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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

CHURCH PLANTING IN A GOVERNMENT FUNDED SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAM

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**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2007
March 2007
Dallas, TX**

The purpose of this paper is to offer an assessment of the advisability of planting a church out of a federally funded social services program. The assessment will be based on the author's experience of planting a church of The Salvation Army (TSA) out of a TSA social services program for homeless veterans he had also founded that is located on the grounds of a Veterans Affairs Healthcare Center (VAHC).

The paper will first articulate the importance of the church and church planting, particularly church planting among the urban poor. The paper will then explain why the author believed planting a church out of a social services program that serves the urban poor was appropriate and feasible. Next, there will be a relatively brief history of the development of the social services program, the Haven, and the church plant, Haven Christian Fellowship. There will then follow an assessment of the weaknesses and strengths of the church plant and its impact on the social services program. The paper will conclude with an exploration of future plans for the Haven and Haven Inglewood Corps (present name of the church), and advice to those that would consider planting a church out of a social services program for the urban poor.

Church Planting

The Church

In the relativistic and pluralistic culture of the United States today there seems to be a growing preference for “spirituality” as practiced by individuals rather than the more traditional organized religious practices of “church.”¹ For Christians, however, the church is to be at the center and their religious and spiritual life. “The church is the people of God, the assembly and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”² The church, at least in the Protestant tradition, is about preaching the Word, faithfully administering the sacraments and properly exercising church discipline.³ That is, the church is about sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to sinners, corporately worshipping the Triune God, fellowshiping with other believers and becoming mature disciples of Christ. It is primarily through the church that the message of salvation is offered to those still lost in sin and that the announcement of the Kingdom of God, or God’s rule and reign, to those still caught in the web of the fallen powers (Satan and his demonic forces) of this world.

Church Planting

C. Peter Wagner has argued that “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.”⁴ While existing churches remain vitally needed for those already a part them and for those within their sphere of influence, new churches can be planted that focus more on those that are presently not connected with any worshiping body.⁵

World Impact is a Christian missions organization focused on ministering to the urban poor of the United States. Dr. Keith Phillips, founding president of World Impact, believes that planting churches in the inner cities is the most effective way to address the

¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1995), p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990), p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

multitude of issues, spiritual and material, facing these inhabitants.⁶ According to Dr. Phillips, of the 40 million poor in the United States' urban areas, 90% had not visited a church in a least a year.⁷ In response to this, World Impact believes that cross-cultural church planting among the urban poor is essential, with the goal of leadership transfer so that these newly planted churches will eventually become indigenously led.⁸

World Impact Model

The World Impact model for cross-culturally planting churches among the urban poor has a number of key components: 1) Cross-cultural church planters move into the area where the church is to be planted 2) evangelism and discipleship happen in the context of neighborhood bible studies and other relational activities 3) a church is planted, possibly starting as a church that meets in the church planters' homes, and 4) social services' programming develops out of assessed needs of the worshipping community and the community surrounding the church plant.⁹ This church plant among the urban poor incorporates those traditional elements of a church, evangelism, worship, fellowship and discipleship, but also focuses on material and social issues in a way most churches do not. Out of the process of discipleship, indigenous leadership is to be identified and nurtured with the goal of, eventually, turning the church over to those trained and now ready to lead. The church planters would then transition out of the community to their next area of ministry.

The Haven Church Plant

This author encountered the approach to church planting advocated by World Impact in February of 1999 and was immediately inspired by their ideas. He had already started a cross-cultural church plant among the urban poor in the greater Los Angeles

⁶ Keith Phillips, *Out of Ashes*, (Los Angeles, California: World Impact Press, 1996), p. 95.

⁷ Keith Phillips, *Crowns of Beauty*, (Los Angeles, California: World Impact Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ Phillips, *Out of Ashes*, p. 90.

area the previous summer and was inspired that others had a similar interest in connecting with those outside of the usual outreach ministries of churches. What World Impact was interested in seemed consistent with the mission of his own denomination, The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army's mission statement reads:

The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and meet human needs in His name without discrimination.

The Salvation Army, while better known as a charity in the United States, still identifies itself as a church and remains interested in evangelism and social services.

