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We Value Your Input

In April, Mary Ellen Schreiber began teaching a course on the Christian family at the Hebron Bible Institute in Zuenoula, Ivory Coast, West Africa. She writes, "I would greatly value prayer for this vital course—for openness, relevancy and that I'll get a session with the men, too!"

I have asked Mary Ellen to share some of the teaching in our next issue of Barnabas. I also plan to include a listing of resource material that **you** send **me** on ministry to families.

Please let me hear from you!

IN FOCUS

Phyllis Kilbourn

My recent trip to Sri Lanka provided yet another window to observe the wickedness perpetrated against women and children in urban centers. Colombo is a main center for foreign, homosexual pedophiles. Just before our arrival, the president had closed thirty orphanages opened by these pedophiles as a "legitimate" means to reach the children.

More probing revealed that young girls are being brainwashed and used as suicide bombers in the war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Other children are being kidnapped or sold into child labor ranging from pornography and brothels to work in the fisheries. The abuse seemed non-ending!

Mothers also have many pressures brought to bear on them as they struggle to survive in hostile, poverty-riddled urban environments. Many husbands are absent from the homes, either killed in war or engaged in occupations that keep them away from home. War, poverty and exploitation are robbing mothers of their most precious possessions: children, home, a means of livelihood and desperately needed hope. Suicide rates are extremely high among both women and children.

These receive little comfort from Buddhism. The religious leaders instruct their followers to become empty, possessing nothing—already their experience! Thus they are left lonely, depressed and trapped in exploitive situations with no hope of escaping their abject misery.

What a challenging mission field urban centers offer! We have the ultimate source of hope to offer people who are "empty, possessing nothing."

Yes, cities can be dirty and smelly, violent and dangerous, oppressive, crime-filled and continuously erupting with shattered, hurting humanity. Poverty and corruption guarantee scant resources for amenities and vital infrastructures. Cities definitely are not attractive places for hanging out your "home sweet home" shingle.

Even Mark Gornik and Noel Castelanos, in this issue's featured article, confess that starting a ministry in an urban center represents an intense amount of work and potential cost. However, they also are firm in their conviction that the cost results in the be-gin-ning of an abundant life. They state, "Where kingdom, city and calling come together, there is privilege and joy unspeakable!"

Robert Linthicum's observation about the call to urban ministry is noteworthy (p.3).

In "Pray for the Little Hearts" Suneetha Feirreira, a dedicated volunteer for a children's ministry in Sri Lanka, offers us an opportunity to enlarge our hearts.

May the Lord give us the needed courage and com-
passion to take bold steps of faith to reach the masses of women and children that choke the main thoroughfares and the hidden alleys in urban centers around the globe.

How to Start a Christian Community Development Ministry

Mark R. Gornik and Noel Castelanos

John Perkins believes the desperate conditions that face the poor call for a revolution in our attempts at a solution. Through his experiences with the poor, he concludes that these desperate problems cannot be solved without strong commitment and risky actions on the part of ordinary Christians with heroic faith. The most creative long-term solutions to the problems of the poor are coming from grassroots and church-based efforts—people who see themselves as the agents of Jesus here on earth in their own neighborhoods and communities. This specific calling is one he has come to call Christian community development (CCD).

The Key Elements of Christian Community Development

Christian community development is a church-based ministry among the poor, which

- begins with felt needs of the people in the community
- responds to those needs in a wholistic way
- is based on clear biblical principles
- is "time-tested"
- develops and utilizes leaders from within the community
- encourages relocation—living among the poor
- demands reconciliation—people to God and people to people
- empowers the poor through redistribution—all community members sharing their skills, talents, education, and resources to help each other.

Joining in God's reign

Setting the context for CCD is where we must start. Christian community development does not begin with a plan or program to solve a problem, but as a call and responsibility within the drama of God's reign. For it is with the redemptive work of Christ that God's urban promises of rebuilt and flourishing communities (Isa. 61:1-4; 65; 17-25) find their fulfillment (Luke 4:16-21; 24:25-27, 44). The Gospels reveal Jesus as the one who has come

to the city as the New Nehemiah to restore lives, families, and communities. A well-grounded biblical theology of the city and kingdom of God is critical.

