# TOXIC CHARITY

*How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*

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# Chapter One

## *The Scandal*

In the United States, there's a growing scandal that we both refuse to see and actively perpetuate. What Americans avoid facing is that while we are very generous in charitable giving, much of that money is either wasted or actually harms the people it is targeted to help.

I don't say this casually or cavalierly. I have spent over four decades working in inner-city Atlanta and beyond, trying to develop models of urban renewal that are effective and truly serve the poor. There is nothing that brings me more joy than seeing people transitioned out of poverty, or neighborhoods change from being described as "dangerous" and "blighted" to being called "thriving" and even "successful." I have worked with churches, government agencies, entrepreneurs, and armies of volunteers and know from firsthand experience the many ways "good intentions" can translate into ineffective care or even harm.

Almost 90 percent of American adults are involved personally or financially in the charity industry. Our entire society—from school children to corporate CEOs, from small churches to massive government agencies—upholds the wonderful value that helping others is a big part of the American character. "Today there's a 'compassion boom' of people helping others," says Patrick Corvington, CEO of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. Unlike during difficult economic times in the past when volunteerism declined, charitable service today continues to increase. A recent poll by the Orlando *Parade* (March 7, 2010) confirms that more than 90 percent of Americans believe that it is "important to be personally involved in supporting a cause we believe in" in their communities and in the world at large. And Americans are working hard to hand down this value to the next generation.

Public service has moved beyond mere catchphrase or school requirement in our country. It is now a way of life for Americans of all ages. Nearly every church, business, and organization gets involved in some sort of service project. College spring-break service projects and church mission trips have become the norm. Corporations realize they can enhance their images through cause-related marketing while also building up employee loyalty and pride in the company. The compassion industry is almost universally accepted as a virtuous and constructive enterprise.



But what is so surprising is that its outcomes are almost entirely unexamined. The food we ship to Haiti, the well we dig in Sudan, the clothes we distribute in inner-city Detroit—all seem like such worthy efforts. Yet those closest to the ground—on the receiving end of this outpouring of generosity—quietly admit that it may be hurting more than helping. How? Dependency. Destroying personal initiative. When we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them.

Africa can serve as a large-scale example of the problem. In the last fifty years, the continent has received $1 trillion in benevolent aid. How effective has this aid been? Country by country, Africans are far worse off today than they were a half century ago. Overall per-capita income is lower today than in the 1970s. Over half of Africa's 700 million population lives on less than $1 a day. Life expectancy has stagnated, and adult literacy has plummeted below pre-1980 levels. "It's a kind of curse," says Dambisa Moyo, an African economist and the author of *Dead Aid*. Aid, though intended to promote health, becomes "the disease of which it pretends to be the cure."

A similar devastation has been inflicted upon the subsidized poor of our own country (though admittedly not as extreme). For all our efforts to eliminate poverty—our entitlements, our programs, our charities—we have succeeded only in creating a permanent underclass, dismantling their family structures, and eroding their ethic of work. And our poor continue to become poorer.

In over forty years working with the urban poor in inner-city Atlanta and around the globe, I have learned that it takes more than high ideals to bring about substantive change in populations of need. The organization I founded, Focused Community Strategies, has worked diligently to sort out, by trial and error, which efforts result in actual transformation and which efforts have results that are ultimately noxious and harmful.

Still, I continually witness profoundly broken systems in nonprofit work. Many people legitimately fault the government for decades of failed social programs, and yet frequently we embrace similar forms of disempowering charity through our kindhearted giving. And religiously motivated charity is often the most irresponsible. Our free food and clothing distribution encourages ever-growing handout lines, diminishing the dignity of the poor while increasing their dependency. We converge on inner-city neighborhoods to plant flowers and pick up trash, bruising the pride of residents who have the capacity (and responsibility) to beautify their own environments. We fly off on mission trips to poverty-stricken villages, hearts full of pity and suitcases bulging with giveaway goods, trips that one Nicaraguan leader describes as effective only in "turning my people into beggars."

Giving to those in need what they could be gaining from their own initiative may well be the kindest way to destroy people.

