

Transforming Urban Neighborhoods



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Introduction

Transforming Urban Neighborhoods is one chapter from a new Book by Stan Rowland of Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation, which is part of the Community Health Evangelism non-profit. The book is entitled *Transforming People and Place*.

Stan's first book, *Multiplying Light and Truth* - Community Health Evangelism (CHE), had three versions with the first being written in 1990 to introduce what CHE was all about. The second version in 2000 was revised to include how CHE was being used around the world, especially in closed countries. The third version, written in 2010, talked about how CHE was used in the USA and the name was changed to Neighborhood Transformation (NT).

By 20017 we found that Americans wanted a book specific to ministry in inner cities or communities in the United States. *Multiplying Light and Truth* was filled with references, examples and descriptions that were not appropriate for the US. Readers were interested in our experiences in applying Neighborhood Transformation. Although our updated lesson plans contain the latest material appropriate for US training, leaders preparing to implement NT needed a complete manual geared not only to the steps of implementation, but to motivating and inspiring leadership.

Both books cover how to create a ministry that is wholistic (physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual) where all elements are intimately intertwined and it is not focused on either a physical ministry or a spiritual ministry. It is both at the same time. Also, evangelism and discipleship are both done and not just one or the other. Coming to know Jesus is the first step but disciples must be obedient to what he tells us to do.

A core value is empowering people to do things for themselves instead of the stronger doing things for the lesser. By doing things for people, we disempower them and keep them controlled by the doers.

We focus on what people have in their hand, not what they don't have, which means everything is built on what will be sustainable. To see change in people and a place they must know their neighbor and trust each other. This is built on Loving your neighbor, as found in Luke 10:27.

For change to take place there must be a certain number of people working together in a neighborhood of maybe 3-8 square blocks.

We are working toward multiplication and not stopping with simple addition. Multiplication is where one person teaches another, who teaches another, who teaches another, starting with four generations of learners.

We are committed to participatory learning, which means we need to listen much more than we speak. We can all learn from each other but that means for things to be passed along, they need to be in the simplest form and cover the most important thing.

To this end I have created an entirely new book, *Transforming People and Place*, for the US market. This a practical, hands-on guide made up of 17 chapters on how and why to uphold the core principles that see people and neighbors transformed. Content comes from our, and others, experience in developing locations across the US. It is designed to be appropriate for an e-book format. As such, it is useful for choosing chapters from the table of contents that you are most interested in, and apply it to your situation. In addition, you can also download the lesson plan workshop related to that chapter.

Since this was an e-book, it was felt that it was important to print out one or two chapters that could be given out at conferences that introduce what neighborhood transformation is about. This booklet is a result of that effort and is from chapter 7 - *Transforming Urban Neighborhoods*. This chapter was chosen because it best demonstrates practical activities that can be undertaken to see transformation take place. The steps by themselves are not magic bullets to cause transformation to happen, but are part of a strategy.

Transforming Urban Neighborhoods

A field guide for engaging people your neighborhood to begin transformation.

As a way of introducing our study of the urban neighborhood, let's examine a typical example. As you read this, think about the neighborhood's assets and liabilities.

Mrs. Brown lives in a neighborhood southeast of a city center on the East Coast. Her neighborhood is bounded by an area 12 blocks by 8 blocks. Mrs. Brown, in her 70's, has lived in her neighborhood for 40 years. She knows many people in her neighborhood and is an accepted informal leader. The neighborhood is run down and fraught with major problems. She wants to see her neighborhood changed.

Most of the homes are very old row houses (townhouses with one house right up against another). Most were built 80 to 100 years ago, close to everything when the city was young; once a desirable location.

As the years passed, the homes became run down and the neighborhood became less desirable, poorer and poorer. Forty years ago it became home for the poor and disadvantaged. Many young families moved in but over the ensuing years a tragic thing occurred. Because of welfare rules and support for dependent children laws, families became women led. Families could not draw welfare if a man lived in the house!

Today the neighborhood contains a varied income population, with a few of the row houses being occupied by older women who have owned the homes for many years. Mix in drug houses that are lived in by young people of different races. On the other hand, because the area is close to the city center, many younger professionals have bought the old row houses and fixed them up. The area is very mixed ethnically and economically. One finds many on welfare, the working poor, new immigrants from other countries as well as people holding reasonably well-paying jobs.

