

Books and resources

Just Neighbors Toolkit

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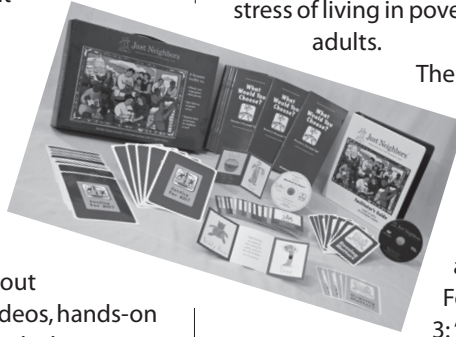
The “Just Neighbors Toolkit” is a treasure chest for anyone interested in teaching his or her church about poverty in the United States. As the introductory material in the kit explains, “Just Neighbors” is a unique, interactive, multimedia curriculum that will educate your congregation about poverty...it includes original videos, hands-on activities, role-play exercises, lively discussions and more.”

Divided into nine hour-long sessions, the curriculum does a great job of giving some structure to the complex and confusing issue of why so many people in America don't seem to be “making it” even though they are working. Each session starts with a scripture reading and ends with suggestions for further reading and ideas for how to take action; in between you'll find high-quality video and a wide variety of thought-provoking, engaging activities.

Five of the sessions include well-produced, original videos that take the problem of poverty out of the realm of statistics and factoids and into the lives of families who are caught in a web of practical dilemmas: How to help the kids with homework when you have to work until it's almost time for bed; how to provide decent nutrition when your wage barely covers the rent; what to do when you make too much for Medicaid, but not enough to afford health-insurance.

My personal favorite is the video associated with Session 7: “Our Children, Our Future.” It is a collage of pictures taken by children. It shows their neighborhoods, families, schools and friends from their points of view. Interspersed with the pictures are snippets of the children talking about their life

circumstances. Quotes like, “My mom gets her pay check next week. That's when she'll pay the electric bill. The others [bills] just pile on each other,” hammer home the reality that the stress of living in poverty doesn't stop with the adults.



The videos are excellent, but the real genius of the curriculum is in the activities that get you engaged with the issues by getting you to “walk a mile in their shoes.”

For example, in Session 3: “What Would You

Choose?” participants take

on the role of Annie, a struggling mother of two. At the beginning of the exercise Annie and her husband Jeff are both employed. They and their two children, Malcolm and Nikki, are living in a rented house. Though their house is “nothing fancy” they are at least making ends meet. They live in a decent neighborhood and they can sometimes afford treats like a night at the movies or an annual trip to an amusement park. Then Jeff loses his job and eventually walks out on the family, leaving Annie to figure out how to manage things on her pay as a part-time waitress. The exercise simulates the decisions that Annie must make along the way: Move, or try to find a house mate? Work longer hours, or have time with the kids? Take a course, or take on another job? Sell the car, or keep it? Each decision results in a mixture of intended and unintended consequences that vividly illustrate the discouraging “one-step forward, two-steps back” dance of trying to make it and be a good parent when you really don't have enough to live on.

The facilitator's guide included in the kit is well-written and should make it easy for anyone with any teaching experience at all to conduct the lessons. Besides clear-cut instructions and recommendations regarding timing,

supplies, and other practicalities; the facilitator's guide is a reference book in itself. It's filled with relevant facts and background information to share with the class or just to build instructor understanding and confidence.

The only slight criticism I might make of this fine toolkit is that I think the sessions are so engaging it would be difficult to finish each of them in an hour. They are sure to spark lots of discussion; I think an hour and a half would be a more reasonable time frame for most of them if you plan to use them as written.

On the other hand, I want to point out what I consider to be the toolkit's greatest strength – flexibility. Although *Just Neighbors* is designed to be taught as a series of nine sessions, most of the sessions (probably all except for the last one) could easily be used as stand-alone lessons, or three or four could be pulled out for a shorter series. Each session is designed to be one-hour, but they could all be easily expanded to an hour and a half or even two hours especially if you were able to supplement them with information from your own community. If you are trying to find something meaningful for a shorter time slot – say 20 or 30 minutes – you could easily show one of the videos as a stand-alone activity with a short discussion, review one of the many case studies and discuss briefly, or use one of the reproducible hand-outs on its own as a short activity. Even though it is marketed as a resource for “communities of faith,” each lesson could easily be adapted to a secular audience by simply leaving off the scripture reading at the beginning. Though the sessions were designed with adults in mind, I think the interactive activities make it a natural for youth.

