

Justice Ministries Proposal for _____

Why: Should our church be concerned with helping the poor?

Today, nearly a billion people live trapped in *extreme* poverty – a poverty distinguished by true hopelessness, desperation, and unimaginable suffering.

Throughout His Word, God plainly calls His people to help the least and the last. We note that in Christ's ministry, there was harmony between His words and His actions. In our church, we speak of the centrality of love and justice to our Christian faith; but our actions -- as evidenced by our church budget priorities -- give a different witness. We are shamed to realize that _____ devotes less than 1% of its annual budget to addressing the *scriptural imperative for helping the truly poor*.

We hope that _____ will someday seriously consider the following scriptures' implications for church life:

- Ezekiel 16:49 -- the sin of Sodom
- Micah 6:8 -- what God requires of us
- Isaiah 1:10-17 -- God's displeasure with the separation of worship and justice
- Isaiah 58:5-12 -- God's chosen fast and the result
- Luke 3:8-11 -- fruit in keeping with repentance
- James 1:27 -- religion acceptable to God
- James 2:15-17 -- the hypocrisy of faith without deeds
- 1 John 3:16-18 -- the love of God in us
- Luke 10:30-37 -- an outsider shows the way
- Matthew 25:31-46 -- Jesus equates helping the poor with loving Him

Is _____ "doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with its God" when it funds evangelical activity and internal programs to the *near exclusion* of ministries which serve the world's least and last? It would appear that Lazarus is lying at *our* gate, and we-the-Church at _____ are passing him by. This apparent indifference deforms both our discipleship and our worship, and is a profoundly negative witness to a watching world. Mark Labberton writes in *The Dangerous Act of Worship*: "Meanwhile our suffering world waits for signs of God on earth... God's plan is that we, the Church, are to be the primary evidence of God's presence." This is no small matter. How tragic it would be if the poor, *and our watching world*, equated our indifference with God's! A profoundly negative witness, indeed: The Church's reputation, its relevance to the next generation of believers, and Christ's name among the nations hangs in the balance.

How: Effective justice ministries for small/medium sized churches

Congregations wishing to take a bolder and more faithful action in making a difference for the world's least and last face a daunting challenge. Of primary concern is the question of effectiveness; yet, the factors impacting program effectiveness turn out to be quite diverse and complex. Historically, a majority of church missions projects and programs have applied shorter term relief-type interventions when development activities were what was truly needed. The unintended consequence of such inadequately conceived efforts at helping is that *dependencies are created or deepened*, ultimately serving to perpetuate the poor's poverty instead of helping them rise above it. Some other factors requiring careful, diligent consideration in *helping effectively* include:

- an orientation towards transformational change
- a long term approach that works towards self-sufficiency
- a commitment to addressing underlying causes, not just surface symptoms
- a commitment to lending a carefully designed hand-up, avoiding dependency-creating handouts
- a commitment to working along side and strengthening the local church wherever possible
- a priority given to a guidance role that identifies, respects, and fully utilizes the abilities and resources of individuals and the community as a whole
- a priority given to developing local (indigenous) leadership and community resources
- an insistence upon community partnership throughout the processes of developing project goals and plans, implementation, and ongoing evaluation and adjustment
- a pervasive focus on community participation, ownership, empowerment, and capacity building

These factors, or “best practices for transformational development,” are necessary to ensure a project or ministry has the best chance to be truly effective in bringing sustainable life improvement for those trapped in extreme poverty. Obviously, such work requires a tremendous commitment of resources and expertise to research, design, staff, fund, implement, monitor, and evaluate – a commitment of resources and expertise that is simply beyond the means of most smaller or medium sized congregations, and many larger ones as well.

Fortunately, numerous explicitly Christian humanitarian organizations (a.k.a. the “parachurch”) are extraordinarily well equipped for precisely this sort of transformative, effective ministry among the world’s poorest. Drawing on deep expertise and extensive skill sets developed through decades of on-the-ground experience, exemplary parachurch organizations have enormous impact in the name of Christ. They are truly God’s people, doing His work, His way, in His name, for His glory: the parachurch indeed acts as an extension of the Church proper in serving the least and the last.

_____ need not reinvent the missions wheel; partnering with one or more of these organizations is a viable and effective way to tangibly show God’s love to the least and last. This would involve making a visible commitment from the general budget, and creating space to meaningfully promote opportunities for involvement and generosity among _____’s congregation.. It is quite possible that creating a focus for making a difference that is outside of and larger than ourselves could be a revitalizing force that fuels growth in discipleship both within the church at _____ and among the world’s poorest.

Church/Parachurch partnerships can range from simple financial support, to distinctive small projects designed especially for your church, to vibrant, ongoing working partnerships with communities on the other side of the globe. Many of these organizations have specialized staff members devoted to helping churches craft programs or projects that fit their church’s unique character, circumstances, and objectives. To find out more about partnering with the parachurch in ministry to the world’s poorest people, just ask for the church mobilization contact at any top parachurch organization. (Top organizations include Hope Int’l, Lifewater Int’l, Plant with Purpose, World Concern, World Relief, and World Vision.)

Our churches, _____ included, must choose between proclaiming indifference, or the love and hope found in Jesus Christ. How much more effective would our collective witness be if We-the-Church were known not for what we were against, *but for what we did?*

Most Sincerely,