There are some informal groups (volunteer associations) functioning in the area including a neighborhood association. Most of the other informal groups are built around the specific interests of their participants. At one time, a quite impressive poll had been conducted in the neighborhood inventorying skills, knowledge and interests.

They had a government sponsored, five year Weed and Seed program which mobilized the community to make their area more secure. Businesses have had some impact by providing some jobs for local people. Gangs had been a major problem before the Weed and Seed program but their negative impact became considerably reduced, though the selling of drugs is still a problem.

There are 18 churches in the neighborhood, all ethnic except one. Most are in storefronts though a few are in the original buildings. All the church buildings are closed except for Sundays. Most of the members no longer live in the neighborhood. The members are mainly people that once lived in the neighborhood but have moved away. They keep coming back because they do not feel they fit into the middle-class churches in the area to which they have moved. They return to where they feel comfortable. Even the pastors in the neighborhood churches do not live in the neighborhood; most have an additional full time job to support their families.

What have we learned about Mrs. Brown's neighborhood that could apply to other urban neighborhoods? The following descriptors are characteristic of most urban underserved neighborhoods in the USA:

- Urban neighborhoods are a complex mix of people from many different ethnicities.
- Because the area contains senior citizens, immigrants, middle-class professionals, working poor, people hold little in

in common with each other.

- There are many churches, but all are commuter type, with no members living in the area any longer.
- Most homes are townhomes over 80 years old, in poor to rehabilitated condition. Housing is sub-marginal.
- Except for the senior citizens, people do not live long in the neighborhood.
- Land is underutilized and vacant lots are littered with junk.
- The elementary school has low achievement scores. 83% of the students are on subsidized meals.
- Residents aren't aware of what services are available in the city.
- The population is composed of a high proportion of single parents.
- Crime rate is high.
- Health problems are different from those found in the rural area.
- Jobs are either unavailable or substandard. Those who are employed are often in service jobs or are day laborers. The poor may be found living right next door to professionals.
- People tend to pay higher prices for everything in the neighborhood stores.
- Public transportation services are either nonexistent or poor.
- Even though there are informal groups operating in the neighborhood, neighborhood assets are poorly unidentified and unused. There are many assets found in people but no one knows about them.

Choosing the Appropriate Size for a Ministry Target Area

A neighborhood may be defined as a residential portion of a city that is identified as a geographic place historically by the city. All cities are divided into zones and neighborhoods. A neighborhood might have been recently constructed by a developer, or may be a district which has been around for a hundred years. Neighborhoods can be as large as 15,000 people made up of high density apartment complexes. Many single-family neighborhoods are 3,000 to 4,000 people.

Ministry is most effectively carried out in a small geographic area since the goal is to bring neighbors to meet and identify with each other. Thus, a good way to define a neighborhood is by the elementary school it serves which is generally 6 to 10 square blocks. This school is in walking distance and can serve as a hub for ministry.

God is Involved in our Neighborhoods

A crucial premise for neighborhood ministry is to realize that God is active in our neighborhoods. Thus, from the beginning it is important to discover what God is up to in the world and what it means to be the church as we move back into the neighborhood. God has imparted gifts to the people of our churches. God has already gifted and called ordinary men and women in each of our churches to participate with the Holy Spirit to do ministry.

As we search for how God wants us to be involved in ministry we are well served by asking new questions. Our insights and habits can begin to be reshaped as we ask questions about God, ourselves, and our neighbors. What does it mean to be God's people in a community? Does God intend to erase the boundary lines of who my neighbor is? When we ask questions in the light of God's intent, our perspective goes beyond what is inside the church walls but becomes something entirely different.

A local church is called to be a mission oriented people. The reason churches are called into existence is for their members to become God's missionaries right where they live. For too long local churches assumed that its mission was about getting people to come to them, joining their church in the process. God has a different plan for His people where a local church is shaped by what He is up to in the neighborhoods and communities outside the church's walls.

Our communities are changing dramatically. They are changing from those homogenized neighborhoods where everyone looked the same. Our neighbors are now a part of the new pluralized, globalized world forming before our eyes. Neighborhoods are now characterized by multiple, competing value systems living side by side in the same community.

