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Mobilizing Christian churches to transform lives and communities in the name of Christ.

From the desk of Alan Doswald
Executive Director



A NEWSPAPER AND A BIBLE

The European theologian, Karl Barth, once said that a Christian should spend his life with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. In other words, we should see what's happening in our world and apply the principles of God's Word as we respond. I think that's great advice.

Over the years, there have been several articles in our local newspaper, The Fresno Bee, about poverty in both our City and our Valley. Here are some excerpts:

August 2002 "Extreme pockets of poverty are located along our border with Mexico, on Native American reservations, in the mountains of Appalachia, in the Mississippi River Delta and in California's Central Valley."

June 2003 "Studies show that 40% of adults in the area find it difficult to put food on the table. Poverty, unemployment, high teen pregnancy rates and low education levels contribute to the problem. Some folks familiar with the situation have started to call the Central Valley 'the Appalachia of the West.'"

Sept. 2003 "Nearly one of every four Fresno County residents lives below the federal poverty line; more than one-third of the county's children live in poverty. Fresno County's level of poverty ranks No. 57 among the state's 58 counties; Tulare County is No. 58. This record of economic despair goes on and on. The poverty of the six-county area is on a level with the mined-out hills and 'hollers' of Appalachia and a Mississippi River Delta still reeling from its legacy of slavery."

March 2005 "If the seven counties—Fresno, Kings, Merced, Kern, Madera, Stanislaus and Tulare—were a separate state, it would be the 23rd largest. That 'Valley' state would have the nation's highest unemployment rate, the lowest per capita income and the highest poverty rate."

October 2005 "The siblings live in one of Fresno's poorest neighborhoods, at Effie Street and Belmont Avenue. They're among the have-nots that are more concentrated in Fresno than anywhere else in the country, according to a national study that examined 2000 census information and was released last week by the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution."

Nov. 2005 "The extreme poverty rate in Fresno is nearly four times that of the national average for urban centers. Nationally, Fresno has the highest concentrated poverty rate in a large city." "According to the study, concentrated poverty results in numerous debilitating effects on the community. Problems identified include: reduction of private sector activity; higher prices for low-income households; limitations on job network and employment ambitions; inhibited educational opportunities; stimulation of higher crime; contribution to poor physical and mental health of the residents; hindered wealth building; burdens on local government services and fiscal capacity; and political and societal division. All of these effects can be observed in the 22 extreme-poverty neighborhoods in Fresno."

GIFT OF A BROKEN HEART

By Alan Pirie

Over 20 years ago I traveled to Ethiopia and Kenya with a group of men from Fresno. The purpose of the trip was to connect the needs of people trapped in famine with people in Fresno who could provide aid.

This trip changed my life. My heart was broken forever by the needs of the poor. I will never forget the three-year-old boy found sitting next to the body of his father who died traveling through cold, rugged mountains to a feeding center to save his son. The boy sat cuddled for hours in our laps. I will never forget his face, and the look in his eyes.

We observed relief workers at the center rising early in the morning to pray and call out to God, asking Him to prepare them for the day serving the poor.

I recall my "culture shock" coming back to America seeing all the products in the supermarket and department stores. I was stunned by the contrast of famine and abundance. There is not a lack of resources in our world to provide for the basic needs of the poor. The challenge is to connect the resources with those in need.

I have worked in the real estate industry in Fresno for over 25 years. We have experienced an unprecedented prosperity over the last few years. It is an intense environment where individuals can be caught in a "rat race" pursuing success, and the accumulation of wealth.

Recently, I heard the testimony of those who served the victims of Hurricane Katrina. God impressed upon my heart that I was to "get my hands dirty". In other words, go and literally serve, connecting and embracing the poor, in addition to sending money.

I serve on the advisory board of Christian Community Alliance, a ministry of ESA.

My goal is to give my associates and peers who have been blessed materially, an opportunity to connect with those in need, that they be spiritually transformed and blessed, as they embrace the poor.

I recently visited some churches in some extremely poor cities in our Valley, including Delft, London, and Raisin City. What I saw touched my heart. We will be looking at various construction and improvement projects that can be done to improve the lives of the people in these areas. We will work through churches in these cities.

My prayer is that as we work together our hearts will be forever broken with that which breaks the heart of God. I believe maintaining a compassionate heart is a gift we can give God. When we give, we will receive joy and significance, which is eternal.

Alan Pirie is owner of Pirie Properties and attends a local church.

If your business would like to get involved in serving our Valley in this way, please contact George Ordway at ESA, 244-0105. We will be glad to take you on a tour of some Valley Cities in need or just discuss some possibilities for involvement.

Dec. 2005 "The San Joaquin Valley really may be the new Appalachia after all, a new congressional study suggests. "By a wide range of indicators, the San Joaquin Valley is one of the most economically-depressed regions of the United States."

At ESA/Love INC, we read our newspaper and we read our Bible. The Bible says to do something about this poverty (there are too many scriptures to list them here). Along with many churches, ministries and

businesses, we are doing something about this poverty and we plan to do more in 2006. We hope you, your church and your business will be involved in transforming our City and our Valley.