We mean well, our motives are good, but we have neglected



to conduct care-full due diligence to determine emotional, economic, and cultural outcomes on the receiving end of our charity. Why do we miss this crucial aspect in evaluating our charitable work? Because, as compassionate people, we have been evaluating our charity by the rewards we receive through service, rather than the benefits received by the served. We have failed to adequately calculate the effects of our service on the lives of those reduced to objects of our pity and patronage.

What have we missed? As reported by Dambisa Moyo in *Dead Aid*, a World Bank study found that 85 percent of the aid money flowing into African countries never reaches the targeted areas of need and often goes to unproductive (if not blatantly corrupt) uses.

Expenditures for a week of service by church and college groups are grossly out of proportion with what is actually accomplished. U.S. mission teams who rushed to Honduras to help rebuild homes destroyed by hurricane Mitch spent on average $30,000 per home—homes locals could have built for $3,000 each. The money spent by one campus ministry to cover the costs of their Central American mission trip to repaint an orphanage would have been sufficient to hire two local painters and two new full-time teachers and purchase new uniforms for every student in the school.

Each year religious mission trips consume billions of dollars (estimates run from $2.5 to $5 billion annually), junkets that put some tourist dollars into local economies but seldom yield appreciable improvement in the lives of those being served. What appears to be extravagant, selfless, even sacrificial investments from caring benefactors may well be exposed as large-scale misappropriations of charitable resources.

To be sure, not all charitable response is toxic. The immediate outpouring of aid in times of catastrophe is inspiring and lifesaving. When an earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan, people responded compassionately from every sector of society. In these types of disasters, our government sends federal troops and civilian experts to assist with search and recovery efforts. Red Cross and other emergency-assistance organizations jump into action. The media brings the devastation into every living room and provides information on donating to responsible nonprofit groups mobilizing to address the crisis. America is in the forefront of generosity when it comes to extending lifesaving assistance in times of calamity. It is a cultural characteristic that should make us proud.

But our compassionate instinct has a serious shortcoming. Our memory is short when recovery is long. We respond with immediacy to desperate circumstances but often are unable to shift from crisis relief to the more complex work of long-term development. Consequently, aid agencies tend to prolong the "emergency" status of a crisis when a rebuilding strategy should be well under way.

Thus, in 2011, six years after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and long after the city should have shifted to long-term development projects, churches and mission organizations still "market" the crisis and volunteers continue to



flow into the city by the thousands, distributing free food and clothing to "victims." When relief does not transition to development in a timely way, compassion becomes toxic.

Not all charity is misspent. There are many stellar examples of organizations, large and small, getting it right. The U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) now focuses not merely on dollars invested in developing countries but on the lasting and meaningful changes that result from those investments. Smart investments call for partnerships with countries willing to help themselves, willing to stand up to corruption, and willing to assume accountability for results delivered from each and every investment in their development. In Honduras MCC is investing in agricultural training and infrastructure improvements (roads, bridges) that enable farmers to grow higher-yield crops and transport them efficiently to market. The net result is sustainable economic growth.

Food Security for America, a fledgling nonprofit based in Atlanta, assists churches and other community groups in establishing food co-ops, replacing food pantries that offer free food at the price of recipients' dignity. Food Security organizes food "buying clubs" that leverage the $3 biweekly dues of each low-income member to purchase $30 worth of surplus food.

THIS NATIONAL TOXIC-CHARITY SCANDAL can be reversed if we begin now to take preemptive action to change the compassion industry before it becomes discredited as a national embarrassment. I have seen that such change can happen. In this book I would like to offer basic operating principles that distinguish wise and prudent charitable efforts from the destructive do-gooder practices currently dominating the compassion industry. After describing the problem and hearing stories of people who are modeling solutions, my goal is to provide for caring people a checklist of criteria they can use to determine which actions they should undertake when they want to help others. Perhaps, like the medical profession's Hippocratic Oath, the charity profession will adopt an "Oath for Compassionate Service" to guide us toward providing responsible and effective aid.

