

HELPING THE HOMELESS: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF A DIFFICULT  
MINISTRY

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## ABSTRACT

Homelessness is a problem that has been rapidly growing throughout the country and it is common for Christians to want to help. However, it is difficult to know how to help. This thesis will identify two challenges that churches in Milwaukee face when carrying out this ministry and provide possible solutions. This will be accomplished in three ways. First, it is important to see this as something God desires for his people to do; therefore, a Scriptural overview will establish the truth that God does call his people to care for this hurting population. Second, a survey of churches from the Milwaukee area will highlight common challenges that churches face when seeking to reach out to the homeless. Finally, I will suggest solutions to the challenges identified by congregations.

## INTRODUCTION

Can we be honest for a moment and talk about something that is a little uncomfortable? It's a situation that most, if not all of us have been in before; or at least, you have if you have driven through just about any major city in America. The situation is this: as you are driving your car, you approach an intersection and the light turns red. Your car slowly comes to a stop. It's then that you notice a man on the side of the road with a sign that reads, "Homeless. Need Money. God bless." It's uncomfortable. You can feel the tension as you try to avoid making eye contact with him. You try to fill the time by flipping through radio stations to make it look as if you are busy and didn't notice the man. After what seems like an hour, the light finally turns green and you drive away. The man becomes smaller and smaller as you look in the rearview mirror but the guilt and uncertainty begin to grow within your heart. The questions start to race through your mind. "Should I have given him some change? Is he actually homeless or is he just looking for handouts? Did I do the right thing?" So, you convince yourself, "If I gave him some money, then he probably would have just wasted it on drugs or alcohol. It's better that I didn't give him anything."

Most of us can probably relate. I have been in a situation like this numerous times and they seem to become even more common as the years go by. This is because there is a complex and persistent crisis that currently plagues our country. Since 2020, the country has witnessed a disturbing trend. In the last three years, homelessness has risen for those over the age of 24 at an

alarming rate of six percent.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, those numbers hit record highs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recorded roughly 582,500 people experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Among this population, 40% live unsheltered.<sup>3</sup> These statistics not only highlight the magnitude of the homeless problem in America but also underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

On a positive note, services that provide shelter for the homeless have also been on the rise annually but unfortunately, they still fall short of helping all of those in need. HUD reports that from 2020-2022, the availability of shelter beds has increased at a rate of about 11%. There were 373,507 emergency shelter beds for people.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this still leaves around 200,000 people on the street without a safe place to sleep. On top of this, a safe place to sleep is not the only need for this rising population.

A needs assessment which was performed in 2022 identified sufficient health care as one of the largest needs for this population. The results of this assessment indicated that 68% of participants perceive their health as “poor” or “fair.” 55% percent indicated they had primary care, and only 64% reported possessing active health care insurance. There were many perceived barriers to care, including lack of transportation, money, and inadequate clinic hours.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between health and those experiencing homelessness is a complex issue. Studies

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1. Tanya de Sousa, Alyssa Andrichik, Marissa Cuellar, Jhenelle Marson, Ed Pretera, and Katherine Rush. “The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress.” (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022),11.

2. Sousa, *The 2022 Annual*, 2.

3. Living unsheltered is defined by HUD as lacking a suitable place for human living, such as a city sidewalk, vehicle, abandoned building, or park.

4. Sousa, *The 2022 Annual*, 84.

5. Joshua Matzke, Bryan Johnston, Thomas Schneider, David Nelson. “A Health Needs Assessment Among Milwaukee Homeless” (Wisconsin Medical Journal 121, no. 2, July 2022), 150.

have shown that most of these needs and problems are interwoven and cyclical causing downward spirals that plunge the homeless into situations that are almost impossible to overcome.<sup>6</sup>

It can be overwhelming to see all the needs that this population has. The extreme nature of the situation can make it difficult for Christians to know how to help. Is there anything a Christian congregation can do to help these struggling men and women out of this difficult situation? What is a Christian to do when they are confronted with guilt as they see someone experiencing homelessness on the side of the street? It is hard to know the answers to these difficult questions.

Ultimately, the goal of a Christian or a Christian congregation is not to solve the problems of poverty or homelessness on this side of heaven. This will never happen. Jesus himself says, "You will always have the poor among you" (John 12:8 NIV). A stable place to live and adequate health care are just a few of the needs that this population has but there is a far greater need. Giving this population that greater need is the ultimate goal of a Christian. It is a need that every single human being has. It's the need for a Savior and the news of that Savior's love. Giving this message to those experiencing homelessness is so much greater than some

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6. Some health problems precede and lead to homelessness. For example, injury on the job resulting in the loss of employment and income, severe mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and more recently, AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). Some health problems are direct consequences of experiencing homelessness. For example, problems resulting from exposure, such as hypothermia; problems resulting from not being able to lie down, such as vascular and skin disorders of the legs and feet; and problems resulting from specific hazards of the homeless lifestyle, such as trauma from being mugged or raped on the streets. And often times, being homeless complicates the treatment of the health needs. One example would be the dietary limitations and the medication regimen that are part of the routine care of hypertension, a problem of particular significance among those past middle age and among blacks. Medication can rarely be taken as prescribed, and the sodium content of food derived from soup kitchens cannot be controlled. A simpler example would be the frequent order to "rest in bed"; this is virtually impossible if one does not have a bed, and very difficult at best if one must give up one's bed in a shelter every morning and wait until evening to be reassigned a bed. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Health Care for Homeless People. *Homelessness, Health, and Human Needs*. (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 1998), 139–140.

spare change or a meal from a fast-food restaurant because this is a gift that will last for eternity.

God has called his people to proclaim this message of love to all people including the homeless

in spite the challenges.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:11–12).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will give an overview of the four most impactful books that I read while researching the topic of homelessness. The first two books are practical and deal with the concept of charity and its effects on the poor. The third book is a historical and sociological overview of “The Great Reversal” and looks at the causes of the division in American churches over the role of compassion ministry in evangelizing. The fourth book addresses eviction and the direct impact that it has on the lives of eight poor families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

### ***Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)***

**by Robert D. Lupton<sup>7</sup>**

"Toxic Charity" is a great book for anyone who wants to get started in community service. The brief 191-page book is filled with “dos and don’ts” when it comes to charity efforts. The book is written by Robert Lupton who has his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Georgia. Lupton is also the founder and president of Focused Community Strategies (FCS), a group in Atlanta that looks to help communities and neighborhoods in need by developing strategies to become self-sufficient. Lupton critiques familiar charitable practices, emphasizing the negative

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7. Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)*. (New York: Harper One, 2011).



consequences of well-intentioned but poorly executed efforts. He uses his experience in urban ministry and community development to argue that many charitable initiatives, especially those focused on providing material goods and services to the poor, can create dependency, strip recipients of dignity, and perpetuate poverty cycles.<sup>8</sup>

A helpful concept that Lupton introduces is the "relief" versus "development" approach to charity. He states that relief efforts are necessary in emergencies but should only be temporary. However, many charities operate continuously in relief mode, offering ongoing assistance without addressing the root causes of poverty, leading to long-term harm. Instead, it is vital to move from a relief approach toward long-term, self-sufficient, development for the community.

The book also delves into the motivations behind charity efforts. Lupton questions whether charity primarily serves donors' desire to feel good about themselves rather than genuinely addressing suffering. He advocates for a shift towards empowering recipients and fostering self-sufficiency as a more sustainable and dignified approach to charity.

