



## A Guide to Involving Your Congregation in Social Ministry

Micah 6.8: “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

“Our faithfulness will depend on our willingness to go where there is brokenness, loneliness, and human need. If the church has a future it is a future with the poor in whatever form.”  
Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*

*Isaiah 58:6* “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

#### A Word about this Resource

Based upon our many years of serving children and families, LFS Carolinas understands that long-term healing and wholeness cannot be achieved by a single organization. The love and support of the greater community is absolutely essential in this journey. The purpose of this handbook is to encourage the types of congregation-based social ministries and partnerships that will support our neighbors in need throughout their lives.

This resource will guide your congregation through the process of conducting a self-assessment, including evaluating the needs and assets in your local community and deciding on a plan of action for effectively reaching out. LFS Carolinas is here to assist you during this process, whether that means walking with you through its entirety or serving as a resource during specific points. However you need us, we are thankful to be serving alongside you to meet the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors.

#### Getting Started

For this process to produce the kind of results that you want, it must be embraced by the congregation as a whole and rooted in the work of a key group of laypeople. Your pastoral leaders should identify a group that reflects the makeup of your congregation, including key leaders, long-time and new members, young and old. The group should be committed to walking through the whole process together, from research to outreach. The process of building a group must be rooted in prayer and the assurance that those involved are called there by God.

You may want to begin your time as a group together in a worship service, focused on Jesus’ call to serve the least of these in our midst. A footwashing service is a powerful enactment of the way we are called to serve one another.

#### I. The First Step: Studying Your Congregation

1 Corinthians 12:4-5 “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all people.”

Before delving into the needs of the community, it is important to first take time to study the life of your congregation. Going through a self-assessment process is important in helping develop an appreciation for your congregation, for identifying where God is already at work, and determining your strengths and weaknesses.

How do you begin?

Have your group reflect on your congregational life by examining the following:

- *Who are we?*
  - Examine your identity and history.
  - Describe your congregation and its ministries, traditions and characteristics that make you unique, and any challenges that you are dealing with.
  - Discuss your membership. Who makes up your congregation? Who are your leaders? Where do you live? What do you do?
  - What are your individual gifts and talents? If you have not already, you may want to consider conducting a gifts and talents inventory for your congregation.
  - What are your relationships like --- with God, within the congregation, and beyond the congregation?
- *What do we believe?*
  - Examine your theology relevant to outreach.
  - What is God's purpose for your church in the world?
  - What influences your church's theology of mission?
- *What do we do?*
  - Examine your ministries of congregational life and outreach, and your church's ministry priorities in terms of staff and volunteer time and resources.
  - What is the balance between internal congregational ministries and social outreach ministries?
- *How do we do what we do?*
  - What kind of leadership do you have?
  - How are decisions made?
  - What resources do you have?
- *Write a brief overview of the key points*
- *Pray!!*
- *Review the study and process its implications for ministry development.*

## II. Step Two: Studying the Community

Jeremiah 29.7: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you...Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Why do a community assessment?

- By examining the community closely, you will be able to fine-tune your outreach to meet the unique needs of your neighbors.
- Your social, political, economic, and historical contexts are forces that affect the life of your church and the lives of the people you will be serving. Deepening your understanding of this context will help you reach out much more effectively.

Community can be defined as either the immediate neighborhood of your church, or your city as a whole. It is a good idea to study both closely, and if your church is not located in a high-needs area, you will be able to locate a part of town that might benefit from your partnership.

### Tools for Studying Your Community

1. Data Gathering (Census data, local government studies, social services research, etc.)
  - Percept is a company that many churches work with to learn more about their own communities. You may be able to gain access to some of Percept's tools through the NC or SC Synod offices. Please contact your synod office for more information.
  - Your local United Way may have conducted a local needs assessment that would offer useful insight into your community.
  - The American Community Survey contains the most frequently updated Census information about communities. You can search online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).
  - Check with your local Chamber of Commerce for locally-conducted studies of the business health of your community.
  - Your city or county government may also have community assessments about health issues, education, poverty, or housing. Check with your local government leaders.
  - *LFS Carolinas has an extensive network of care providers throughout North and South Carolina, many of whom work in your local communities. Our insight may be able to assist your congregation with the process of gathering information and interpreting the social services landscape. Please let us know when you are ready to investigate this aspect of your community and we will be glad to help.*

### 2. Maps

Get or create a detailed map of your community. Mark key spots for community life: churches, schools, non-profit organizations, businesses, government agencies, public transportation, etc. What does this map tell you about your community? Where are the resources concentrated? Are there obvious gaps in resources and services?