These well-tested principles, applied to service work, point individuals and organizations toward practices and partnerships that empower those we wish to assist. You will see them come into play throughout this book—either as models of what we might accomplish or, in their absence, in the stories of where we go wrong.

### *The Oath for Compassionate Service*

- Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
- Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.



- Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.
- Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
- Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
- Above all, do no harm.

This book explores these principles alongside practical case studies to examine how we practice charity. It takes a candid and sometimes critical look behind the scenes at the unintended harm inflicted by our kindness. My hope is that the following chapters will point the way toward more careful and effective directives for our compassion, to the end that the interactions between the rich and poor may be redemptive—never toxic—for either group.

The current energy driving human compassion is at an all-time high. Rightly deployed, it can move intractable societal problems toward lasting solutions. Rechanneling this awesome force away from toxic activities and into transformative outcomes is not an unrealistic goal. I have witnessed it on a small scale and know it can be done. I believe such a shift is possible on a much broader scale as well. I trust you will agree by the end of this book that we have good reason for hope.

# Chapter Two

## *The Problem with Good Intentions*

Who would fault the motivation of compassionate people to help those in need? Certainly not I. It is not motivation, however, that we are questioning but rather the unintended consequences of rightly motivated efforts. Negative outcomes seldom make it into the inspiring reports of service projects and mission trips. This chapter looks behind the scenes at some of the unreported aspects of service.

With enthusiasm and energy my Presbyterian church missions team laid the groundwork for a partnership with a remote Honduran village. A bishop in that region had told us of their desperate need—an isolated people struggling with daily survival needs. Church leaders determined that this would be more than a ten-day service trip. They would make a long-term commitment to this village, build friendships and trust over time, have a true partnership. This would be both a sensitive and responsible investment of time and resources.

On the initial visit one need became obvious. Water. The village women had to carry water from a supply source miles away, spending hours each day trudging in the oppressive heat. The church could do something about that and had connections with well-drilling engineers. The church also had money to cover the costs. This was a desperate need that could be addressed immediately. And the church did so.

When the first water was pumped to the surface and villagers filled their jugs with cool, pure water, there was a great celebration. There were cheers and hugs of joy and many "*gracias, señors*." We had changed these people's lives.

The following year, however, as the church's returning missioners rumbled up the dusty road toward the village, they observed women carrying water jugs as they had done before. Arriving at the village, the team saw that the well was idle. The pump had broken down, and there was no way to draw precious water to the surface. The ministry team knew what they had to do. They repaired the pump. Soon water was flowing in the village once more.

But by the time the team returned the following year, the pump had broken down yet again. And women resumed their toilsome treks. This happened year after year. The village simply waited until their benefactors returned to fix *their* well.

Another remote Central American village had a similar need for water. They, too, were blessed with a partner from



the United States. But this Nicaraguan village, unlike the Honduran village, received a mission partner with an altogether different approach to serving.

Opportunity International, a Chicago-based microlending organization, commissioned a community developer to assist the residents in creating a plan for their much-needed well. She assisted them in finding information on drilling and material costs. She helped them formulate a budget and a rudimentary business plan. She arranged for a loan conditional upon villagers' investing their own money from their meager savings. Then she connected them with a reliable Nicaraguan engineer and helped them organize a water commission to set fees, collect water bills, manage finances, and maintain their new utility.

Village men provided all the labor, digging trenches, laying water lines, and setting 220 water meters. When the pump was switched on and water surged to the homes, the village erupted with pride. Their water supply, they soon learned, was abundant—sufficient to allow them to sell water to the local government school and negotiate supplying an adjacent village. They now *owned* and *managed* a wealth-producing asset.

## *The Short-Term Service Industry*

ACROSS THE SPAN OF four decades I have observed many well-resourced, well-intentioned people attempting to help the poor. I have been among them. My church has been among them. Most of the time, these efforts have produced little lasting benefit for those "served," with a few notable exceptions.

For the most part, when those of us who serve are candid, we admit an uneasiness in our viscera, a largely unspoken concern that our helping might not be accomplishing what we had hoped. This is especially true when it comes to the now-routine practice of sending groups of youth or adults to do service projects.