Globalization is creating new kinds of neighborhoods across the street and around the corner from where we live. This is the work of the Spirit. As God's people, we're being invited to join with the Spirit by "pitching our tent" beside the varieties of cultures living all around us. Our worlds are no longer separated by national and ethnic boundaries. Jesus' disciples of today will be shaped by engaging their neighborhoods, asking what God is up to and joining God in these places.

We need to be in touch with our changing neighborhoods. They are the primary context of the church's calling. Programs and strategies that were effective as recently as five years ago, no longer connect with the people outside the church's walls. Our choice is to stay in touch with our changing communities or become ingrown, irrelevant timepieces, reflecting a particular era of a single ethnic group.

The underserved tend to be invisible, not seen or thought about. As our Lord sees them and has a plan. These people

are the homeless, the disabled, the poor, the immigrant, the refugee and the elderly. Often they are ethnically different from the main group in the neighborhood.

The Challenge of Working in Urban Neighborhoods Where People Don't Know Each Other

Urban people are transient and mobile. They move often. Therefore, they tend not to know each other or trust one another. The fact is, they have little interest in knowing each other. This means there are few ties or relationships between people. To add to the problem, our culture prizes individualism and self-sufficiency, further leading to isolation.

Neighbors are inclined to think of their home as their fort built to keep others out. People stay to themselves and do not walk their neighborhood. There is little sense of community or of belonging. Because of the major struggle just to earn a living, volunteerism is practically nonexistent. Differing cultural backgrounds fosters disharmony and distrust. Mixed economic levels further foster the isolation.

Many are demoralized and helplessly fatalistic about creating any change in their neighborhood even if they desired change. Long-term dependency and feelings of inferiority are characteristic in poor neighborhoods. Some know little and care less about the neighborhood in which they live.

Yet all people deep down want to feel valued and needed. However, we as Christians may unwittingly stifle this by assuming the poor have nothing to contribute. Many North Americans believe they can solve the problems of others by coming with preconceived plans. What makes the giver feel good about doing something, only make matters worse for those they are trying to help. The danger is to focus on people's needs and what they lack, to passionately attempt to remedy preconceived solutions to problems of the poor. The

better way is to search out their assets, what they have in their own hands to help themselves in every area of their lives.

Considerations Which Hinder Ministry in Churches

Gaining momentum to motivate a congregation is frankly a challenge. There are a number of issues mitigating against ministry startup which can seem to be as formidable as the task of the mythical Prometheus condemned to rolling the boulder uphill. If it were not for the quickening and empowering of the Holy Spirit, neighborhood transformation would be a lost cause for the following reasons:

- Since there are so few neighborhood churches where people actually live near their church, the very act of choosing a neighborhood becomes difficult. In these commuter churches where membership is drawn from a large geographic area, group allegiance to any one neighborhood is hard to stimulate.
- Today's Christians suffer from a dichotomized worldview where our spiritual life is separated from our real life of living. This mentality is difficult to change. It is easier to keep doing what we have been doing in the past.
- In our busy culture, time is the precious commodity no one has enough of. People are not willing to be trained in something which takes time unless they are already very interested in the content. Therefore, training must occur in small time blocks and in nearby venues.
- Considering the finite hours available to each member for ministry, their time may already be taken up volunteering inside the church. Therefore, people may need to make the decision to give up something they are already doing in ministry. This decision is made easier by discovering what one is really interested in and how one's time can most effectively be spent in building God's Kingdom.

- The motivating vision of most churches is to attract people to their facility to build their numbers rather than building God's Kingdom, the Church universal.
- Although the traditional goal of church leadership has been to bring new believers back to the church building, new believers find these buildings foreign and uncomfortable. New believers are best disciplined in small groups right in their neighborhood during the time that relationships and trust is being built.
- Even in the local neighborhood church members are isolated from one another. Bonds of relationship tend to be superficial. Lack of knowledge and trust in one another make it hard to work together.
- A critical mass of interest needs to be stimulated within the congregation, to initiate an effective outreach. Studies show that critical mass is approximately 20% of the whole. The good news is that not everyone must be convinced and motivated.
- As has been previously pointed out, many church members have preconceived plans to solve the problems of the poor. The short-term mission trip is the prime example. Those who participate return feeling good about having alleviated poverty yet they have left behind a group even more dependent and less able to help themselves in the long-term. Focusing on people's assets rather than what they lack is so much more effective. The concept is to come alongside neighbors to help them discover what they have in their own hands to help themselves rather than focusing on their needs.

