



Pastor Tommy Sparger (left) presents a check to a school official in Springfield, Mo.

Invade your community with

By Tommy Sparger

HOPE

The local church is the hope of the world

Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, coined the statement. Great leaders have reiterated it and I believe it with all my heart. Just as Jesus was the revelation and representation of His

Father to the world, the local church represents Jesus. When a community sees a church, they should see Christ. The church is called to be Jesus to its community. I think that rocks (and that's a good thing). The heart of Jesus' ministry was and is compassion. Jesus reached out to everyone including the

poor, the sinful, the down and out, and the marginalized. At North Point Church — where I pastor in Springfield, Mo. — we strive to emulate Jesus by cultivating a culture of compassion in our church that extends to our community through outreaches. Doing so has transformed our church on several fronts: Dozens of people have made

commitments to Christ and countless members of our church have been spiritually revolutionized. **It's all good** Since our church started four years ago community outreaches have been a cornerstone to our growth numerically and spiritually. There is nothing more

spiritual than partnering with God to see Him produce life change in the hearts of people in our church and community. To that end, we have given away tens of thousands of dollars in school supplies, frozen turkeys at Thanksgiving, clothing, shoes, bicycles at Christmas, food and general services. Each year we do a school

makeover where up to 350 volunteers from the church paint, landscape, clean, scrub and repair a public school. We have also done home makeovers and have given away several cars and Christmas shopping sprees to families in need. In addition to this, we have provided 75 local classrooms with their annual budgets for teachers.



Volunteers from North Point Church spend a Saturday renovating an elementary school.



COMPASSION

By helping others, we work the DNA of servanthood, giving and Christ-centered compassion into our church body. One of the unique things about our outreaches is we do them with no strings attached.

For instance, we don't corral school officials into a room during the school makeovers and force them to listen to one of my sermons. Instead, we give, expecting nothing in return. As a church we are committed to this philosophy, believing it to be the model Jesus left for us.

Show me the money

Some people tell me, "We can't afford to do such outreaches." I don't believe this to be true for several reasons.

First, when a church does compassion outreaches it automatically falls in step with God's will, and He provides.

Second, people will give to a big vision — especially one that is God-breathed and heaven-sent.

Our congregation is made up of lower- to middle-income families. The fact we are not a rich church has not stopped or even hindered the outreaches we do.

The first Christmas we had as a church, which was less than three months after we opened our doors, I wanted to give away 225 brand new bikes to kids in need with no strings attached.

The bikes cost about \$35 each. With refreshments, bows and all the extras that go along with doing compassion outreaches, I was confident we didn't have the money in our general budget for this ministry.

So, I went to our people and presented the vision. They not only gave above and beyond their tithes and offerings, but they did so with tears of happiness and grateful attitudes. They even came in on a Saturday and put the bikes together.

Third, don't be surprised when your outreaches capture the attention of the community. I can't tell you how many of our ventures have been covered by the local media. We don't do our projects for this reason and neither will you, but when the media takes interest, it's like getting free exposure.

Consequently more people come to check out the church. Many of those visitors stay,

commit their lives to Christ, and become faithful members.

Wrecked in a good way

For a myriad of reasons many people are skeptical of Christians even though they may like the idea of God and Jesus. It's against this backdrop we put our faith in action instead of just talking about it.

Jesus came for everybody.

The future of compassion ministries in the local church

Jesus challenged His followers to meet physical and spiritual needs. Increasingly congregations are looking for innovative ways to meet human need and spread the gospel. New ministries are being born as believers move beyond the walls of their churches and demonstrate the compassion of Christ. In the years ahead, how will this trend impact the local church?

1. Many suburban and rural churches, once isolated from social need, will discover and confront human need in their communities, birthing new and dynamic ministries.
2. Overwhelmed community leaders and elected officials will turn to churches for help in responding to social needs.
3. Churches of different faiths will come together to touch their communities.
4. People from the community will increasingly choose to attend a place of worship based on the outreach opportunities the church affords.
5. Churches will increasingly hire full-time, trained compassion ministries personnel to ensure they connect with their communities.
6. Because of their outreach to the poor and suffering, more churches will adopt a "come as you are" attitude.
7. Church members will be encouraged to adopt families in need within their communities, to provide ongoing care and discipleship.
8. More people with checkered pasts and difficult circumstances will be transformed by the love of Jesus. They will be discipled and, in time, assume places of leadership within local churches.
9. Funding for compassion ministries will come from unusual sources — government, foundations, unbelievers and businesses.
10. New church buildings will be designed to accommodate compassion ministries, such as warehouses, soup kitchens, health clinics and more.
11. Churches will be started in neighborhoods where the need is the greatest. City fathers will see firsthand that churches can play an important role in keeping the peace.
12. Because churches are reaching out to their communities, miracles will occur in the streets and in the lives of hurting people. Just as Jesus healed the leper and blind man in the marketplace, people will be touched today by the power of the Holy Spirit on the sidewalk.

Thank you for praying for the harvest in Europe



www.eyeoneurope.org

COMPASSION

What can be done now?

1. Research your community (e.g., poverty, schools, tutors, single mothers, elderly, crime, drug abuse, abortion, etc.).
2. Ask God to raise up leaders in your church to start ministries that target groups in need.
3. Encourage people to pray for those in need. Consider placing a prayer request sheet in your church bulletin.
4. Start outreaches (e.g., adopt-a-block, food distribution, serve your city, etc.).
5. Incorporate compassion ministries in your church's long- and short-term plans.
6. Offer to support various community efforts (e.g., blood drives, food drives).
7. Appoint a civic representative in the church to attend city council and school board meetings and report back to the congregation.
8. Alert the media to your community outreaches.
9. Consider leading a citywide outreach that includes churches from other denominations. Invite Convoy of Hope to your community.
10. Make Thanksgiving more meaningful for your congregation by participating in Assemblies of God World Hunger Day or Convoy of Hope's One Day to Feed the World.
11. Support compassion ministries financially so your congregation can touch areas of the world they cannot visit personally.
12. Hold special prayer meetings when crises arise in your community and in troubled areas around the world.
13. Get acquainted with the mayor, police chief, city council members and others who are working to improve the community.
14. Ask yourself: What in your community is stealing, oppressing, and corrupting lives? Ask the Holy Spirit how He wants you to respond.

The Great Commission is real. We're supposed to reach everyone, not just church people, and that's why we strive to make our church relevant to the culture and the people.

To do so, we work hard to connect with people during the outreaches by being authentic and caring. At church we constantly challenge our people to invest in relationships with family, neighbors and friends, and invite them to a church service where they will receive the timeless message of the gospel in a culturally relevant atmosphere.

When missionaries go to another country, they learn the culture, language and about the people. This helps in being relevant to those they hope to reach. Missionaries also understand their ministry is for both believers and people in the world.

We take the same approach.

Begin with compassion

Compassion outreach is great, but people need a church — they

need the Hope of the world. It doesn't do any good to do an outreach if a church is not relevant, welcoming and friendly. Such an atmosphere creates a place where people can feel God's presence and be challenged for a life change.

Every week we give people the opportunity to make a decision to become a follower of Christ. People respond every Sunday and lives are changed. Jesus' heart is with people, and He wants to reach those who don't know Him.

That's reason enough to be relevant and do compassion outreaches regularly. Your church has the resources, ability, and calling to partner with God in being Christ to your community. You just have to get out and do it.

If you do, I guarantee the endeavor will transform lives in your church and in your community for eternity. **tpe**

TOMMY SPARGER is lead pastor of North Point Church (AG) in Springfield, Mo.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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