

VISION OF HOPE

Good Works Philosophy of Ministry

Good Works exists to connect people from all walks of life with people in poverty so that the Kingdom of God can be experienced.

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To view the previous version of the Good Works Philosophy of Ministry, [click here](#).

Introduction

This document came to be through the life, experience and learning of the Good Works community, primarily expressed in the words of Keith Wasserman. It was first written in the mid 1980's, a few years after Good Works began. Along with Keith, former staff member Bob Carter was particularly instrumental in helping to express our foundational philosophy. As God assembled people into the community from various generations, denominations and perspectives, their insights inspired many unique contributions to this writing. Most of the matters voiced here were initially experienced in the midst of daily life, and understood and written about in hindsight. Staff member Dawn Tobin rewrote the Philosophy of Ministry in 2011, with Keith's oversight. It remains a living document—never complete as we keep seeking the Holy Spirit's illumination.

The purpose of this writing is to honor God through inspiring, teaching, reminding, and encouraging the Community of Hope towards the core values of our life together. Primarily a visionary document, we seek to express the joyful goals that are ahead of us. Examples of how we are experiencing these ends in our everyday life are also included. We desire this article to be useful to people who are learning about our community, are preparing to join us in service, or are currently living and working with Good Works. We assume most readers are familiar with the Christian faith and have some knowledge of the Bible. We heartily acknowledge that this expression of our vision is not exhaustive or complete.

A Vision of Hope

For each work of revival, reform, and rebuilding that God has called his people to in the history of the Church, God has planted in his people a vision for that work. A vision is necessary because it directs and empowers people to take part in God's action. Without a vision, a hope of what will come to pass in their midst, the people despair and succumb to the status quo. It is a *vision* that empowers the community of Good Works to carry on.

The essence of our vision is quite simple: that we may receive the love of Jesus so deeply into our lives that it propels us to love God and our neighbors with all of ourselves, thus sharing the good news of Jesus with each person who is among us. We love God by personally growing in our obedience to Christ, and by being a faithful worshipping community. We love others by caring for and instilling hope in the vulnerable people who have been entrusted to us: those who are homeless, children who are experiencing the risks of poverty, and older adults who need physical assistance and support. We share the good news by expressing our faith in Jesus' power to transform us.

All along, we are creating ways for the body of Christ and those who do not identify themselves as Christians to partner with us for the purpose of deepening or exploring a relationship with God. Our sights are set on the revealing of God's eternal reign, in all its goodness, beauty and majesty. What we do emerges from who we are—may we be the body of Christ in the world, for the world, for the glory of God!

I. The Great Commandment

Loving God

Before Jesus entered his work, his Father proclaimed: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). God’s affirmation of Jesus’ identity provided the foundation of his ministry. Likewise, Jesus’ new commandment to his disciples was to love each other just as he had loved them.¹ So, *let us begin by receiving the love of God*. A poet writes, “The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes” (Psalm 119:64). The principles expressed in the following pages are most alive in the experiential awareness of the rich mercy and goodness of God.

Because of God’s immense love expressed to us through Jesus, we are awakened to respond back toward God with affection, trust and obedience. We receive a truly great commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). In the Good Works community, we believe that there is a mystical and inseparable relationship between loving God and loving our neighbors. Such is the dynamic flow between the two that it may not be important to God when we are doing one and when we are doing the other.²

Being Worshippers

Our good works, the outward expression of the inward change in our lives, well up out of our love for God. Our love for God is the spring. We believe that being a worshipping community is the first priority of our lives.³ In John 4, Jesus explained to the woman of Samaria that the Father seeks worshippers who will worship him in spirit and truth (verse 23). *We want to be those worshippers!* This means we must honestly seek to honor God with our whole heart. Our will must be submitted to God and God alone.

As we are yielded to Jesus as Lord, God can work in us and through us. The fruit of our lives emerges from our faithfulness to first be worshippers ourselves. In our communal life, this means that we set aside regular times to nurture our relationship with God together. As we come before God in listening, gratitude and praise, God shows us a holy perspective of both ourselves and others. We see that we are small, as are our efforts to love others. Through humility, we are lifted above our human point of view to see people with compassion. We cannot hope to see or love our neighbor properly unless we understand how God sees and loves them. Our souls crave such refreshment and refocus.

This attitude of worship can pervade every daily activity from mowing lawns to listening to a friend. In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that what we have done for the least of these, we have done for him (verse 40). Thus, our service to others is simply an expression of our worship of Jesus. We choose to love all people, especially those who are weak and vulnerable, because we love Jesus! So, in the end, whether someone we are serving is grateful or ungrateful is irrelevant. Ultimately, our work and service is not for them, it is for Jesus.

If every aspect of our life is open to God and we desire to please him with it, there is little room for hiding in the dark corners of half-heartedness, hypocrisy or deceit. Our ministry is led by

¹ See John 13:34-35.

² Ephesians 2:8-10 gives an eloquent summary of how God’s grace saves us and leads us to good works.

³ Matthew 6:33 expresses this value well: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

the core value of integrity. Indeed, if we fail at our integrity, we fail at the ministry God has trusted us with. Many social service agencies have programs; *we want our program to be our integrity.*⁴ The way we live should be authentic and consistent because what we do emerges from who we are. That is, our thoughts, feelings, words and actions flow from our identity as God’s children seeking to “praise God with an upright heart” (Psalm 119:7). Our ministry, therefore, is only as strong as each member of the community is in their private and corporate life with Christ.