Gathering People to Focus on the Neighborhood

After getting to know your neighbors there needs to be taking an honest look at the challenges before us, how does one go

about initiating this kind of life changing, strategic ministry in a neighborhood. It begins in the chosen neighborhood bringing people together by holding a series of meetings with as many neighbors as can be gathered to find out their history and what they might want to change. Here is a suggestion for how to go about this.

In the first meeting create a timeline on a large white board and ask the neighbors to create a history of the neighborhood from its beginning to the present day. Hand out post-it notes asking all participants to write down one neighborhood event on a separate note. When they have completed the task of noting everything they can think of, ask them to stand and put each note where it belongs in chronological order on the time line. Ask if people would like to move a note around to correct the sequence of events. This creates a neighborhood history signifying the important events in the minds of the participants that have occurred over the years.

At the next meeting, give everyone more post-it notes and have them write one thing they would like to see changed in their neighborhood. Encourage them to take the time to write as many things as occurs to them. Then have one or more persons sort the notes into grouping of common issues, posting them on the board. Then ask everyone to put a name to each group issue. Read the notes aloud and ask the participants if any notes need to be moved into a more appropriate grouping. The ideal is to have no more than three or four issue groups.

At the third meeting go back to the board containing the different posted issue groupings. Ask if any in the group would like to work on a specific issue. Then form a team for that issue. Divide the whole group into smaller teams each focusing on their chosen issue. The small group will first describe

the current situation of the problem issue. Then they are to describe how the issue would look if it were to be successfully resolved. Then trying the small groups back together and allow each group to describe their issues and what resolution would look like. Then, taking each issue one at a time, ask the large group to brainstorm by listing the activities necessary to move from where they are to their goal.

Then comes the moment of truth. After a brief motivational pitch as to how they themselves have demonstrated their ability to resolve their issues if only they will be willing to work together, ask the large group to stand in front of the issues they would be interested in working on. This then gives you a core group to begin to deal with that issue.

Differences Between People in Poverty, Middle Class and the Wealthy

There is a vast difference between how people view their world depending upon their class. Below is a graph showing this.

Hidden Rules Among Classes

	POVERTY	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTHY
POSSESSIONS	People	Things	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees
MONEY	To be used/spent	To be managed	To be conserved, invested
PERSONALITY	For entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued	For acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.	For connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.
SOCIAL EMPHASIS	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion

	POVERTY	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTHY
FOOD	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important	Key question: Did you like it? Quality important	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important
CLOTHING	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important	Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important
TIME	Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications	Traditions and history most important. Decision made partially on basis of tradition and decorum
EDUCATION	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
DESTINY	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance	Believes in choice. Can change future with good choices now	Noblesse oblige. (idea that people born into the nobility or upper social classes must behave in an honorable generous way toward those less privileged)
LANGUAGE	Casual register. Language is about survival	Formal register. Language is about negotiation	Formal register. Language is about networking

	POVERTY	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTHY
FAMILY STRUCTURE	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who has money
WORLD VIEW	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of national setting	Sees world in terms of international view
LOVE	Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked	Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement	Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections
DRIVING FORCES	Survival, relationships, entertainment	Work, achievement	Financial, political, social connections
HUMOR	About people & sex	About situations	About social faux pas

One can see at a glance the considerable chance for misunderstandings in communication between classes. Therefore, when a middle class suburban church works with an under-served group, there needs be considerable sensitivity in the way the two interact. The apostle Paul said, "I have become all things to all people that I may by all means when some."

Because the urban underserved tends to have a profound sense of alienation from mainstream society, middle-class church members must approach with empathy. The urban poor feel they are uneducated and of little value. This sense is reinforced through word and action by the world. For transformation to take place this self-image must be modified by the insight that they can take care of themselves. The ministering

middle class must avoid giving the impression that they are superior by freely sharing how the urban underserved should think, do and speak.