### 3. Surveys

Use written or oral questionnaires to discover local needs, issues, and assets from a cross-section of community residents. Your own church members are the best people to conduct such a study. If possible, this information is most effectively gathered in person (door-to-door, or at a community gathering spot). You can also use the opportunity to learn more about the community's opinion of your congregation. Some questions you can ask:

- How long have you lived in this community?
- What has been your experience of living here?
- What are the things you enjoy about living here?
- What do you think are some areas of need or challenges for the community?
- Have you heard of our congregation? If so, do you have any thoughts about our church's involvement in the community?

#### 4. Interviews

Conduct in-depth interviews with several leaders and key residents (political officials, non-profit and business leaders, pastors, educators, longtime residents) about their experiences and perceptions of the community, including its strengths and challenges, ideas they may have about needed programs and services, and any thoughts they may have on your congregation's place in the community.

#### 5. Focus Groups

Gather groups within your church to share insights about the community. Begin with general perceptions and then, if necessary, you can move to creating focus groups to study particular aspects of the community.

#### 6. Observation

Conduct visual surveys by foot and car in order to learn more about needs and assets in specific parts of town.

### III. Step Three: Processing the Study

1 Corinthians 3:9 "For we are God's fellow workers"

At each step during your research, it is important to spend time processing what you are learning. Here are some important questions to ask:

1. What are you discovering about your community? What aspects of community life need to be transformed? What are the spiritual and material needs in the community?

2. How is God already at work in the community?

To be effective in our work, we must be on board with what God is already doing. What did you learn about the good work that is already being done? Where is there room for your involvement and partnership?

3. What do you understand to be God's desires for this community?

4. Pray! Where and how is God leading you to serve? Consider how you can be faithful to what you learned in this process.

5. So, where do you go from here? What are the possibilities for getting more deeply involved in your community?

### IV. Getting Involved

Hebrews 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another"

As you move forward from study to action, consider the several ways that your congregation can be in partnership with LFS Carolinas:

- If you are committed to developing your own project, we have included information on “Building a Community Ministry” below. LFS Carolinas would be glad to work with you through this process to build a ministry tailored to the needs and assets of your congregation and community.
- We can work with your congregation on a shared project, where we become equal partners, combining the expertise of our agency and the unique gifts of your church and community. Our staff is available to discuss opportunities for this type of partnership.
- There are also many wonderful volunteer opportunities with LFS Carolinas programs that we would gladly connect you with. Depending on your location, the opportunities include administrative office work at one of our four hubs, occasional projects, and ongoing supportive client relationships in a number of our programs. Please contact us for more details about serving your community through volunteer opportunities with LFS Carolinas.

## V. Building a Community Ministry

Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

If this process has led your congregation to consider launching a new social outreach ministry, congratulations! You have a lot of rewarding work ahead of you!

1. A few questions you should ask before launching a new social outreach ministry:
  - Is someone already doing what we want to do?
  - Should we consider collaborating on an existing program instead of starting something new?
  - If we develop a new program, how will we pay for it?
  - Will this outreach primarily serve the community or the interests of our church?

### 2. Do Your Research

Now that you are intimately aware of the needs and assets in your own community and are considering how to shape your outreach, is time to look at what other congregations have done to meet the needs in their own communities. It will be important to remember that you are not doing this research in order to create carbon copies of successful ministries. Rather, you are learning what it took for other churches to go from vision to outreach so you will better know how to chart your own course.

Please see the attached “Best Practices Guide” for examples of healthy congregationally-based social ministries in North and South Carolina. LFS Carolinas will gladly help you connect with any of these congregations, or others in your area who have developed social outreach ministries in their communities.

You should plan on visiting these ministries when they are fully in action. You will want to spent ample time with the pastor or director of the ministry to find out as much information as possible --- the history, development stage, funding, volunteer resources, and other details that will be helpful as you build your own ministry.

### 3. Claim the Project

It is important to formally establish the mission and vision of your ministry and begin building a broad base of support. Collaboration is the key to this work! Here are a few steps to get you started:

- Get congregational approval for your plan. Their official approval needs to be in place before you begin building support from elsewhere.
- Develop a leadership team that is committed to overseeing the successful implementation of the ministry, including everything from budgeting to volunteer management. Define the goals of the group and establish specific roles for each member so that each person has a specific contribution to make.
- Share the story of your group's process of self and community assessment, which will help build a base of key stakeholders in your congregation and community. Gaining the support from the neighborhood that will benefit from your ministry, from local community leaders, and other local program directors, is crucial to your success. These partners can help contribute in various ways to the ministry (finding/screening participants, marketing, volunteers, transportation, etc.). Remember, collaboration is the key!

### 4. Developing Goals

It is important to focus on what you want to accomplish through your ministry. You should establish several attainable goals and develop strategies on how you will reach them.