Honestly, all of this is impossible without the daily sustenance of God’s presence. Given the heavy task of leading the people of Israel, Moses cried out to God:

“If your presence will not go with us, do not send us from this place. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.” (Exodus 33:15-16)

Our prayer is the same. *Lord, if you are not with us, there is no point in us carrying on! We can do nothing without your Holy Spirit empowering us. We are utterly dependant on you.* Thus in our personal and corporate lives, we seek to cultivate a holy desperation for God’s presence. We are asking for more—more dependence, more depth, more hunger, and more joyful resting with God.

We yearn for closer intimacy with a loving God because our lives are radically changed as God is with us. God reveals to us good news about a person: Jesus Christ. We have come to believe that Jesus is God’s son and came to earth in human form, giving us freedom through a personal relationship with him. Jesus allows us to see ourselves as God sees us: sons and daughters who are loved. We experience and put faith in his power to save us—a comprehensive rescue—from our sin and from the sin of those who hurt us.

As we trust Jesus, we are able to see our own brokenness, know real forgiveness, and earnestly want to change the way we live in order to please him. Jesus cleanses our shame, and allows us to forgive both ourselves, and those who have sinned against us. The Spirit of God fills us, which added to our faith, brings power to actually transform our lives. This deep love of God allows us to see people and circumstances redemptively. Unrelenting hope becomes our song, both in this life and in the life to come.

Community

Embracing the good news causes us to hunger to be with others who also want to follow Jesus with their whole heart and life. We are led to a new community. This is not optional. There must be more to our faith than a private, internalized individualism. Developing our relationship with God means we must intentionally connect ourselves to a network of people in our area who also love Jesus. Without these relationships, we cannot fully experience the good news of Jesus.

Further, our witness to others is wholly dependant on the way that we as believers treat each other. The goal is love, to model Jesus together. This is what it means to be the body of Christ. Thus, in the Good Works community and other contexts, we seek to share our lives with vulnerability and become mature as we find helpful accountability. In turn, we hope that our godly relationships will help people know Jesus. May God help us as we continue to discover what Jesus meant when he promised, “I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18).

In the Good Works community, we place high priority on creating an environment in which each member and participant can experience God’s love, conviction and forgiveness through trusting

⁴ This was stated by Patrick Filipiak who served on staff from 2001 to 2003.

friendships with others. In fact, this is what we mean by *community*: the extent to which we are in healthy relationship with each other. Whether we live in the same house or neighborhood is less significant than the quality of our connectedness. So, we practice how to give and receive. We learn how to affirm and encourage, correct and rebuke, apologize and say, “I forgive you.” Slowly, we learn how to live out reconciliation with each other. Through our relationships the healing love of God becomes tangible for us and able-to-be-touched for those who are watching as well.⁵

Our vision is to be people who care, comfort, and at times confront one another, spurring each other along in growth as disciples. We desire for our character to be marked by humility. We pray for teachable spirits so that we can hear from each other the truth about ourselves, our circumstances and about God. This truth-telling love is a sign to the world that we belong to Christ.⁶

As such, we seek to live by biblical instructions about resolving conflict. We are taught: “When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 6:23-24). This means that as the “offender” we take initiative to go to another in humility and work things through with the other person before we continue our worship or service. We also check in with each other regularly, asking if we are “clear,” or if something hurtful has come between us.

Being in healthy, reconciled relationships with one another comes prior to our mission of serving people in need. Because we see broken relationships as one cause of poverty, and reconciliation as a core solution, a lifestyle of daily reconciliation provides our only credibility to help others in this area. As we commit to live in unified relationships with Jesus and each other, we have a basis to speak to others about the gospel. If we cannot practice and model reconciliation to one another, then the impact of our ministry will be weak at best, and harmful at worst.

Confidence in the truth-telling love of our community opens up beautiful opportunities for risk-taking faith, innovation, and creativity in caring for hurting people. Why? Because we know that someone will be backing us up, with grace! This gives us the freedom to fail. We believe that it is acceptable to make mistakes insofar as we can see each failure as a tool for growth and maturity. One corporate motto says it this way: “Fail often in order to succeed sooner.” Taking risks in learning how to love others causes our faith to show up and eventually produce good fruit.

Receiving this grace from our community members helps us to “let in” God’s abundant mercy as well. For all the striving we do, God is God and we are God’s small children. We recognize that the work we do is not ours; it belongs to the Lord. In this vein, Solomon writes:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved. (Psalm 127:1-2)

The Lord has trusted us with this work for a season. He has invited us into it and may, at any time, invite us into something else. Because our primary goal is to worship God through our love and care for others, our core motivation is not in accomplishment, solving a social problem or “fixing” someone. This freedom allows us to obey and honor God with both work and rest. Our snowball fights, frisbee-throwing, film-watching, pizza-making, quiet reading, walks in the woods, laughter and full nights of sleep are expressions of worship, too!

⁵ See II Corinthians 5:16-21.

⁶ See Ephesians 4:15.

Jesus' Mission

Loving God and becoming followers of Jesus means that we become members of Jesus' living body in the world.⁷ The mission of Jesus becomes our mission; the people he loved become the people we love. Hear the words Jesus used to proclaim his ministry on earth:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18)

We cannot sit at a comfortable distance from these words! They are our calling. *The Spirit of the Lord is on us.* We are anointed to bring good news to the poor. This is the overarching purpose of Good Works. Obeying this calling from God requires us to wrestle out what it means for our context in time and place. Questions arise: First, what is the good news? Second, who are the poor? And third, how do we share the gospel with them? Searching for answers to these questions lies at the heart of our discipleship and is an ever-evolving process.