This new sensitivity leads to an equal partnership where both parties know and treat each other as children of God and each has assets to share with each other. The key is to build relationships over time between the two groups by spending time together, studying topics of mutual interest. Facilitators are drawn from both sides. Service projects are accomplished by both groups working together with leaders drawn from both groups. The two groups spend enough time in each other's locations that they become entirely at ease.

The truth is, middle-class neighborhoods are also in need of transformation! Most middle class people don't think they have needs because they are thinking only economically. Yet from the wholistic standpoint, people have needs in all areas of life, physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Here, as in the underserved neighborhoods, the question is what assets are present to help people in the neighborhood? Middle-class neighbors also need to come to know their neighbors. They too need motivation in transforming their neighborhood. Today of 50% of the poor live within 2 miles of middle class neighborhoods. Mutual exchange in ministry is a natural from a geographical standpoint.

Concepts Found in Transforming Neighborhoods

Through our organization, Coalition for Neighborhood Transformation, there is available a small team of people who train and coach leaders across North America to help churches in their city. For identification purposes let's call these leaders the master training team. The coached city leaders, in turn, are prepared to train their church members to reach out to nearby urban poor neighborhoods. The goal is to encourage

people in the neighborhoods to take responsibility for their own lives. Neighbors are encouraged to reach out to other neighbors and break the isolation of those living in urban settings. As neighborhood people undergo this transformation they then revitalize their neighborhood from the inside out.

The objective is to transform neighborhoods from the inside by building on the assets already present. Think about the following questions and their implications:

- What if neighbors helped their neighbor instead of being dependent on professionals for help?
- What if citizens took control of the future of their neighborhood rather than city leaders?
- What if we concentrated on the people's assets not their needs?
- What if we concentrated on possibilities not problems?
- What if we listened to the poor, having real conversations with them; resulting in helping them to accomplish what they want to do, rather than what we thought is best for them?
- What if we empowered people to do things for themselves instead of doing things for them?
- What if we joined in with what was already going on in a neighborhood instead of bringing in our own agenda?
- What if people's lives were transformed in all areas (physical, spiritual, emotional and social) instead of concentrating on a single area exclusively?
- What if Christians walked the Christian talk?
- What if these things were multiplied from individual to individual and neighborhood to neighborhood so that the city became transformed from the inside out?
- When these "what if" questions become a reality, what will an urban underserved neighborhood look like?

These “what if” questions are helpful to impart vision when considered by the laypeople in your church. Ask these questions as you seek to motivate and equip your people to initiate neighborhood ministry. In the power of Christ working through average people, these questions can become reality.

The master training team trains lay-people from the church to enter a nearby neighborhood, develop relationships and identify human assets already present in each neighborhood. Then these people-assets are networked together for the neighbors to begin to impact their own neighborhood. As we have frequently emphasized, NT is built on possibilities not negatives.

A centerpiece within the principles of Neighborhood Transformation is that of seeking to uncover and highlight the strengths of neighborhoods as a means for sustainable development. Although there are both capacities and deficiencies in every neighborhood, we believe a capacities-focused approach is more likely to empower the neighborhood and therefore mobilize citizens to create positive and meaningful change from within.

Because there is such diversity in an urban poor area, it is more difficult to start a transformation program than in a rural overseas setting. In the urban setting people hold so few things in common and have little or no sense of unity. Therefore, it is critical to find mini sub-neighborhoods within the target geographic area. The most obvious sub groups are likely to be ethnic groups living together in an area. However, in many slums these groupings may not be present. Therefore creating new communities where there are none may be necessary. This is accomplished by getting isolated neighbors networked together, coming to know each other.

An extensive amount of time is spent in identifying the assets of individuals, associations, social networks, and institutions before they can be mobilized to work together. Local associations found within the neighborhood have great power to drive neighborhood development. These associations also can leverage outside support and entitlements. They are the vehicles through which neighborhood assets can be identified and then connected to one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness.

People of the neighborhood must view problem solving as in their hands, rather than the hands of outsiders. This is an underlying fundamental principle in successful development. The neighborhood must initiate the facilitation. If the organization comes from the outside to do for the people, anything accomplished disintegrates when the outsiders leave. Sustainability of progress is lost. The people of the neighborhood come to expect the outsiders to provide the funds, parts, and labor to maintain and repair neighborhood projects. They remain dependent.

