

The Multitude, The Master, & The Method

Principles and Best-Practices for Launching a Community-Based Ministry

“And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.”

Matthew 14:14 (NKJV)

No one taught the way Jesus taught. Jesus had a holistic ministry that met the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of people. He didn't just preach. He identified, in a very intimate way, with our tribulations and struggles. He ministered to the very core and heart of our being. He helped us, without leaving us helpless. He corrected, without being overly critical. He restrained us, without leaving us bound. He rebuked us, without leaving us despondent. He rendered our own vain attempts at redemption useless, without stripping us of our ultimate value and worth to Him. Jesus exemplified a balanced ministry, reinforced by both word and deed.

The Biblical Platform for Community-Based Ministry

Matthew 14:14 paints a picture of Jesus caring for the needs of people. Furthermore, this verse provides the foundation on which we can build effective, life-changing ministries in whatever capacity we happen to serve. Notice carefully the three actions Jesus executed as He “went out.” The text begins with “He saw a great multitude...” As we engage in ministry for the Master, what do we see? Jesus saw people and not problems. He saw a chance for exhortation and not exploitation. He saw an opportunity to meet the needs of others. Again, when we engage in ministry, what do we see? Jesus saw a multitude of people who were hurting, helpless, and in need of a touch of healing and a word of hope. But He not only saw the multitude. Christ was also “moved with compassion” by what He saw. As believers, are we moved by the needs of the multitude? When we hear of tragedy and injustice in our community and in our world does it move us to want to do something about it? Does our heart go out to the hurting and the hopeless?

Experiencing a heart for the hurting and a genuine love for people is essential to effective ministry for the Master. And the multitude has a way of sensing authentic, genuine ministry when it happens. They may not be able to define it or articulate it, but they know it when it is experienced. They saw it in the life and ministry of Jesus. The question today is, “Do they see it in you?” Jesus didn't just minister on a cerebral level, He engaged His whole being in ministry. He ministered on a “heart” level as well. He felt our pain. He was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and was “moved with compassion.” True ministry for the Master involves wholehearted, passionate service, with nothing held back. This is the method Jesus has laid out by His own example. Effective ministry for the Master involves seeing the multitude and being moved with compassion towards them.

Compassion is a Touch

But not only does effective, life-changing ministry involve the ability to see and feel the needs of the multitude, it also involves the sense of touch. It involves the ability to reach out, to touch, to heal in His name. Real ministry rallies all of the senses to action. We must see them, feel them, and touch them. The text says that "He healed their sick." The Greek term "healed" is *therapeuō* from which we get the transliterated English equivalent "therapy." Jesus is the Great Physician and a Balm in Gilead and He knows how to minister to our every need. He has a therapeutic touch, a healing hand. What do people experience when they come in contact with us? Do they go away feeling better or bitter? Battered or believing? Assaulted or accepted? Victorious or vandalized? Consecrated or manipulated? Effective ministry manifests itself in transformed lives. It produces an eager multitude yearning for more of the life-giving power which flows from the hands of the Master.

I am convinced that many believers and churches want to experience the transforming power of the gospel. They want to share it in practical, holistic ways that uplift the lives of others. Too often, however, while our motivations are pure, we fail to achieve the desired results. One of the best ways to raise the level of impact you, your church, or related ministry can potentially have in your community or targeted service area is through the formal launch of a 501c3 tax-exempt organization. And yes, I'm sure you've heard all of the horror stories and reasons to avoid going this route, but establishing a community-based non-profit to effect change can exponentially increase the potential impact we can have. Here are a few practical steps and mistakes to avoid as you get started.

3 Mistakes to Avoid When Launching a Nonprofit

1) Don't expect a nonprofit to be up and running in a few weeks.

Recruiting your initial board of directors, filing the necessary paperwork, including the 1023 application for nonprofit determination status may take up to four months or longer. Registration requirements differ from state to state. Pay close attention and follow all applicable laws. Fulfilling your legal and fiduciary responsibilities is just the first step. Starting a nonprofit is not much different than starting a for-profit business. It takes time to grow. Launching a start-up non-profit, much like its for-profit counterpart, works more like a crock pot than a microwave so be patient.

2) Don't expect something for nothing.

No man or woman is an island when it comes to a nonprofit launch. Eventually, you will need help. And expect to pay for that help. There are wonderful people out there who are more than willing to assist you. If you are fortunate enough to be surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, accept them...welcome them...learn from them. But more often than not, more help is needed to launch a non-profit organization than you may find within a small circle of friends and associates. Seek professional help and avoid placing yourself or others in potential legal jeopardy.

Do not expect to launch a non-profit without start-up costs. And don't expect everyone to give you everything just because you are a "nonprofit" or have a great cause. Be intentional about joining professional associations that provide resources, tools, and support for nonprofits such as your state chapter of the National Association of Nonprofits, along with online support systems like Grant Station or BoardSource. A formal connection with such organizations is usually membership-based, which means it may cost you a modest fee to join. Some of the services needed, such as accounting, legal, and fund-raising assistance, may be available and at your disposal. But don't lean too heavily on a friend-of-a-friend who may not have the expertise to provide the necessary help.

3) Don't expect to rely on grants for everything.

Grants do not pay for start-up expenses. How much does a new organization need? Well, that depends upon such things as the location, mission, and goals of your non-profit. While there are exceptions, grants rarely pay for "brick and mortar" projects such as construction or acquisition of buildings or property. Conventional wisdom suggests that funders look for existing projects or programs to support, not ones that are "waiting for the money to come in."

Ethical and experienced grant-writers DO NOT contract based upon the percentage of a grant that may be potentially awarded. They don't get paid "after the money comes in." It is a standard industry practice to avoid arrangements based upon a percentage of the grant award. It is considered unethical and unfair both to the grant-writer, the funder, and the potential beneficiaries who receive your services and benefit from the funding.

If you're in the process of launching a nonprofit, don't expect to find grants that will immediately fund or underwrite salaried positions. Grants for small and new agencies rarely include enough funding to support full-time staffing. It takes time to grow to that level. Nonprofit work is about seeking to serve, not to be served. There's nothing wrong with anticipating or even working towards an opportunity to be compensated for your work, you'll just want to be realistic about how soon those expectations may be realized. An agency may grow to the point where it requires full-time staff support, but don't expect that initially. Needed resources will come with time, the trust of the community, a record of accomplishment, and a clear mission that your community, constituents, and board all support.

Finally, Non-profits, like their for-profit counterpart, utilize similar strategies to achieve long-term sustainability. For those just starting out or others desirous of taking ministry to a new level – remember, be ready to stay with it for the long-haul, prepare to make personal sacrifices to achieve success, and be sure to develop a plan to acquire the necessary resources to get started. But most importantly, remember that starting a non-profit is about caring for people. So see your non-profit as an opportunity to practice the compassion of Christ and truly transform communities and people.