

## CHAPTER 16

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### GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS: MODELS AND FIRST STEPS FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORKERS

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Over the last eight years of helping churches think through their community outreach ministries, I've heard one question more often than others: "How can we really make a difference in the lives of the poor, and not just offer Band-Aids?" Many congregations that have offered traditional benevolence programs (e.g., food pantries, clothing closets, and emergency cash assistance) want to know how their efforts can be remodeled to engage persons in longer-term relationships through which positive, permanent transformation can occur. Staff and volunteers from faith-based nonprofit agencies are also exploring new ministry ventures in the era of welfare reform. They are eager to know "what works" and where they can connect to others who have already implemented creative innovations. No one wants to reinvent the wheel, and everyone asks for "best practices." All want, in short, exposure to real-life ministry *models* that they can imitate or learn from.

This "felt need" is positive, since much of the battle for increasing the scope, scale, and effectiveness of Christian social ministry around the country rests simply on plausibility. People need to be shown that it really *is* possible for them to make a difference in their communities: it is possible, because real Christians in real places are running real programs with real results! Social workers armed with knowledge about a diverse range of ministry models will be well-positioned to work with pastors and lay people who have the desire to help, but lack "how-to" skills. This chapter offers brief summaries of ministry models being employed in a variety of settings by small, medium, and large-sized churches and nonprofit agencies. It also lists suggested first steps for social workers in leading the charge to implement such community ministries.

The possibilities for creative ministry are, of course, endless. This chapter can hardly address them all; instead, we'll focus on a handful of projects representing effective models of ministry for children, youth, and families. Many more models are available in a variety of resources—

books, magazine articles, websites, and training conferences (see Resource listing at the end of this chapter).

### Models: Children and Youth Ministries

Through **Kid's Hope USA**, congregations “adopt” a local elementary school and provide tutoring in reading skills for at-risk children in first through fourth grades. Founded in Michigan by Virgil Gulker, author of *Helping You is Helping Me* and the visionary behind the Love, INC ministry model, Kids Hope programs currently involve 179 congregations in 27 states. The programs are based on solid research findings indicating that children who learn to read by the fourth grade are much less likely than those who do not read to drop out of school, get pregnant as teenagers, or use drugs.

Gulker has long been an advocate of face-to-face relational ministry, recognizing that a genuine friendship between a church volunteer and a person in need can radically transform both individuals. Through Kids Hope, participating children are growing in their self-esteem as they watch adults give them their most precious commodity—their time. Stories abound of kids with better grades, more positive attitudes toward school, and improved behavior. Meanwhile, the volunteer tutors have their eyes opened to needs in their community. That can be sobering for the volunteers—for example, when they learn that “their” child's father is in prison. But Gulker reports that these experiences are also driving the volunteers into a deeper prayer life, as they intercede for the kids and families that become dear to them.

Here's how the ministry works. A Kids Hope team composed of the pastor, lay people, and parents develops the ministry. This involves identifying a partner school—usually an elementary school located near the church building. Team representatives meet with school personnel to describe the program and solicit buy-in. Typically, the church identifies a program coordinator from the congregation and this person works part-time (paid or volunteer) to oversee the initiative. In some cases, existing staff, such as the Outreach Pastor or Missions Pastor may assume the coordinator responsibilities as part of his or her job. This individual coordinates the mobilizing and training of volunteer tutors. For a fee, which is pro-rated based on the size of the congregation, the national Kids Hope office provides start-up tools and consulting help. Tutors receive training in child development and educational “tips” for serving their kids. Prayer partners are also mobilized to undergird each tutor-child pair. School personnel identify kids in need of extra help, and invite parents to consider enrolling their children in the Kids Hope

program. Once matched, tutors meet on school grounds one hour per week with an individual student. They work with the child on assignments prepared by the teacher.