When we do things for people in the neighborhood, the people always see the accomplishments as belonging to the outsiders. The emphasis from the beginning must be on neighbors viewing the project as their own. Insiders make it happen. Our role is to facilitate and empower people, so that they take responsibility for their own work and health under God's direction. Neighborhood ownership is purchased dearly over considerable time, through many neighborhood activities.

Transformation Started from Churches

Initial activities are started from the local church but as quickly as possible facilitation is transferred to the neighborhood. We call this a church-initiated approach in which the trainers/facilitators are volunteers from the church. Lay volunteers

do this as their service to God knowing that He has called them to serve the poor. This service is the same as being involved in weekly ministries at the church. Yet this involves the more strategic and impactful ministry to a poor, oppressed neighborhood of the city.

A good project requires a team of 10 or more people who are committed to this service. The reason for the larger number of trainers/facilitators is that they will not be working full time as is usual of trainers in international ministry. Thus, three or four full-time trainers in the overseas setting are replaced by 10 part-time trainers in our US-based ministries.

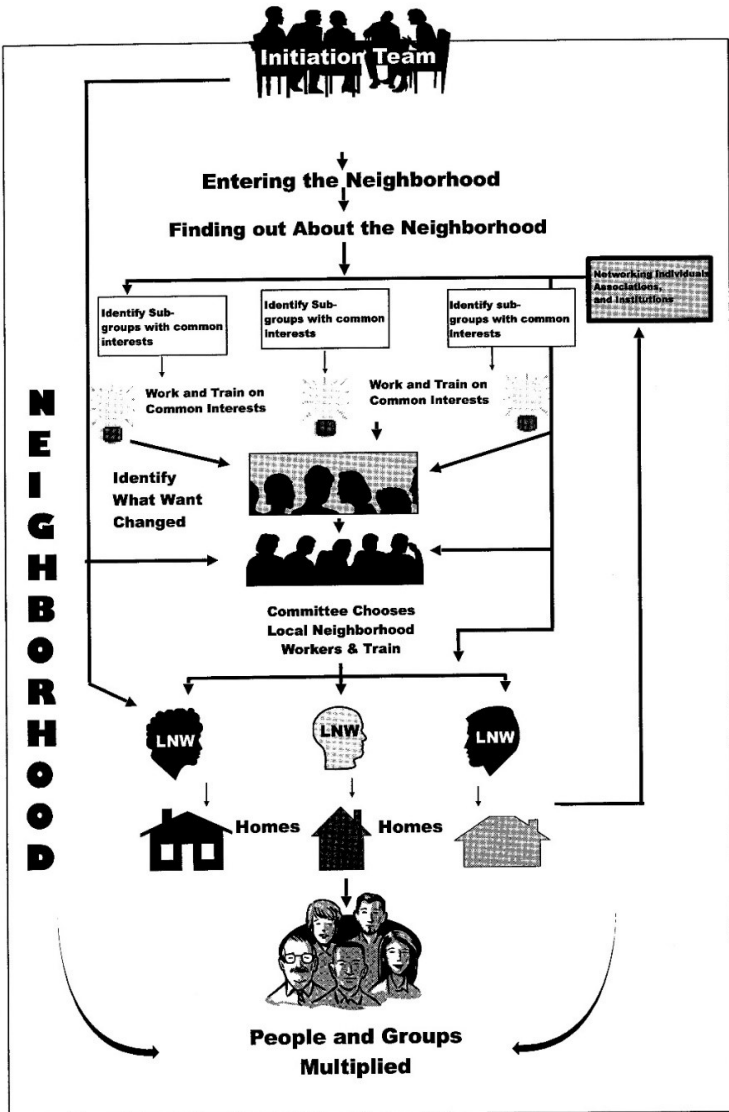
The trainer/facilitator role is to help an urban neighborhood identify what God's plan and agenda is for their area. They help the neighborhood identify God's plan, and then help them to implement this plan in both physical and spiritual ways.

The first step that a congregation takes towards this neighborhood outreach is to hold a vision conference for key members and church leadership. If this conference sparks the necessary interest, they will then begin to raise up people who want to be trained to become facilitators in the neighborhood of their choosing. The facilitators will most likely come from the church initiating the program, however the committee members and the neighborhood area coordinators should come from the target neighborhood.