Overall, the brevity of the book and its easy readability make this book a must-read for anyone curious to learn more about "toxic" charity. However, if you were looking to find a resource on this topic from a strong Scriptural basis, the next book in this review might be a bit more helpful. While Lupton is a Christian and his book speaks to church organizations, there seems to be a lack of scriptural depth in the content of his writing. This is not intended to be an attack on the book itself since the book does not claim to approach this topic from Scripture.

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8. Look back to footnote six for examples of poverty cycles.

***When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself* by  
Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert<sup>9</sup>**

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert’s book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself*, is a groundbreaking book for any Christian looking to approach poverty alleviation and community development. Originally published in 2009, with a second edition published in 2012, this book looks to “appropriate ways for a North American congregation – and its missionaries – to participate in poverty alleviation at home and abroad, taking into account the God-ordained mission of the church and the typical church’s organizational capacity.”<sup>10</sup>

Corbett and Fikkert present a perspective on poverty that goes beyond just a lack of material possessions. The book proposes that the lack of possessions is a result of a person having broken relationships as well as having distorted worldviews. The individual’s sin as well as the corporate sin of the world is to blame for this brokenness. Because of this, the book contends that the only way to truly alleviate poverty is by reconciling these broken relationships, with the most important emphasis being the relationship with God.

The book’s scriptural focus is clear throughout. The authors often reference scripture passages in support of their claims and arguments. The pivotal passage used concerning the solution of poverty is 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and the theme of reconciliation. With this passage in mind, the goal of the alleviation of poverty is not to make sure the poor receive material possessions but rather that they receive the news of their reconciliation with God.

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9. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012).

10. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 15.

This emphasis on the message of reconciliation to both God and neighbor is what makes this book vital for any Christian looking for a resource on poverty alleviation. The book offers lots of insightful approaches as well as pitfalls to avoid when trying to help those in need such as Asset-Based Community Development, a development tactic which strives to make use of the gifts and assets which the community already has and by making use of them, upholds the dignity of the poor. But the book truly shines with its focus on bringing broken humans into a perfect relationship with their God.

***The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* by David O. Moberg<sup>11</sup>**

David Moberg's book is an interesting read for those looking to get a better understanding of the "Great Reversal," a term Moberg picked up from the lectures of historian Timothy L. Smith.<sup>12</sup> The book was written in 1972 and while over 50 years old, it provides insight on theological and societal issues that are still applicable today.

Moberg received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and taught sociology at Marquette University for 23 years. He played significant roles in various professional associations, especially as an editor for the Review of Religious Research, Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation, and Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion. Another great accomplishment was his founding of the Association for the Development of Religious Information Systems (ADRIS).

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11. David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern*. (New York: Lippincott, 1972).

12. Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 30.

In the beginning of his book, Moberg gives historical background on the tensions between the social gospel movement and the evangelicals which tightened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moberg argues that as society and culture began to shift so did the focus of many evangelicals. As the social gospel became more prevalent, many Christians became more focused on social concern, while other Christians went to the other end of the spectrum and abandoned social concern. One criticism of *The Great Reversal* is that Moberg does not do a great job identifying the groups which he addresses. He uses the terms *liberal* and *conservative* but does not specify who it is exactly that he is talking about.<sup>13</sup>

There are many beneficial aspects of this book. The fifth chapter is especially insightful. Moberg outlines some of the barriers to social concern especially in modern America. Moberg highlights neutrality, individualism, social Darwinism, and the polarity of the conservative and liberal mindset as key barriers.

When complex issues become polarized and caricatures begin to be made, it is very difficult for beneficial solutions to be found. The polarization of Christian values in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is something that Christianity is still facing today. Moberg's book attempts to find a balance with constructive criticism, encouragement, and Scriptural support for both sides. He finds a common ground between the two, i.e. the salvation of souls, and shows that evangelism and social concern work hand in hand. Each is empty without the other.

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13. The vague nature of these terms to the modern ear could be caused because of our modern political climate. Moberg could also be using vague terms to avoid highlighting a specific church body or denomination.

***Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond<sup>14</sup>**

Matthew Desmond's groundbreaking book, which was awarded both the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction and the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, is a must-read for anyone dealing with the homeless population regularly. Desmond received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2010. He currently is serving as a Professor of Sociology at Princeton University.

*Evicted* focuses on the lives of eight families who live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and are directly impacted by eviction and homelessness. The book addresses challenging topics such as economic structures, modern segregation in Milwaukee, discriminatory practices, and the impact landlords can have on poor families. By looking at multiple causes of eviction and homelessness, Desmond shows his reader the complex nature of these issues.

Desmond's approach throughout the book is to be a close and immersive observer. Desmond uses personal interviews and observations to make statistics feel personal and give a real voice to this marginalized community. The gut-wrenching narratives that Desmond works into the book are difficult to read at times and stick with the reader. But it certainly accomplishes its goal of getting the reader to think about the struggles, problems, and causes of the American housing system. That's why this book is so important. It gets the reader as close as possible to these real problems that families face and gives them a voice. This book is a must-read not only for those wanting to learn about homelessness and eviction but also for any looking to broaden their understanding and empathy for those in need.

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14. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. (New York: Crown, 2017).

## GOD’S WORD CALLS US TO CARE FOR THE HOMELESS

Before we begin to look at God’s call to care for the homeless, it is necessary to know who exactly we are talking about when we use the term “homeless.” A study performed by a committee on health care for homeless people gives the following definition:

1. an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence: [or]
2. an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is—
  - a. a supervised or publicly operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
  - b. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
  - c. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.<sup>15</sup>

The term “homeless” is a broad category into which people can be placed. Unfortunately, there is a stereotype that causes many people to believe that people who are homeless are only those standing on the street corner or sitting under an overpass, but this is simply not true. There are plenty of people who are experiencing homelessness or are home insecure that you would never know about unless they told you.<sup>16</sup> The broad nature of those experiencing homelessness can make it complicated to know who to help and how to help them.

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15. Institute of Medicine, *Homeless*, 2.

16. Thought from a conversation held with Lori Hayes, the manager of Community Volunteerism at United Way of Greater Milwaukee.

Another factor that adds difficulty to this topic is the complexity and wide variety of reasons why someone might become homeless. Personal mistakes, natural disasters, and systemic failures are just three examples of different causes of homelessness. Unfortunately, personal mistakes and failures are often emphasized over others, causing many people to show apathy towards those who are homeless. For many struggling with homelessness, their situation may be the result of personal mistakes or sin, but that is certainly not the case for every person. Many people struggling with homelessness are put into this horrible situation through no fault of their own. The Committee of Health Care for Homeless People researched the causes of homelessness and found two emerging concepts and neither mentions personal mistakes.

The first emphasizes homelessness as the result of the failures in the support and service systems for income maintenance, employment, corrections, child welfare, foster care, and care of mental illness and other types of disabilities. Homeless people, in this view, are people with the problems that these systems were designed to help. . . . An alternative formulation emphasizes economic factors in the homeless person's lack of a regular place to live. As the supply of decent housing diminishes, more and more people are at risk of becoming homeless. The tighter the housing market, the greater the amount of economic and personal resources one must have to remain secure.<sup>17</sup>

This is not to say that there aren't people experiencing homelessness who actively choose to live this way. In reality, there are people experiencing homelessness who have chosen this lifestyle through sinful actions. Corbett and Fikkert give helpful advice when faced with this problem:

At the lowest end of the continuum are people who simply have no desire to change. *Some*, but not all, members of America's homeless population fit into this category. If, as we get involved with people, it becomes clear that they are simply unwilling to even consider any changes, then it is *not* loving to enable them to persist in sin by providing them with handouts of food, clothing, or shelter. Rather

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17. Institute of Medicine, "Homeless," 22.

the loving this to do is allow them to feel the burden of their choice in hopes that this will trigger positive change.<sup>18</sup>

### **The God of Compassion**

While there is no explicit command from God in Scripture which says, "You shall care for the homeless," it would be ignorant and foolish to say that our Lord does not want us to do so. Both the Old and New Testament are filled with passages that emphasize the importance of caring for the poor, providing for the needy, and offering hospitality to those without shelter.