It's not all bad news in our Valley. The Bee also reported that our Valley continues to be the richest agricultural area in the world. There are resources in our Valley—let's work together to change it. There is hope, because of the Lord.

WE'RE MOVING!

But we don't know where.

After 12 years at our present location, the offices of ESA will need to be relocated before the end of March 2006. The Southern Baptist Building is being remodeled and they'll need our office space for their staff. They have been great landlords!

We ask you to pray about this need and keep your eyes open for possible office space. Here is what we are looking for:

- 2,000-3,000 Square Feet
- Ground Level
- Safe Area (also perceived as safe)
- Good, Accessible Parking
- Fairly Close Freeway Access
- Handicapped Accessible
- Affordable Price

Please contact ESA at 244-0105 or esaloveinc@sbcglobal.net if you have any possibilities. Thanks for your help.

COMING UP

WEEKLY PASTOR'S PRAYER: All Christian Pastors are welcome. Every Tuesday, 8-9 a.m. at Bethel Christian on North First (south of Shaw).

COMING TO FRESNO January 10-March 28, 2006: The Perspectives Course, "Encountering The World of Islam." Great speakers plus college credit available. See www.p-norcal.org or call Anita at 432-8489.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Do you have three-hours per week to help at the ESA Office? There are openings for receptionists, as well as computer-entry people. Please call Nancy Tillman at 244-0105. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon; and 1:00-4:00 p.m.

CREDIT-CARD/DIRECT DEPOSIT

ESA/Love INC can now receive donations through Direct Deposit or through the following credit cards: Visa, MasterCard, Discover or American Express. To give to ESA in this way, please contact Nancy at 244-0105 for further instructions.

Love INC

Love In the Name of Christ
CLEARINGHOUSE MINISTRY

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

At times we all need a helping hand. Love INC received a call from Fresno County Mental Health Department describing a family that was in need of help. The mother was one of their clients and had four children. Her landlord said the rent wasn't paid and after taking it to court, the family was evicted. The oldest son (13) had some problems in school and was expelled. They needed a fresh start. They were very grateful to some relatives in a nearby city that agreed to take them in and help them get on their feet. All they needed was a U-haul trailer so they wouldn't have to leave all their beds and possessions in Fresno.

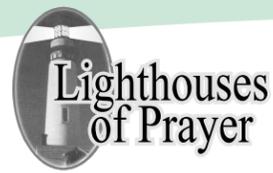
Some churches got together and paid for the trailer rental and the family came in to Love INC to pick up the check. It was an honor to pray with them and encourage them to call the Love INC near their new home to get connected to a local church family. (In the last few months, a Love INC has begun in that county.) They were very grateful. Because of caring churches, this family was in a safe, caring home with their family for Christmas. It's wonderful when the Body of Christ works together!

LOVE INC HELPS CHURCHES HELP PEOPLE

There are so many ways God's people can serve. Here are just a few of them:

- Serve a weekly 3-hour shift as a phone volunteer in the Love INC Clearinghouse. (Shifts are 9:00-noon or 1:00-4:00 at the Love INC Office, Monday through Friday. Training and supervision are provided)
- Be a Lighthouse of Prayer on your street by praying, caring and sharing the good news with your neighbors. (Training available)
- Read to a child at one of seven elementary schools, one hour per week either at their lunchtime or between 2:30-5:30. (15-week commitment, One By One Leadership)
- Spend time with a child who has a parent in prison. Four hours per month. (One-year commitment, One By One Leadership, Training available)
- Spend time with nursing home residents – individually or as a group. Often this can be done with your children. (Minimum of one hour per month, GAP Ministries)
- Build a friendship with a new Hmong refugee family from Thailand. Group activities available. (Minimum of one visit a month for six months, FIRM)
- Visit a prison inmate once per month. (Matching and training available, Prison Fellowship)

Please contact Jan at 244-0105 for more information.



GOD IS AT WORK

Although we are to continue in prayer no matter what we see, God has allowed me to see some of His wonderful work in recent weeks.

After two years of praying for a lady whom I occasionally meet on morning walks, I was able to have a substantial conversation with her in September. I asked if she had any prayer requests and she had dental pain and an upcoming root canal appointment. After she gave permission for prayer, I touched her shoulder and prayed for both concerns. She told me later, (with uncharacteristic friendliness), that her pain was relieved and the appointment went well!

After years of praying for people and challenging situations in the rental house next door, the Lord has brought a Christian family whose dad was on his third strike when he came to Christ in prison. Recently he has been able to clearly share Christ with two other men on our block to whom I have also witnessed.

One neighbor whom I have befriended and prayed for, for 15 years, has recently agreed to do a 6-week Bible study with me on having a real relationship with God. What a thrill! Another needy neighbor who needed glasses was touched when a Christian optometrist provided an exam and glasses free of charge. Now she can read the Bible I gave her!

Another neighbor (ex-prostitute and druggie) recently gave me her drug paraphernalia to destroy and also burned the addresses of her drug contacts in my presence.