God's reign has come (Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9; 11:20), but we still anticipate its final completion (Matt. 6:9-10). In other words, it is present "now, but not yet." We know that sorrow, death, exploitation, and weeping will give way to joy and restored relationships, all of which find their center in God in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-4). But we recognize and grieve that this time has not yet come.

God invites us to joyfully share in his good future in the here and now. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides our sure commitment that the new city—both urban place and community—will become a reality. And so we wait, not with hands folded, but as God's copycats, modeling his love for the city (Luke 10:2). As the community called into being by God's reign, we are to anticipate the shalom of the new city through our corporate life and witness in the present. We are to be "impatient" with brokenness and oppression, because we know the wholeness and mercy in Christ that awaits the cities of our world.

Such a vision of the new city is truly transformational—it is meant to nourish our faith, celebrate new possibilities, and give us a firmly anchored hope. The biblical testimony equips us to be both utterly realistic and truly hopeful at the same time. For while we trust God to do great things here and now, we also hunger and thirst for the fulfillment of his reign (Heb. 1:11).

As our understanding of God's reign grows, we should recognize its claim upon our lives and invitation to take visionary risks in developing new ministries, signs and samples of his reign. We are the manifestation of his community-changing power in the world (Eph. 1:20-21). While starting CCD churches and ministries represents an intense amount of work and potential cost, it can really be the beginning of an abundant life. Where kingdom, city, and calling come together, there is privilege and joy unspeakable!

Hearing the call

Every church and ministry has its genesis with a deep stirring and burden from God. Similar in internal conviction to a conversion experience, a calling provides a sense of purpose focused on serving God with everything within us. A calling is empowering and sustaining, enabling us to joyfully stick to the task God has called us to through thick and thin. Theologically, a call is the Spirit working with God's Word in terms of our gifts and context (Neh. 2:12; John 16:13-14). What we hear is God's Word about cities, reconciliation, and justice. Our context is a hurting and broken urban world. Practically, we respond to this call out of a vast combination of events, personal gifts and abilities, relationships, and experiences. Later, of course, we can look back and see God's sovereign hand in the smallest details and significant events (Neh. 2:8, 18).

Nehemiah's experience provides a clear example of calling. Having heard of the bleak state of Jerusalem from traveling businessmen, Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed (Neh. 1). Nehemiah's heart was broken by what he heard. He was gripped by a conviction that his city was worth fighting for. As Robert Linthicum observes,

The starting place for us is with the question, "What makes me weep over my city?" If you answer that question, "Nothing makes me weep over my city," you had better get out of urban ministry because you do not belong there. Only a man or woman who allows his heart to be broken with the pain and the plight of the hurting poor and/or the hurting powerful belongs in ministry there. To be effective in urban ministry, you must have a heart that is as big as the city itself.¹

And just like Nehemiah, our brokenness must turn to deep and vulnerable prayer.

Starting out

... The main task is to build relationships and learn to love the community where God has placed you (Ps. 48). Relationships are the heart of God's shalom and are the true bridges to change. We are called to be friends (John 15:12-15), not service providers or saviors. Though there will be occasions for miscommunication, remember that love covers over a multitude of sins! A deep and wide relational base in the community provides the strong foundation for all of the ministry that will take

place. Learning to love the community means enjoying not only the people, but the streets, stores, sounds, and character of the community. Internally, it means coming to the point in your heart where there is no place else you would rather live!

The importance of staying focused on the vision and ministry of the church cannot be overstated. There will be countless potential distractions of your time and energy. A way to stay focused is to agree upfront on vision and priorities. A clear vision holds people together through hard times. Let ministry emerge naturally.