Building a program with specific goals in mind will help you to develop a strong, effective ministry that will continue to serve people in need far into the future. These goals must be evaluated regularly in order to determine how effective the program is in helping to improve lives and strengthen your community. Here are a few suggestions for how to make this happen:

- Keep good records! Everything from planning meetings and brainstorming sessions to budget information should be well-organized and safeguarded.
- Start small! It is okay to focus on one small aspect of a greater community need. If you are faithfully aligned with the true needs of your community, a small, focused ministry can make a big difference in the lives of your neighbors.
- Develop a questionnaire for participants, volunteers, and staff to fill out before, during, and after program completion. Their input will help determine satisfaction with the program and its effectiveness.
- Regular evaluation will ensure that your ministry continues to be strong, relevant, and flexible. The evaluation process can reveal more ways to enhance the program, opportunities for partnership, and advocacy opportunities.

### 5. Developing a Budget/Grant Writing

Important things to think about:

- How will you pay for this ministry?

- Does your church have a social outreach budget that is committed to paying for it? Are there denominational resources that you can tap into?
- Would it make sense to charge a reasonable fee for service?
- Is there local community funding available?
- Appoint a treasurer who will keep a comprehensive and accurate budget

There are a number of ways you can raise money, if your congregation does not have enough to support the project to the extent that you need. You can hold benefit events, write grants, charge fees for service, or encourage direct donations. A great resource for building church-based outreach programs is the Fasten Network ([www.fastennetwork.org](http://www.fastennetwork.org)). Their website has many useful tools for the basics of fundraising, Grant Writing, and developing and measuring measurable program goals.

Here are a few tips for successful Grant Writing:

- Develop a comprehensive description of your project. What are your goals? Who will you serve? How will you determine if your project is successful?
- Develop a budget for your project
- Research funding opportunities. Develop contacts within funding organizations. Ask questions that will help you write an effective proposal.
- Identify funding that is a good match for your ministry. Don't "chase" funding that would require you to take your program in a direction that doesn't work for your congregation or best serve your community.
- Write a proposal. If you are creating a new program, you will need to make the case for why this program is necessary. If you are collaborating on an existing effort, it will be important for you to show how your involvement will enhance the project and why additional funding is necessary. Include long-term and short-term goals and ways you will measure whether or not these goals have been achieved.
- Keep good records of every proposal you write, dates that you expect to hear about awards, and a schedule of when updates are due, if you are awarded a grant.
- Always write thank you notes – even if you are not awarded a grant!

## 6. Celebrate

Now that you have designed a program, established support, and are ready to begin serving, it is time to stop and celebrate! Your whole congregation should take time to look forward to the good work that they will be involved in, and cover the work in prayer and praise.

## Conclusion

It is our hope that this handbook has helped guide your congregation through the process of determining how to reach out to your community. It is a long process of listening, discernment, patience, and hard work --- and it is only the beginning! LFS Carolinas will continue to be here as a resource for your congregation as you encounter the questions and challenges that inevitably arise from engaging in outreach ministry. Please let us know how we can help you. Together, we are partners in ministry, reaching out to our communities to create healing and wholeness. Thank you for your faithfulness in this work!

## Resources

The following print resources are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. To order, call 1-800-328-4648. You can visit [www.augsburgfortress.org/store](http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store) for more suggestions.

Funding Expanded Ministries: How to Raise Money for Your Social Ministry Program. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996.

Jesus, Miguel de. *Beyond Our Comfort Zone: Developing Social Ministry Programs in Multiethnic Settings*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

Mayer, David P. *Our Gifts: Identifying and Developing Leaders*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

McCurley, Foster R. *Go in Peace. Serve the Lord*. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Church in Society, 2000.

### Other Resources:

Bos, A. David. *A Practical Guide to Community Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Dudley, Carl S. *Community Ministry: New Challenges, Proven Steps to Faith-Based Initiatives*. Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2002.

Durbin, Mary Ellen, Cathy Katoski, et. Al. *The Empowerment Process: Centering Social Ministry in the Life of the Local Christian Community*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.

Fasten Network. <http://www.fastennetwork.org>. The Faith and Service Technical Education Network offers networking opportunities and informational resources to equip faith-based practitioners, congregations, private philanthropists, and public administrators seeking to collaborate effectively to renew urban communities. Includes many valuable tools, including managing volunteers, writing grants, measuring outcomes, and models for effective outreach.

Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993.

(<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/buildingblurb.html>)

Outlines in simple terms what local communities can do to start their own journey down the path of asset-based development.

Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. *Mapping Community Capacity*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1990.

(<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/papers/mcc.pdf>)

Offers a blueprint for identifying resources that can help regenerate communities.

Lupton, Robert D. *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor*. Ventura: Regal, 2007. This book asks tough questions about service providing and community building to help enhance congregations' effectiveness in reaching out to the poor.

Sherman, Amy L. *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries that Work*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997. The stories of seven ministries that have helped transform communities and lives.

Sider, Ronald J., Philip N. Olson and Heidi Rolland Unruh. *Churches that Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002. Explores how to develop and maintain an effective holistic ministry that combines evangelism and social outreach.