

**A Faith-Based CDC  
Survival Guide  
By  
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**Serving The People**

Go to the people  
Live among them  
Learn from them  
Love them

Start with what they know build on what they have: But of the best leaders when their task is accomplished their work is done the people all remark “We have done it ourselves”.

Chinese poem

*Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell. (Isaiah 58:12)*

**In the Beginning...**

In the aftermath of the Contract with America, Welfare Reform, And the Devolution of the federal government comes the debate on the role of churches in meeting the needs of the poor in so called ‘faith-based initiatives, as promoted by George W. Bush in the 2000 Presidential campaign. Not that the church has not already been involved in the struggle for economic justice and the care of ‘widows and orphans, in our society. Moreover this was precisely the role of the American church in response to the message of **Charles Wesley**, the abolitionists, **William Booth** and others regarding the plight of ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’, which was not enjoyed by all. Active involvement extended through the early settlement houses established by **Jane Adams** at the turn of the century.

Fast forward to the 1960s, when two distinct movements were born that engaged the Faith Community: the War on Poverty and Dr. **Leon Sullivan’s** Philadelphia plan. Churches were utilized in the development of these efforts to ameliorate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty’ in America. Dr. Sullivan essentially franchised his pre-employment training program through local churches. Low-income housing and small business projects were also launched.

After 35 years of mixed experiences, a renewed call to faith-based organizations was sounded in 1996 by a Republican Congress. The **Charitable Choice** provision of the *Welfare Reform Act* set the pace. This was the product of a bipartisan effort, *The Project for American Renewal*, which embodied a compendium of several ‘compassionate conservative’ initiatives (many framed in biblical terms). For the first time in modern history a role for the church was codified in Federal law. This has been met with a backlash from several camps in the Faith Community fearing government control or that the church would be burdened with total responsibility for serving the welfare state. Having abdicated any direct responsibility for the plight of the poor, many churches are disaffected having escaped to suburban communities as schools and cities declined. This does not obviate the mandate in James 1:27 for “Pure religion ... To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.

The purpose of this work is not so much a treatise of social history, rather a plausible plan for active involvement. Not for the faint of heart, it is a ‘long and tedious journey.

## **Where Do I Begin...**

Everything has both a start and an end. It is obviously advantageous to get off to a good start and to ultimately win in the end! If only it were that easy. The course you are contemplating is not to be taken lightly. It is not without its share of challenges and difficulties (and that's the good news) as you seek to serve others. However, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28) and this is the hope you must have to endure.

## **First Steps**

### **ORGANIZATION**

1. *Developing your primary mission for involvement* - The single most important task is to cultivate a sense of purpose for being involved in this work. This should not be presupposed because of your prior Christian convictions. You must be intentional in this endeavor and conquer 'first the natural then the spiritual, to be effective. You should inform both your mind and spirit in this regard. To do this with integrity, requires that one possess (or acquire) certain technical skills on par with our secular counterparts: Real estate and financial analysis as well as business management just to name a few.

Additional 'vision, training' is also essential for duration of the journey. I recommend **Dr. John Perkins'** book, *Beyond Charity: A Call for Christian Community Development* for a practical theological foundation.

**Robert Woodson's** *On the Road to Economic Freedom* is also a good primer on grassroots community organizing. Both books will radically challenge any preconceived notions regarding the people you are called to serve. You must continually reassess your values and focus on your specific desire or motivation to serve others in this way. In spite of even your most noble intentions, you will find resistance or strong opposition to your efforts 'to help the poor, - even from the intended beneficiaries!

2. *Mobilize others to assist with the vision* - If you are still convinced that you want to move on, then you must be a person of vision: one who sees the end first but must travail creatively until they will be done'. Sharing this labor of love with others of like-minded precious faith will assure you of the core support for this endeavor. Opposition will be instantaneous by many doubters, naysayers, and those who just do not share your zeal and optimism. As long as this does not come from persons whose wisdom and knowledge you respect, you will come to understand that the righteous must take the battle to the enemy and much force (personal fortitude) may be required to prevail. Remember the man Nehemiah had to resist the taunting of those who tried to get him to come down off the wall he was rebuilding with the help of people. Then they said, "Let us arise and build. So they put their hands to the good work. (Neh. 2:19) Don't go it alone.

