
STREET MINISTRY

EQUIPPING THE CHURCH

A PREPRINT

Asher Mancinelli
Indian Trail Church
Spokane, WA 99218
asher.mancinelli@pnnl.gov

May 20, 2019

ABSTRACT

By equipping the saints to lead and minister in the context of Spokane, Washington, we as the Church may better live out the Gospel. The local church's ministry to the homeless and food-insecure in Spokane is best accomplished by small teams with one leader, working in coordination with other long-term organizations already at work. The local church should not contribute to systemic problems or hinder the work of full-time ministries, but should contribute to the work of long-term organizations. The local church should use its financial resources to tend to the poor, and its knowledge of the Gospel to bring more people into a saving knowledge of Christ.

Keywords **The Church:** All those who have trusted in Christ for salvation, and who are incorporated into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, spanning all time and space · **The Local Church:** The local church is a group of believers in a given area who are organized under leadership, and who regularly gather together to carry out the mission of the Church · **The Gospel:** That all humanity was separated from God by sin, but is overcome by an individual's faith in Christ and Christ's saving work to overcome the debt of sin, bringing that individual into communion with God and into continued sanctification and conformation into the image of Christ

1 Audience

This work targets churches with a biblical understanding of the Gospel's call for the church to engage and come alongside the poor. I do not attempt here to provide an exhaustive theology of social justice, but rather the specific steps that local churches in Spokane can take to better care for the needy. This is intended for congregations that understand the need to engage with the poor, but perhaps lack the information or experience to carry it out.

2 Opportunities to Equip the Saints

In my experience with local churches, organizations and individuals in Spokane, there are three areas where believers tend to feel ill-equipped. Believers in middle- to upper-class Spokane tend to be somewhat removed from the needs of the poor. As a result, they do not know what physical needs they are able to meet, or what of those needs are of the highest priority. Believers also rarely feel comfortable sharing the Gospel, which is significant because of the opportunities to share the gospel downtown. The church can bridge this gap by equipping:

- Members with information needed to tend to the physical needs of the poor
- Team members to share the Gospel and pray with people
- Leaders to coordinate and empower team members

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 1:27

3 Intended Results

All team members should be equipped in the following capacities:

- Preparing and distributing items for physical aid
- Sharing the gospel
- Praying with/for the served
- Deescalating conversations with upset people
- Developing relationships with those being served

Leaders should be equipped in the following additional capacities:

- Navigating the streets and leading teams on foot
- Leading and comforting team members coming for the first time
- Equipping others to lead in the same capacities

4 Implementation

This section describes the steps that the local church can take to achieve the goals previously outlined.

4.1 Team Members

Every team member should be ready for the following five responsibilities:

4.1.1 Preparation

If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

James 2:16

Though the spiritual health is in every case more important than the physical, the physical is still of utmost importance, and we are commanded to tend to the physical health of those who lack it. There are many ways that we as the local church can tend to the needs of our community. In my experience, the most common way for the local church to provide is through bagged lunches, hygiene supplies, and clothes. In the past, the lunches have had been composed of a sandwich, a fruit, and a snack. It is worth noting that many homeless people do not have healthy teeth, so they cannot eat fruits like apples or crunchy snacks. Additionally, foods with nut products should be kept separate in case of a nut allergy. Of all the clothing items to donate, socks and underwear seem to be in the highest demand. This is because used underwear cannot be donated and many people are not comfortable giving them out. The needy do greatly appreciate when we overcome this social stigma and donate unused underwear, as fewer people are willing to do so. Each member of the Body of Christ is gifted uniquely for the construction of the Kingdom of God, and each may contribute according to their gifting. For example, some may be physically incapable of walking long distances, so their contribution may be the purchasing or preparing of goods to be taken with the rest of the team. Each ought to contribute according to their capacity, however I have met many elderly ladies, exceeding eighty years of age and with many crippling physical ailments, who faithfully take to the streets with whatever aid they can provide. Their steadfastness has been an encouragement to me, and I hope it will also be for any members of the Body that feel incapable of contributing. Let it also be an encouragement that the Father will notice and remember the efforts of every member of the body—the valiant efforts of the physically impaired are of great value to the church, and are pleasing the Father.

4.1.2 Sharing the Gospel

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19

The most capable entity in equipping believers to know and share the Gospel is the local church. The local church should equip its members to know and share the Gospel by biblical teaching from the pulpit, and through members teaching each other. Each member of a team going downtown ought be a member or attendee of a local church that professes Christ and teaches biblical doctrine, enabling the member to articulate the Gospel. This is a great opportunity for more mature members of the Body of Christ to model to the younger ones how to share the Gospel. Particularly, parents have the opportunity to show their children how to share the Gospel, a skill that may translate to their schools and eventually their workplaces.