Let us consider the second of these questions now: Who are the people that God is especially concerned about? Scripture gives us a very clear answer. In his covenant with Israel, God describes himself as the one who “executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers” (Deuteronomy 10:18). A model of faithful living, Job recounts:

I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them. The one who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth. (Job 29:12-17, NIV)

Countless other passages say the same thing.⁸ God has consistently identified the fatherless, widow and stranger as people who need loving attention. These groups represent the people who are marginalized in our own society: those most likely to be lonely, vulnerable, economically in need and often “cut off” from their biological families. The fatherless or orphan is the child who is not tied to healthy adult relationships; one who is experiencing the risks of poverty. The widow or widower is the woman or man who has lost their spouse and is facing old age or disability with little family support. The alien or stranger is the person who has limited healthy connections with a community, often leading to homelessness. Every person who comes to our community seeking help and companionship is unique in their beauty and story. Most are from Southeast Ohio, and their troubles are varied. Job loss, relocation or domestic disputes have caused some to lose their homes. We have met people who are veterans, students, single parents, teenagers aging out of foster care, and those recently released from prison. Some are struggling with emotional distress, mental illness or addiction to alcohol, drugs, unhealthy relationships, food or sex. Others are living with various kinds of disability, have experienced abuse or violence, are caught in legal troubles, or have been stuck in poverty for a long time. Often, it is when several of the above factors occur at once

⁷ In 1 Peter 2:4, we are called “living stones.”

⁸ Here are just a few: Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 27:19; Proverbs 15:25; Isaiah 1:17.

that people find themselves in an overwhelming crisis. Most are struggling with some level of disconnection from others, and lack a sufficient support system. The severe shortage of affordable housing, meaningful work and transportation in our area are barriers faced by nearly everyone.

The neighbors we are commissioned to love are not limited to the people in need who are coming to us. They are also our physical neighbors, those who live near the Timothy House and on Luhrig Road.⁹ We believe we have a responsibility to model godly behavior in these settings, and seek to build relationships characterized by respect, trust and blessing. When we invite those who are homeless to live at the Timothy House, we do so with the safety and well-being of that household and the rest of the neighborhood in mind—screening everyone by phone before granting shelter.

Our Mission

The ministry God has trusted us with is not about buildings, programs, techniques or methods. Rather, God has trusted us with people—neighbors—to serve and love. In Matthew 25, we read a story of a master who entrusted his property and resources to three servants (verses 14 to 30). When the man returned, he rewarded or punished his servants based on how they managed the money. Immediately following this passage is a telling of how the nations will be judged. The criteria to inherit the kingdom is whether or not the people fed the hungry, gave something to drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the prisoner. We too will be called into account for our stewardship toward the poor. Thus, let us be faithful in our responsibility to them.

Do we think of ourselves as religious people? Then we *must* join works to our faith. James tells us, “Anyone who sets themselves up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, that passes muster before God is this: reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from an evil world.”¹⁰

Jesus’ life on earth embodied such a vision. Going through all the cities and villages, he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and cured every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.¹¹ Jesus exemplified the coming of his kingdom or reign by being friends with the poor and eating at their houses.¹² In doing so, he brought real hope in the form of physical healing, and freedom from spiritual, emotional, relational and structural oppression. Bestowing on them God’s forgiveness, Jesus released people from the cycle of sin’s consequences.

Jesus’ mission didn’t stop with Jesus! He said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37). In this community, we desire to embrace more and more of God’s Spirit to carry on in Jesus’ mission. We believe that the Lord gives his followers an anointing: the special ability to work with people who, because of their suffering, can be unresponsive, distressed or angry. It is as we step out, putting our faith into action, that we realize the comfort and power of the Holy Spirit. God gives us not only the inspiration, but also the sustenance to be healing agents in a society sick with sin.

⁹ In Acts 1:8, Jesus instructs the disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem (their immediate location), in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

¹⁰ James 1:26-17, The Message

¹¹ See Matthew 9:35-38.

¹² See Matthew 9:10-13.

Eyes to See

In our experience, caring for people rightly begins with seeing them as their Maker sees them. A holy perspective of a person, who may at first seem unlovable, stems from our commitment to letting God renew our minds through worship. God gives us grace to see each person as a child of God, made in God's image. They, along with us, are fallen yet valuable. They are precious, lovable and created to fulfill God's purpose in the earth. Although the person we are serving may be facing a tragic situation, we want to clothe them with dignity and emphasize our common humanity. Further, we desire to be a community in which those who were once oppressed, broken-hearted, and imprisoned can have a transformed identity and be named "oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Jesus' view of suffering people informs our own. Describing Jesus' response to the crowds that pressed in on him, Matthew says, "He had compassion for them, because they were *harassed* and *helpless*, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). Let us consider the implications of this description. It is easy to think that people who are poor can make it on their own if only they tried hard enough. But, some people are helpless in the truest sense: unable to change their situation without assistance from others. At the same time, every person has inherent gifts and must take stock of them in order to respond to their unique situation.

We have learned that poverty and homelessness often result from a collision course between unwise personal choices, natural calamity and systemic sin. Of these three, individuals have control over only one: the choices they make. In comparison, natural calamity and structural sin are forces that no individual can escape. The story of the prodigal son clearly illustrates this truth: the younger brother's problems occurred due to both selfish decisions and a famine in the land. Keeping the multiple causes of poverty in view offers us balance in understanding someone's struggles.

Returning to the Matthew passage above, Jesus also identifies the crowd as harassed. In Matthew 23:23, he rebukes the Pharisees and teachers for neglecting the most important matters of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness. Mourning their misuse of power, Jesus condemns the religious leaders for harassing those who are poor in their community. Perhaps Jesus' outburst of holy anger and table-turning in the Temple represents God's anger at the barriers that the poor had to wade through in order to receive God's favor.¹³ Those with religious power, the guardians of religious institutions, are capable of erecting similar barriers today. In our community, we continue to question how religious culture, including our own, could unintentionally abuse people who are vulnerable and create walls that prevent them from having relational networks in the church.