Critics of short-term trips often point to the make-work nature of many of these service trips. They point to projects like the wall built on an orphanage soccer field in Brazil that had to be torn down after the visitors left. Or the church in Mexico that was painted six times during one summer by six different mission groups. Or the church in Ecuador built by volunteers that was never used as a church because the community had no need for it.

A March 18, 2008 article in *USA Today*, "Christian students get immersed in lives of the poor," reported that Princeton University conducted a study that found 1.6 million American church members took mission trips abroad in 2005—an average of eight days long—at a cost of $2.4 billion. And the number has grown every year since. "Religious tourism," as some call it, has become a growth industry. The web is full of agencies (denominational and parachurch, college, and service organizations) ready to connect service groups and church groups to a "meaningful experience" in an exotic location rife



with human need. The Bahamas, it is estimated, annually receives one short-term missionary for every fifteen residents.

Yes, many of our motives are noble. We want to invest in the lives of others. We want to expose youth and adults to the needs of a hurting world. We want to engage people in life-changing experiences. Some of us are motivated by the teachings of Jesus—to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and show compassion to the oppressed.

Often, though, we miss the big picture because we view aid through the narrow lens of the needs of *our* organization or church—focusing on what will benefit *our* team the most—and neglecting the best interests of those we would serve.

Even when we believe that serving others will at the very least change *us*, early research by Kurt Ver Beek of Calvin College and Robert Priest of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School suggests that service projects and mission trips *do not effect lasting* change. Within six to eight weeks after a mission trip, most short-term mission-trippers return to the same assumptions and behaviors they had prior to the trip.

Contrary to popular belief, most mission trips and service projects *do not:*

- empower those being served
- engender healthy cross-cultural relationships
- improve local quality of life
- relieve poverty

- change the lives of participants
- increase support for long-term mission work

Contrary to popular belief, most mission trips and service projects *do:*

- weaken those being served
- foster dishonest relationships
- erode recipients' work ethic
- deepen dependency

Some Christians argue that short-term service trips whet the appetite for long-term mission involvement. Research, however, does not support this claim. In spite of the moving testimonies of "life-changing experiences" by returning short-termers and the occasional example of full-time missionaries who point to a mission trip as the catalyst for their calling, there is no evidence that missions as a whole has benefited from the rise in short-term service.

If we listen to those on the receiving end of these service projects, we see a different picture emerge. Most work done by volunteers could be better done by locals in less time and with better results. The president of a struggling seminary in Cuba confided in me the conflict she felt hosting U.S. volunteers. A new group of twenty youth and adults had just arrived, eager to lay tile in a new dormitory addition. Not one volunteer had



experience in tile work, but the local supervisor remained patient. No matter that some of the grout lines were crooked and the tile had to be reset. No matter that skilled tile layers sat outside the seminary gates, waiting to see if there would be any work left for them after the volunteers left. These volunteers had paid good money to come all the way from the States, and they were expecting to do "meaningful" work.

The seminary president saw to it that kitchen staff prepared plenty of food the Americans would like. She scheduled various faculty members to arrange lodging, offer presentations, and conduct tours. She had all the materials and supervisors lined up for the work. But what she could not do, would not do, was tell her eager, naive servant-volunteers that all this was a gross misappropriation of resources. To do so would almost certainly have cut off the support from this church's missions budget. And this her struggling seminary could not afford to have happen. Oh, what she could have done with the nearly $30,000 this group was spending on this trip! Still, the church's forthcoming, smaller donation for the true needs of the seminary was essential to their continuing work.

Anyone with a business background (or even street smarts) would agree that the amount spent on service trips is extravagant when compared to the monetary value of the actual work done. But when people with business backgrounds enter service work, they repeatedly fail to bring with them their common sense and business acumen, defaulting to traditional charity models. They would not put up with this kind of return on investment in their professional lives. Otherwise, they would see what should be obvious: if the money spent on travel, lodging, food, and staff time were directly invested in the people being served, far more could be accomplished with greater effectiveness.