3. *Get professional help early* - There are numerous legal and financial requirements that will challenge both your faith and your intellect! As it says in Proverbs, there is safety in a multitude of counselors. - A good attorney and accountant are 'more precious than gold, in guiding you through the technical aspects of starting such an endeavor. Do not underestimate the complexity and difficulty associated with the secular aspects of this type of ministry. The accountability required is rigorously enforced and ignorance can be detrimental to you.

**IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT A NEW SEPARATE ENTITY BE ESTABLISHED FOR THIS PURPOSE.** This segregates the secular aspects from your principal religious activity so as to not encumber it with the regulation, financial reporting and/or other liabilities ensuing from these activities. You do not want to burden the church unnecessarily with the plethora of rules, regulations and red tape that come with the funding.

4. *Formal Action Steps are necessary*- There are several, formal procedural measures that are necessary to be taken:

(a) **Incorporation** - The Secretary of your State requires that Articles of Incorporation be filed with a statement of your mission or purpose and identification of a Statutory Agent (correspondent). You should also secure registration of your corporate name and obtain a Federal Tax Identification Number (not to be confused with your tax exempt status). State incorporation as a nonprofit organization under applicable laws grants an exemption on state sales tax.

There is a small charge for filing these documents. You may not have to submit your By-Laws or Code of Regulations at this time but you will need to develop them for other submissions and organizational purposes.

**YOU NEED TO CLEARLY AND BROADLY STATE YOUR MISSION AND ESTABLISH YOUR IDENTITY AS A CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SOCIAL MINISTRY.**

This will preserve the spiritual character of your ministry.

(b) *Tax Exempt Status* - The most valuable asset you will need is a federal tax exemption under Section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS code to benefit from gifts or charitable contributions from others who support your cause with donations of cash, goods, property or grants. Many funders require proof of our tax-exempt status in order to apply for grants. **HOWEVER., THIS SHOULD NOT BE YOUR SOLE PURPOSE FOR FILING.** The field is already crowded and IRS scrutiny is its own reward!

The specifics are outlined in Publication 517 available at the local IRS office along with the required forms. This is only the beginning and a more substantial fee is required to be submitted. Special attention should be paid to specific language required:

- 1) Anti lobbying or political activity prohibition;
- 2) Non-Inurement (personal benefit to individuals/ board members).
- 3) For Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO) the provisions of the Cranston-Gonzalez Act regarding your housing purpose and a one-third low-income board representation are to be clearly delineated.

While your Christian witness can be upfront, here are three major challenges: (1) the express prohibition against proselytizing; (2) not discriminating on the basis of religion and (3) limitations on the control of the organization by a religious organization. This does not have to hinder you from affirmatively demonstrating the 'power of the Gospel's and God's love by your actions in serving others transparently as salt and light.

(a) **CHDO Certification** - If affordable housing is a primary emphasis of your ministry, it must be addressed strategically as well as stated in your formal documents (see above) . Of particular concern is whether your CHDO has material involvement' in these projects as either sponsors, co-developers, or developer in fact. **AVOID MERE PAPER INVOLVEMENT OR ALLOWING YOUR ORGANIZATION TO BE USED BY OTHERS DANGLING MONEY!** Your tax exempt status is at risk and you may incur additional legal liabilities.

**COMMUNITY BUILDING STEPS**

1) *Define your geographic service area.* Gather demographic information to survey the conditions of the area. You may find critical statistical data in the hands of social service agencies to support your efforts. For example, I asked the county welfare director to tell me how many cases were located in the three zip codes comprising our service area. His database

revealed that there were 9,000 cases! This supported a successful effort to locate a satellite facility in this area. This solved a major access problem for these families to these services. Similar responses have come from other agencies when such primary data is verifiable from their own records. Secure current Census demographic data for your community as well. You may be able to identify key indicators or trends for the types of services or activities you are planning.