On school grounds, the focus is on the friendship between the adult and child and on the child's academic development. Tutors are also free to join the student in the lunchroom or volunteer in other ways at the school. Off school grounds, church members can also connect with their students' families through various recreational and social events sponsored by the Kids Hope program. These events, such as church picnics, fellowship dinners, and other activities, occur at the church where there is freedom for spiritual ministry, such as Bible stories, preaching, or free Christian counseling. These activities also permit interaction between the tutors and the children's parents. Church leaders can inform the Kids Hope families of additional services available to them, strengthening the bridge being built between the congregation and the families.

City of Refuge Church in Houston, a racially and economically mixed congregation of about 100 members, has pioneered an innovative **Vocation Bible School** program (note the "o" in vocation) for kids ages 10 to 14. Pastor Rufus Smith was tired of the traditional Vacation Bible School programs ubiquitous in the city. These provided good ministry to kids for a single week, but, in his experience, rarely led to much contact with parents or to a long-term relationship with children. Consequently, Smith developed a summer-long program targeted to a particularly vulnerable group in his inner-city context: middle school kids. Smith found that struggling single moms of children these ages often cannot afford daycare for them, but the children are not old enough to work summer jobs. Left unsupervised, these children can fall into trouble—hence the need for an-ongoing outreach to engage them in positive, constructive activities.

Through the Vocation Bible School initiative, the middle school youths come daily for a several hour program. The church has launched two micro-enterprises—a mobile car washing service and a mobile deck/driveway cleaning business—that engages the kids in work each morning. Church leaders have garnered support from local businessmen for the program. One, for example, donated the high-volume deck spraying/cleansing equipment and other businesses match the dollars earned on particular days by the students.

The church youth pastor oversees the program. He and Pastor Smith have identified large office complexes, located not far from the church, that house multiple businesses and nonprofit agencies. They meet with the heads of these organizations, suggesting that employees sign up to have their cars washed by the kids in the parking lot throughout the morning. Employees then make a donation. Staff members also secure the per-

mission of the building management company for the enterprise. Having the youth work in one location all morning cuts down on the number of supervisors needed and simplifies transportation arrangements.

In the afternoon, the students gather back at the church for lunch and spend time going through a Biblically based youth entrepreneurship curriculum. The course, called YES!, was developed by Christian businessman Duane Moyer. Pastor Smith reports that he has not had to alter the lessons; the materials are already age-appropriate and “accessible” to the urban students.

City of Refuge leaders consider the program a triple win—for the kids, their parents, and the church. Kids end the summer with new life skills, their own hard-earned cash in their pockets and savings accounts, and a vibrant relationship with church staff and volunteers. Parents are delighted. Their sons and daughters are responsibly supervised throughout the day and are earning their own spending money (which helps single parents on tight budgets). Church leaders are excited about the developing ties with these neighborhood families. Many of the kids who participated in the first summer Vocation Bible School have since joined City of Refuge Church—some with their moms or dads. That affords opportunity for a year-round relationship. Encouraged by all he has seen happen among his own flock, Pastor Smith is now championing the program among other inner-city ministers.

### **Models: Adult and Family Ministries**

Through the **New Focus** ministry, 65 churches in 18 states are learning how to move from short-term benevolence that only involves distributing food, to effective, relational, holistic ministry among low-income families. Individuals with financial needs who solicit help from congregations are invited to become New Focus members. Membership involves attending weekly life skills and personal budgeting classes at New Focus churches. Members bring their children, who take part in a church-run program that meets simultaneously during the New Focus classes. Members also receive a personal budget counselor and are rewarded with various practical helps (financial aid, groceries, and laundry supplies) as they make progress in advancing through their self-designed personal action plans. Members are also enfolded into a “Compassion Circle,” a group of church volunteers willing to encourage and support the New Focus member as he or she takes small steps to change.

Others in the congregation have opportunity to be involved through the ministry’s “Giving Tree.” New Focus members write down requests on pieces of paper shaped as apples. These requests can range from “a

winter coat for my son” to “a used car for transportation to work.” The requests are hung on the Giving Tree display, located in a central gathering area at the church such as the fellowship hall or the front lobby. Church members read the “apples” and supply the requested items as they are able. Both giver and receiver are kept anonymous.