There were some differences, however, between the approach that the author was involved in and what World Impact was advocating. The most important difference was that he was attempting to plant a church out of an existing social services program rather than developing social services out of the church plant. Other differences included the reality that he had not relocated to the area where ministry was taking place and that he had started the church solo rather than with a team of cross-cultural missionaries.

But, he was inspired enough by the World Impact model that he thought it worth the investment to try to incorporate as much of this model as possible into his setting. This author also began to wonder if the approach he was taking could serve as a model for others that might be interested in planting a church among the urban poor out of a social services program. Social services programs regularly encounter the urban poor, many of whom are disconnected from any worshiping community. In the context of addressing material needs the opportunity to offer spiritual succor might present itself and this might eventually lead to connection with a worshiping community.

On the basis of this, the author entered into a relationship with World Impact, beginning in 1999 (and lasting until 2003), in which he was mentored/coached by them in church planting with the urban poor. Before describing this church plant in more detail, however, it may be helpful to understand the social services program that serves as the community out of which the plant occurred.

History

History of the Haven

The Salvation Army Haven began in June of 1994 as a joint venture between TSA and VAHC to provide housing and support services to homeless veterans. The VAHC hospital in West Los Angeles, the largest VAHC campus in the country, had become a place to camp out for many homeless, particularly homeless veterans. It has been estimated that there are 90,000 homeless persons in Los Angeles County and, possibly, 30,000 of these are veterans. The VAHC hospital was providing medical and psychiatric services for a number of these homeless veterans, but there was a high level of recidivism because after being discharged from the hospital many of these veterans returned to less than adequate sleeping arrangements. With this in mind, TSA was asked to come onto the VAHC campus and occupy an unused building to provide shelter and support services, first to homeless veterans being discharged from the hospital, and then to homeless veterans in general that were in need of temporary housing.

When the Haven opened there was only funding available to support the shelter of up to 20 homeless veterans at a time. Over the years, however, other streams of revenue have been tapped and, at the present time, the Haven can house up to 250 veterans at a time in two buildings on the VAHC campus. The range of services offered has increased dramatically as well; while continuing to provide emergency shelter (50 beds), the Haven also provides shelter for veterans undergoing detoxification from alcohol/drugs (5 beds), social model substance abuse treatment (65 beds), treatment for dually diagnosed veterans (30 beds), transitional housing for senior veterans (15 beds) and female veterans (15 beds), and a state-licensed board & care facility for mentally ill veterans (70 beds).

From the time the Haven opened until a few years ago the peer-support model was used for the delivery of services. Most of the staff, including program directors, were former Haven residents and graduates of its substance abuse treatment program. The present approach, however, is a combination professional/peer support model, with

entry level staff taken from the pool of program graduates and senior level staff being hired with advanced degrees in social work or psychology.

While about ten percent of the 3.5 million dollar annual budget is from unrestricted donations, the majority of funding comes from a number of government contracts, including HUD and the VA's national Grant and Per Diem program. The Haven also has per diem contracts with the local VAHC. Because of these sources of funding, the location on federal VAHC property and the focus on providing services for veterans being discharged from the VAHC hospital, the Haven's programming has always been non-sectarian.

TSA employment practices also prohibit religious discrimination for positions without a specific religious function. The Haven does have one chaplain position and a number of chaplain interns, but the overwhelming number of the present 50+ staff was hired without taking into account their religious convictions.

History of Haven Christian Fellowship

From its earliest days the Haven offered voluntary chapel services on site for its residents. The chapel services were led by this author with the assistance of interested staff and residents. This author noticed, over the years, that residents would come to the chapel services faithfully, but then not connect with a worshipping community, even after being encouraged to do so, once they graduated from the Haven. So, the initial interest in planting a church out of the Haven was the desire by the author to provide a worshipping home and place for ongoing discipleship for those that had made some spiritual progress while residents. The author also hoped that these individuals would then bring their families out to the church so that it would eventually become multi-generational.

TSA approved of this plan and also agreed that the church plant should not be on VAHC grounds for two reasons: 1) It would be easier to continue to assert that the Haven program was non-sectarian, and 2) The VAHC was in one of the most affluent sections of Los Angeles and would not be the home to many Haven residents once they completed treatment. Therefore, Haven Christian Fellowship was located in Inglewood, 10 miles

away from the VAHC and populated predominantly by African-Americans and Hispanics from the poor and lower-middle classes. (The Haven resident mix has always been about 70% African-Americans and 30% Caucasian). The meeting site would be an already existing TSA church that had dwindled in attendance since the days when the area was predominantly Caucasian.

