

Church and Community Programs that respond to Individual Needs

In this series I have talked about Church as Sign or Preview of the Kingdom and I am laying out several dimensions of what it takes to be a servant church in and with the community. I talked about performing services and using aid wisely. In this article I want to talk about programs that respond to individual needs.

Most churches do benevolence on an individual basis. Mary comes to church and says, "I need a rent deposit," or John says, "my car broke down and I need money to fix it," or Navi says, "the cupboards are bare because I was laid off and my unemployment benefits just ran out." Responding to people in a time of crisis is good and important. Keep doing it. But don't spend all your resources at this level because you will exhaust your resources and limit your Kingdom impact. All of the cases above have several programmatic needs in common:

1. Out of money
2. No savings
3. Lack of income (probably, but not always)

4. Probably (but not necessarily) needing budgeting skills

The impact is greater when a church has (or partners with) an employment program to help people generate revenue, or increase their wage level, so that they can allocate their own income to their needs. The impact is greater when a church has a financial literacy class that helps people learn what money is and how to use it wisely, how to align income to meet goals. (An aside - Church members in ALL categories of income need this for Stewardship to be lived out in our culture, especially the rich. Poor people I see are living far more generously and creatively with limited resources than the rich). The impact is greater when a church has a matched savings program to create incentives for asset procurement. Imagine a church that matches dollar for dollar all down payment deposits (up to \$2500) for first time home buyers and matches 2 for 1 for the first \$1000 for any couple or family that completes a 12 week class on strengthening the family. It is lack of assets that distinguish who is poor and who is not! I think you get my point. Churches need to spend some of their time and resources on programs that help people move into a fruitful life with Christ.

We know from our experience at CRWRC that some key program areas are critical to helping families get out of poverty:

- Employment
- Continuing Education
- Financial Literacy


- Asset building programs
- Housing (Safe, affordable, in a stable mixed income community)
- English as a Second Language
- Communication Skills, Healthy relationships;

Who in your community can you partner with to ensure that your church is providing these kinds of programs to help people experience fullness of life with Christ? I am not advocating that every church do this. I am advocating that every church have as part of their identity, the eager desire and ability to help people move out of poverty!

—Jay Van Groningen, North America Ministry Team Leader

P.S. Watch for *Communities First*, a new resource coming soon to help your church do this!

Communities First is now in print.
Purchase at:
Faith Alive - 1-800-333-8300
www.faithaliveresources.org



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