Dr. Keith Wessel highlights the compassion God showed to his people in the Old Testament as he writes:

The Lord faithfully defended those less fortunate and at the mercy of society (Ps 145:9). Such defense extended not only to physical life but also to the economic and legal interests as well (Prov 15:25). Since the lowly were considered valuable to God, the nation of Israel was likewise to regard them as valuable members of the community. To abuse the poor was to forget Israel's bondage in the land of Egypt and the Lord's mercy to Israel in rescuing them.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, abusing the poor is exactly what Israel did. They failed to reflect the love and compassion of their God. Helen Rhee describes the abuse this way, "The powerful rich oppress the poor and crush the needy with their avarice, their covetousness for amassing more wealth, and their ruthless acquisition of the land at the expense of the poor."<sup>20</sup> God's response was to send his prophets to rebuke their lack of compassion.

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18. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 217.

19. Keith Wessel, "See How They Love One Another." (Paper Presented at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium, 2022) 2.

20. Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2012), 28.



For example, through the prophet Isaiah, God condemned the Israelites for their false sense of piety and lack of concern for compassion. "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Is 58:6–7).

Likewise, the prophet Amos rebukes the wealthy for ignoring the poor, cheating them in the markets, and denying them justice in the courts. "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed" (Am 2:6b–7).

“The prophets saw this process not only socially but also theologically because it ran contrary to Yahweh's will for Israel, and they denounced the wealthy and powerful (the same people) not only for idolatry but also for their social and economic injustice and oppression of the poor in particular.”<sup>21</sup> And yet, despite their warnings, Israel did not listen to the prophets and because of their stubborn hearts, God sent them into exile.

Why was God so displeased? Both passages emphasize that God was furious over Israel's failure to care for the poor and the oppressed. He wanted His people to 'loosen the chains of injustice,' and not just go to church on Sunday. He wanted His people to 'clothe the naked,' and not just attend midweek prayer meeting. He wanted His people to 'spend themselves on behalf of the hungry,' and not just sing praise music. Personal piety and formal worship are essential to the Christian life, but they must lead to lives that 'act justly and love mercy' (Mic. 6:8).<sup>22</sup>

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21. Rhee, *Loving the Poor*, 28.

22. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 39–40.

God's desire for the Old Testament people to have compassion for the poor and oppressed is not unique to the Old Testament. The New Testament shows that compassion is an expression of God's love which flows out naturally from a Christian. 1 John 4:8 teaches that "God is love," and that Christians are called to emulate God's love in their lives. Compassion is a tangible way in which believers can do that. In Mark 12:31, Jesus commands his followers to "love your neighbor as yourself," highlighting the inseparable connection between love and compassion. By showing compassion and doing for others what you would like to be done for you, Christians express the compassion God desires and exemplifies God's love to others in a tangible way.

There is no explicit passage in either the Old Testament or the New Testament that commands Christians to care for those experiencing homelessness. But God still desires his children to love their neighbor and the homeless certainly fall into that category. On top of the explicit command for Christians to love their neighbor, there is also a connection between the homeless population and those other special groups that God highlights for his people to show compassion toward.

### Connection to Widows and Orphans

In the first chapter of his letter, James writes, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27 NIV11). Taken out of context, one might "misunderstand these verses to think that James is intending to summarize here all that true worship of God

should involve."<sup>23</sup> That is certainly not the case. James is not making a blanket statement about exactly what true religion is in complete detail. Instead, James' point is that true worship of God involves caring for *any* group that is marginalized and oppressed. "Widows and orphans" in this context can be understood as a synecdoche. James is using this pair of marginalized groups because it would resonate with his mostly Jewish audience.

Widows and orphans are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as recipients of God's special concern and care. For instance, Exodus 22:22 states, "Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless." The Psalms repeatedly depict God as the defender of widows and orphans. Psalm 68:5 declares, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." Isaiah 1:17 mentions these two groups together as well. "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." Although the phrase is used often in the Old Testament, James 1:27 is the only time this pair is mentioned together in the entire New Testament.

James uses his reader's assumed knowledge of the Old Testament to his advantage as he makes the point of caring for the marginalized. When James says that pure and faultless religion is to look after orphans and widows in their distress, it's not as if James was saying that *all* a Christian ought to do is care for those two groups. Rather, he mentions the well-known and typical marginalized groups<sup>24</sup> to get his readers to think about God's compassion and love before addressing other doctrinal topics.

As James continues, it is clear that compassion ministry was something the recipients of this letter struggled with. It seems as if they were showing favoritism to the wealthy (Jam 2:2-4),

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23. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 96.

24. D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith*. (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 142.

they were not providing for each other's basic needs (Jam 2:16) and became corrupted by wealth and oppressed their employees (Jam 5:1-4). And yet, before addressing any of those issues, James boils religion down simply to caring for widows and orphans. What makes them the well-known and typical marginalized groups? Why are they the group to which compassion is emphasized? It comes down to the way the economy and the societal structure of the Ancient Near East, including Ancient Israel functioned.

### ***Widows and Orphans in the Ancient Israelite Economy***

"The household was the primary production unit in ancient Israel, for both the dominant mode of production and the residual mode. Constructed around a marital couple, the household varied from a small nuclear family to a multigenerational family, including servants and other non-familial members."<sup>25</sup> Ronald Simkin's point is that the way people worked and survived in the ancient Israelite economy was intimately tied to their familial relationships. "To be outside, or marginalized from, this basic social support unit of provision and protection was to be at risk."<sup>26</sup> Widows and orphans were at risk because either the death or lack of a patriarch would leave them without an economic support system to subsist on.<sup>27</sup> Widows and orphans could not prevent the fact that their support and source of provision and protection was lost when for one reason or another. The patriarch of the family was gone. Therefore, God established laws to be

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25. Ronald A. Simkins, "The Bible, the Economy, and the Poor." (Journal of Religion & Society), 25.

26. Hussain, "Participating In Godliness," 103.

27. Simkins, "The Bible," 28.

set up to provide for and protect them. How does the reason for God's special compassion toward the widows and orphans connect with those experiencing homelessness?

In many cases, the relationship between the causes that lead widows and orphans to need special care and concern is very similar to the causes of those experiencing homelessness. Widows and orphans could not gain sufficient financial resources on their own and often the system that was established to provide for them failed to do so. For many people experiencing homelessness, they are unable to sufficiently support themselves either because of a disability, the loss of a loved one, a health problem, etc. The American system looks to support these people but often because of the sheer number of those needing assistance, resources are limited and people fall through holes in the safety net.

Certainly, widows and orphans are still in need of assistance in our modern world and ought to be shown special compassion. However, what groups would James have mentioned were he to write a letter to an American congregation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Would he still mention widows and orphans as groups that are well-known and typical to show compassion, or would he make note of different groups that resonate better in the modern context? Perhaps he would highlight those struggling with addiction, the mentally ill, or those experiencing homelessness as those for whom Christians ought to show special compassion.