### *Ministry Entrepreneurs*

Of course, all charitable activities cannot be painted with the same critical brush. Some groups accomplish amazing results and work efficiency. Opportunity International, for example, invests in poverty-stricken populations through microloans to help them build their small, life-sustaining businesses. But responsible development efforts such as these are sometimes thwarted by well-meaning missioners who have little understanding of the negative impacts of their good deeds. Consider the following dilemma currently playing out in Nicaragua.

Microlending offers small loans to peasants in underdeveloped countries to assist them in growing their grass-roots businesses. Like $50 to a woman in Nicaragua who makes hand-stitched baby clothes so she can buy a treadle sewing machine. Or $100 to a woman to enlarge her produce stand and expand her selection at the local village market. Microloans at modest interest rates counteract the exploitation of loan sharks and enable the poorest of the culture to take small, steady steps toward economic health.



And the repayment rate is amazingly high. Many microfinance organizations say their default rate is less than 5 percent. In Nicaragua, for example, Opportunity International (one of its most effective microlenders, who worked with the local community to partner the well project) claimed 98 percent repayment among its thirty-four thousand borrowers scattered throughout the cities and rural villages of that country. Through the establishment of "trust groups"—small clusters of twenty to thirty neighbors, all of whom run tiny businesses—borrowers agree to provide accountability and support for one another. Trust-group members, mostly women, select from among themselves who should receive the first loan and collectively guarantee its repayment. Over time all the members of the trust group receive loans and, with positive credit histories building, the frequency and size of their loans increase. Opportunity International requires each borrower to establish a savings account. Peasants in Nicaragua have accumulated more than $1 million in private savings—a safety net for emergencies, equity for home improvements, or funds for their children's education.

"And how does the church fit into this?" I asked Juan Ulloa, Opportunity International's Nicaragua director, on a recent visit to that country. Juan is a small, soft-spoken man whose vision propelled this poorest of Central American countries into becoming an international model of microenterprise excellence. As a banker-turned-minister, Juan successfully combined marketplace skills and theological training into a ministry that ignited hope among many thousands of desperately poor Nicaraguans. For Juan, this work was more than economic relief—it was the embodiment of Christ's love for the poor. I had to agree, witnessing firsthand the proud faces of peasants reading scripture together in clearings under the canopy of squat shade trees, collecting their weekly payments and savings deposits from one another, and praying together for strength, for success in their little businesses, and for wisdom to deal with village problems.

Juan tried to be diplomatic in responding to my question about the church's involvement with the microlending model. Faint praise indirectly revealed the truth. But finally, after my continuous probing, Juan admitted that many growing Nicaraguan churches were active in their evangelism efforts—and that was good, he added—but they did little to assist their converts in the struggles of their daily lives. They seemed more concerned about saving souls than saving people. The biggest problem, however, was with those churches that have church partners from the United States. And here Juan's expression became very intense. "They destroy the initiative of my people."

He described whole regions of the country where microlending was virtually nonexistent, areas where church partnerships were concentrated. "People say 'Why should we borrow money when the churches give it to us?'"

Juan went on to describe how entrepreneurship declines as dollars and free resources flood in, how people become conditioned to wait for the next mission group to arrive instead of building their businesses through their own efforts. He talked about how dignity is eroded as people come to view themselves as charity cases for wealthy visitors, how they pose with smiling faces for pictures to be taken back for the marketing of the next group. "They are turning my people into beggars," Juan said, now with full emotion.



And what peasant scratching out a bare existence can refuse suitcases bulging with new clothing for his families?

What struggling pastor can resist the temptation to accept a steady salary and generous church income in exchange for hosting visitors, organizing volunteer work, and staffing funded programs?

What village would borrow money to dig a well or buy books for their school library or save money to build a church if these things were provided for them free of charge?

If all they were required to do was make a wish list, show up for the schedule arranged by the donors, and smile graciously until their benefactors head back home, who would blame them for accepting easy charity?

