

Title: The Local Church as a Major Player in Dealing with Short- and Long-term Crisis and Poverty

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Abstract:

The local church has a strategic role to play in response to global crises and long term poverty.

The church is empowered to help people change holistically, impacting character formation as well as external life circumstances. This holistic change of person sets the stage for the individuals' multiplicity of gifts and vocations to be used for the good of other people.

When a local church gathers around a common vision of serving a community in need, a variety of professionals and laborers gather together to serve including doctors, lawyers, construction workers, counselors, teachers, and healthcare workers, young and old. When a church is healthy everyone's gifts are being used together for the common good.

The church is also strategic in its ability to respond promptly when global crises occur. When the church is prepared for venues of response, i.e. emergency response teams, the church can mobilize its skilled workers to respond to the need. A healthy local church has connections with other churches and ministries in different parts of the world, with a common heart and common goal who can respond immediately.

One of the unique things happening in our world in the area of armed services is a real emphasis on Special Forces. Special Forces can move quickly and directly with minimal set-up and tear down. A healthy church is able to move quickly and respond immediately.

A funding arm is needed within a healthy church for dealing with those crisis situations and ongoing issues. If a healthy local church commits to a particular project they are able to have continual funding through tithes and offerings from the people in the congregation and they are also able to be committed long term if they so desire. Ultimately, the paradigm shift in being sent from a faith based group, is that we are not simply focusing on the resources of man but on God Himself to move in and through people to help both short term and long term.

A practical example of a local church playing a strategic role in response to a global crisis would be a practical case study of Antioch Community Church's response to the 2004 Tsunami that hit much of Southeast Asia. During this time the church was able to respond immediately with men and women of like values and of different professions and vocations to bring aid to Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the team made their way down to the southern part of the country to a fishing village that had lost about half of their population in the Tsunami, leaving about 400 men, women, and children living in poorly constructed, dilapidated government housing. Our team was given the opportunity to serve and to care for this community.

We began by treating minor medical needs, gathering children, and beginning a school. Trained counselors evaluated what their mental health needs were after the devastation and loss of loved ones, as well as their practical needs. They were able to assess quickly and respond.

In the end it became apparent that the longer term need would be housing and over the next 30 days they were able to secure 29 acres of land donated by the Sri Lankan government and began the process of building a village. The power of this project was that it was done in partnership with the Sri Lankans. In order to qualify for a house they had to assist in clearing the land and the building of the houses.

This transitioned from a short term approach to a long term approach. Construction workers and consultants were brought in as we continued to work on building the village. Business people came to look at opportunities for small cottage industries that would empower the people as many of them still lived in terror of going back to the sea. We began the process of setting up a medical clinic and to care for their practical needs.

Eventually there were 85 homes built to house 400 people. There have been three small businesses started which allow exporting goods to developing countries for resale. A community leadership team of Sri Lankans was organized to manage the projects.

A long term team of Americans have remained in place, not to lead but to serve. They continue to navigate the challenges and the issues of empowering these people to a healthy lifestyle and prosperous vocations.

Lastly let me say that when people are loved well and long term they can't help but ask what the motivation is behind what you do. For those who come from a Christian background they are able to share not only a message of God's hope and love through Jesus Christ but through their lives as well.