Regardless of whether or not James would mention caring for the homeless in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century letter, Jesus does when he calls his followers to show love to all people when he says that the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). This is an easy command to remember but a much more difficult one to put into practice. When trying to carry out compassion ministry to those experiencing homelessness, there are many questions

and concerns that people have. The next section of this paper will summarize a few of those questions or concerns in a survey of Milwaukee churches on the topic of compassion ministry.

## SURVEY OF MILWAUKEE CONGREGATIONS

This survey<sup>28</sup> was sent out to 75 churches located in the city of Milwaukee. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of how different congregations and their leaders approach compassion ministry as well as compassion ministry specifically directed toward those experiencing homelessness. The survey was sent to either the church's email or, if available, directly to the email of the leader of that congregation. To gain a wider perspective, the survey was sent to a variety of different Christian denominational churches including Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterian, and Non-Denominational. The respondents were kept anonymous with the hope that their responses would be an honest representation of their thoughts about their congregation's ministry. Of the 75 surveys sent out, 14 surveys were completed and sent back. The following is a summary of the responses to each question.

### **Summary of Questions and Answers**

#### ***Question #1: How long have you been serving in the city of Milwaukee?***

I put this question in the survey to see whether or not there was a relationship between the time someone spent ministering in Milwaukee and their attitude toward and success with compassion

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28. See Appendix 1

ministry. The responses varied from 2 years of service up to 34 years. There did not seem to be a corresponding relationship between the amount of time a particular congregational leader has served and the degree to which that congregation had success with compassion ministry or motivation for it.

***Question #2: How would you describe your congregation's attitude towards compassion ministry?***

There were two basic responses to this question, each with slight variations. About one third of the respondents felt that their congregations see compassion ministry as a strong priority and central to their mission. Five respondents<sup>29</sup> used words like "strong, top priority, central, high, and motivated" to describe their attitude toward compassion ministry. The other respondents<sup>30</sup> recognized the need and had the heart for compassion ministry but also used words like, "wary, careful, cautious, baffling"<sup>31</sup> to describe their attitudes. Respondent 14 explained the caution of the congregation in this way.

The general attitude is positive and one rooted in God's heart and love for people. I think the difficulty is helping them distinguish between a sinful pity and godly compassion. By sinful pity, I mean one looking at our neighbors as those in need who are incapable of helping themselves and need a "savior" to step in. This particular perspective can often be rooted in stereotypes, fear compelling one to just help someone and get away from an uncomfortable situation, and often can lead to dehumanizing someone.... In contrast to sinful pity, compassion is rooted in God's concern and love for his crown of creation that goes deeper than the physical and mental needs, but also to the soul--to the spiritual needs. Compassion is seeing your fellow neighbor and Christ's love moving you to listen and be attentive to your neighbor so you can serve meaningfully with specificity....

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29. Surveys 1, 2, 3, 6, 12

30. Surveys 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14

31. Any quotes in this section come directly from the responses to the survey found in Appendix I



Compassion seeks to equip someone with the gospel to live and to persevere no matter the circumstances with a mindset that is heaven-oriented.

***Question #3: On a scale of 1-10, how often would you say that someone asks your church for assistance of some kind? (Money, gas, food, etc.)***

It was not surprising to see that all respondents answered with a five or higher on a scale of one to ten. The highest percentage of respondents answered with a ten. Congregations all over the country receive requests for assistance regularly whether that be for money, gas, food, clothes, etc. This just proves that churches in Milwaukee are no different.

***Question #4: Does your church run or partner with a food bank, clothing bank, or soup kitchen?***

There were three basic responses to question four. When asked about their involvement with food banks, clothing banks, or soup kitchens, eight congregations stated that they do partner with or support either one or more of these organizations. Two congregations run their own. Four congregations do neither.

***Question #5: In your opinion, what is a challenge (or challenges) that your church faces when it comes to carrying out compassion ministry?***

Of the 14 respondents, seven of them identified the lack of “resources”<sup>32</sup> as a major challenge to compassion ministry.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, respondent 14 noted that resources are not the issue but

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32. “Resources” is a broad category that can include financial resources, time, volunteers, etc.

33. Respondents 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13

rather “Focusing and narrowing the items we want to offer from our pantry that our neighbors need without overwhelming ourselves.”

Respondents also noted the struggle to properly identify those who are truly in need from those who are just looking for a free handout. A concern that respondent number 4 brings up is this, “Lots of people who are in need will go knocking on any door they can find. To them, we're one of many possible places to find cash, and nothing else. Sometimes people aren't in that much need and lie to get something. I have a few repeat customers who show up when money gets tight.” However, slipping too far into this mindset causes problems as well. Respondent number 5 balances that danger with, “Setting aside prejudices and the idea that everyone is trying to scam you.”

Experience and expertise were mentioned by both respondents 10 and 12. In that same realm, multiple respondents mentioned not knowing how to properly handle and address mental health illnesses which are prevalent in this population. Respondent 1 first mentioned resources and a challenge but continues, “Mental health of folks is so important to address especially trauma issues.”

One of the more insightful responses to question five was from respondent 14. A challenge that this respondent brought out was one that impacts more than just the physical or emotional needs of the person. This particular challenge deals with the spiritual nature of compassion ministry. Respondent 14 describes the challenges as “involving the Word in such a way that does not create a conditional environment that gives an incorrect impression of God (e.g. if you want to get something, then you need to hear/listen to this devotion, chapel or do this Bible study or go to church, etc.).” Respondent 14 is cautioning against a transactional approach

to charity and compassion ministry which tarnishes the message of the gospel as well as hurts the one receiving the gift.

***Question #6: In your opinion, what is a blessing (or blessings) that flows from carrying out compassion ministry?***

There were many blessings that the respondents highlighted. Respondent 4 said,

Jesus tells us to be generous and to give. They say virtue is its own reward, and it is a satisfying thing to give with the right kind of heart. Anything beyond that is gravy. When I was a seminarian, I was optimistic that churches could turn compassion into membership. I don't think we should expect it, and it hasn't really happened for me, despite the 10+ people we've really helped out financially. Rather, give and be kind. That's something Jesus tells us to do, without expecting a return.

The goal of compassion ministry to those experiencing homelessness or any other person cannot have the ulterior motive of getting them to become a member. Rather, it must flow from a heart of love for our neighbor. Respondent 11 echoes this in their response to question six as well. "I wouldn't approach it in term of what we get out of it, but in terms of part of what Jesus has called us to do." While it would be wrong to only focus on "what we get out of it," there certainly are many important and faith-strengthening blessings that flow from compassion ministry. Here are a few of the blessings highlighted by the respondents.

Respondent 3 notes that this ministry opens doors to new relationships and "sharing a safe place with people." Respondent 10 mentions the blessing of being able "to share Jesus' love in an unselfish, concrete way." Respondent 14 said,

Three major blessings that have come out are (1) The stronger, deeper relationships we have developed in our neighborhood where we know each other by name and also celebrate joys and successes in our neighbor's lives, (2) The informal ways we've engaged in spiritual conversations and prayer that come across as authentic and meaningful that provide more opportunity for next

encounters to follow up and check-in, (3) Involving neighbors in volunteering at our pantry where the neighbors are serving each other and with each other.

***Question #7: How (if at all) has your time ministering in Milwaukee affected your view of those experiencing homelessness?***

Some of the responses tended to lean more toward a negative view of the person in need. For example, respondent 10 remarks “I tend to think most people who are truly homeless have chosen to do that, either consciously wanting to live that way, or ending up there because of bad decisions/actions.” While personal decisions and systematic issues can be the cause of someone experiencing homelessness, there are no doubt many other factors that come into play. Respondent 12 expresses, “It can also be from poor landlords, eviction records, and domestic abuse situations. It is an incredibly complicated situation and it will take the effort of so many people to bring about a solution.”