“*Just Neighbors*” is a program of Family Promise. Cost for the kit is \$175.00 plus shipping and handling.

Reviewed by Ashley Bean Thornton,
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Ashley attends Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX, and maintains a Web site for local community service:
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Small Footprint, Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly, by Tri Robinson
Ampelon Publishing (Boise, ID, 2008).
ISBN: 978-0-9786394-8-8, 159 pp.

Culture tells us to “leave our mark” as a way to prove our lives have value and meaning. But in a consumer-driven culture it has become all too easy to seek status via cars, clothes, accessories, and trendy home decor. We allow our possessions and desires to dictate how we spend our time. We spend more and more time working to pay for stuff, or worse yet, we buy it with credit.

Tri Robinson, founding pastor of the Vineyard Boise Church in Boise, Idaho, challenges Christians to look more closely at the way in which our use of time and energy impact the world. What witness does this bear? he asks. As Christians we should be mindful of the way we interact with God's creation, being conscience of waste and overuse.

Robinson gives several examples of how an evaluation of your budget and use of time can offer simple, yet meaningful ways to change your lifestyle. This impact can result in less pollution and expense, and more efficient use of time. Most important, he says, these changes will be a positive witness to others.

Small Footprint Big Handprint is an easy read and perfectly designed for an individual, couple, or small group. It should serve as a great catalyst for discussion and introspection of one's life choices. Each chapter has questions for discussion and an action point to guide you through the self evaluation process. Christians can benefit from this book by learning to challenge their use of time and money. Robinson says that as followers of the promise of salvation that Christ brings, we should be living our lives in such a manner that when global, political or economic tensions arise we are so sure-footed on the foundations of our faith in Christ that we are ready to tend to those in need.

Our actions should bear positive witness. Our consumer habits should show how to live in God's creation respectfully. Our faith



and lack of excess can set an example during economic downturns, and enable us to help others. And as Robinson so wisely points out, giving is not only done with money, sometimes it is showing up and doing work with our hands. Time is often the most valuable asset we have to give. If we choose to live such jam-packed hectic lives that we aren't left with time to give, what does that say about our priorities? Have our own comforts, desires and guilty pleasures become more important than living the way that Jesus did?

"No matter where we are in our life's journey we can always readjust our vision and begin seeing the world around us through the lens of eternal perspective," Robinson writes.

Reviewed by Kimberly Schlesinger,
administrative associate for the Center
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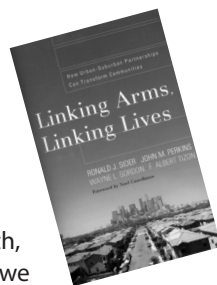


Linking Arms, Linking Lives: How Urban-Suburban Partnerships Can Transform Communities, by Ronald J. Sider, John M. Perkins, Wayne L. Gordon and F. Albert Tizon
BakerBooks, Baker Book Publishing (Grand Rapids, MI) 2008,
240 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8010-7083-9

Last October we took a dozen staff and students from the Center for Family and Community Ministries to CCDA – the Christian Community Development Association's annual conference. We heard Wayne Gordon and John Perkins each day offer bits of wisdom for churches coming together to engage their communities in transformational development. These leaders, and others, have written extensively on the lessons they have learned from churches participating in community development. At this conference, they offered insights from a new book focused on urban-suburban partnerships.

Gordon and Perkins, together with Ron Sider and Al Tizon, have authored *Linking Arms, Linking Lives* as a resource for churches on either side of the urban divide. As these four experienced leaders define the terms "urban" and "suburban," they focus less on geography and more on socioeconomics, providing theological insights for diverse experiences

Christians have with regard to race and class. These authors remind us that Christians working for justice and living out compassion must engage our poverty and our wealth, as well as the advantages we have, those we lack, and those we take for granted.



Rooted in a biblical theology of partnership that seeks to overcome our divisiveness, the authors share their own personal experiences of what helps followers of Christ cross our divisions to address oppression and exclusion and to create radically different communities of "jubilee justice."

Reconciliation is a driving theme in the book, one that begins the journey toward the "authentic relationships and collaborative action" that are the goal as churches overcome mistrust and misunderstandings that have shaped our past racial and economic divisions.