Haven Christian Fellowship began in that Inglewood location in June of 1998 with services on Sunday morning and transportation from the Haven provided by vans (in later years buses would be used). For the first eight months the church functioned as little more than a chapel service, with the same issue surfacing as when the chapel service was held at the Haven; namely, people tended not to stay with the church once they graduated from the program.

A few did stay after they graduated, however, and they became part of the leadership team that was put in place once the relationship between Haven Christian Fellowship and World Impact was solidified in the spring of 1999. Out of this relationship it was decided to add a bible study on one of the nights during the week and have a Christian 12 Step meeting on another night. After running those two additional services for about a year, and seeing a few more people stay with the church (the average attendance was by this time about 50, with regular attendees at 10-15), the decision was made to start a Sunday School for children and develop a discipleship program for future church leaders.

The Sunday School started with the author's wife as the teacher and the two students being their sons. But soon, a few other regular attendees began to bring children to the services.

After much prayer and planning, a discipleship program, known as the Haven Knights Discipleship Training, started in the summer of 2001. The program included a number of elements in a progressive scheme. Participants would begin by working through the materials of Celebrate Recovery, a Christian 12 Step ministry pioneered by Rick Warren at Saddleback Church in Orange County, California. After completing this

material and showing some evidence of pursuing a clean and sober lifestyle, students could move on to the Experiencing God course by Henry Blackaby. This course is designed to assist one in knowing and doing God's will.¹⁰ If one completed this course then the student would be eligible to participate in the Haven Bible Institute. The church worked with the Evangelical Training Association to offer classes in basic biblical literacy and leadership development through the Institute with the hoped for outcome of some students rising to the place that they might become leaders in the church and influence others.

But, the idea was not to limit this training program to structured educational activities alone. A key additional component was the "accountability partner." Those further along in the process would help those newer to the program. It would be a Christian version of the "sponsor" role in traditional Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. However, in addition to working with others on recovery issues, the accountability partner would also encourage daily bible reading and scripture memorization. The qualification for being an accountability partner was having completed a 5th Step (completing a moral inventory of one's wrongs and sharing that with God and another human being) from a Christian perspective.

In the context of designing the Haven Knights Discipleship Training program to enhance the growth of the church plant, the author began to study more closely the TSA mission statement. The clear implication of the statement is that those committed to the holistic ministry of the TSA should be the ones primarily engaged in evangelism and social services. The author read a critique of TSA that argued that by having employees not committed to the overall mission of TSA it risked drifting from its founding purpose of evangelizing the lost.¹¹ And, he read Jim Collin's assessment that companies become great by having the kind of workers prepared to enthusiastically support a company.¹²

¹⁰ Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Life Way Press, 1990), p. 7.

¹¹ Charles L. Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 229.

¹² Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York, New York: Harper Business, 2001) p. 41.

So the author came to believe that the Haven Knights could serve a dual purpose: help grow the church plant and also prepare recovering persons for future employment at the Haven. If participants in the Haven Knights were the most diligent in their recovery work they would be most qualified for the entry level peer support positions at the Haven. If the majority of the staff was committed to the larger purposes of TSA (while remaining not required to be so as a condition of employment) the Haven could remain non-sectarian as a program to fulfill its obligations to its funding sources, but the staff would be prepared to represent the larger purposes of TSA when Haven residents might bring up the subject. This might further support the growth of Haven Christian Fellowship and the Haven Knights program. The church and social services could become mutually supportive and contribute to fulfilling the mission of TSA as it is presently stated.

During the three years that the Haven Knights Discipleship Training program operated out of the church, 152 residents of the Haven's substance abuse treatment program voluntarily participated. Of those that participated, 69 worked through the Celebrate Recovery material to complete at least a 5th Step. Of those 69, 29 also completed the Experiencing God course and participated in one or more of the courses offered through the Haven Bible Institute. Out of the 29 that took an Institute class, only three that were not employed when they began the Training later became employees of the Haven (one still remains an employee), while all three are still active in the church. There were seven participants hired as employees at the Haven before they finished Experiencing God course because of staffing needs at the program. None of these participants ever finished the course nor remain employed at the Haven, and none remain connected with the church.