Other respondents’ views have become more negative toward the government. The perspective of respondent 2 shifted during their time in Milwaukee as they see the problem of homelessness as less of a result of personal decisions and more of a systematic issue. This is in line with the response from respondent 9 who has a growing concern about the lack of government action to help in this area. Respondent 13 has become “much more aware of the lack of mental health resources for people who live on the street.”

Although many were negative, there were also many positive responses. Respondent 3 has “heightened esteem for those who live under such difficulty.” Respondents 4 and 11 feel more “empathetic and compassionate.” Respondent 14 has recognized a change in mindset from feeling rushed to a feeling of urgency.

I do not need to rush to help someone, I should never be in a rush. When you rush you can make mistakes, let assumptions dictate, and perhaps be taken advantage of. Rather than rush to help, I am urgent to help. Because when I am urgent, I am focused and patient. Urgency helps me listen and learn what someone needs and doesn't need. Urgency helps me to know when to say, "Yes," and when to say, "No," or when the time is to act.

### *Survey Takeaways*

Through the responses to this survey, it became clear that everyone comes to the topic of compassion ministry to the homeless with a different perspective. However, there seemed to be common mindsets that emerged through these different perspectives. The first mindset was one that has a strong desire to help and has turned that desire into action. These are churches that see the need for action and have established a way for their congregation to contribute to those needs. A second mindset sees that many are in need but they do not spring into action because they do not have the means to do so. The third mindset is more complicated because it sees the need and it feels the desire to help but does not know how to carry it out. This is when guilt comes into the mix. When the desire is there but obstacles hinder a person from carrying out that desire, a guilty conscience is bound to follow. The most common obstacles mentioned were resources and knowledge.

## WHAT SHALL WE DO?

So, what should those with the second or third mindset do? What do you do if you want to help but don't have the resources or don't know what is the right way to help? There are three options you could take.

One option is to be apathetic. You could do nothing and attempt to suppress the guilt which benefits neither you nor the person experiencing homelessness. In fact, this approach harms you and the person in need. Suppressing guilt may help temporarily but that guilt might come back and if it does, it will probably be stronger than before. The apathetic approach also harms the person in need because it disregards both the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of that individual.

A second option involves what could be called conventional charity.<sup>34</sup> Conventional charity provides short-term relief but ultimately does long-term damage. Christians could offer support to the homeless with material goods such as money, food, or clothes. This approach may relieve the guilt of the Christian and help the person temporarily but could harm the person experiencing homelessness in the long term. The long-term harm comes in the form of building

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34. Conventional Charity is an idea that Lupton discusses in his book *Toxic Chariry*. Corbett and Fikkert also bring up this idea in their book *When Helping Hurts*.

dependency by doing “for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them.”<sup>35</sup>

A third approach is working towards a ministry of healing.<sup>36</sup> The Christian could seek to build a relationship with the person experiencing homelessness, assess their immediate physical needs, and, most importantly, look to give them something worth more than any material gift they could receive, the message of their reconciliation with God. The third option is by far the best and most impactful approach. In their book on alleviating poverty, Corbett and Fikkert explain the ultimate goal of caring for those who are stuck in a tough spot.

The goal is *not* to make the materially poor all over the world into middle-to-upper class North Americans. Nor is the goal to make sure that the materially poor have enough money. Rather, the goal is to restore people to a full expression of humanness, to being what God created us to be, people who glorify God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.<sup>37</sup>

In the introduction of this paper, I asked the following questions. “Is there anything a Christian congregation can do to help these struggling men and women out of a difficult situation like homelessness? What is a Christian to do when they are confronted with guilt as they see someone experiencing homelessness on the side of the street?” The answer to these questions is to share the good news of Jesus’ salvation with them. But as some of the respondents from the survey pointed out, this isn’t always easy to do.

We do not always feel equipped with either the knowledge or the proper resources to help people experiencing homelessness. Often this is because of the vast spectrum of different needs

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35. Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 3.

36. Healing both the physical needs and well as the spiritual needs.

37. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 74.

that this population often has. The final portion of this thesis is intended to encourage you and give you some ideas on how to overcome the obstacles of a lack of knowledge and resources.

### **Overcoming the Lack of Resources**

As an individual or as a congregation, it can be challenging to afford enough to provide for yourself, not to mention trying to help those in need around you. So, it is understandable to see that the majority of respondents identified “resources” as a major challenge when it comes to compassion ministry. In his paper on compassion ministry, Ryan Kolander describes a common mindset for a congregation: “We don’t have enough human or monetary resources to engage in a mercy ministry. Pastor is way overworks. We can’t add another program. We already must staff education, facilities, worship council, elders, evangelism, and more. This might be an eighth or ninth priority, and we can’t properly do it.”<sup>38</sup>

It is important to remember that you don’t always need to supply all the resources yourself. You can refer those asking for assistance to resources and services that are already established to help those in need. For example, the city of Milwaukee has many resources available for people, especially for those experiencing homelessness. A congregation can refer someone to these resources and by doing so relieve themselves of the financial burden of supplying their own resources. These resources include shelters, food pantries, health clinics, and legal services.<sup>39</sup>

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38. Kolander, *Cultivating*, 7.

39. Look to Appendix 2 for a full list of services offered in Milwaukee.



Granted, these resources will not always provide exactly what is needed but they are a great start. As you become more familiar with the resources and services that are available around you, you can become aware of gaps that you or your church can fill. Fikkert and Corbett outline three basic categories that an organization can focus on providing – relief, rehabilitation, and development.

“Relief” can be defined as the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis....

“Rehabilitation” begins as soon as the bleeding stops; it seeks to restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their precrisis conditions....

“Development” is a process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved – both the “helpers” and the “helped” – closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation.<sup>40</sup>

However, Fikkert and Corbett highlight the challenge for any organization to provide all three of these categories.<sup>41</sup> No church or organization can provide everything that a community needs so knowing what is already offered and discovering in what ways you can supplement is vital. As you assess your strengths, weaknesses, and resources, the place where you fit in will become clearer and you can find the best way to care for these groups.

Service to this population may look different depending on your gifts and abilities. Maybe your gifts are best suited for relief and you hand out gift cards, food, or clothing to those on the streets. Perhaps you fit better in a rehabilitation role and you are a great communicator who can help those in need to take their first steps to recovery. Or maybe you are a strategic planner who has the means to set up systems that will help build community. Find your niche and let the love of Christ be reflected in your actions.

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40. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 109–110.

41. Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 113.

### Overcoming the Lack of Knowledge

A second challenge that emerged from the responses to the survey was not knowing how to help. Looking at the statistics that are out there for the homeless epidemic that is sweeping through the nation can be daunting. It can make it seem like the task of caring for this population is impossible. But the key to overcoming this challenge is realizing that your goal is not to solve the problem of homelessness. Your goal should be more personal... more individual. The best way to figure out how to help people struggling with homelessness is to get out there and meet them in a real and tangible way. This can be done by volunteering at shelters, food banks, or clothing banks. I had the opportunity to experience this firsthand.

In October of 2023, I had the opportunity to volunteer for Project Homeless Connect (PHC). PHC is “an annual event that brings resources and services together under one roof to best serve those experiencing homelessness.”<sup>42</sup> This one-day event creates a one-stop shop for Milwaukee’s homeless population and provides services such as clothes, dental exams, haircuts, hygiene products, a job fair, medical exams, legal guidance, and much more.

