

Inviting the Parachurch into Our Churches

Many in our churches today have a heart for those who suffer the grinding hopelessness that characterizes extreme poverty. Mature, scripturally literate believers take the biblical mandate for helping the poor seriously; next generation Christians come to the Church with a global perspective and the desire to make a difference. So, many in our churches truly want to give, sacrificially and specifically, to make a real and lasting difference for the world's least and last, beyond what they already give for programs that primarily benefit the church and its members. The oft-heard statement "*I want to give more, I want to make a real difference for those who really need it*" is both an expression of the fact that we are built, redeemed, and blessed to do so, and a cry of frustration.

Many believers feel stymied in this God-breathed desire to make a difference for the least and last because while they prefer to give to or through their churches where possible, they realize that out of \$1 given to the general budget, only a few pennies are likely to go towards helping those suffering in extreme poverty. This "dilution" has spawned a sense of futility and frustration in many believers who wish to give sacrificially towards helping the desperately poor; the unfortunate end result is that the poor are denied the help they might have received, while believers miss out on *the joy of giving* that God intended for them.

Our churches must find a way to *accept, facilitate, and even promote* the sacrificial giving towards the least and the last that so many of her members desire to undertake. This need not involve creating new in-house missions projects, or committing additional church resources in the form of expertise, energy, and funding. The solution could be as simple as selecting a few (or even one) exemplary Parachurch organizations – Christian humanitarian organizations with demonstrated track records in serving, in the name of Christ, those who live in extreme poverty – and then *including them within your church's existing range of options for donor directed giving*. Creating a focus distinctive to your church can be accomplished simply by choosing a few programs, regions, or causes (clean water, human trafficking, medicines, etc) for which the organization has well developed solutions. Of course, asking your congregation to participate in choosing these focal points is a powerful way to activate this new "church distinctive," creating a broader enthusiasm and buy-in, and strengthening your congregation's appetite for externally focused ministry in general.

The benefits are considerable. In facilitating, even promoting, sacrificial giving to help the world's poorest, the church is in a very real sense nurturing its members' *growth as disciples*. Our predominately self-centered use of the resources that God has blessed us with betrays a pervasive, accepted idolatry – we call it the American Dream. In sacrificial giving, we intentionally turn our backs on this idol. As R. Scott Rodin writes in *Stewards of the Kingdom*, "There is no greater expression of money's total lack of dominance over us or of its low priority in our lives than when we can with joy and peace give it away for the Lord's work... Giving, both how we give and how much we give, is the clearest outward expression of who our God really is." This line of thinking applies to us as individuals, and together as church bodies. When our churches facilitate and promote sacrificial giving to serve the least and the last, they are acting as a conduit of God's love to a hurting world – and, in the process, *growing sacrificial givers*.... disciples of the risen Christ.

The benefits do not stop at the individual believers' level. Indeed, many churches who have invited the Parachurch into their ministries have found their congregations *revitalized* as they focus on a purpose outside of and larger than themselves. Programs focused on helping the world's least and last speak authenticity and relevance into the ears of the *next generation* of Christians. And, finally, the broader Church's reputation and *witness* grows in the eyes of a world watching to see if Christians walk their talk. God intends for His people, His Church, to make a difference for the least and last (Isaiah 58:5-8).

To find out more about how your church can partner with the Parachurch in ministry to the world's poorest people, just ask for the church mobilization contact at the organization of your choice.