2) *Conduct focus groups to prioritize community needs.* Engage area residents, businesses and other churches and organizations serving the community early in the process. A premium will be realized from genuine involvement of area residents and local neighborhood leaders. More “Bottoms up” planning is talked about than actually done. If empowering the community to own the revitalization process is not priority one, your motives and credibility will be severely questioned.

3) *Organize potential board members.* Include low-income persons and/or their representatives from the community. Avoid labeling and patronizing behavior so as to not demean them. For example, we designated persons on our board as ‘Community representatives’ rather than ‘Low-Income Representatives’ (though they meet the eligibility requirements specified) to avoid the risk of offending them. This was a lesson of respect that we learned early on. Too often our well-intentioned efforts have been rather gratuitous and self-serving. This kind of paternalism has reinforced the dependency and powerlessness of these persons. True empowerment does not enable, it affirms the dignity of the individual and elevates them to their fullest potential.

4) **Contact the HUD designated Participating Jurisdiction.** Either the City, County or State provides the program guidelines and technical assistance. Request and review any relevant available public planning documents (ie. **Consolidated Plan**, Land Use Plans). These do not normally cost anything and have much detail about the community. The **Consolidated Plan** is the primary document to consult for identifying local priorities for housing and community development resources.

#### **SURVIVAL TIPS:**

1. *Operating assistance or support is limited and highly competitive.* Funders are particularly skeptical of new start-up groups and shy away from them. Politics is often a consideration for exceptions to this rule.

**DANGER WILL ROBINSON:** The faith-based banner is not readily embraced by the secular funders and may pigeonhole you if you are perceived as not being professional or organized. Your good intentions alone are not enough to sway this group. More established agencies, who have been used to getting these funds, are not just going ‘to rollover and play dead’ or ‘let the new kids’ have a shot at these funds. These roadblocks are apparent in some of the responses and criticisms inherent in the debate of the President **George W. Bush’s** Faith-Based Initiative. Bureaucrats often ‘stonewall’ uninitiated groups by passive aggressive measures to confuse them or frustrate their efforts to access these funds. I have observed this behavior in the past when they have disdain for a new policy. They may throw up artificial impediments and limit or withhold crucial information that might enhance your ability to develop a quality proposal. This type of behavior is not truly representative of the good work that these people normally do, but it is incumbent on you to resist the temptation to succumb to their resistance. If you have a cause you feel is important to you, ‘don’t be weary in well-doing’ and continue to ‘press toward the mark’ in all that you do. Good will inevitably triumph over evil, Luke Skywalker!.

2. *Planning assistance may be available.* Consult the City or County planning agency in regard to specific studies or statistical data for your area. Our tax dollars have paid for many studies and reports on development issues in our communities. In addition, annual

funding applications detail current plans and resources (eg. the *Consolidated Plan* required by HUD). Consult these documents for linkage to your area needs.

3. *Building consensus*. Your partnership with other residents, local businesses, churches, etc. is essential but also time-consuming. It may also be highly confrontational! Not all are believers' and even those you are seeking to help may be leery of your plans. The cost of time and the tension is essential if you truly desire to serve them.

#### **What Do I Do Now...**

*Blessed be the LORD, For He has made marvelous His lovingkindness to me in a besieged city. (Psalm 31:21)*

Are we there yet? If you have gotten this far, then you possess sufficient umph to join in the fray! Fasten your seat belt, it's going to be a long ride!

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy. (Proverbs 31:8,9)*

Making a difference in your community is what really matters. It's a matter of the heart! Bearing another's burden in the heat of the day has its own rewards. You will not be paid enough for this work nor should you expect it. You will profit from your labor of love. If you give that which costs you nothing, you will gain that which you cannot lose.

O brother where art thou? The only separation of the church from the state of people is the distance from their need! The contemporary church is disaffected by the plight of the poor. With 'checkbook indifference' she has abdicated a prophetic role. Cheap grace as **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wrote is a poor substitute for true Christianity. Compassion for the poor is the mandate of the church not the state! Their plight should invoke anger, righteous indignation as Nehemiah decried the oppression of his community.

*Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. (5:2) For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live. 11 (5:3) There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." (5: 4) Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. (5:5) "Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brother. (5:6) Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. Nehemiah 5:1-6*

We cannot afford the comfort of what **Dr. James Forbes** describes as 'the cataracts of cultural conformity, or easy believism'. When 49% of minority families do not own their homes, how can you boast of your own which is mortgaged up to your eyebrows? To own something is affirming to one's dignity and self-esteem. Subsidized or public housing for the poor is more like a detention camp stifling hopes and dreams for those confined there. Urban sprawl has drawn individuals and churches from decaying cities to utopian suburban communities. This is a false reality oblivious to God's purpose.

*For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. (Matthew 26:11)*

Christ's words were not an indictment against the poor. The poor exist to temper our propensity for self-indulgence or self-centeredness. Sometimes serving the poor often masks a more basic desire to have our own needs met. We must avoid such duplicity or 'I-

centrism". Too often we also promote co-dependency rather than true empowerment, because we are in denial and don't have the answers.

People are poor for many reasons. However our materialistic culture has launched an aggressive assault on the low-income community. Check cashing, pay advance centers, rent to own stores, convenience stores, and 'buy here/pay here' car lots are some of these predators who ravage the vulnerable. They thrive because of economic apartheid, in the form of dis-investment in these communities by banks and retail businesses. In addition, dollars spent do not return or circulate nor are jobs generated in this exploited economy. Harvard's **Michael Porter** has done landmark work in touting the competitive advantages of the \$85 billion untapped urban market. But more needs to be done to empower persons within these neighborhoods, to retain this wealth by owning these enterprises and creating jobs there for struggling families. **Magic Johnson's** work in South Central Los Angeles has mined the true potential for urban retail development.

*Powernomics'* author **Claude Anderson** is the 'Godfather' of urban entrepreneurship taking his seasoned message to the listening audiences of urban radio programs such as those of **Tom Joyner** and **Tom Pope**. Public Television moderator, **Tavis Smiley**, has also brought much light to this subject as well. They all chime in the pole of the black church in this area as a trusted institution for financial empowerment in the community.

Most recently **Bishop T. D. Jakes**, an experienced entrepreneur, has conducted a series of forums to engage the faith community in economic empowerment of urban communities to 'loose the shackles' of poverty and abandonment plaguing many today trapped in its clutches. He has learned the lessons that the late Tom Skinner taught that you can't preach to hungry man. You must reach out to lift him from that condition to gain his trust in your words of hope. **Dr. John Perkins** teaches that it is more than 'giving him a fish and you feed him for a day' nor is it 'teaching him to fish and he has food for a lifetime' as the adage goes- He says 'It's the one who owns the pond who determines who will eat!

This is a working draft. Your comments are welcome.

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### **William A. Dodson Jr. Community Builder**

**William A. Dodson Jr.**, has over twenty-five years of community development and housing experience. He holds a **Master of Arts in Public Administration** from the **Ohio State University** (1981) and a Bachelors degree **Marshall University, in Sociology and Social Welfare**. Mr. Dodson has extensive public service experience and has given extensive volunteer service to nonprofit boards. He also hosted both a weekly public affairs program (Sound-Off) and a Gospel music program (Soul & Spirit) for 16 years on local

Christian radio station.

Mr. Dodson presently serves as **Executive Vice-President and Director of Community Relations** for the **Rhema Christian Center**, a large urban church in Northeast Columbus. He was ordained to Christian Ministry in 1992 and received the Certified Church Manager from the Christian Management Association (1997). Also serves as **Executive Director** for the **Dayspring Christian Community Development Corporation** established by the church to address the need for affordable housing, employment, literacy, and economic development. DCCDC has assisted in the development of over 1450 units of affordable housing for seniors and families in the Central Ohio area. Over 150 persons have completed the Workforce 2000 pre-employment training program as well. He is a frequent presenter or panelist on faith based community development issues and has also mentored many church leaders in the area of church administration.