But Juan did not blame them for becoming beggars. He faulted the affluent, well-meaning U.S. churches for their unexamined generosity. His accusations, now pouring forth with considerable force, were directed at the naive "vacationaries" spending millions of dollars traveling to his country, creating a welfare economy that deprives people of the pride of their own accomplishments—all in the name of Christian service.

But it's not only church-based groups that bring toxic charity and use obsolete service models. Those in business, law, engineering, the sciences, and local government also seem oblivious to their default charity mode when they do philanthropic work—even though our nation rejected this type of charity with the passage of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. As a country, we understand that welfare creates unhealthy dependency, that it erodes the work ethic, that it cannot elevate people out of poverty. Yet we continue to perpetuate ill-thought-through models when we "invest" in service work. Take the story of Billy Mitchell.

### *Bad Business Equals Bad Ministry*

Powerful people offering selfless support to the powerless. No thought of repayment. No ulterior motive. Charity work with no strings attached. Seems so noble, so Christian.

That's how Atlanta real-estate developer Billy Mitchell attempted to invest when he volunteered to organize a new community-development corporation to revitalize the long-neglected inner-city neighborhood of Summerhill. A man who had done well in the city wanted to find ways to give back. And he believed that caring for the poor is important to God. So Billy responded from his heart to the appeal of community leaders to help turn their devastated neighborhood around.

As Billy understood it, bringing a volunteer spirit and



service-oriented heart to investing meant listening carefully to the needs and desires of Summerhill residents, then jumping into action on their behalf. The biggest problem, they said, was housing. Their neighborhood was in disarray—streets lined with hundreds of dilapidated rental houses, entire blocks blighted by scores of vacant, trash-strewn lots. If it were ever to be a healthy place for children to grow up, a place with safe streets and thriving businesses, new home-owning neighbors would have to be attracted back. Such a desire might well have been idle fantasy were it not for the fact that the Olympic Summer Games were coming to Atlanta and Summerhill was right in the path. Billy immediately saw the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In order to transform the neighborhood, a nonprofit community-development corporation (CDC) would have to be formed. It would require a blue-ribbon board with all the necessary skills to negotiate complex property deals, secure millions in funding, and manage dozens of projects simultaneously. One concern, however, was that such a high-powered group might easily steamroll right over community leadership. And this mission was about investing in the community, not real-estate conquest. So the decision was made to subordinate the new CDC to the neighborhood association, making it a wholly owned subsidiary of the community. The board and staff of the new CDC would serve at the pleasure of the community and implement the community-defined vision. It all seemed so right. So just.

In the spirit of serving the community, Billy and the board launched into multi-million-dollar real-estate acquisitions, secured millions in loans and foundation grants, attracted large corporate investors, and negotiated Olympics-related deals—all to benefit the community. It was stimulating work made even more rewarding because of its noble purpose. A vacant 840-bed hotel was purchased to be converted to student housing. Blocks of land were cleared, and rows of attractive new homes sprung out of the ground. A public-housing project was transformed and private management hired. The dreams of a forgotten neighborhood were at long last becoming reality.

One big flaw in the strategy, however, proved fatal. In putting together complex, big-dollar real-estate deals, Billy and his capable cadre of prominent business leaders failed to establish adequate guarantees and contingencies to cover the substantial loans and investments. They would never have taken unsecured risks in their corporate business dealings. But because this was all pro bono—for the good of the community—they entered into agreements based upon goodwill rather than good business sense.

And goodwill did carry the mission forward—for a time. Until a disgruntled pro bono attorney got upset when another legal firm scooped up some fees he was entitled to. The project turned ugly. The angry "advocate for the community" launched a personal vendetta against the CDC board, turning the community leaders against the volunteers doing all the heavy lifting. In the mayhem that ensued, Billy was fired,



other board members resigned, and law suits were filed. It was like rats jumping off a sinking ship.

Overnight, the vision was dead in the water.

The corporation collapsed, creditors scrambled for whatever they could salvage, and what began as an inspiring vision ended as a devastating debacle. Race relations took a severe blow. Old stereotypes resurfaced as angry community residents exchanged hot words with their bewildered and perplexed would-be benefactors. Fifteen years later Summerhill remains a rudderless neighborhood that no one in the city wants to touch.

