

## Principles Related To Biblical Outreach To Those In Need

### Biblical Mandate:

There are **several thousand verses in the Bible on the poor, and God's response to injustice**. God's passionate concern for those in need, the voiceless, the vulnerable and oppressed, is a theme that runs through the whole Bible, along with God's call for His followers actively to care for those in need.

Matthew 25: 40 - "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth. **Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.**'"

Isaiah 58

### Wholistic ministry:

A core principle is the importance of **wholistic ministry** – to the whole person – spiritual, emotional and physical. A **relational** focus is essential. A servant heart is necessary on the part of volunteers, with the recognition that a key element will be **mutual transformation and empowerment**.

**"Transformational Community Ministry is the art and discipline of recognizing, developing and calling forth the gifts, talents and resources God has already placed in the world for the benefit of all in the community. We need to measure our efforts with under-resourced communities by asking ourselves if what we are doing: respects the dignity of the people involved; strengthens the community in sustainable ways; promotes freedom from dependency; allows people to use their own resources and be self-determining."** (from: Empowerment: A Key Component of Christian Community Development by Dr. Mary Nelson)

### What Is Poverty? (from: **When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor, And Yourself** by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert)

"Due to the comprehensive nature of the fall . . . every human being is suffering from a **poverty of spiritual intimacy, a poverty of being, a poverty of community, and a poverty of stewardship . . . Until we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low-income people is likely to do far more harm than good . . . Shame – a 'poverty of being' – is a major part of the brokenness that low-income people experience in their relationship with themselves. Instead of seeing themselves as being created in the image of God, lower income people often feel they are inferior to others. This can paralyze the poor from . . . seizing opportunities to improve their situation . . ."**

"At the same time, **the economically rich - including most of the readers of this book – also suffer from a poverty of being . . . The economically rich often have "god-complexes," a subtle and unconscious sense of superiority in which they believe that they have achieved their wealth through their own efforts and that they have been anointed to decide what is best for low-income people, whom they view as inferior to themselves . . . Why do you want to help the poor? . . . I sometimes unintentionally reduce poor people to objects that I use to fulfill my own need to accomplish something."**

According to John Perkins, co-founder of the Christian Community Development Association, **"Acts of charity can be dangerous because givers can feel good about actions that actually accomplish very little, or even create dependency . . . their self-satisfaction takes away any motivation to seek more creative long-range development strategies. Overcoming an attitude of charity is a difficult task because it requires givers to demand more of themselves than good will . . . Christian charity should never be discouraged and there will always be a place for acts of sharing and kindness, but charity is**

**only a beginning point, not the final strategy or solution . . . (often it is) much more important (to have) a long-term commitment to development. Many times we give because we don't know what else to do . . . Sometimes our giving is motivated by guilt. When this is the case, we are giving for selfish reasons – to make ourselves feel okay. This can be very dangerous for the poor.”** (Beyond Charity: The Call To Christian Community Development)

Katrine Barton-Coward, who worked with street-involved people in Ottawa for 15 years with Urban Christian Outreach, cautions middle-class volunteers: **“it is not God's goal to create the poor in our own image. God is not seeking to make them 'middle class' in terms of goals and objectives in life. Indeed, a volunteer's involvement may raise disturbing questions for them about their own priorities in life, priorities that they have never questioned before.”**

There is also the risk that if our own “poverty of being” results in us struggling with issues such as our own self-esteem, or the need to earn God's approval, we could be driven to serve for the wrong reasons. It is important for volunteers to be open to growth in this area.

### **Biblical Models of Serving the Poor:**

The type of help must be appropriate for the need (see handout: There Are Different Ways To Help A Neighborhood)

The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates a crisis situation, in which **Relief** (Doing For) is not only appropriate, but essential. However, when relief is continued long-term, in situations in which people are capable of helping themselves, it is harmful, since it **creates dependency**.

**“Doing for others what they can do for themselves is charity at its worst . . . We must come to deeply believe that every person, no matter how destitute or broken, has something of worth to bring to the table.”** (from Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life by Robert Lupton)

The **Biblical principle of gleaning** (Deuteronomy 24: 17 – 24 and Leviticus 19: 9 – 10) provided a means for the alien, the orphan and the widow to help themselves. According to Wayne Gordon, pastor of Lawndale Community Church in Chicago, (from the book Linking Arms, Linking Lives) from **the gleaning system four very important guiding principles of empowering the poor emerge:**

- 1) The portion of the field left unharvested created an opportunity for the poor to meet their own needs. Much of community ministry is simply to create opportunity.**
- 2) The unharvested portion required the poor to work in order to meet their needs. Food was not handed to them; they had to go into the fields themselves and pick up the fallen crops. Community ministry places responsibility and accountability upon the people and thus does not create unhealthy dependency.**
- 3) Gleaning was meaningful work – that is, it was purposeful and necessary. Community ministry creates meaningful service, developing life and vocational skills that will enable persons to contribute to the community.**
- 4) Because the gleaning system required the poor to do the work of meeting their own needs, their dignity was affirmed. They felt good about themselves. If community ministry does not uphold the dignity of the poor, then it falls short of the gospel.”**

### **ABCD = Asset Based Community Development**

Development has often started with a focus on a community's “felt needs” in order to diagnose problems and formulate proper solutions. “However, **starting with a focus on needs amounts to starting a relationship with low-income people by asking them ‘What is wrong with you? How can I fix you?’** Given the nature of most poverty, it is difficult to imagine more harmful questions to both