Participating churches rave about the success of the program. Earlier benevolence approaches, they admit, often helped people simply to manage their poverty rather than to escape it, and rarely afforded the opportunity of developing a real friendship with the family in need. Previous “commodified charity” might involve only a one-time exchange of money or food. Through New Focus, church volunteers develop genuine relationships with struggling families in the community, through which mutual encouragement and learning are occurring. Additionally, the New Focus approach creates a variety of roles for church members, allowing them to find a position suited to their particular skills and spiritual gifts. Some can serve as budget counselors, others as teachers in the life skills classes, some as mentors on the Compassion Circles, and others as child care volunteers.

Establishing a New Focus ministry may require cultivating a new mindset about outreach ministry at the church. The deeper level of engagement means the congregation typically assists fewer families overall than was the case under previous benevolence programs that focused on a one-time distribution of food or other goods. The “bigger is better” mentality does not lead to effective ministry. The New Focus approach, though promising a more meaningful impact, also demands more of volunteers. No longer is contact with the poor limited to church members on one side of a soup kitchen line and low-income recipients on the other. That model permits an involvement that is “clinical” and takes place at arms-length—less rewarding, too, but easier and less emotionally costly than the relational, holistic, New Focus model. Thus, casting vision for a greater investment in the lives of struggling families and equipping members for an on-going, rather than sporadic, outreach are critical preparatory steps.

In Orlando, the **Jobs Partnership of Florida** engages churches and businesses in partnerships to serve unemployed and underemployed Floridians. Jobs Partnership, unlike New Focus, is a multi-church model. It is usually developed in a community when pastors from a variety of churches and Christian business professionals unite around a vision for prayer, racial reconciliation, and life transforming ministry among neighbors struggling to make ends meet. Typically, for the first year, participants in the program are recruited from the inner-city congregations involved in the Jobs Partnership leadership team. As pastors see the program work for their own

members, their excitement multiplies and they take the model “to the streets,” inviting unemployed community members to join.

The 12-week program involves classes twice per week. One class uses a Biblically based life skills curriculum called “KEYS to Personal and Professional Success.” The other class focuses on practical job searching and job readiness issues and uses a curriculum called “STEPS to Personal and Professional Success”. Each student is matched with a personal mentor who attends the KEYS classes with them, providing transportation if necessary. The National Jobs Partnership office provides the curriculum and training for pastors from the participating Jobs Partnership congregations who take turns teaching the KEYS classes. Ideally, job coaches are also recruited for each participant; these individuals attend the STEPS classes and walk alongside the participants as they design resumes, prepare for job interviews, and tackle the logistical issues of daycare and transportation. Participating business professionals help to teach the STEPS classes and bring information to class members regarding specific job opportunities. Job openings are also listed in a Jobs Partnership Clearinghouse, posted for students in a notebook, on a bulletin board, or on a website. Program graduates are introduced to affiliated businesses and guided into new jobs suited to their interests and skills. When possible, the business provides the new hires with “job buddies,” fellow employees who have worked at the firm for a few years and know the ropes. These individuals help acclimate the graduates to their new jobs, trouble-shooting problems and answering questions.

Jobs Partnership programs have now been developed in over 20 cities in the U.S. Nationally, the Jobs Partnership boasts a job retention rate of 83 percent, an astonishingly impressive record when compared to other job training programs that typically claim retention rates in the 50 to 60 percent range. In Orlando, graduates are not only doing better at keeping their jobs, they are also earning higher wages than are individuals graduating from government-sponsored programs. They are also mobile. The Jobs Partnership of Florida has partnered with Charity Cars, a nonprofit agency that provides donated vehicles to the working poor. Charity Cars gives vehicles to Jobs Partnership graduates with transportation needs. The agency pays the down payment on car insurance and fees for titles and tags, and offers classes in car maintenance.