Description of a Church Initiated Transformation Program

The diagram on the next page illustrates the flow of the process of a typical neighborhood transformation.

Champion



The congregation must view this strategy as a means to reach out to their non-Christian neighbors in a transformational way, rather than exclusively serving their own church members. Therefore, it is important to introduce empowering, transformational ministry throughout the church. This is best accomplished through Bible studies in the church's small groups.

The facilitators will be lay volunteers drawn from the church. Their training needs to be done in a way that is appropriate and timely for busy people who are making a living at full-time jobs. To this end, training is conducted over seven Saturdays spread over 24 months. Each Saturday training lasts six hours covering need-to-know topics for the current stage of their ongoing ministry. These are topics regarding the startup of the NT program in their chosen neighborhood. In between the trainings, for the next three or four months, they put into practice what they have just learned.

Location of the Initiating Church

It is most desirable to work with a church within the neighborhood itself, but many times this is not possible. We find the following to be true:

- Churches by and large are no longer neighborhood churches serving their neighborhood, but commuter churches with people coming from a distance to attend.
- In urban poor neighborhoods, which are ethnic, many residents have left the neighborhood, but do not feel comfortable attending Anglo churches in their new neighborhoods. Therefore, they remain in their old church, although they have no allegiance to the old neighborhood. In fact, pastors are usually bi-vocational; therefore, their small churches are only open on Sunday. These pastors have little or no contact with neighborhood people.

- At one time only the poor were concentrated in the city center. Today living in the city center has become fashionable for the middle class and rich. Gentrification is produced. The poor are being forced out of the central city core into older apartment complexes which once were the suburbs! These new poor neighborhoods are now surrounded by middle-class neighborhoods.
- Immigrants are moving into the cities from overseas and moving into these new poor neighborhoods found in the suburbs.
- God calls Christians to be the salt and light where they live.
- Networks such as the Externally Focused Church are mobilizing Christians in middle-class churches to reach outside of their church's four walls to become salt and light in their area of influence.
- Other networks are mobilizing individual Christians to reach out to others for transformation in their area of influence such as work, school, club, etc. This is good, but the impact is so dispersed it is lost with little concentration of impact. Focusing on a neighborhood brings the effort back into focus with greater impact.
- The middle-class church is the great, untapped resource of knowledge, skills and abilities. It can have huge impact in dealing with poverty if mobilized to do so.
- The rich, the middle-class, and the poor must work together on equal terms to attack poverty.
- Traditional development philosophy holds that the only way to have impact with the urban poor is to relocate to the target neighborhood. Yet very few middle-class people are willing to relocate into an urban poor neighborhood.
- Today with urban poor neighborhoods being close to middle-class churches, the middle-class church members

can have impact even though they do not live in the poor neighborhood.

- As the middle-class gain experience in working with the poor, some might be led by God to move into the poor neighborhood itself.
- Middle-class individuals not living in the target neighborhood can be used as catalysts or trainers in urban poor neighborhoods.
- If the facilitating church lays outside the target neighborhood, it is important to work with churches in the urban poor neighborhood. As the neighborhood church begins to meet its neighbors, the goal is for the neighborhood church to grow and become the lead church.

Connecting Individuals Together Through a Common Elementary School

When people have come to know their neighbors, the next important step is to connect them into a group. One way to foster this is to work with the elementary school that serves a neighborhood made up of multiple small groups.

To accomplish this, trust must be established with the school. A dialogue takes place with the key leader of the school (usually the principal) explaining that you wish to work together to allow the school to perform at its highest level for the sake of the many children in the neighborhood. The principal comes to know that the individuals in the neighborhood are willing to do anything asked of them to come alongside and assist the school. Then, of course, follow-through is critical to accomplish whatever the principle proposes in a timely fashion. This is repeated multiple times during the school year. The neighborhood participates as the hands of the school, building enthusiasm by working together in being responsive to the school's interests. The result is not just a bond of trust

between the school and the neighbors but the neighbors are bonding with each other and with the leaders of the facilitating church; all with the result of building up the students and the parents in the school.

