

How Church Generosity Can Impact Your Community

How can we ensure our giving helps those in need instead of hurting them?

Americans continue to give to charitable organizations at a record pace. Charitable giving in 2015 was over \$373 billion, according to The Giving Institute, surpassing the previous year's amount by over four percent.

Religious giving is the top category in that total, with over \$119 billion given. While much of that amount goes to internal church operations, a large percentage goes to help individuals and groups "in need."

It's that last phrase – "in need" – that has come under scrutiny in recent years, as churches consider how their giving to others is actually impacting their lives.

Is it possible that much of the money we give is either wasted or actually harming the people it is intended to help?

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [When Helping Hurts](#), by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert

When Helping Hurts is a paradigm-forming contemporary classic on the subject of poverty alleviation.

Poverty is much more than simply a lack of material resources, and it takes much more than donations and handouts to solve it. *When Helping Hurts* shows how some alleviation efforts, failing to consider the complexities of poverty, have actually (and unintentionally) done more harm than good.

But it looks ahead. It encourages us to see the dignity in everyone, to empower the materially poor, and to know that we are all uniquely needy—and that God in the gospel is reconciling all things to Himself.

Focusing on both North American and Majority World contexts, *When Helping Hurts* provides proven strategies for effective poverty alleviation, catalyzing the idea that sustainable change comes not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

The American church exists in the most prosperous and materialistic society in the world. Because of that, the church often thinks of poverty as a lack of material things – money, food, clothing, and shelter.

As a result, many think the way to alleviate poverty is to simply give material things to low-income people: money for bills, food and toys during the Christmas season, and warm clothing during cold winters. These are often presented as immediate needs, and we respond by taking

care of the problem.

Or does it? In most cases, what has been taken care of is a symptom, not the underlying problem facing the individual. Repeated over long periods of time, these “charitable” actions often create crippling dependencies. To be most effective, churches need to move past the immediate and correctly diagnose the deeper causes of material poverty.

Truly helping the material poor typically requires a much greater commitment of time, resources, and energy than the common method of simply giving them handouts. Truly helping the material poor means you have to look for ways to move away from practices that create dependency and toward approaches that promote long-term positive changes.

Poor people in North America could benefit from all the following: 1) the ability to work at jobs with living wages; 2) the capacity to manage their money; and 3) the opportunity to accumulate wealth. Moreover, like all of us, poor people need the highly relational ministries – delivered through the body of Jesus Christ – that help them to overcome the effects of the fall on their individual heart, minds, and behaviors.

Employment, financial management, and wealth accumulation are all part of the “economic development” sector of poverty alleviation. While each of the economic interventions discussed play unique roles, they are similar in that they all:

Use development rather than relief, because the vast majority of poor people in North America are capable of participating in the improvement of their lives.

Improves some aspect of the economic system or enable poor people to use the existing system more effectively;

Use an asset-based approach that builds upon the skills, intelligence, labor, discipline, savings, creativity, and courage of poor people;

Have the potential to be designed, implemented, and evaluated in a participatory manner;

Provide an opportunity to use biblically based curricula, allowing for a clear presentation of the gospel and addressing of worldview issues;

Use church-based mentoring teams that can offer love, support, and encouragement, thereby providing a relational approach that seeks to restore people’s dignity, community, stewardship, and spiritual intimacy;

Are implemented over fairly long periods of time, thereby creating space for “development,” the process of ongoing change and reconciliation, for both the “helpers” and the “”

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, [When Helping Hurts](#)

A NEXT STEP

Think about ways your church has been working with poor people. How have you been fostering triggers for positive change or undermining them?

What has been your church's history of using a team of supportive people to help individuals and families to change? What are some things you have learned? If you are not using teams of supportive people, what could you do to change this?

Ask any Christian business people you know if they would be willing to provide an employment opportunity to a poor person. Find out what steps you could take as a church to make this idea more palatable to these businesspeople.

Could your church provide temporary employment to poor people by opportunities to do yard work, cleaning, repairs, etc.?

Consider getting additional training for your congregation on jobs preparedness, financial education, and wealth accumulation ministries.

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix 59-3, February 2017.

*This is part of a weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** Book Summaries for church leaders.*

SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; each solution is taken from a different book. As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS provides 26 issues per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).

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