Also during the three years of the Training program, average Sunday worship attendance increased from about 50 to approximately 80. And, the size of the children/youth Sunday School increased from two to 15.

The finances of the church, however, were tenuous. TSA originally provided Field Development Grants to support the work financially during the early years. This

had ended by the time the Training was instituted. The church became self-supporting with an annual budget of approximately \$45,000, but this was not enough to cover much more than the rent being paid to the TSA corps (church) where Haven Christian Fellowship was meeting. There was definitely not enough money raised to support any paid staff positions. So, the author continued to donate his time as the pastor while receiving his salary as Executive Director of the Haven.

The formal Haven Knights Discipleship Training program ended in 2004, although the individual courses that made up part of the Training are still used in the church. The program did not significantly increase the number of leaders in the church or committed employees at the Haven. It required a heavy commitment by the leaders of the Training and they began to sense that their time and energies might be better spent in other areas. Also, three of the original six leaders relapsed and one of those later ended up in prison.

Sunday morning worship attendance dropped dramatically in 2004 and then rebounded in 2005. By the end of 2005 it had returned to approximately 80 each Sunday. The long-time pastors of the aging TSA corps in Inglewood decided to retire in 2005. It was eventually decided by the divisional leadership of TSA to merge Haven Christian Fellowship with this TSA corps (which was averaging 20-25 in Sunday worship). In July of 2006 the merger took place and The Salvation Army Haven Inglewood Corps was born. The corps averages a little more than 100 for Sunday morning worship with children/youth Sunday School at 15-20 in attendance. Two leaders from the old Inglewood congregation have joined the remaining leaders of Haven Christian Fellowship. The author is the (unpaid) pastor of the merged congregation while maintaining his responsibilities at the Haven.

Assessment

Weaknesses (Real and Perceived)

Lack of a Church Plant Team. As mentioned earlier, this author began the church plant by himself. While TSA did provide initial financial support, there was no hands-on

TSA support for the project. TSA did not have the human resources to provide this support, but was still willing to provide the author with financial backing to see if the project could get off the ground.

World Impact recommends that the initial church plant team be at least 5-10 urban missionaries trained in church planting among the urban poor.¹³ This group engages in the initial activities of evangelizing and discipling the urban poor that will make up the future leadership of the church. The urban missionaries also provide a stable foundation for the church during its early phase before a number of urban poor come to identify the church as their church.

Out of desperation this author allowed just about anyone that continued to stay with Haven Christian Fellowship beyond their stay at the Haven to be a leader, of sorts, during the early years of the church plant. These persons, all in recovery for substance abuse, came with a number of issues that still needed to be addressed while they were thrust into positions of responsibility. They were being discipled by the author while also representing the church to newcomers. Their personal lives, particularly having to do with whom they were living, did not set a good example for others as to God-honoring personal relationships. If there had been a more stable leadership in place initially then these people would not have been put in leadership until they had been discipled further.

This author attended a class at a local seminary a number of years ago and, during the class, described his ministerial situation with particular focus on his struggle to train leaders. The teacher responded by suggesting that maybe it would have been better, in hindsight, to have started with a bible study wherein discipleship might occur. If out of the bible study a sufficient leadership base had emerged then the church plant might have started on a more firm foundation of human resources.

Lack of Initial Staff Support. There was no initial support for the church plant from among the existing staff members of the Haven at the time. The author did not,

¹³ World Impact, *School for Urban Cross-Cultural Church Planting* (Los Angeles, California: World Impact, 2000).

initially, elicit their support nor provide a clear understanding to them of why this plant was taking place. The author knew, through years of informal conversations with Haven staff members, that none was presently connected with a church. He also knew that a number of staff was antagonistic towards the Christian faith. Most staff had been hired because of their knowledge and experience of traditional 12 Step recovery, and they were interested in working for the Haven because of its social model substance abuse treatment program, not its connection to TSA as a church. But this should not have hindered the author from attempting to articulate clearly the vision and reason for attempting the church plant.

After the church was established, however, the author attempted to articulate this message to staff, even taking some key staff to trainings related to evangelism and church growth. But those that were initially antagonistic remained so.