Many years of prayer have gone into this neighborhood. It's a joy to see just a glimpse of God's working and of His faithfulness and love for people.

"A Lighthouse from Clovis"

This is the work of Lighthouses of Prayer: to continue to seek and search for those hidden families who are in desperate need. You can become a lighthouse of prayer—call Becky Ray at 244-0105.



SERVING A RETIRED SERVANT

Men With a Mission exists to mobilize men's ministry groups in the local churches to build a network of servant leaders who will serve others in Jesus' name.

Partnership is awesome when God brings everything together. In August, Love INC received a call from the son of a retired pastor. Carl and Mary Young pastored for 45 years in Petaluma. He is 84 years old and struggles with a bad hip and congestive heart failure. He needed a wheel chair ramp built onto his mobile home and could not afford to have one built. A MWAM team from Trinity Presbyterian Church stepped up to the plate and were willing to do the labor. Team leader, Harold Belmont, and seven men built a 20' ramp, along with installing a new top step in about four hours.



Men from Trinity Presbyterian Church with Carl and Mary Young after building them a wheelchair ramp.

The partnership also extended to how their costs of materials were provided. We are thankful to 84 Lumber, a Clovis business that provided a generous discount on materials, along with individuals who contributed towards the cost of the ramp. Many joyfully shared this gift of mobility.

In their thank-you note to the church, the Young family said: "It is wonderful to know about your Christian work. Our families will remember the Christian love your group and volunteers have shown us."

Love INC receives many requests for wheel chair ramps to be built for those on limited incomes. We need more teams to come together for these tasks. If your church would like to help build a ramp, please contact George Ordway @ 244-0105.

Men With A Mission, a ministry of Love INC would like to mobilize and develop teams that will serve Jesus as they serve people in the name of Christ. For more information, please contact George Ordway, @ 559-244-0105.

VALLEY COMMUNITIES FOR CHRIST

TRANSFORMING VALLEY COMMUNITIES

Converging on our poorest Valley Communities in 2006 is what it seems like God is calling many of us to do.

Our vision for the last six years has been to transform Valley Communities through connecting church-to-church, city-to-city, and life-to-life. What do we mean when we say convergence? In 2005, ten Fresno/Clovis churches were identified, connected with Valley churches, and many were saved; some churches tripled in size and became more racially diverse. God did a great work in 2005.



Pastor Ramon pictured in center.

For 2006, we are working with several regional pastors who share a vision to reach thousands of people in our Valley. Some that are getting involved are a network of Junior and Senior High youth and pastors called Fresno's Youth Network, the Kern County Ministerial, led by Ramon Vera, the local Christian Medical & Dental Association (CMDA). CMDA wants to reach out and do medical missions in our Valley communities through a partnership project ESA/Love INC and California Southern Baptist Convention will be involved in. The California Southern Baptist plan to send 1,000+ volunteers into 50+ Valley communities over a nine-week period this summer. Key Hispanic leaders throughout our Valley have agreed to partner in a regional vision to reach, teach and equip our Valley's Hispanic to serve together.

God is doing much more than we could possibly tell pastors you in this article. He is putting the pieces of His plan together, as it says in 1 Corinthians 12: 18, "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

Please pray for us in 2006. God is on the move in a big way, and if you would like to be involved or would just like to have more information, please contact George Ordway, or phone him at 559-244-0105.



ESA/LOVE INC AND JONI AND FRIENDS

ESA partners with Joni and Friends (JAF) through our staff person, Rick Eastin, who also serves as a Ministry Associate for JAF. Rick is the main speaker for JAF and is a very gifted on issues of disability and the Christian Faith. These are some of the topics Rick speaks on:

- Three Views of Disability
- Developing a Church-Based Disability Ministry
- Urban and Disability Ministry
- Healing
- Our Redeeming God
- How Grace and Law Fit Together

For more information about Rick speaking for your church or group, contact David Hooker at JAF (227-5664) or Rick at 439-4311.

OUR CORE VALUES

1. We are **Christian**. Everything we think, say, and do is in the name of Christ.
2. **Prayer** is an integral part of who we are.
3. We follow Christ's example of valuing the **poor and needy**.
4. We value **unity** of the Body of Christ.
5. We value **transformation** in the lives of people and communities.
6. We value **churches** living out the two great commandments to love God and love their neighbors.
7. We value building Christ-like **relationships**.
8. We value the **connectedness** of the Love INC movement.
9. We model **excellence**.
10. We value continually **maturing** in our capacity to meet people's needs.

MISSIONS NETWORK CHURCHES HELPING CHURCHES DO MISSIONS HERE AND THERE!

If you are interested in getting together with other missions-minded people from the Fresno/Clovis area, we have monthly gatherings. Please call Jan at the ESA office at 244-0105. We would love to have you join us as we share ideas and encourage each other.

End of the Spear is a new movie coming to theaters on January 20th. It's the story of Jim Elliot and the Auca Indians of Ecuador. These Indians massacred Jim and his fellow missionaries but later their entire village was redeemed through Jesus Christ. Don't miss this movie about one of the greatest missionary stories of all time.