### **Models: Collaborating with the Local Department of Social Services**

In many communities across the nation, churches are partnering with their local government social welfare agencies to provide supportive services to low-income families:

In San Diego, a consortium of churches called All Congregations Together (ACT) has partnered to staff **ACT Help Desks** in the lobbies of local “One Stop Centers.” Clients visit One Stop Centers to meet with caseworkers, learn about California’s welfare reform programs and rules, apply for assistance, or use the job bank or computer lab services. The Help Desks are an “oasis” for clients who may feel overwhelmed by the process of applying for aid or effectively utilizing the employment-related services offered by the One Stops. Volunteers help clients to navigate the One Stop, and can refer them to services provided by the faith community if they have needs that the government agency cannot meet.

In Montgomery, Alabama, several congregations are collaborating with their local department of human services through the **Adopt-a-Social Worker** program. As the name suggests, the program matches individual congregations with specific caseworkers. With clients’ permission, caseworkers inform their sponsoring church of needs that their clients have. These are wide-ranging: perhaps a math tutor for a daughter struggling in school, or kitchen supplies to furnish a new apartment, or short-term transportation assistance while a client’s car is in the shop, or help with tax preparation, or respite care for low-income parents raising a disabled child.

In Ottawa County, Michigan, **Good Samaritan Ministries** has mobilized over fifty congregations to provide mentor teams that are matched with TANF families referred by the Michigan Family Independence Agency. Good Samaritan trains the church volunteers and coordinates the match-making process. Mentor teams work for several months with the clients, offering emotional and practical support.

### Implementation: First Steps

The models just summarized above are diverse, but the processes of implementing these new ministries involve a number of common elements. Specifically, some of the first steps involve *activities within the church* (or nonprofit agency). These include assessing strengths and weaknesses; casting vision for outreach; defining a mission and designing an initiative; establishing basic organizational and operational policies; raising resources; mobilizing and training volunteers; and, most importantly, praying often and vigorously. Then there are a variety of *activities to be undertaken in the community* to be served, such as assessing assets and needs, learning what others are already doing, and building relationships with potential ministry partners. In their enormously useful “Good News, Good Works Holistic Ministry Resource Kit,” Heidi Unruh, Ron Sider, and Phil Olson (2002) have identified seven key com-

ponents of a ministry launch that cover the spectrum of such internal and external preparatory steps. Each of these components involves a variety of activities and decisions. Some of the steps can be taken sequentially, but others, such as the church assessment and neighborhood assessment, can be conducted simultaneously if there are enough volunteers and other workers.

Social workers can help to lead congregations and nonprofit agencies through the various components, but they cannot do everything alone. Rather, the social worker may serve as Project Coordinator on a ministry team. Unruh, Sider and Olson (2002) suggest that a ministry team be composed of at least 13 members, including the congregation's senior pastor.

The ministry team will guide the development of a new ministry launch through the initial stage of getting approval for the project and planning the format and timeline for it. Social workers will need to be acquainted with the leadership structures and decision-making apparatus of their particular context, since congregations “do business” in different ways. Conversations that lead to a verbal decision in a staff meeting may be enough to get the ball rolling in one church, whereas another congregation may have a leadership group that needs to review and vote on a formal, written proposal.

### Seven Steps for Launching Outreach Ministries

**Step 1** involves *learning about holistic ministry*—that is, reading about the Biblical and practical principles of holistic ministry and “seeing” ministry models through readings, interviews or, preferably, on-site visits. As mentioned earlier, engaging in a relational holistic ministry like a New Focus program or a Jobs Partnership model is more time-consuming and emotionally costly than are traditional one-time benevolence approaches. Given that church members are busy people who are fallible human beings, inspiring, motivating, and equipping congregants for this deeper service is vital. And where better to find that inspiration than in the pages of scripture, the model of Jesus, and the real-life testimony of fellow Christians from other churches who are living out effective, relational ministry?

Mercy ministry is not all action and no talk; rather, contemplation and study lay the foundation for a successful outreach. In my own church, which is a large, predominantly white, suburban congregation, the senior pastor preached for several weeks on the characteristics of the Kingdom of God prior to our launch of a new, ambitious urban ministry. A considerable portion of the congregation had also completed a 13-week



adult Sunday School course on evangelism and social action that had cycled through the various teaching fellowships over the past year. And the Urban Ministry Team, which led the charge for the new ministry, had read together John Perkins' compelling book, *Beyond Charity*. All of this meant that by the time the church stepped out into the new urban ministry venture, many leaders and lay people had been challenged by the clear, Biblical message of God's heart for the poor and were educated and inspired by what they had heard and read about others who were making that heavenly compassion visible in distressed communities.

