

Building Community by Serving Community: Ways Congregations Can Organize for Justice Equity

Excerpted from an article by Bonnie Andrews, retired nonprofit executive

God calls us out of the church and into the community to share in the concerns of our neighbors, work together to alleviate suffering and bring about God's justice. How does that look in your neighborhood?

Research by the Center on Faith in Communities* showed that *while faith motivates service, service magnifies faith*. Your congregation's service to and connection with the neighborhood can create a way for the congregation to put its faith into action, that creates growth.

The first step is to see how the needs in the neighborhood and the concerns/passions of church members align. An inventory of the neighborhood (for an inventory, see "Justice-Seeking Congregations") and a survey of members' skills and interests will help this process. Do you have hungry neighbors, and do you have members who like to cook? Your meal ministry could start small, monitor progress and take larger steps as you learn, gain momentum, and increase commitment.

Some congregations have the energy and resources to create these ministries to serve in and with the community. Other models include **connecting** with another congregation or nonprofit, using the neighborhood inventory as a place to start. Are there existing programs that you can support with donations or volunteers? Do you have a school nearby, and does your congregation include retired teachers who would love to tutor? These connections could lead to a long-term, weekly connection, or an annual donation event.

Action Questions:

1. Have you conducted a neighborhood inventory? What did you learn? If not, how might you begin?
2. How does service impact your congregation? Your neighborhood?
3. What partnerships for service are possible?
4. Do you know how members are already serving your neighborhood? How could you build on these connections?

*Center on Faith in Communities: <https://www.centeronfic.org/v2/aboutUs.html>

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