Working with the elementary schools as opposed to the junior high or high school is preferable because parents have the greatest interaction at the elementary school level. The real goal is to work with the parents of the school not just do things for them but improve their capacity for doing things for themselves.

Case Study of an Elementary School

Flatirons Community Church in Lafayette, Colorado, has had a good relationship with a nearby neighborhood elementary school for several years. They have held backpack drives, school improvement days, fundraisers, and have assisted occasionally with teacher appreciation and one-time events such as field days.

These are some of the basic challenges facing the school:

- 85% of the students live below the poverty level
- 2 out of every 10 students qualify for homeless student services
- 50% of the students are learning English as a Second Language
- 25% of the students struggle with transitory issues related to poverty

This large church began with simple programs, which the school leadership had ideas for incorporating, but could not do without some outside help. Their team has worked with the staff and PTA to accomplish these projects. They have seen amazing results.

They created an award program for students who have no absences, no tardy slips and no pink slips for behavioral issues. The awards are given out at assemblies every two months, and the parents are invited to see their children receive the award. The students are given a special certificate and a small bag with two healthy snacks, a chapter book, fun pencils and a few school supplies. The main goal was simply to get the children to school on time and ready to learn. Another goal was to increase parent involvement in their children's education. These are a few of the results which have followed from this one program:

- The school has gone from last place in attendance in Boulder County to first place in one year's time (a 42% improvement).
- They boasted a 95% attendance record for this year.
- Positive behavior at the school has increased by 50% in the past year.
- Parental involvement has increased as parents have come into the school to participate in their children's recognition.
- Kids are on-time and tardy slips have reduced significantly.

Their church donates backpacks full of supplies at the beginning of the year for families who cannot afford them. This year, the Family Resource Center set up a "Time and Talent" program for these backpacks. Every family that accepted a backpack agreed to give two hours of their time back to school in some form of volunteer work. As of January, 100% of the parents had completed this commitment.

They set up a clothing closet where parents can come in and get items that they really need for their kids, such as shoes, boots and jackets. A Christmas shop was set up in the school where parents come to buy something for their

children. The goal of this program is not to just give out items that are needed but to have parents pay 10% of the item's worth so they would be able to provide gifts for their children. This builds self-esteem and self-worth. It also gives the family resource coordinator time with the parents thus establishing a bond of relationship with the school. This is another contact to encourage parents to give their time and talent in exchange for needed items.

They have also worked with the school to establish a strong relationship with another organization that their church partners with, the Sister Carmen Community Center. This center assists with food, rent, utilities, transportation, medical care and other basic needs. They also work one on one with individuals and families to promote self-sufficiency.

The example of Flatirons Community Church demonstrates how to begin with a church's own members as volunteers at their level of commitment, to:

- Do things for people in a group
- Come alongside another person to develop relationships with them and help them improve their life
- Guiding neighbors to work on their own in their own neighborhood, taking ownership and leadership of what is done there. The volunteers become the catalysts for impacting the neighborhood

Desired Outcomes

This is what a church can do when it focuses outside its walls in neighborhood ministry:

1. Increase knowledge, skills, and resources benefiting individuals throughout the neighborhood
2. Transform neighbors who in turn impact others around them. Thus, results are multiplied throughout a neighborhood and the neighborhood is transformed from the inside out.

3. Neighbors are taking more responsibility for their own lives, in all areas.
4. The program is integrated into the neighborhood infrastructure, with neighborhood leaders arising.
5. New leaders are emerging neighborhood by neighborhood.
6. The sense of community grows. People see the program as their own rather than belonging to an outside agency.
7. Programs are neighborhood funded rather than funds coming from the outside.
8. The program continues after outside assistance has left the neighborhood.
9. Improvement in social indicators such as less crime and divorce, improved education and economics.
10. The program continues and expands to adjacent areas through local training teams, after the initial training team leaves.
11. The entire city can become transformed in all spheres of life, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Change Driven by Grace

Transformational ministry sees results, impacting the whole person, in many different religious settings, rural and urban, throughout the world, over and above wildest expectations! The Lord calls each of us, who are ministering in His name, to deal with people as whole persons: physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. He is the starting point and center of good health. The Lord Christ is working through Neighborhood Transformation to build His Kingdom.

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