**Step 2** involves *assessing the church's ministry context*—that is, undertaking a congregational self-study and conducting a community assessment. Church leaders can tackle this internal and external work simultaneously, assigning some volunteers to assess the strengths, weaknesses, assets, history, and vision of the congregation while others seek to learn about the needs and assets of the community.

Unruh, Sider and Olson (2002) suggest that the internal review team engage congregants who have been at the church long enough to know it fairly well but who can offer an objective, detached, honest assessment of it. These individuals should investigate the outreach ministry history of the church to determine whether God has given the congregation particular passion for a certain kind of ministry or for a certain population, such as the homeless, single parents, or persons who are physically or mentally challenged. An inventory of current ministries can also be helpful, especially to identify gaps that should be filled or floundering programs that may need to be terminated so that something fresh can arise. The team should also seek to understand the congregation's demographics and what those may imply for ministry. A church with many retired persons may be well-suited to launch a "Senior Corps" outreach to provide pro-bono consulting help to nonprofit agencies or start-up inner-city entrepreneurs. A congregation with many skilled trade workers may wish to launch a single mom's car repair program or a widow's home maintenance ministry. A church located in a university town, with many educators and college students in the congregation, may wish to start an after-school tutoring program for at-risk kids.

While the internal team assesses the church context, the community assessment team educates itself (and eventually, the whole congregation) about the needs of the community beyond the church walls. Much can be learned through meetings with the city's community development staff, census data research, and discussions with leaders of secular and faith-based nonprofit social service agencies. The community assessment team can also visit other ministries on-site; take guided tours through distressed neighborhoods, or interview social workers to

gain a better understanding of the issues faced by lower-income families in the community. Importantly, the team should seek to understand the neighborhood's assets. Participation in a training seminar on asset-based community development would well-equip the members for this research. Moreover, they should be eager to discern where in the city God is already at work, and whether the congregation is being called to join as partners with existing ministries or to start a new program that meets an identified service gap.

**Step 3** involves *cultivating the ministry vision*—that is, praying, discussing, and discerning God's plan for the church's mission and vision and beginning to outline specific plans for "putting feet" to that vision. Having gained a sense of what the church's strengths, gifts, and resources are, and where those might be most fruitfully invested, the team now needs to articulate a specific vision and action steps. Unruh, Sider and Olson (2002) label this stage, "unleashing the vision." It involves discerning what Christ's plans may be for *this* specific expression of His Body, given this church's unique history, demographics, passions, and context for ministry.

The unleashing the vision phase involves some exciting and "heady" work as well as mundane, down-to-earth tasks. First, leaders should articulate vision, mission, and philosophy of ministry statements. The vision statement outlines the long-term picture of what the future might look like if the ministry accomplished its goals. The mission statement is a shorter, more specific explanation of the "what" of ministry; what concrete purposes the ministry is pursuing in order to achieve the future vision. The "philosophy of mission" statement lists the core values or the "how" of ministry.

For the urban ministry our church launched several years ago, the vision was to see our target neighborhood—a place of beauty, but also of crime, poverty, and violence—increasingly reflect the values and attributes of God's Kingdom. Our mission statement elaborated on how we sought to equip neighborhood residents to flourish in the home, school, workplace, church, and community through Christ-centered educational, vocational, and recreational programs. Our philosophy of ministry statement made clear our commitment to conducting these programs in a way that emphasizes our core values of relationship, reconciliation, personal responsibility, prayer, and indigenous leadership development.