Over the years, however, the establishment of the church has become a more accepted part of the life of the Haven; an explanation of TSA's mission statement is provided during new staff orientation, as well as how the connection between the church and the social service program is an attempt to contribute to the fulfilling of that mission. This connection is also emphasized during various staff trainings that occur throughout the year on "holistic" social services. Presently, anywhere from 10-15 Haven staff members participate in the church at some level, and two senior staff members are also part of the leadership team at the church.

Ongoing Issues of Staff Support. With the failure of the Haven Knights Discipleship Training program to provide qualified entry level staff, the reality has been that most applicants for entry level positions at the Haven are not connected with the Haven Inglewood Corps or any church. And, when the decision was made to require professional qualifications for some senior staff positions, an attempt was made to recruit these new staff from institutions that might provide applicants with greater appreciation for the entire mission of TSA. However, the most qualified persons (and the ones that were hired) are not supportive (while not being antagonistic) of the entire mission.

The ongoing reality is that there is a staff split between those supportive of the entire mission of TSA, particularly the integration of the Haven and the Haven Inglewood Corps, and those that are not. While there is usually not overt tension because this, there is inevitable tension below the surface. TSA has contributed to this situation by adopting a non-discriminatory hiring policy as it relates to religious affiliation. TSA remains committed to its mission statement but has hiring practices which inevitably lead to employing people not committed to the mission. If this author gave up the commitment to integrating the Haven with Haven Inglewood Corps then much of that tension would be eliminated. But, that would seem to undermine the attempt to contribute to fulfilling the mission of TSA through the Haven program.

Confusion of Roles. Although there are professional relationships, most relationships in a church setting are personal and voluntary. The relationships in social services, however, must be professional and contractual. This author is the Pastor of the church and also Executive Director of the Haven, and he relates to residents from professional and pastoral roles. Haven staff members that are also church members relate to clients as residents while at work and fellow parishioners while at church. The Executive Director and senior staff supervise line staff at work and then relate to them as church members on Sunday. The possibility of role confusion is real as well as the charge that those staff/residents that attend church will be treated in a way differently from those staff/residents that do not.

This author was aware of this possibility from the beginning of the church and so boundaries were established early on that have become part of the ethos of the Haven and Haven Inglewood Corps. The Pastor does not, and encourages staff that attends church not to, engage in any Haven decisions while at church. Residents that attend church (and some attend just for this purpose) to get a hearing for their situation at the Haven are told that those decisions can only be made at work. The Pastor refuses to counsel any Haven resident on any matter other than spiritual, and he has stopped counseling sessions when the resident has tried to veer the session toward a Haven situation. Residents that

regularly attend church have been just as easily discharged from the Haven for program infractions as those that do not. And, Haven staff members that have become members of the Haven Inglewood Corps have been dismissed from employment for failure to meet job performance criteria. (Interestingly enough, three staff members that were dismissed from Haven employment continued to attend the church after dismissal, and two remain regular attendees to the present).

Government Opposition. The services of Haven Christian Fellowship and, now, Haven Inglewood Corps, have always been voluntary for Haven residents. However, all Haven residents are encouraged to participate in church-related activities and transportation is specifically provided by the Haven to all Haven Inglewood Corps' events. Each new resident to the Haven receives a letter from the Executive Director and Pastor inviting them to the services of the church. The Chaplain and chaplain interns are required to offer the resources of the church to the residents of the Haven while making it clear that these resources are voluntary.

The Haven, however, is located on federal property, receives federal funds and is non-sectarian in the delivery of services. The VAHC is also daily involved with the flow of clients into and out of the Haven. All Haven residents come from referrals from the VAHC (which determines that clients are eligible to receive services as veterans) and the VAHC is supposed to respond to any complaints from veterans relative to their treatment in a VAHC supported program. Complaints about church/state separation and discrimination in the delivery of services are leveled against the Haven from time to time by Haven residents to the VAHC. While none of these complaints has ever been proven true, the time and energy needed to defend the institution when it is under investigation has resulted in the Haven being less aggressive in encouraging residents to participate in Haven Inglewood Corps' activities than it would if the Haven did not have this constant oversight.