My time spent volunteering was valuable for many reasons. It was helpful to see all the different resources that were provided. It allowed me to speak with experts in this area and I was able to meet many wonderful people throughout the day, both people who were currently experiencing homelessness as well as other volunteers.

The highlight of my time was a conversation that I had with a man who was homeless just five years ago. When I asked him what it was that helped him get out of that difficult situation, this is what he said:

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42. Statement found on the website for Project Homeless Connect. <https://unitedwaygmwc.org/Project-Homeless-Connect>

When I was homeless, I had access to lots of resources like the ones offered here at PHC. In fact, I came here to PHC a few times while I was experiencing homelessness. The truth is that for many people, the resources are not what gets people out. People get people out. None of those resources would have been any benefit at all if I did not meet people who wanted the best for me. It's the love and care of others that helped me the most.<sup>43</sup>

Did you hear it in the man's response? As a Christian, you have exactly what this population needs. You don't have all the resources needed. You don't need to have all the facts. You don't need to know exactly how to fix the problem. The best way to overcome the lack of knowledge is to get out there! Go and meet the people where they are. Learn from the experts who have regular interaction with this population. Have a conversation with those struggling in this way and listen with your heart. Many of the people that need help do not expect you to have all the right answers. Many of them are just desperate for connection with people who care and that is exactly what Christians have to offer. We can offer not only a meaningful connection to a community but to Christ himself.

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43. Anonymous Conversation with a man at PHC.

## CONCLUSSION

If you find yourself feeling guilty as you see a homeless person on the side of the road, here are some things that you should know. One, your salvation is won by Christ's work alone. What you do in that moment at the stoplight does not determine whether or not you are saved or make you a better or worse Christian in the eyes of God. Two, know that God does call for his people to carry out compassion ministry to marginalized groups including the homeless. At times, this is difficult to carry out. But know that there is no "right way" to carry out compassion ministry to the homeless. Everyone has different gifts and talents which the Lord has blessed them with. So, if the guilt rises, find a way to help. Go volunteer at a shelter. Meet people at a community meal. Build a relationship with someone who needs help, discover their needs, let the love of Christ shine in your interaction, and be amazed at the many ways the Lord will bless your work.

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## APPENDIX I

Question #1: How long have you been serving in the city of Milwaukee?

1. 34 years
2. 18 years
3. Current outreach ministries in place 12 years.
4. 6 years, going on 7.
5. twenty years
6. My ministry here has been since 2019.
7. 22 years
8. 10
9. 17 years
10. 2 years
11. 15 years
12. 3 years
13. 12 Year
14. Just over 2 years.

Question #2: How would you describe your congregations attitude towards compassion ministry?

1. Definitely strong
2. Top priority. A passion and catalyst for our congregation.
3. We seem is as mandated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and central to our mission.
4. We have an Assistance Fund, which is contributed to quarterly. Only a few members contribute to it, but I know that numerous members have done various other forms of charitable giving, including volunteering with different organizations.
5. supportive,
6. Extremely high. We are active participants in the neighborhood. We co-founded Food for the Journey, where the suburban churches build community gardens and grow fresh vegetables for our churches with food pantries. We developed the Calvary Resource Card that provides information on where to find food, shelter, health care, jobs, etc. in the 53233 zip code. That card is requested by local government agencies, churches, and non-profits. We have a special partnership with Project STAY, a MPS high-school for homeless students. We provide furniture and other resources for those stays at St. Bens.
7. We are open to helping those who are less fortunate, but we are at the same time wary, because there are many who take advantage of people's compassion, and we are also careful of the need for safety and security if we minister to those in need.
8. Fair
9. They recognize the need to help those who can't always help themselves.

10. It's baffling. When should/shouldn't we help? How should we help?
11. They believe it is a very good thing
12. Highly motivated, empathetic, helpful
13. Welcoming to people who venture in off the street
14. The general attitude is positive and one rooted in God's heart and love for people. I think the difficulty is helping them distinguish between a sinful pity and godly compassion. By sinful pity I mean one looking at our neighbors as those in need who are incapable of helping themselves and need a "savior" to step in. This particular perspective can often be rooted in stereotypes, fear compelling one to just help someone and get away from an uncomfortable situation, and often can lead to dehumanizing someone (seeing them as poor puppies rather than fellow human beings and image-bearers of God loved and saved by God; favoring an us vs. them mentality rather than a mentality of they are fellow neighbors). In contrast to sinful pity, compassion is rooted in God's concern and love for his crown of creation that goes deeper than the physical and mental needs, but also to the soul--to the spiritual needs. Compassion is seeing your fellow neighbor and Christ's love moving you to listen and be attentive to your neighbor so you can serve meaningfully with specificity. Compassion sees your neighbor who may be in need and Christ's love compels you to be present in shining your light (your good deeds in word and action) and sharing the light (the gospel). Compassion seeks to equip someone with the gospel to live and to persevere no matter the circumstances with a mindset that is heaven-oriented. I would say our congregation is growing in this area and maturing in their understanding of what compassion means and how to show it.

Question #3: On a scale of 1-10, how often would you say that someone asks your church for assistance of some kind? (Money, gas, food, etc.)

1. 10
2. 6
3. 10
4. 6
5. 5
6. 10
7. 5
8. 5
9. 6
10. 7
11. 5
12. 7
13. 10
14. 10

Question #4: Does your church run or partner with a food bank, clothing bank, or soup kitchen?

1. Yes
2. We operate a monthly community meal and clothing ministry, as well as a weekly food pantry.



3. We run a food bank and a weekly community meal.
4. No, though I would like to.
5. Yes to food bank and clothing bank.
6. Yes
7. No
8. Yes
9. No, but we serve or assist in other outreach efforts
10. No, but we have Pick and Save gift cards.
11. We support the work of the Rescue Mission, which offers meals to guests as part of it's ministry.
12. Yes, Milwaukee Rescue Mission
13. Yes
14. Yes

Question #5: In your opinion, what is a challenge (or challenges) that your church faces when it comes to carrying out compassion ministry?

1. Resources, but also the need to get to root causes. Mental health of folks is so important to address, especially trauma issues.
2. It's too easy for people to get into the mindset of simply doing charity, a good deed that helps the less fortunate. We are constantly lifting up our values of forming personal relationships and building mutual community together as one.
3. Occasional difficulties scheduling volunteers.
4. Lots of people who are in need will go knocking on any door they can find. To them, we're one of many possible places to find cash, and nothing else. Sometimes people aren't in that much of need and lie to get something. I have a few repeat customers who show up when money gets tight. And then some people get some money and then we never hear back if the money was a blessing or not. It's certainly not as cut-and-dried as a funeral is, for example.
5. Setting aside prejudices and the idea that everyone is trying to scam you.
6. Financial and volunteer resources.
7. We are an ethnic church, and this tends to take our eyes away from compassion ministry. But compassion ministry also takes a lot of energy to do well, and not all churches can do it.
8. Financial constraints
9. None
10. 1. Knowing how/who to help. 2. The lack of resources (money and people and expertise) to help in lots of situations.
11. Resources
12. Resources and Experience
13. 1. How to leverage limited assets to help as best we can. 2. Treating people who are difficult with dignity.
14. Three major challenges we face are: (1) Feeling equipped to have conversations with people that aren't always delving deeper into the negative situation someone may be in, (2) Focusing and narrowing the items we want to offer from our pantry that our neighbors need without overwhelming ourselves, (3) Involving the Word in such a way that does not create a conditional environment that gives an incorrect impression

of God (e.g. if you want to get something, then you need to hear/listen to this devotion, chapel or do this Bible study or go to church, etc.).