In addition to setting vision, the team must begin grappling with a variety of practical administrative issues. For example, the church may need to address the question of whether the ministry will be launched as a program of the church or under a separately incorporated nonprofit agency. Leaders may also need to review liability and insurance questions, exploring whether the church's current insurance policy will be adequate to cover

incidents that could arise in conjunction with the operation of the new ministry's program(s). Staffing concerns should also be discussed. Will the envisioned ministry be supervised by a current staff member or by a new director? Will that individual be paid? Does that individual need to be a member of the congregation? Will volunteers be used in the ministry, and if so, will only Christian volunteers be allowed to participate? The congregation will also need to wrestle with questions about fund-raising. Will the church supply all the required resources or is money needed from outside sources? If outside money is needed, will the ministry apply for funding only from private sources (individuals and foundations) or also from public sources (for example, competing for government grants)? Practical-minded folk in the congregation may be enthused to hear of a grandiose new ministry vision, but will have hard questions about how the church is actually going to do it. The team should be prepared and have some answers ready.

**Step 4** involves *strengthening the congregational foundation for ministry*—that is, equipping the congregation for outreach through Bible study on holistic ministry and through specific training to for engagement in community outreach programs. This phase might involve encouraging the church's home Bible study groups to use, for a season, devotional materials that highlight God's heart for the poor. Or it could involve a special missions conference focused on community ministry. Or a team of core volunteers for the new ministry might travel together to a training conference, such as those offered each fall by the Christian Community Development Association or by the national office of the ministry model the church is adopting (such as New Focus or Kids Hope training seminars). It may mean establishing a course through which congregants learn to discern their own spiritual gifts and calling. Or it might involve a preaching series from the pulpit on servanthood.

**Step 5** involves *pursuing spiritual power for mission*—that is, mobilizing a strong prayer team to undergird the effort and support the frontline leaders and encouraging all the holistic ministry team members to engage in personal devotions that nourish them and shape their thinking about outreach. Prayer should permeate every phase of the ministry launch. I Peter 4: 11 states, "if anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." This kind of God-dependent service gets fleshed out through prayer. Prayer is a posture of dependence, an explicit admission of our weakness and our need for God's equipping. Continual prayer also works to cultivate humility, which helps restrain a paternalistic or condescending attitude that can sometimes begin to arise in our fallen hearts as we serve among people whose needs are more obvious than ours.

**Step 6** involves *offering special events to renew and rejoice*—that is, keeping the ministry vision and process alive by celebrating successes along the way. It can mean getting key leaders away on retreats that rejuvenate and refresh them and allow uninterrupted time for reflection and any necessary changes in course. These events can also widen the participation of the whole congregation in the visioning process. The leadership team must necessarily be limited in size in order to function effectively, but the goal is for the congregation at large to embrace the vision of invigorated, holistic outreach. Special worship services, congregational dinners at which the leadership team presents information, answers questions, and casts vision, or community events that expose congregants to the places where ministry is planned, can all serve to create “buy-in” and enthusiasm by church members.

Finally, **Step 7** involves *planning next steps*—that is, developing a strategic plan to guide the implementation and successful continuation of the ministry, as well as designing an evaluation process that can be used to keep the ministry on track. Think of it this way: the vision, mission, and philosophy of ministry documents serve to identify a destination, create a general roadmap, and articulate what kind of vehicle will be driven. The strategic plan tackles such practical issues as how to raise funds for the car, how to mobilize and train the drivers, and what items should be packed in the trunk.

Much thought and planning needs to go into the initial ministry launch. Some may prefer a “big splash” approach where the launch does not move forward until all the ministry components are in place, volunteers are mobilized and trained, and program participants recruited. Others may want to begin quietly in a pilot project, testing the waters and making adjustments as needed before widening the circle of participation in the new venture.

### **Commitment Over the Long Haul**

How long will it take to go through all seven steps of a ministry launch? Unfortunately, the answer is not easy. It depends. Unruh, Sider, and Olson (2002) estimate that a holistic ministry team within a congregation needs nine to twelve months to prepare for a ministry launch. They acknowledge, nonetheless, that some churches may be able to do things more quickly, perhaps within six months. My own experience in launching our church’s urban ministry suggests that, however long one thinks it is going to take, it will probably take longer! While the steps we needed to take within the congregation could have been accomplished within six months, the task of acquainting ourselves with the community, building relationships, and es-

tablishing credibility took over a year. Going slowly, and gaining the ear and trust of community residents, was crucial for us. Without this trust, we could have been accused of simply barging into the neighborhood and imposing a program on it, rather than working in partnership with community residents to design and inaugurate the ministry.

