

Good missions & ministry contributes to a healthy church!

*“Contrary to popular belief, most mission trips and service projects do not: empower those being served, engender healthy cross-cultural relationships, improve quality of life, relieve poverty, change the lives of participants or increase support for long-term missions work,” (Lupton, Robert. Toxic Charity)*

The purpose of a ministry or a mission trip is to empower people to be all that God created them to be: people made in God’s image with gifts and abilities, capable of making decisions, managing their resources and able to bring about change in the world. Our CBFNC churches are involved in a multitude of ministries and mission trips. It feels so good to help, however, could our helping be doing more harm than good? Are we taking away jobs or their dignity or their ability to make decisions for themselves? While they might be materially poor, we are often unaware that our actions reveal a God-complex of superiority and the belief that we have achieved our own wealth by our own efforts. We often decide for them what they really need. We suffer from a poverty of being! We must embrace mutual brokenness!

In the book “When Helping Hurts” the story is told of a church delivering toys for Christmas. The church members noticed that there were no men in the apartments when they delivered the toys. They said, “The residents are all unwed mothers who keep having babies. They don’t deserve our help.” In reality, the men were embarrassed and ran out the back door experiencing a deep sense of shame and inadequacy, which made it even more difficult for them to apply for jobs. We all need a sense of dignity!

As a church assesses its’ ministry projects and missions, some questions to be asked are, “Are we doing the work that they can do themselves?” “Are we taking charge because we can do it quickly and efficiently?” “Are they letting us take charge because they lack confidence, don’t care as much as we do about the project or think they will receive more resources?” Empowering people to be what God created them to be involves looking at this as a highly relational, learning process where those we are ministering with (not ministering to) are involved in the project planning and action. We can also ask, “Are our church participants experiencing spiritual growth leading to a stronger connection to missions & meaningful ministry?”

“Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a methodology for the sustainable development of communities based on their strengths and potentials. It involves assessing the resources, skills, and experience available in a community; organizing the community around issues that move its members into action; and then determining and taking appropriate action.” (Kretzmann, John and McKnight, John. Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets) Reading the community is essential to good mission.) What is important to that community. What is its’ story, core rituals, and institutions? What about the

community's environment, pace of life, and laws? How does the community approach justice and the well-being of its' people?

Essential to the process is discovering the individual capabilities and passions of the people ("What are you good at doing?") as well as unearthing what has worked well in the past and what are their dreams for the future. Using the assets of the community and the assets of individuals to address the needs and working together to accomplish change is good mission!

Through good missions & ministry, the local church will find its' identity as a church that cares for others and has more compassion for the poor, the outcasts, the "others." Church members involved in local ministry and mission trips will learn team-building, flexibility, and leadership skills. Life-giving relationships will be experienced by all. A church with good missiology will be one that encourages cross-cultural relationships and is comfortable with diversity. It will be a healthy church experiencing God's amazing power to spiritually transform us into the people of God bringing "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."