Question #6: In your opinion, what is a blessing or blessings that flows from carrying out compassion ministry?

1. We are blessed with enthusiasm and love.
2. Love abounds and lives are changed.
3. Building relationships, meeting new people, sharing a safe space with people.
4. Jesus tells us to be generous and to give. They say virtue is its own reward, and it is a satisfying thing to give with the right kind of heart. Anything beyond that is gravy. When I was a seminarian (and I wrote a senior thesis on a very similar topic to what you're exploring. If you find it, just know it's not that good or helpful), I was optimistic that churches could turn compassion into membership. I don't think we should expect it, and it hasn't really happened for me, despite the 10+ people we've really helped out financially. Rather, give and be kind. That's something Jesus tells us to do, without expecting a return. As my wife says - and she works in the nonprofit/charitable world - giving with expectation is manipulation.
5. We are to recognize more clearly our own blessings and also live out our faith in a meaningful way.
6. We went from a dying church to one of the most vitalized churches in Milwaukee once the focus went from saving the building to recognizing who our neighbors were and asked how we could better serve them.
7. Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
8. Fighting Western Comfort and Entitlements
9. Maintaining compassion for those less fortunate. Strengthen bonds of those members who serve in this way.
10. You get to share Jesus' love in an unselfish, concrete way.
11. I wouldn't approach it in terms of what we get out of it, but in terms of part of what Jesus has called us to do.
12. It opens eyes to what the people in our community are dealing with. It breeds compassion and understanding. Also, it compels people to serve more, donate more and be more informed on issues like homelessness and lack of basic resources.
13. Blessing flow when the Gospel imperative to love one's neighbor is lived out regardless of who is on the receiving end.
14. Three major blessings that have come out are: (1) The stronger, deeper relationships we have developed in our neighborhood where we know each other by name and also celebrate joys and successes in our neighbor's lives, (2) The informal ways we've engaged in spiritual conversations and prayer that come across as authentic and meaningful that provide more opportunity for next encounters to follow up and check in, (3) Involving neighbors in volunteering at our pantry where the neighbors are serving each other and with each other.

Question #7: How (if at all) has your time ministering in Milwaukee affected your view of those experiencing homelessness?

1. It has become more fervent.
2. A clear look into how homelessness is much less a result of any personal issue of those experiencing it and much more a systemic issue of how we as a society choose to set our priorities in organizing our public resources.
3. It has broadened my view of the reasons a person may be without housing and heightened my esteem for those who live under such difficulty who so often manifest demonstrable kindness and grace.
4. People who are truly homeless are usually affected by addiction, mental illness, or both. Learning that has made me more empathetic to the homeless. That said, a person on the street with a sign asking for change may not be homeless. My wife has taught me to look at the possessions a "homeless" person has with them. If it's just a small backpack, that person must have some place to stay. All a homeless person has in the world is with them at all times. I think Milwaukee does a much better job than some other cities on helping the homeless, but I assume the cold climate pushes out the homeless more so than Vegas or LA, for example.
5. I try to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. I don't think anyone starts out saying, "Someday I want to stand on a corner with a cardboard sign and ask people for money." But it happens.
6. Honestly, I have done this type of ministry before coming to Calvary. Sadly, not much has changed despite everyone's best efforts. The challenge is that many of those who come to this church with needs struggle with mental illness. Just getting access to medications that could help them is an extreme challenge.
7. It is a very complicated problem. It takes a lot of time, and you have to immerse yourself in their lives. And it is very hard. And they have to be willing to change. And sometimes people just do not want to change, and you can't make people change. The last thing you need is to have a savior mentality because you can't solve everyone's problem.
8. Significantly
9. The city/county of Milwaukee has gutted its mental health budget over the last couple of decades. My view toward the homeless has not changed, but my concern at the lack of government action to help them on this level has grown quite a bit.
10. I can't say it's affected my view of it much one way or another. (I tend to think most people who are truly homeless have chosen to do that, either consciously wanting to live that way, or ending up there because of bad decisions/actions.) The big challenge is what to do with that rare person who doesn't fit that mold. For example, we have a young man (19, I think) who says his family hates him, so he's found himself without lodging a couple times. (One Saturday night he slept by the church doors, then came to church and Bible study.) We don't have the people/money/resources to do much. We hooked him up with 211, which does have a shelter for men, and that helped for a night. He now seems to be back living with one of his sisters, so it seems to be working out. But, it's hard to figure out.
11. I use to work at the Milwaukee Rescue Mission as a counselor in their rehab program. So I've had a lot of interactions with the homeless. It has made me much more aware of their situation and compassionate towards them.

12. Since working with the Rescue Mission and reading the book "Evicted" Which is specifically written about Milwaukee...I've come to understand far more about the homelessness specifically in our area. Yes, drugs do play a large roll in people not being able to pay bill resulting in losing their homes...but often it can also be from poor landlords, eviction records and domestic abuse situations. It is an incredibly complicated situation and it will take the effort of so many people to being about a solution.
13. It has made me much more aware of the lack of mental health resources for people who live on the street. Also, how hard it is for people without an address to get ahead-- even when they are really capable of doing so.
14. Those experiencing homelessness are those who need God's love, promise, and direction, and God calls us to provide that generously. I do not need to rush to help someone, I should never be in a rush. When you rush you can make mistakes, let assumptions dictate, and perhaps be taken advantage of. Rather than rush to help, I am urgent to help. Because when I am urgent I am focused and patient. Urgency helps me listen and learn what someone needs and doesn't need. Urgency helps me to know when to say, "Yes," and when to say, "No," or when the time is to act. Jesus' words, "The poor you will always have," provide a unique comfort that I am not here to solve world hunger or the housing crisis, but I am here to serve a deeper issue than the physical and mental...I'm here to serve the spiritual. However, that does not mean I ignore someone's physical and mental needs. Jesus' words, "Whatever you do for the least of these you did for me," provide me the awareness that I attend to my neighbors needs with attentiveness and love with a goal to serving their spiritual needs as if serving Christ himself. And in all this, I pray the Lord give me and the congregation the wisdom, patience, discernment, and willingness to minister as his ambassadors of love, truth, and hope.

## APPENDIX II

## MEAL SITES

## Agape Community Center

Contact: Carly Garry  
 464.4440 (x222)  
 6100 N 42nd St 53209  
 Community Services: 8:30am-  
 5:30pm  
 Meals: Tue Wed 5:00 to 6:00pm

All Saints Meal Program 445.5610  
 Contact: Nicole Pate (x103)  
 4051 North 26th St, 53216  
 Meals: Mon, Tue, Thur 5:30-6:30pm

## Bethesda Outreach Center

Contact: Mother Bates  
 344.9881  
 2810 W Highland 53208  
 Meals: Tue - Thu 12:00-1:15pm

Casa Maria – 344-5745  
 1131 North 21st St, 53233  
 Women with Children

Central Seventh Day Adventist  
 273-7933 Bus stop 9th & Wisconsin  
 4th & 5th Sat 4pm  
 Soup, sandwiches & clothing

## The Gathering

Contact: Ginny - St James  
 272 4122  
 930 W. State Street, Milwaukee, WI  
 53233  
 Meals: Mon - Fri 8:30-9:30am  
 Sat 11:30am-12:30pm

Christian Faith Fellowship East  
 724 S Layton Blvd 53215  
 Meals: Mon & Wed 4:30-5:30pm  
 Sat 11:30am-12:30pm