The Key Elements of Creating a Christian Community Development Ministry

- Starting a ministry that bears fruit over the long haul has more to do with calling, vision, passion, focus, bonding, and relationships than with funding or developing effective programs.
- Urban areas are dynamic and complex settings. Make a concerted effort to bond with and thoroughly understand the community where God has called you to serve.
- Although the task of developing and maintaining a team of people to grow the ministry is very demanding, it is clearly the single most important area for developing a healthy ministry.
- The importance of staying focused on the vision and ministry of the church cannot be overstated. Agree up front on vision and priorities and reinforce them regularly.
- Remembering and telling the story of the ministry builds confidence, increases spiritual commitment, and keeps God at the center. It reminds us that God is with us through our trials and tests.

Paul's question concerning urban incarnational ministry in his day is ours today: "Who is equal to such a task?" (2 Cor. 2:16). What a humbling privilege and opportunity we have to be the body of Christ, sent by God into a broken and hurting world. Let us embrace the challenge of starting new churches and development ministries!

¹Robert Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 196.

Excerpts taken from chapter 11 in *Restoring at-risk communities: doing it together and doing it right*, edited by John M. Perkins, published by Baker Books, 1995; used by permission.

Pray for the Little Hearts

Suneetha Ferreira

Throughout the day, in the midst of our busy schedules, we all stop at least once to take a quick glance at two mechanical hands positioned on the face of a lifeless clock. Amazingly, what we see there has the power to change the gears of our thoughts, our actions and the very direction of our day.

How many of us, as Christ's disciples, stop to kneel and glance at His living hands, His living face? Do we allow the great Time Keeper, the One who created time itself, room to show us the direction in which His hands are pointing? When was the last time you asked Him to show you His heavenly schedule? His prayer list?

Prayer is not only communication with God, it is also making ourselves available to Him, His will and His purposes in our lives as well as the lives of others. Prayer is God's ordained vehicle for delivering *real* responsibilities to the doorsteps of our lives; kingdom responsibilities having eternal consequences. Responsibilities that we cannot politely ask to come back another day!

I believe this is the hour when God's hands are pointing us, His disciples, to rise up and take hold of our responsibility to pray for the little children of Sri Lanka. Jesus wants us to be a church that loves her little children. "Then they brought young children to Him that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them; for of such is the kingdom of God'" (Mark 10:13-14).

Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus has not changed; He is the "same yesterday, today, and forever." He still desires to have the children brought close to Him, to take them up in His arms and bless them. As we look at today's church, we might wonder if His present disciples have changed much either? Are adults the only ones allowed to meet Jesus? No, today the Lord is looking for disciples who will recognize His desire to touch children.

The church is compared to our natural body which is made up of many different parts, each with its own special function. Imagine your own natural

body without the little parts! What would we do without those vital little organs such as our pancreas and pituitary glands? Church, it is time to wake up! We need the children! They have unique talents and abilities necessary to the health of the *whole* body—*now*, not some day when they grow up. Jesus sees children as important right now, and He wants us to pray so He can release them to be dynamic little instruments in His hands. Jesus wants you and me to begin sowing the seeds of His way, His truth and His very life into the hearts of our children through prayer.

John 17 records Jesus' priestly prayer; a prayer on behalf of Himself, His disciples and all believers. One of the beautiful things in this chapter is that Jesus specifically prays for future believers who will come to Him because of the testimony of His disciples and their intervening prayers.

Our children were born to believe that Jesus Christ gives eternal life (John 17:2). This Scripture reinforces the tremendous responsibility that we have. As Christ's disciples, we must follow His example. We, too, must pray for future believers. We must pray that not one of His little ones be lost but that all be saved, restored and healed in the name of Jesus!

We all know that sowing seed is hardest in parched ground. But how many of us are aware that Satan is attacking the fertile ground of our children's hearts? Did you know that he is causing thousands of children's innocent hearts to harden not only by robbing them of their self esteem but also by squeezing out every bit of the sense of "self" from their hearts? Psalm 10:8-10 states, "He (the child abuser) lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. His victims are crushed, they (the children) collapse; they fall under his strength"

Remember, through prayer, you *can* make a difference for our children. We can set the little captives free from Satan's net and lift them into the waiting arms of Jesus.

God needs you to prepare His way. Sow your prayers for an eternal harvest *today*. The time has come to pray for the little hearts.

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