Summerhill needed true friends and partners, not softhearted volunteers, friends good enough to clearly define roles and expectations, partners with whom to negotiate responsible if/then contingencies. The board's decision to subordinate its control to the political whims of the community and surrender its ability to deliver on commitments was not only bad business, it was ethically questionable. If Summerhill taught us anything, it was that no-strings-attached service needs some strings attached.

Unselfish self-investment may be freely offered with no expectation of repayment. It may not seek credit. It may even be anonymous. But unselfish investment should:

- never be mindless
- never be irresponsible
- always calculate the cost

- always consider the outcome
- always be a partnership

### *Money and Partnership*

In the following story, Ron Nikkel, president of Prison Fellowship International, describes the challenges he encountered moving from a traditional charity model to a partnership of international members, putting policies in place that invest in healthy, long-term relationships.

> Following the 1976 founding of Prison Fellowship in the USA by Chuck Colson, there was a great deal of interest among prison chaplains and prison volunteers around the world. The stature of prison ministry was raised to a new level by Colson's White House-to-jailhouse conversion story, and many were intrigued by the idea of starting a Prison Fellowship in their own countries. Along with this came the inevitable requests for assistance, if not outright support—at least start-up grants.
>
> Initially, that is exactly what Prison Fellowship (PF) did. By the time I joined Prison Fellowship International, the relationship between the PF organizations in other countries that had been funded and PF in the United States were already contentious. PF in England and Canada had received start-up grants, but now they were demanding additional funding to keep them going—and if not a grant, then a loan. Money became a political problem in the relationships. On the one hand the recipients felt manipulated anytime they felt or suspected that we were in any way being directive. On the other hand we felt that we had learned a few things in prison ministry and simply wanted to share those best practices with them.



> It did not take me long to realize that the development of a healthy international organization had to be built on relationships in which each national organization was an equal partner and participated on an equal basis. We stopped the grants and loans, instead requiring that every national PF ministry be responsible for its own funding. And not only that—each national PF was required to pay a standard percentage of their income to the PF International association as a membership fee. Membership would be voluntary, and any PF organization could opt out at any time, but in doing so, it would lose its license to use the PF name.
>
> On the basis of membership fees, PF International began to provide training, consultation, and other membership services to its member organizations. In thirty years the number of national PF organizations around the world grew from 5 to 117.
>
> Not a single one of these ministries receives grants

or loans for start-up or for ongoing operations. Today national PF ministries as diverse as PF Nepal, PF Benin, PF Venezuela, and PF Papua New Guinea raise their own funds and contribute their annual membership fees for the support and extension of the ministry worldwide.

Sooner or later most PF ministries realize that they are working with a population of people that is often the poorest of the poor. Not only are they poor and often marginalized to begin with, but the reality is that in countries with high unemployment it is virtually impossible for a person with a prison record to get a job. In response, a number of PF organizations have learned not to provide ex-prisoners with the financial assistance they inevitably ask for. Instead, these PF groups have begun providing prisoners and ex-prisoners with skills training and often repayable microloans and business mentoring to enable them to create their own small businesses—whether tailoring service, motorcycle repair, landscaping, fruit and vegetable stands, pedicabs, barbering, and so forth, in order to become self-supporting.

Again and again we are finding that when it comes to global needs in organizational development and human development, the granting of money creates dependence and conflict, not independence and respect. By changing the equation to other means of exchange,



we find that we are empowering people based on shared responsibility, mutual support, and accountability.

Stories like these line the pages of this book. Some critically explore what happens at ground level when caring people lead with their hearts but ignore checks on their intellect. Through case studies, the following chapters reflect on the unsettling reality of charity work. Yet also woven throughout this book are informative glimpses into the private struggles and victories of those who attempt to navigate their churches or organizations away from traditional "doing for" the poor models toward a "doing with" paradigm. Here, you will meet thoughtful, courageous people who risked examining their current methods of service and forged ahead to develop enlightened new technologies of compassion. I hope you will find sufficient encouragement in these pages to inspire new models of caring.