Learning How to Love

How do we love people well? *We love, together.* Over time, we understand more and more that this kind of ministry *must be done in the context of community.* For when the body of Christ organizes together and shares responsibility, we can go far beyond what any individual, however gifted, could ever do to help someone in need. But the goal is not simply to achieve more. In fact, working together is often painstakingly slow! We call this the "ethic of inefficiency." The process of getting where we want to go is as significant as our actual destination.

This journey is simultaneously very joyful and very difficult. Living and working together in community is not to be idealized, but it does ground us. As we involve ourselves with people who have experienced much pain, we ourselves endure hardship and at times, genuine suffering. This

¹³ See Luke 19:45-46.

often comes in the form of emotional weight. But because we are not isolated in bearing this pain, we gain courage to continue to accept Jesus' invitation to lay down our lives.¹⁴ We need each other to keep perspective, stay encouraged, and remain pure.

Many people have bought into the mistaken notion of radical individualism, thinking that they don't need others to fully experience God's will. In fact, some have even been seduced into doing ministry like running a business, in which the people with power and expertise lead those who have fewer worldly skills. In the Good Works community, we want to learn that the contribution of each member is essential, regardless of how capable each person first appears. In fact, the gift offered by the weaker or "less honorable" member often leads us directly to the heart of God.¹⁵ Our moments of profound truth usually happen when we are listening to and being with someone who, in the eyes of the world, has nothing to offer.

Jesus demonstrated the depth of this value when he willingly took on human form and humbly lived with us on earth. He didn't save us from on high, but through coming near, close enough to know our names. Beyond this, Jesus intentionally spent time with outcasts! In the same way, we hope to follow in Jesus' footsteps and care about people in need through genuine relationships with them. We reject the idea that people in need are our "projects." Rather, they become our friends.¹⁶

Submission to Christ means that we lay down our social lives; we give Jesus authority over who our friends are. We must learn from Romans to give up pride: "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position" (NIV). As we choose as friends those who Christ chose, his reign is revealed to us. The words of James ring true: "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom?" (2:5).

Christ's incarnation didn't happen on accident and neither does ours. For many of us, it takes a great deal of intentionality to cross over into a different social class.¹⁷ This expression of downward mobility takes different forms for each person, and we start small! Often, it means we are in the position of a learner. As we give up control, we begin to feel our own vulnerability. Being with people who have needs that aren't neat and hidden, forces our own deep needs to the surface as well. We realize that we cannot "fix" others, and so we feel powerless. Learning to embrace the weakness of our friend in need, and the weakness inside ourselves is a hard lesson.¹⁸

Its rewards are great, however, because vulnerability is a door to true friendship with the poor, and with Jesus. His words, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" start to become real in our own experience (Luke 6:20).

Discerning Love

The people God is teaching us how to love often come broken, rejected, confused and in pain. Each person's situation is unique. Thus, our hurting neighbors need us to understand them, responding with love that is guided by God's wisdom. This wisdom from above is pure, peace-

¹⁴ See Matthew 10:37-39 and 16:24-28.

¹⁵ See I Corinthians 12.

¹⁶ Keith received this injunction through a prophetic exhortation that said, "I have not given you projects who are poor. I have given you friends who are poor." This was from *The River 3: Lament for the Poor* by Robert Stearns and Eagle's Wings Ministries.

¹⁷ At this point, is important to note that the Good Works community represents a diverse group from many different social and economic backgrounds. Thus, we approach incarnational ministry from different vantage points.

¹⁸ We are grateful for Jean Vanier and his book *Befriending the Stranger* for his insights on this matter.

loving, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.¹⁹ We receive it by being yielded to the Holy Spirit and humbly receiving counsel from others. May receiving wisdom from God be our daily prayer!²⁰ One question that we often ask each other when faced with a difficult decision that will affect someone's life is: "What is the most loving thing we can do for this person or in this situation?" Sometimes, the most loving thing does not *appear* to be the "kindest" thing. In this way, we can learn how to develop discerning love: love that is tough and tender, providing accountability and extending grace.²¹

Some people who are hurting simply need us to be good and kind. Others experience healing as we are unwavering and firm in our love, for example, through accountability. Through our residential opportunities in particular, we seek to love people by helping them embrace healthy outward structure in their lives, so they can begin the process of developing healthy inward disciplines.²² Loving others can also mean advocating on their behalf, or walking with them as they confront oppressive systems for themselves.²³ Those who are suffering deeply need us to be merciful, and suffer with them. Sometimes, we can do nothing at all but be with them. We believe that our presence is a powerful form of love. Because of the breakdown of the family in our culture, which can lead to homelessness, many people are yearning for the nurturing relationships of kinship. They need us to be a father or mother, sister or brother to them.²⁴ We believe it is possible for our community to be this type of family!

Some people we meet have feelings of such deep depression, hopelessness and anger inside them that these emotions are just waiting to burst out.²⁵ This pain is often directed toward themselves, in the form of self-destruction, but it is also expressed towards other people and towards property. At times, antagonism is their first response when we begin addressing the cycle of bondage that holds them down. In the midst of their oppression, their pain is so intense that it often drowns out the message of hope inside our counsel.²⁶ Our love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, must learn to endure this. One vital step in this process is confronting our own need to be appreciated, and to let it die. We can do this because ultimately, we serve in order to worship God.