Manipulation. Residents do not come to the Haven in order to join a church. They come for food, shelter, substance abuse treatment, therapy, family reunification,

vocational counseling and planning for the re-integration into the mainstream of society. They come to a social services program that is billed as non-sectarian in the delivery of services to those who agree to be in its care. It is licensed by the State of California to provide substance abuse treatment and services for the mentally ill in a non-discriminatory way. And, TSA states that those who practice social work in their social services program should follow after the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers by respecting a client's right to "self-determination."¹⁴ If there is an attempt to grow a church out of such a setting, are not residents being misled and the program manipulating residents against their right to self-determination? Should not the Haven, instead, focus on discovering the residents' spiritual inclinations in attempting to provide "holistic" care and then try to assist the resident in accessing those spiritual resources?¹⁵ Connected with this, might it not be better to elicit support from various denominations and faith traditions so that when residents present with similar interests appropriate referrals to these institutions be made out of respect for a resident's right of self-determination?

While never having been told so, this author has inferred out of conversations with various VAHC social workers that have frequent interactions with the Haven that they would prefer the approach to "holistic" services coming out of the questions above. This author has also inferred that various VAHC social workers believe that what the Haven does as it relates to encouraging participation in the activities of Haven Inglewood Corps may not be discriminatory, but it is manipulative.

In response, the Haven has always supported the rights of residents to participate in the spiritual activities of their choosing. The Haven has brought in speakers over the years to help explain the religious holidays of Jews and Muslims. Residents that participate in religious services/practices outside of the Christian faith are accommodated

¹⁴ James Winship, *Faith in Action* (Des Plaines, Illinois: The Salvation Army, 2001) p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to the best of the program's ability. Residents that are part of another Christian church when they come to the Haven are encouraged to continue to participate in that church.

However, from the statistics the Haven has gathered over the years from resident intake information, over two-thirds of Haven residents have not been connected with any worshiping community in at least one year. Why not encourage (but not require) them to attend a place (Haven Inglewood Corps) where recovery language is spoken from a Christian perspective and where a group of people gather together in Christ's name that have gone through, and are going through, many of the same issues that beset them? Why not provide a place that is associated with the name of Jesus Christ that has as its emphasis what defined His ministry, as He stated in Luke 4:18-19, as "preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners, recovering of sight for the blind and releasing the oppressed?"

Strengths

Everyone is Welcome. While many churches claim to be accepting towards everyone, most churches will struggle being friendly to the type of person that regularly attends the Haven Inglewood Corps. The type of person that comes to the church is most likely a resident at the Haven or some other social services program. They have become disconnected from family and many positive influences. Their behavior is beyond what the mainstream is comfortable with. And, while some churches may intentionally try to work with people like the ones that attend the Haven Inglewood Corps, the relationship will tend to be that of "ministering to" the poor person rather than "ministering with" the person.

Connected with this is the reality that the leadership of the church, while far fewer in number than what this author desires, is indigenous, having come from the ranks of former program participants and setting a positive example for newcomers of what one can become if they engage themselves in ways similar to what the leaders have. And, these leader roles provide meaning and significance for those persons that fill them as

part of their spiritual growth. It is unlikely that many of the leaders of the Haven Inglewood Corps would be recognized as leaders in most other churches.

Growth Barrier Broken. The Haven Inglewood Corps averages a little over 100 in Sunday worship attendance and sees almost 130 different people per week through all of its services. While regular attendance remains a challenge with 20-30 attendees likely just passing through because of their participation in a Haven program, a few of these persons do stay with the church and this gradually adds to the regular participation. According to Carl F. George, by breaking the 100+ average in weekly attendance, the Haven Inglewood Corps now has attendance greater than 60% of the churches in the United States.¹⁶ While the socio-economic makeup of the congregation means that it still struggles financially without paid staff, the church has grown from about 30 in average attendance the first year to its present average. This may not be the kind of growth expected in most successful church plants, but church planting leaders tend to believe that 125 is a large congregation for churches planted among the urban poor.¹⁷

A Missional Church. Much has been written in recent years about where the church needs to be heading in the 21st Century. A post-modern culture requires an “emerging church” that speaks to this situation. One of the patterns of life for these “emerging churches” is the move from the church as being a place where people come to a people that incarnate God’s love in the world.¹⁸ This is being referred to as a “missional church.” The Haven Inglewood Corps fits the understanding of being a “missional church” as well as any. People connected with this church are daily encountering the urban poor in conditions of material and spiritual brokenness, providing support at the point of need, but also offering a worshiping community as a place of ongoing nurture and connection that is comfortable with their socio-economic situation.