**low-income people and to ourselves! . . .** For these reasons, **many Christian community development experts have discovered the benefits of using “asset-based community development” . . .** (which) is consistent with the **perspective that God has blessed every individual and community with a host of gifts, including such diverse things as land, social networks, knowledge, animals, savings, intelligence, schools, creativity, production equipment, etc.** ABCD puts the emphasis on what materially poor people already have and asks them to consider from the outset, **‘What is right with you? What gifts has God given you that you can use to improve your life and that of your neighbours? How can individuals and organizations in your community work together to improve your community?’** Instead of looking outside the low-income individual or community for resources and solutions, **ABCD starts by asking the materially poor how they can be stewards of their own gifts and resources, seeking to restore individuals and communities to being what God has created them to be from the very start of the relationship. . .**

“In summary, **ABCD has four key elements:**

- 1) Identify and mobilize the capabilities, skills and resources of the individual or community.**  
See poor people and communities as full of possibilities, given to them by God.
- 2) As much as possible, look for resources and solutions to come from within the individual or community, not from the outside.**
- 3) Seek to build and rebuild the relationships among local individuals, associations, churches, businesses, schools, government etc.** God intended for the various individuals and institutions in communities to be interconnected and complementary.
- 4) Only bring in outside resources when local resources are insufficient to solve pressing needs. Be careful about bringing in resources that are too much or too early.** Do this in a manner that does not undermine local capacity or initiative.”

(from: When Helping Hurts)

### **Different Realities and Approaches Needed With Street-Involved People**

According to Katrine Barton-Coward, **“downtown poverty neighbourhoods have a very different dynamic from suburban poverty neighbourhoods . . . It’s almost all single adults downtown. Life is lived out on the street and in the rooming houses and shelters . . . These differences in themselves will condition different responses in those who are at ‘street level.’** They may have no suitable coping mechanisms for living on a ‘poverty’ residential street. They want to roam. Families will be suspicious of them, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly. A street level person will have great difficulty fitting into life lived in one small box (apartment) or a job located under one roof. . . Some shelters run transitional housing projects to mentor in this change.”

The reasons that people ended up on the street, or in chronic poverty, affect the approach and goals. Some people with serious mental illnesses, or whose lives are fragmented by past abuse and addictions, may never be able to work, or live what society would consider a “normal” life. Coming along-side people in these situations in supportive, caring relationships, is probably best done with the support, training and accountability of organizations that have strong connections and experience in this area. Collaboration between churches, helping agencies, businesses, community agencies, and mental health services (such as Canadian Mental Health Association and local psychiatric services) will lead to greater effectiveness.

Katrine adds the following words of caution: **“I recommend that volunteers be cautioned not to attempt to arbitrate or mediate neighbourhood disputes. They need a lot of experience of poverty neighbourhoods before they will be able to do that wisely and safely. The more I came to know about such things, the more I realized how complex it is and how much damage I could do with naive approaches.”** Exploring community resources, such as the YMCA, that offer neighbourhood dispute resolution programs, would be worthwhile in these situations. **“The flip side of this coin is that, by**

**working one by one (one family by one family) and in the Spirit of Jesus, you are constantly bringing new potential for peace into neighbourhood relationships.”**

The biblical concept of **Shalom** has significant implications for Christian community development. When Jesus called His followers to be “peace-makers” (Matthew 5:9), “He would have been using the word **Shalom** for peace. For us, the word peace usually means the absence of conflict. Shalom, for a Jew, was much more. It was the presence of wholeness, completeness, even healing. . . **To bring shalom means to bring healing and wholeness, to lives, people and the world. To bring shalom would mean deliberately looking for the shattered, the hungry, the lost, the down-trodden, and to act in such a way as to change the state . . . So when Jesus calls on His followers to be ‘peacemakers,’ He is calling them to be the ones to bring healing and wholeness to a broken world.”** ( [www.bible-guide-online.com](http://www.bible-guide-online.com) Inspirational Bible Verses: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers . . .’)

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

**Cultural sensitivity is a basic requirement** for all volunteers who volunteer in cross-cultural settings.

### **Resources**

Beyond Charity: The Call To Christian Community Development by John M. Perkins, co-founder of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)

Dangerous Surrender by Kay Warren

God In The Alley – by Greg Paul, based on the experiences of Sanctuary church in downtown Toronto

The Twenty-Piece Shuffle: Why The Rich And Poor Need Each Other – by Greg Paul

Compassion, Justice And The Christian Life – by Robert Lupton

When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting The Poor, Or Yourself – by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert (who are both associated with The Chalmer’s Institute for Economic Development – [www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org) Its mandate is: Helping The Church Help the Poor Help Themselves.)

Good News About Injustice by Gary Haugen (founder of International Justice Mission)

Just Courage by Gary Haugen

Same Kind Of Different As Me – by Ron Hall and Denver Moore

Walking With The Poor by Bryant Myers

Christian Community Development Association web-site ([www.cdda.org](http://www.cdda.org) )

Start Becoming A Good Samaritan – an excellent DVD series for groups or individuals

The Soloist – an excellent movie showing some realities of relating to street-involved people

Books related to Shalom and Community Development (recommended by Dave Witt from International Teams in Hamilton, Ontario)

Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace by Perry Yoder

Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom by Walter Brueggemann

Bridging The Gap: Evangelism, Development and Shalom by Bruce Bradshaw

To Live At Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City by Mark Gornik (has a whole chapter on how the Hebrew concept of shalom gives direction to our work in cities)

Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith by Eric Jacobsen (addresses the shalom perspective as well, but from a more macro city planning perspective)

Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City – good material in his messages – “he has provided probably our best short-hand definition of shalom as ‘flourishing in every dimension;’” Dave Witt likes to call it “God’s intention”