We need wisdom, however, to know the boundary between enduring love and tolerating abuse. We do expect to face some hardship and be challenged in our emotions, minds and spirits. But under no circumstances is it right for our staff or volunteers to be required to take any form of abuse from those we are serving. Keeping our relationships open to the input of others or "in the light" helps us in this area. When our emotional involvement in people's lives causes us to lose perspective, we depend on our co-workers to speak with us, restore us, and offer us wisdom.

Our relationships with each other also provide a healthy check and balance to how we use our power in the lives of vulnerable people. Keep in mind that in most cases, the staff and volunteers of Good Works have incredible power and influence over those we serve. Thus, we ask

¹⁹ See James 3:17.

²⁰ I appreciate these words from Psalm 119:130-131 regarding the wisdom of God: "Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."

²¹ Keith credits M. Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Travelled* for helping him understand this concept of discerning love.

²² A biblical image of this comes from Isaiah 58:12, "Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called the Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Proverbs 25:28 tells of the opposite: "Like a city whose wall are broken through is a person who lacks self-control." (TNIV)

²³ See Proverbs 31:8-9.

²⁴ See Job 29:16 and I Thessalonians 2:7-8.

²⁵ We have learned that some depression is a result of unforgiveness, which can lead to bitterness. We believe that Jesus can give us healing in this type of struggle as well.

²⁶ See Exodus 6:9.

every staff person, intern and volunteer to make a commitment to use their power for good: for what is in the best interest of those being served and the community at large. We must be anchored in the fear of God or we are likely to become abusers and oppressors ourselves. Recognizing the wisdom found in those who have been serving at Good Works for a long time is an essential characteristic of those who wish to serve on any level.

Thus, we choose to act according to this simple principle: *Where* a staff member, intern or volunteer first makes contact with someone who is a recipient or participant in a Good Works program determines the level of accountability that Good Works staff will exercise in that relationship. For example, if a volunteer first meets someone at a local restaurant, the full-time staff will have a limited voice in how the volunteer conducts themselves. If the volunteer meets this person through a Good Works context, however, we are responsible for that relationship and expect the volunteer to listen to and consider our voice.

Clearly, loving people together takes much patience—with each other and with the process. We must also be patient as a natural relationship with those we are serving grows. The guidance of the Holy Spirit will teach us how to walk in God’s timing. So, we wait prayerfully, looking for opportunities to build trust with the person we seek to love, and answer the questions they are already asking. We recognize that much of the impact we have in ministry results from people trusting us. Only *after* people invite us into their lives and give us permission to speak to them can we do so.²⁷

Trust opens up a beautiful opportunity for meaningful change to happen. Lovingly, we are able to help people name the issues at the root of their struggles. This is “problem identification” and leads to the next step: “problem ownership.” Finally, we assist people in finding solutions. We teach that each person is responsible for his or her choices, and must make an effort address the situation they are in. After all, *response-ability* is simply our “ability to respond.”

Our role is to help people understand what they *can* do, and what resources are already available to them. This means we come along beside them to motivate, support, and empower. Loving accountability is also necessary to help them to complete the goals they desire to accomplish. Change always happens slowly. But we believe that the momentum of progress in one area of life often produces positive change in other areas, much how throwing a pebble into a pond creates ripples that move in widening circles.

Creating a Context

We have relied on Spirit-inspired imagination to find creative yet patterned ways of building such relationships with our neighbors. Out of innovation, specific *contexts* for ministry were born.²⁸ By context, we mean an event or opportunity in which a specific set of values guide all interactions. As these values instruct the way we interact with people, our contexts become channels through which the good news can flow and the kingdom of God can be experienced. The context often occurs within a building or under the name of a program, but these are only paths that take us to relational opportunities. We have identified four characteristics that hold true for the majority of our initiatives.

²⁷ An interesting illustration of this principle is how Philip waited for the Ethiopian eunuch to invite him into his chariot to explain God’s word. See Acts 8:31.

²⁸ In Mark 2:1-12, we read of the friends of a paralyzed man, who cut a whole in a roof to lower him down to Jesus. This is the kind of innovation that we envision as we serve others—because of our passion for bringing people close to Jesus’ healing touch, we are willing to take risks.

As a starting place, each context *meets a felt need* for those who are involved. For example, the Timothy House meets a need for shelter. Secondly, *relationships are at the center*, not a program. That is, we encourage those who are serving others to associate with people they are serving. To facilitate this, defined relational boundaries are upheld, providing safety and predictability. One expectation is that as we develop a relationship, we start at “arms length” and involve someone in our life slowly. Such an atmosphere creates the possibility of friendship with someone who is very different than us. To illustrate this value, picture Timothy House volunteers washing dishes with residents—it is a very natural time for conversation.

The third quality is that the environment must nurture *trust* between the people who are serving and those being served. From the onset, both parties are clothed with dignity. Some level of mutuality is present, in which both sides have something to learn and something to teach. For example, we invite people who need transportation to come and volunteer with us in order to receive the gift of a car. In contributing to the community they gain self-respect.

Finally, it is essential that the *recipients* in each context, in time, *be invited to become participants*. We believe that giving people opportunities to use their gifts, however small or large, helps them discover their belonging, or place. Place is the door to purpose—knowing and fulfilling one’s purpose in life. Thus, incremental opportunities to assume responsibility are made available based on trust. For example, many of our former Timothy House residents return as volunteers, and several of our current staff members were once residents.