4.1.3 Prayer

In my experience, one of the methods of sharing the Gospel that has met the least friction is prayer. For example, “Father in heaven, I thank you for your Gospel, which is...” with a subsequent articulation of the Gospel. Prayer opens up a window for sharing the Gospel and is an opportunity to bring someone’s needs to the Father, and every team member should be comfortable in praying with and for people they meet.

4.1.4 Deescalation

Occasionally, people being served get agitated for one reason or another, and it is important to know how to deescalate these situations. For example, a member of a team I led once offered some cookies to a man with his dog. The man became quite upset that my team member only had cookies for people, and didn’t bring dog treats. As he became more upset, my team member wisely replied, “Well I am very sorry that we don’t have any dog treats, but I will make sure

to pack some next time!” She then proceeded to walk away from the man and wish him a nice day (she also did in fact make sure to bring dog treats the next time!). Any team member would be well-served to follow her pattern, which is to:

- Speak softly and kindly,
- apologize,
- and if the person continues to escalate, walk away

Additionally, this is an example of why it is always a good idea to walk with other members of the team.

4.1.5 Developing Relationships

I am glad for adrenaline; I suspect it gets me through lots of Sundays. But it doesn't do much for Mondays. I am more thankful for my heart. It just keeps on serving. . . Coronary Christians are like the heart in the causes they serve. . . O, for coronary Christians! Christians committed to great Causes, not great comforts.

A Call for Coronary Christians, John Piper

It is in the context of relationship that the Holy Spirit seems to do the most work. In living out the Gospel, we as the Church seek not to simply distribute food to people, we seek to love them and forge relationships with them. This does not happen on one day, but over weeks, months, and years. By going downtown many times, each team member ought to get to know and pray for specific people. This means remembering names and other details about those we server, with the intention of forming long-term relationships. Referring to a person by his or her name and remembering information about them carries a special significance, especially when this demographic is often treated as sub-human.

4.2 Leaders

The responsibilities of team leaders exceed that of the other team members.

4.2.1 Leading on Foot

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

Luke 22:25-26

It is usually best to have a specific route in mind before actually hitting the streets for a couple of reasons. Firstly, if a couple of members of the team are talking for a particularly long time with someone, it may be helpful for the team to temporarily split up. In that case, there should be at least two people equipped to lead a group, so that no group is left without anyone to lead. Then, because there is already an established route, the each group knows where the other is going, and can regroup later. Additionally, a team leader should always be conscious of where his or her team members are, ideally keeping all of them within eyesight. Some team members may absently walk away from the group and end up alone in a crowd of people, which is undesirable. There is usually not any danger, however it is the team leader's responsibility to make sure that everyone stays together and is accounted for.

4.2.2 Leading First-Timers

When leading someone downtown who has never gone before, it is extremely helpful and reassuring to describe to them what typically happens and what the plan for that day is. Even if they seem comfortable, they may need some encouragement to feel ready to talk to people or hand out food. For example, as the leader you may begin an interaction with somebody and invite the newcomer into the conversation, or ask them to give some food to someone in particular to get them started. Encouragement, reassurance, and gratitude go a long way in making a team member feel comfortable sharing and speaking with people on the streets, I have found.

4.2.3 Equipping Others to Lead

Leading is the best way to equip another person to lead. Especially if someone has participated several times before, it may be helpful to let that individual carry the food/goods and handle most of the interactions with people. This will boost their confidence and make them feel comfortable, while you stay close by and encourage their interactions. The mark of a truly experienced leader is their ability to empower others to lead—in the same way, a leader downtown ought to bring up other capable leaders from within their team.

5 Concluding Notes

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Not only is God the supreme source of satisfaction for the human soul, but God himself is glorified by our being satisfied in him. Therefore, our pursuit of joy in him is essential.

Christian Hedonism, John Piper

The church in Spokane has room to grow in its service to the poor, as evidenced by the number of deaths this last winter. This is not an emotionless duty, however. Christ is faithful to provide us with surpassing joy and satisfaction in Him when we obey His word, and service to the poor is no exception. I encourage each local church in Spokane to engage with the poor of our community no matter how uncomfortable it may be. Uncover the treasures of joy in store for those faithful to live out the Gospel.