After a discussion of why reconciliation matters, the middle section of the book reads as a handbook for partnerships. It offers clear and useful lists of dos and don'ts for urban and suburban partners. Items here include principles such as sharing responsibility and leadership, interdependence and mutual learning.

The final section then moves to examples of how urban and suburban churches, para-church agencies, businesses and individuals have partnered together in ministry based on the experiences of these four leaders and others. Included is one of the first models of partnership ministry I was able to be a part of, *Strategies to Elevate People (STEP)* in Richmond, VA. With a leadership team comprised of individuals from urban and suburban Richmond, this project is a great example of churches coming together to walk alongside each other as they address the needs of families in urban public housing. From informal, yet highly relational "family share teams" to after-school and summer programs, this program serves to overcome racial tensions in this highly divided and historic city.

Throughout, this book is an insightful and sensitive read that can easily be used to guide difficult discussions about our experi-

ences of race and class in a Christian context. Each chapter offers discussion questions that seem to come straight from the authors own conversations: What is the relationship between being God's people and doing God's mission in the world? How are the works of justice, compassion, and reconciliation related to the mission of the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth? How do these fit into God's call to be radical community?

I can hear the four men discussing these items throughout these pages. I hope, as they do, that we hear churches discussing them all over our nation.

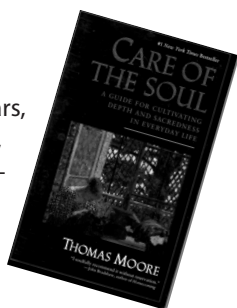
– Reviewed by Jon Singletary

Care of the Soul, by Thomas Moore
Westminster John Knox Press (Louisville, 2008).
ISBN: 978-0-664-23282-5, 192 pp.

While rummaging through a used bookstore recently, I rediscovered this classic first printed in 1992 and then a New York Times Bestseller. I can't remember the first time I read it, but this time, the book seemed to read me!

Moore, who lived as a monk in a Catholic religious order for 12 years, has degrees in theology, musicology and philosophy. A psychotherapist for many years, he became a well-known lecturer and author in the areas of archetypal psychology, mythology and the imagination. From these perspectives, he draws the reader along a path toward heightened spirituality that is both gentle and challenging.

Describing self-knowledge and self-acceptance as the very foundations of the soul, Moore asserts that psychology is a secular science, while care of the soul is a sacred art. He says that in the modern world we have separated religion and psychology, spiritual practice and therapy but that the two need to be seen as one. "Our very idea of what we are doing in our psychology has to be radically re-imagined," he says, adding that he sees therapy "as nothing more than bringing imagination to areas that are devoid of it." Because most, if



not all, problems that people bring to psychologists deal with love, Moore believes it makes sense that the cure is also love: "Taking care of the soul is a way of loving it ... the ultimate cure ... comes from love, not logic."

Care, not cure is the process Moore encourages as we struggle with the themes of our lives. He asks us to consider how our "shadow" side, as Jung called it, can enlighten us and be integrated into our whole – a much different perspective from "fixing" them or "getting rid of them." Moore says that to care for the soul is to "open our hearts wider than they have ever been before, softening the judging and moralism that may have characterized our attitudes and behavior for years."

Moore outlines the different ways to care for the soul in relation to family and childhood, self-love and its myth, love's initiations, jealousy and envy, power, depression, illness and the effects of work, money, failure and creativity. Relying heavily on figures from Greek mythology, the author introduces us to these ancient stories and their underlying relevance to our modern psychological and spiritual struggles. He writes with as much imagination and poetry as he encourages each of us to practice as we care for our souls. It is a style that effortlessly blends storytelling, information, application and possibility.

Although not overtly Christian in its ideology, Care of the Soul does contend that "a spiritual life of some kind is absolutely necessary for psychological 'health.'" To befriend and be willing to learn from that which plagues our emotional well-being brings balance and wholeness to our lives, Moore says. "Suffering forces our attention toward places we would normally neglect," and it is at that difficult point when we don't know what is going on or what to do that we can find "an opening to true faith."

In a day when we increasingly turn to therapy and pharmaceuticals to ease our minds and quiet our restless souls, perhaps taking time to rediscover this book and its holistic approach to soul tending would serve us all well.

Moore's most recent book is A Life at Work: The Joy of Discovering What You Were Meant to Do, published in 2008 by Broadway.

– Reviewed by Vicki M. Kabat