Hospitality builds another paradigm through which to understand our contexts. We understand that nourishing physical environments form the basis for a deeper experience of welcome. Specifically, we are welcome in a place where people are available and attentive to us. Being a hospitable community also means that we intentionally create opportunities for each person to be him or herself. When someone feels valued, free and not suffocated, they are able to offer their unique gifts to others and let good change happen in their life—to influence and to be influenced. Within hospitality is the experience of mutuality: we extend our lives to the people we desire to help and in turn receive the blessing of being invited into their lives.²⁹

In practice, this means that we seek to be available and sensitive to each other, within the community, first. Our second priority is in offering hospitality to others, for example, through inviting men, women and children who are homeless to stay at the Timothy House. In addition, when a visitor comes to our property, we stop what we are doing, greet them and make an effort to connect them to whom or what they need. These are just a few of many ways in which we welcome people into our community.

II. The Great Commission

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his disciples clear directions about how to continue the work he inaugurated while on earth. Drawing near to the doubtful eleven, he commissioned them:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

²⁹ Henri Nouwen’s book *Reaching Out* offers wise thoughts on the discipline of hospitality.

We too are given this calling to make disciples and lead them in obedience. Receiving the abundant love of God births in us a desire to share this good news with each person we encounter. Our worship of God overflows into a lifestyle of bold expression of the faith that motivates us. This communication of the good news happens through both *demonstration*, being good to others, and *proclamation*, telling and teaching others about Jesus. Thus, our evangelism is simply *overflow*. As Jesus touches our lives, we are changed and impart that love to others.

Sharing the Good News with People Who Are Vulnerable

Our primary role in sharing the good news is to allow people to *experience* God's grace and love, and thus understand that Jesus really is the Messiah. Therefore, we seek to place love and not "an agenda" as the foundation of each relationship. When people tangibly feel God's grace and power to help them with their struggles, they too will want to trust him with their lives. Our motive is simply to know and love people who find themselves vulnerable, regardless of whether they choose to follow Jesus or not. As we demonstrate integrity, the Holy Spirit may use us in bringing them salvation.

We strongly desire for each of our ministry contexts to create an environment in which people can experience and receive the good news. Friday Night Life, which combines the provision of food with companionship, learning and service, is one context in which there is much potential to add the *proclamation* of the gospel to its *demonstration*. With spiritual leadership, both spontaneous and organized prayer, conversations about God, and Bible studies can emerge. We also seek to partner with other communities of believers in such efforts. For example, on occasion, local congregations have led scripture-focused discussion groups at the Timothy House one night a week.

In the Good Works community, we are particularly aware of the power we have in the lives of people who are vulnerable. We are very careful not to manipulate people into hearing about Jesus or saying they are Christians simply because they need our practical assistance. Thus, we do not hold required worship meetings or Bible studies as a condition of people receiving help. We feel this would be a grievous distortion of the gospel. Rather, our approach to sharing the good news is guided by the following principles:

First, *respect* is the spirit in which we relate with people. Regardless of belief or lifestyle, we want to honor each person's inherent dignity. Second, we must work to establish *trust* as the foundation of our relationship, slowly earning the right to share our values. Third, we actually *get permission* to talk with someone about the convictions we hold. We may ask, "Would it be okay if I shared my story with you?" Lastly, we do all this knowing that *God is already present and active* in the life of every person. In humility, we realize that whatever we have to say about the good news simply builds on the way God is already working.

Because of the health and forgiveness we have found in Jesus, we have a deep hope that our words and actions draw others to this same source. One specific way we practice this is by inviting those we are learning how to love into our Christian community. In his book *Community and Growth*, Jean Vanier teaches that loving someone means to welcome him or her into your network of relationships. Thus, we encourage staff, interns and volunteers to invite Good Works residents and participants into their social lives. Sharing a meal, watching a movie, playing basketball or going to a church event together could be starting places. Our desire is for people who feel unloved and disconnected to form healthy relationships with believers who can lead them closer to God.

In addition, we have a culture of inviting those we are learning to love into our regular gatherings of worship. These are intentional times when the community seeks to be with the Lord,

offer praise and thanks, and receive sustaining grace. So, we simply invite our friends into what we are already doing; we would gather whether they came or not. We meet not to put on a performance for others. On the contrary, it is a meeting of the Body, where together we can experience freedom and truth as we encounter the living God. As a place of greater vulnerability and honesty, this is where those we are including can see us for who we really are. When what we say about our lives holds true in our actions, we become credible witnesses of Jesus.

Wrestling with our desire for people to experience salvation and full restoration through Jesus, we ask ourselves the question that others often pose: “How much success are you having?” We have discovered two answers that exist in tension with each other. They form what we call the “*continuum of success*.”

On one end of this continuum is a type of achievement that has no visible results at all: faithfulness. Mother Teresa said it well: “God has not called me to be successful, he has called me to be faithful.” Here, we realize that true success, which is understood as simply pleasing God, is found when we are obedient and willing to walk in the instruction that God has already shown us. Surprisingly, the Lord then “glues together” our small acts of faithfulness and gives them back to us in the form of faith. With faith, we are able to trust God more fully and have confidence that our labor is producing long-lasting fruit, even if it isn’t recognizable yet.

On the other end of the continuum, we realize that if we are faithful, our lives will indeed produce this fruit. It will be real! What should it look like? What should it taste like? The fruit of our lives will reveal what is really in our hearts. What is our deepest longing for both ourselves and those we are learning to love? It is to see each person fully integrated within the body of Christ—to be embraced and participate as a fully functioning member of a local Christian community or church congregation.³⁰

Thus, we care for the needs of others, but soon discover that it is not enough to provide food, shelter, employment, housing, counseling, or friendship. As a next step, we invite our friends into our Christian community and they come. This is joyful, but we know there is more. If the friends we are learning to love decide to follow Jesus, this is cause for great celebration! But, our highest hopes are fulfilled when those who were at one time alienated from God and from others find their home within a specific spiritual family, where they can be nourished, grow into maturity, and share their gifts with others.

