

Many sincere Christians are concerned, even frustrated, by the fact that our nation's churches do not do what they could for those who suffer in extreme poverty. Meanwhile, many exemplary parachurch organizations (World Vision, etc) do *excellent* work, in the name of Christ, in bringing sustainable improvements to the lives and communities of the world's desperately poor. These two points bring to mind an obvious opportunity for a powerful partnership which would bring benefits to all concerned: believers, local congregations, the broader Church, and, of course, the poor. This partnership opportunity is simple and straightforward: **When you think about it, aren't our nation's churches in the IDEAL position to champion the work of the parachurch?**

With this in mind, here's a scene we'd like to see...



Imagine a small to mid-size church, anywhere in this promised land we call America. The sermon "*Answering the Call*" (or one similar) has just been preached, teaching on the biblical mandate for helping the desperately poor. Interested members have been invited into one of the Sunday school rooms for donuts and a follow-up discussion about how their little church might do something, together, to help with extreme poverty around the world.

Here's how the presentation might go...

Pastor: Thank you for coming; we'll keep this brief.

That was a challenging sermon, wasn't it? Here's the thing – it is an important truth that WE are the Church... what we do as individuals matters, because we are truly the body of Christ – His hands and feet in a needy world. *But what about church organizations*, like our little church here on the plains? Surely, what the local church does, or does not do, as the body of Christ, matters too.... Mark Labberton spoke truly when he wrote that "God's plan is that we, the Church, are to be the primary evidence of God's presence" in a hurting, searching world.

I'm reminded of a simple but profound question that David Platt posed for our nation's churches in his book *Radical Together*; his question was this:

*Amid all the good things we are doing and planning, **are there better ways** to align with God's Word, mobilize God's people, and marshal God's resources for God's glory in a world where millions of people are starving and more than a billion have never even heard of Jesus?*

Yes, I believe there are indeed better ways. And perhaps the ideas we talked about in this morning's sermon – the scriptural imperative for helping the desperately poor, loving God by loving "the least of these", not harvesting to the very edges of our fields, sacrificial giving, our collective witness – perhaps these apply to church bodies in much the same way they apply to individuals.... So here's an idea for us to consider.

What if we were to call our present church operating budget “**enough**,” and instead focused ourselves a bit more on answering God’s call to help the least and the last? What if, in the Sundays ahead – indeed, in the years ahead – we were to give you the opportunity to give even more generously than you already do.... but not for more staff or additional programs aimed at serving our own congregation.... **What if** we, as a church community, **instead** passed these new gifts along, **in their entirety**, to Christian organizations with demonstrated track records in helping the desperately poor transform their lives and communities?

Our little church on the plains can, in partnership with these exemplary organizations, play a role in bringing transformation and self-sufficiency to some of the world’s poorest people — *in the name of Christ*. I like the sound of this! On the tables behind you, you will find information about a few of the best of these organizations. Over the coming weeks, the missions and outreach committee will look closely at some of these programs (like providing for safe water, improved agriculture, protection against preventable disease, education, and so forth), and decide which we might want to come alongside of as a congregation. They would welcome your input.

While our missions budget will certainly make its own contribution, the amount sent towards the programs we choose together will be largely dependent upon the results of the personal, prayerful conversation with God that I urge each of you to have over the coming weeks. Because in the future – each week, or month, or quarter, or year, whatever works best for your household – you will have the opportunity, right here in our little church, to answer God’s call to help the desperately poor by *designating contributions* towards one or more of these programs.

(Questions and Discussion)



Thanks for coming. Truly, we have been blessed, to be a blessing. Together, we can make a difference – to the glory of Christ’s name.

The scene described above is imaginary — This scene has been played out, for real, in precious few of our local churches. Yet, the local church truly **is** in the **ideal** position to champion the work of exemplary parachurch organizations as they serve the poor in the name of Christ.

So the question is: Must this scene remain, for the most part, in the realm of imagination?
Why or why not?

(The sermon “Answering the Call” can be found at www.GiversByDesign.org/About/Answering-the-Call)