

The Case for Inner-city Ministry

In their book, **Externally Focused Quest**, authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson state that their vision is to be a church that the community and city would miss if it were to disappear. This is more than a church moving to another location or ceasing to exist. The critical difference is *measured impact* of the ministry the church has on the people and community. If the church was to disappear, its contribution and how God is using the church, would be perceived as a great loss. Every church wants to have a positive impact by mobilizing the congregation to serve, whether as a Sunday School Class, Life Group, Ministry Department, family or individual, across all ages.

When God wanted to transform the world, He sent Jesus, not an organization, program, or para-church ministry. Ministry approaches begin by focusing on relationships with people and then establishing organizational partnerships that enhance existing relationships. Programs cannot substitute for relationships. Much of traditional *local missions* is built on supporting the programs of local agencies at the expense of developing deep relationships with the people being served. It is the job of the church to be the church, and not depend on the para-church to do ministry for the church. Historically, the para-church filled the gap when the church was not doing mission; it is time for the para-church to serve with the church and not vice versa. It is the job of the church to live incarnationally within both the community and the inner-city, developing a deeper understanding of the people, their individual culture, and building lasting relationships that will allow effective evangelism and discipleship to take place.

We need to shift from a shallow and wide perspective to a deep and narrow. Instead of thinking “para-church mission agency”, we should be thinking “community transformation through our own congregation”. The bottom line is transformation of people. One approach is to let the

organizations and agencies determine from the top down what needs to be done in ministry. Another approach is asset-based, a bottom-up perspective that assumes God already exists in a community at some level and the seeds of transformation are already present. The community itself is mobilized to take ownership of their community starting with “what positives already exist in the community”. This is basically a Christian Community Development Association approach based on long-term relationships for maximum impact. Community development works toward holistic ministry addressing a variety of needs in a specific area with multiple partners to bring about transformation in a community. While Community Development may be a new concept, it has been taking place in Memphis in Binghampton for two decades.

In light of the traditional local missions approach, the church needs to move from periodically serving a para-church ministry to “demonstrating and engaging” in relationships on a regular basis. A major benefit for establishing a strategic location is having a place to do apprenticeship and equipping.

A deep and narrow laser focuses on a **specific location** of ministry, similar to a geographic zip code, as opposed to ministry all over the city. To think intentional small steps is to start with a neighborhood or a school and grow street by street or student by student. To have impact is to grow deep, committing the church to long term partnerships to build relationships and empower communities to take responsibility to change their environments. The best way to bring Christ to the inner-city is through relationships by impacting families and education. With this in mind, KCB’s inner-city focus will be in **Orange Mound**. On a micro level, KCB will work with church partnerships to mobilize the congregation to transform the community through relationships and servant leadership.

Our philosophy behind development is along the model of the books When Helping Hurts and Toxic Charity. There has been much discussion

about the difference between a hand up and a hand out. Work in the inner-city should involve three components: relationships, empowerment, and sustainability. **Relationships** are the foundation of all serve opportunities. Just as Christ came in the flesh, we serve incarnationally in the midst of people. The goal is to **empower** those in the inner city to take ownership for their own community. We want to raise up leadership rather than do things for them that they can learn themselves. Finally, it is important that if we plan big projects, we want them to be **sustainable**, something that has structure that can be carried through long-term. We start a ministry in mind that can be handed over and sustained by people in the community, as well as support itself with the needed resources as time goes on.

Summary:

The goal of community development in Orange Mound with a long-term commitment is evangelism, discipleship, transformation of people and the community for the purpose of completing the Great Commission. KCB becomes a servant to the community and partners with agencies, churches, or individuals that live life in the community daily. While we serve, we share Christ and become the hands and feet of Christ to bring forth the Kingdom of God in Orange Mound.