As a result, our success or fruitfulness is almost completely reliant on the willing participation of people in local congregations. When local believers make themselves available for genuine relationships with people struggling with poverty, those on the margins can be embraced into fellowship with the body of Christ and become whole. As such, Good Works seeks to live and work together with the larger network of Christian communities in our area.

Discipleship

In scripture, we are told just once that we must be born again. Several times, scripture says we must be saved, but at least twenty times in the Gospels Jesus tells us to follow him. To follow

³⁰ While helping people become fully participating members of the Church is our goal, we don’t want to mistakenly communicate that the main reason that people are poor is because they are not Christians. Indeed, we know many sincere followers of Jesus who are experiencing real economic need due to structural oppression, natural calamity and the poor choices of others. In these situations, people are restored to wholeness through compassion and justice enacted on their behalf. In the midst of this, the strength of their spiritual faith is an area we have much to learn from.

Jesus is to be his disciple, someone who is under the teaching and discipline of Jesus. In the Good Works community, we believe we are called to be disciples and make disciples. As we hear the truth of Jesus, we are compelled to entrust this message to faithful people who will teach others as well.³¹ Thus, all of our work is, in some way, focused on discipleship.

From our perspective, the act of serving those who are struggling with poverty is a primary means by which God develops people into mature disciples. As much as those in poverty need help and love, disciples of Christ need to serve. Essentially, if we are to grow up in Christ, we must learn to embrace suffering and oppressed people, even to the point of suffering with them.³² This compassionate solidarity between the rich and poor is an essential if the body of Christ is to be true to its identity. Its unity is at stake because there is only one Body—rich and poor together.

Thus, those with power and wealth must approach relationships with those in need with utter humility, because they have something invaluable to receive from the poor. Often, it is through this kind of friendship that the rich can identify and accept their own inner poverty. In the words of Jean Vanier, they discover that, “in their own brokenness, they are truly brothers and sisters with the people they came to serve” (Community and Growth, page 99). Inviting people who feel vulnerable and rejected into the relational streams of our community takes discernment from God, counsel from friends and much faith. Yet as we do this, we believe that maturity, fruitfulness and possibly even revival will come about!

In the Good Works community, half of our ministry is to love God and people in need ourselves, and thus fulfill the Great Commandment. The other half is to invite others into this life of discipleship with us, which fulfills the Great Commission. To that end, we seek to structure a variety of safe yet challenging opportunities for people from all walks of life to engage with and serve those in need. Some avenues are designed for young people or those who want to commit to an “entry-level” experience. Other contexts provide the opportunity for a deeper, more advanced commitment. For example, Work Retreats offer volunteers a one to five-day experience of practical, relational service, whereas the Weekend Opportunity at the Timothy House asks volunteers to take on defined responsibilities over a 6-month period.

Good Works focuses its ministry of discipleship toward several groups. The first is internal, among the staff and interns. Related to this, we encourage those who are discerning whether to join the Good Works community to consider these questions: *Are these the kind of people I believe I can learn from? Do I believe they could learn something from me? Are these people concerned about my development? Might I be able to experience healing here?* It is imperative that the internal environment of the community nurtures the spiritual and personal growth of each person. Thus, the discussion that follows, regarding discipleship within the body of Christ, applies to the staff and interns as well.

The community of Good Works serves as a training center to inspire, educate and provide practical experience for the Church or body of Christ to encounter people in need and grow in spiritual maturity.³³ In this way we provide a non-traditional teaching environment for individuals and congregations. It is our prayer that as people connect with those Jesus called “the least of these,” they connect with Jesus himself and grow in their submission to Christ as Lord, or King.³⁴

³¹ See 2 Timothy 2:2.

³² Here again, I want to respectfully acknowledge that some inside the Good Works community struggle with the ongoing effects of economic poverty. Based on our life experiences, each person has a slightly different perspective on what solidarity with people in poverty means for their own life. We are united by our mission, not our economic status.

³³ For an expanded discussion on this subject, see the Good Works Board “ends” Policy written in November 2001.

³⁴ See Matthew 25:40

We hope for each person to grow in their ability to see how God is at work for good in their own lives, in the lives of people who are suffering, and in the world. Ultimately, we want to see the Church actively living Jesus' prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Said in other words, our community exists to *connect people from all walks of life with people in poverty, so that the kingdom of God can be experienced.*

Along with an expanded vision of the kingdom of God, we desire for people to be further equipped in discernment, wisdom and grace to persevere in loving those who are difficult to love. We all need practice for our senses to be trained to distinguish good from evil.³⁵ The solid food God wants to nourish us with has something to do with using or "walking in" the light that God has already given us. We seek to lend balance to the diet of discipleship displayed through the traditional structures of the Church by promoting face-to-face opportunities in which Christians can use their faith. As people step out to act on what they already know to be true, we believe the Holy Spirit rises to teach, strengthen and build them up into maturity.

Our community sees these lessons we are learning together, with the Holy Spirit as our teacher, becoming transferable; they are useful to other believers and communities seeking to develop relationships with people in poverty. Spending time with those coming to Good Works in order to learn is very important to us. Our role is to listen to how God may be leading them, offer counsel as appropriate and potentially invite them to participate with us on some level. Very often, the exchange is mutual, with both sides sharing something of value.