Six to twelve months or more may sound annoyingly slow to congregants with much vision, energy, and a Nike “just do it” spirit. But while it may be very possible to build a new ministry program much faster, the question is: What kind of foundation will a hastily constructed model stand upon? Probably, one that is not deep and strong and that may not be able to support the new initiative over the long run. All talk and no action is, of course, a problem to be avoided. But the launching process should involve a good balance of action and reflection. The congregations could couple Bible studies on holistic ministry with on-site visits to real models. Develop a timeline of steps and at various points along the way, celebrate with specific events—especially those that afford opportunities to connect with the community or individuals that the ministry will eventually serve. Or, get potential volunteers involved in a short-term training program to promote the feeling that their active service has already begun, even though they have not actually started the more tangible ministry tasks.

## **Conclusion**

Launching a new ministry is exciting, if strenuous, work. Social workers desiring to lead new efforts should beware, though, of some potential obstacles. One of the biggest concerns is to determine how a new ministry venture will affect the current programs of the congregation or nonprofit agency. Leaders of existing programs may feel threatened by the new venture, if they are not invited into the discussions or never are helped to understand how the new programs will relate to the old ones. Another potential challenge relates to timing. Ministry leaders may have wonderful, God-inspired visions for new outreach, but lack a good sense of when to initiate such plans. Congregations or nonprofit agencies that are in the midst of transitions, such as hiring new leadership or embarking on a major capital campaign, or that have recently gone through a crisis (like a church split or scandal), may be ill-prepared to launch new ministries. Some time is needed, instead, for disciplined focus on current challenges or on reconciliation and healing. A season of “in-reach” may need to precede the expansion of outreach. In short, wisdom is required not only about the “what” and “how” questions of ministry, but also the “when.”

Finally, social workers should capitalize on their unique strengths when offering assistance to churches and nonprofit agencies seeking new ministry endeavors. Some Christian leaders may be unaware of the challenges faced by lower income families in the community. Others may know little about the public assistance system. Others may be ignorant of existing community resources—both private and public. Still others may have little experience interacting with secular social service agencies. And others may have a sincere heart to help the poor, but no real relationships with poor people and little personal familiarity with distressed neighborhoods. Social workers bring knowledge and experience in all of these areas. They can help to educate and equip ministry leaders and volunteers about everything from potential partners in the community, to navigating the welfare system, to preparing for both the joys and challenges of outreach. Social workers may be especially well-equipped to shape leaders' understandings in ways that protect against the church or nonprofit operating out of stereotypes, unrealistic expectations, or unwittingly patronizing attitudes. In these and other ways, social workers can help ministry leaders build a solid foundation on which to construct initiatives that are holistic, relevant, and effective in fostering positive transformation.

## References

- Unruh, H.R. Sider, R.J., & Olson, P. N. (2002). *Good news, good works holistic ministry resource kit: User's guide*. Wynnewood, PA: Evangelicals for Social Action.

## Resources for Models of Ministry

### BOOKS

- Carlson, D. (1999). *The welfare of my neighbor*. Washington, DC: Family Research Council.
- Dudley, C. S. (2002). *Community ministry: New challenges, proven steps to faith-based initiatives*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute.
- Sherman, A. L. (1997). *Restorers of hope: Reaching the poor in your community with church-based ministries that work*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

### NATIONAL TRAINING CONFERENCES

- Christian Community Development Association ([www.cdda.org](http://www.cdda.org))
- North American Association of Christians in Social Work ([www.nacsw.org](http://www.nacsw.org))

### WEBSITES

- [www.churchesatwork.org](http://www.churchesatwork.org)
- [www.network935.org](http://www.network935.org)
- [www.hudsonfaithincommunities.org](http://www.hudsonfaithincommunities.org)