¹⁶ Carl F. George, *How to Break Growth Barriers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 132.

¹⁷ Rick Grover, “Urban Church Planting: The Call to the City,” *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, Tom Jones, ed. (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 2004), p. 48.

¹⁸ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005) p. 140.

Over 200 of the urban poor, whether Haven residents or persons outside the Haven and not presently connected with the Haven Inglewood Corps, are presented with the gospel message each year through bible studies, worship services, Christian 12 Step meetings, spiritual retreats, outdoor crusades and holiday celebrations.

A Spiritual Program. In spite of criticism that the Haven violates church and state separation, discriminates on the basis of religious orientation and possibly manipulates residents into attending Haven Inglewood Corps, the program also has a reputation of caring for any veteran, no matter what. In crises, this author and some of the leaders of the church have been called on to provide spiritual support for VAHC social workers and others connected with the VA that have not been supportive of TSA presence on VAHC grounds. This author has officiated at funerals for those not connected with the Haven, but connected to the VAHC in some way, because someone knew of the Haven's reputation and asked for help. The program is informally known around the VAHC as a "spiritual" program where people will be assisted in addressing spiritual questions if they so choose. Whether or not outsiders are aware of it, the development of the Haven as a "spiritual" program is an outgrowth of the development of the Haven Inglewood Corps and the attempt to integrate activities of the two programs.

Future

As long as this author has any influence, the Haven will continue to encourage residents to participate in activities at the Haven Inglewood Corps and will be interested in moving participants into membership and leadership. The Haven will continue to provide spiritual nurture for residents through chaplains and staff connected with the church and the Christian faith. The Haven will continue to be interested in hiring those most qualified for positions available that support the overall mission of TSA without violating TSA's policy of non-discrimination in hiring practices.

As far as the future of the Haven Inglewood Corps is concerned, there is underway a concerted effort to reach out to the residents of Inglewood not connected with the Haven program. The residents that attend will likely be of a similar socioeconomic

background to Haven residents, but more committed to living and, possibly, worshiping in Inglewood. This concerted outreach effort will further allow the church to become more multi-generational and address felt needs beyond those of middle-aged substance abusers that are also veterans of the military.

Advice

If this author could provide any advice to someone contemplating planting a church of the urban poor out of a social services program it would be:

Make Sure This is God's Will—Planting this church was the most difficult professional endeavor the author has engaged in, with far more setbacks than perceived successes. In spite of this, the author has believed all along that this was God's will for this season in his life and so he has been able to continue to engage this ministry with passion in spite of the many challenges.

Have a Committed Leadership Team—The biggest mistake made was pursuing the church plant without a stable group of committed urban missionaries that could be the ones to engage in the initial tasks of evangelism and discipleship. They will be able to influence a larger initial group of the targeted population than someone attempting this alone at the start.

Prepare the Staff—Once the groundwork for the church plant has been worked out by the leadership team, the senior staff and then the entire staff need to be introduced to the plans before any implementation. This author took all staff members out to lunch, in groups of four and five, to explain the vision for the church/program, but he did this three years after the church had been planted. This type of activity should have occurred before the church was planted, so that questions could be answered, concerns addressed, and people valued for their service to the program, even if they chose not to participate in the plant.

Prepare the Clients—Make clear what is being offered to the residents, why it is being offered, and what is not being required. Offer to hear complaints if someone

begins to feel as if they are being discriminated against. Continue to assert the non-sectarian aspect of the program while encouraging participation in the new church.

Lower Expectations—When the author planted the church he believed that the attendance would fairly rapidly approach 150, and eventually reach at least 400. He based this on the number of people that came through the Haven each year and the number that regularly attended the voluntary chapel services that were conducted at the Haven before the church began. He did become discouraged, initially, when growth happened far more incrementally with many more setbacks. But, over time came to see that ministering to this population required a re-assessment of what would constitute success in this setting.

Have Fun—If this is what God has called you to do, then how can you have more fun than seeing the formerly homeless, addicted and destitute: praising God, becoming employed, reconciling with families, getting married, serving Him?!