Sharing the Good News with People From All Walks of Life

Many of the people who serve with and support us are not Christians. We welcome their involvement! We believe there is a flow of passion hidden inside every human being that longs to care for and serve others. As Christians, we identify this as the image of God in each person. Stated differently, we believe that God fashioned humankind to do good; we are "created for good works."³⁶ By inviting people from all walks of life to be engaged in service with us, we enable them to experience the goodness of God's character that is already inside them.

Further, they are given the opportunity to see the body of Christ at work, in active fulfillment of Jesus' mission. In many ways, the world cannot see Jesus until it touches the hands and side of His body serving those in need. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus urges his followers to, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

In this way, the mission of Good Works is not only to bring hope to people experiencing economic poverty. Rather, we desire for God to use us to impart wholeness into the life of each person we come to know. All of us, rich and poor, are in need of God's healing in the most basic relationships of life—with ourselves, other people, God, and creation, which includes our perspective towards work.³⁷ We hope that our relationships with people who are not Christians will create opportunities for them to not only do good, but to explore questions about life and God, receive salvation through Jesus, and become full participants in a local Christian community.

We recognize that the showing and telling of the gospel occurs in many different ways. Some will come to experience the love of Christ through serving people in poverty. Others will experience God's grace by receiving care and assistance. For some, we plant the first seed, or experience with Jesus, into a person's life, and other times, our role is to nurture a growing faith.

³⁵ See Hebrews 5:14

³⁶ See Ephesians 2:10

³⁷ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert's book, *When Helping Hurts* (2009) has an excellent discussion on this subject.

We believe there is great value in simply preparing people to be receptive to Jesus.³⁸ Like a plough, we get the rocks out of the soil of the heart so that good things can be planted there later. In all of this, we take the view that our witness is only the outward sign of our inner integrity. We believe that God is concerned with our hearts, with truth in our innermost being.³⁹

Our work provides many clear avenues for being witnesses of Jesus, including the opportunity to share with our contemporaries in local agencies who are serving the same people we are. We realize that there are people from many different walks of life who are working with compassion in a genuine effort to help those in need. Because we believe that all truth is God's truth, we feel privileged to be taught of God both by our Christian and non-Christian friends in the secular field of the helping professions. To the degree that our contemporaries help people know the truth, it is our desire to join hands with them and work together. This trust that we build with local agencies and authorities is, in many ways, for the sake of the people we are serving. They receive the benefit of our communication and partnership.

III. Being the Body of Christ

Our intentions to learn how to receive the love of God, love each other, and love our neighbors; to follow Jesus and invite others to do the same, is in essence a yearning to learn how to be the Church, Christ's body on the earth. We are continuing to ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be the body of Christ in the world, for the world, for the glory of God?"

As we wrestle with this question in our particular context, we remember the expansiveness of the Church as it spans space, time and eternity. Our community is simply a small "lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). Our hope rises towards the future, when we will look and see a new heaven and a new earth. The Church, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband, will come down out of heaven, and God's dwelling place will be among the people of God.⁴⁰ We see the people of God drawn into communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All divisions are laid to rest as nations enter the peace of Christ.

Today, the daily life expressions of the Church become a sign of this reality to come. One such signpost exists as the Church experiences unity while in the world. In his final prayer, Jesus speaks about this clearly:

"My prayer is...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:20-23, TNIV)

In the Good Works community, we want to be part of the answer to Jesus' prayer. We believe that God has trusted us to facilitate unity in the body of Christ, which becomes a sign of God's kingdom in its coming fullness. We realize that often, Jesus is more concerned about unity than we are, and we need to receive the prayer of God's heart into our own.

We understand that God has already given the Church the gift of unity, through the Holy

³⁸ John the Baptist gave his whole life to this very purpose.

³⁹ See Psalm 51:6 and 17.

⁴⁰ See Revelation 21:1-3.

Spirit. Thus, it is the Church's role to preserve it.⁴¹ Doing this takes work, especially the work of humility. It requires our community to remain yielded to the Holy Spirit and teachable at all times. We know we must work towards relational unity before we will experience any theological unity. But when we are working together to preserve unity, nothing can stop us. Nothing. Jesus says, "I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:11). It is clearly God's will to bless the unity of the body of Christ.

We believe that true spiritual unity is experienced through a heart of worship: bringing glory to God through adoration, service, sacrifice, suffering and giving. This includes the worshipful act of serving people in need, together. Thus, Good Works is passionate about inviting Christians from diverse denominational backgrounds to serve with us. When Christians from different streams come together to serve people in poverty, we believe that God stands ready with blessing.

When in unity, we find ourselves carried along in the goodness and blessing of taking part in God's will and kingdom. Indeed, our unified relationships have a purpose that is beyond ourselves. Jesus desires for us to be reconciled to each other "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). As the body of Christ becomes whole, the world is able to know and believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Ultimately, this, and all we have been speaking of, is for the glory of God: for the day when, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). Paul speaks of this living hope:

"We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:2-5)

We persevere in love despite suffering because God first loved us. The love of God provides us with *hope*: the ability to see beyond what our natural eyes see. We get a glimpse into the future of possibilities, both for our lives here and now, and for the consummation of all things when Jesus returns. It is hope that carries us along when we grow weary in doing what is good.⁴² It is hope that sustains us when we lose perspective.

Our vision is to create and sustain a loving community built on this hope, where we, along with people struggling with poverty can experience the kingdom of God—an all-encompassing reign of justice, goodness and splendor. May Good Works shine as a testimony of what the Church can do as we yoke ourselves together in unity and invite those who are not Christians into our life for the purpose of serving and loving people who are struggling with the despair of poverty. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Note: All scripture references are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

⁴¹ Ephesians 4:2-6 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (TNIV)

⁴² See Galatians 6:9