ONG Neighborhood Center  
 3421 W Lisbon Ave 53208  
 Meals: Sat 11:30am-12:30pm

Gesu Parish 288.7101  
 Contact: Eileen Ciezki  
 1210 W Michigan Ave 53208  
 (Lower level brick bldg)  
 Meals: 1st 2nd & 3rd Sat 5:40-  
 6:30pm

Metropolitan Baptist 562.7200  
 Contact: LaVerne Smith  
 1345 W Burleigh 53206  
 Sunday Breakfast 8:00-9:00am  
 Tue & Thu Dinner 5:00-6:00pm

Milwaukee Rescue Mission  
 Women Only 344.2211  
 830 N 19th St 53233  
 Serves meals at 1820 Wells St:  
 7:00am 12:00pm 4:45pm  
 Prayer service mandatory half hour  
 before each meal.  
 Men Only 935.0200  
 1820 W Wells  
 Chapel First

Daily Bkfst 6:15am, Lunch 11:15,  
Dinner 4:15

Open Door Cafe 276.9814  
Contact: Schauneille Allen (3112)  
831 North Van Buren 53202  
Meals: Sun-Fri 11:15-12:30pm  
Bag lunch after - 1:-2:30pm

St Ben's Community Meal  
Contact: Fr. Mike Bertram, OFM  
Cap.  
(414) 271-0135

930 W. State Street, Milwaukee, WI  
53233  
Meals: Sun - Fri 5:15-6:30pm

St Vincent De Paul 649.9555  
Contact: Jean Baumgardner  
- 931 W Madison St 53204  
Meals: Sun - Fri 5:30-6:15pm  
- 2610 N Martin Luther King Dr  
53212  
Meals: Mon - Fri 5:30-6:15pm

Vets Place Central 342-5000  
330 W Wells Vets Only  
Daily Bkfs 7am, lunch 12, Dinner  
6pm

## CLINICS

Ascension Angel of Hope Clinic (414) 647-  
7466  
Contact: Marysol Zeidler, Clinic Supervisor  
209 W Orchard St  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
All insurances accepted, Ascension Charity  
care available for uninsured based on income,  
sliding scale fee  
Accepting new patients  
Clinic Hours: Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m.  
to 4:00 p.m., Fridays, 8:00 a.m. to noon.

City on a Hill 931-6670  
2224 W Kilbourn  
Uninsured only: ID req'd  
Clinic, health screening  
Lunch & free bag groceries 2nd Sa 12-3:30

Healing Center 671-4325  
611 W National 4th floor  
Adult Sexual abuse survivors  
Call for appt M 9-5pm; tu-Th 9-6pm; F 9-  
2pm

Marquette Women's & Children's Clinic  
755-6970  
1821 N 16th St 53205 and Cross Lutheran  
Uninsured women & children; appointment  
only  
Call M Tu 10-am-1pm; Th 8am-noon

Ascension St Ben's Clinic (414) 765-0606  
Contact: Marysol Zeidler, Clinic Supervisor  
1004 N. 10th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 43233  
Clinic Hours: Monday through Thursday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Closed Fridays.  
All insurances accepted, Ascension Charity  
care available for uninsured based on income.  
Primary care for homeless men and women.

STD Specialties 264.8800  
3251 N Holton 53212  
Mon- Thurs 8am to 3pm, call for  
appointment  
Saturday 9am to 12pm (gay & bisexual only)  
HIV & syphilis testing free anytime.  
Can test women, just no pelvic exam.

Salvation Army Clinic 265.6360 ext 22  
 Contact: Aubrey (Social Worker)  
 1730 N 7th St 53205  
 Appt: M, Tu, Th F 8-3pm  
 Walk-ins: M, Tu, Th F 8-12noon; W 6-8pm  
 Appt are seen before walk-ins

Repairers of the Breach 342-9323  
 Contact: MacCanon Brown  
 M-Sat: 7am-4pm  
 Governed by homeless persons, offers  
 variety  
 of programs & services  
 Clinic: 1335 W Vliet. Free walk-in clinic for  
 all

Hours vary weekly. Call 934-9035

UWM House of Peace Community Nursing  
 Clinic  
 Contact: Beth Peterman 933.1590  
 1702 W Walnut St. 53205  
 M-Th 9am-12noon; 1-4pm  
 Call ahead to verify what services are  
 available.

Walker's Point Community Clinic  
 Contact: Steve Ohly 384.1400  
 611 W National, Suite 400, 53204  
 M – F 9-5. Must sign up for "lottery"  
 before 8:00am for appointment

## FOOD PANTRIES

All Saints Pantry 444.5610  
 Contact: Peggy Owens  
 4051 N 25th St 53216  
 Tue & Fri 9:30-noon

Casa Maria  
 1131 North 21st St, 53205  
 Mon & Wed 10-2pm  
 Call ahead for appointment

Central City Churches Outreach  
 Ministry  
 Contact: Alicia Ellis 342.1522  
 3022 W Wisconsin Ave, 53208  
 Mon -Thu 9:30-11:30am (bring  
 photo ID, proof of current address)  
 Serves zip codes 53205, 53208,  
 53233

Friedens Community Ministries  
 289.6030  
 Contact: Broiann Pyant  
 1220 W Vilet (main)  
 Mon-Fri 8:30-4:00pm

Hope House 645.2122  
 Contact: Stephanie  
 209 W Orchard 53204  
 Tue & Thur 12:30-2:30pm; Sat  
 10:00am-12noon  
 Serves 53204 (Bring piece of mail,  
 photo ID)

House Of Peace 933.1300  
 Contact: Dominique McGee  
 1702 W Walnut St 53205  
 Mon - Fri 9:00-12noon; 1:00-4:00pm  
 Serves zip codes 53205 53233 53206

St Martin de Porres 372.3090  
 Contact: Pat Ellis  
 128 W Burleigh  
 Serves between Capitol and North;  
 Holton and 20th St.  
 Mon. 3-4:30; Thur 5:00-6:30; Sat  
 12:30-2:00pm  
 ID and mail with current address  
 required

St Rose  
 514 N 31st St  
 Tu & F 9:30-noon  
 Serves 53208 only

Salvation Army Social Service  
 831.1156  
 Contact: Donna  
 1645 N 25th 53205  
 Mon-Wed, Fri 8:30-11:00am; 12:30-  
 3:00pm  
 Thur 1:00-3:00pm

UMCS  
 3910 W Lisbon  
 M, W, F noon-4pm.  
 All Milwaukee zips served

## LEGAL SERVICES

Centro Legal  
 Family law & criminal  
 misdemeanors  
 Low-income only. Bring documents  
 Call for appt. M 9-10am

Community Advocates 449-4777  
 728 N James Lovell (7th St)  
 Info & referrals: T-19, Badgercare,  
 Tenant-  
 landlord, housing, food share,  
 utilities, disability  
 appeals, health care, case mgmt.  
 Walk-ins OK; best to call first.  
 M: 11-5pm, Tu-Th 9-5pm; F: 9-4pm

House of Peace Legal Services  
 Contact: Choua Vang (x22)  
 933-1302  
 1702 W Walnut St 53205  
 Tuesday 3:00-6:30pm (walk in with  
 paperwork)

Legal Action of Wisconsin  
 278.7722  
 230 W Wells 53203  
 Call for various service hours

Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee  
 727.5300  
 521 N 8th St. 53233  
 Mon & Wed 1:30-3:30pm  
 Available Tuesdays at St Ben's 4:30-  
 6:30pm

Marquette Legal Clinic- House of  
 Peace location  
 Tu 3-7pm, bring documents. Walk-in  
 only  
 - County Courthouse location  
 901 N 9th, #106  
 W 5-7pm, Th&F 2-4pm