

When Charity Does Not Provide Justice

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*Last September, the NBA Incubate Initiative welcomed its largest SENT Seminar cohort yet! The annual four-day training opportunity equips Disciples social entrepreneurs of faith for leadership and change as they nurture emerging health and social service ministries. This project, **Phoenix Outreach**, seeks to provide an environment where justice involved individuals can become equipped to create stability in their lives and the lives of family.*



As I reflect on my experience at the SENT seminar hosted by the National Benevolent Association, the images captured by the stained glass window below helped me formulate a greater understanding of the ministry I came here to learn how to build. As I listened to what all of the partners and participants said, it suddenly became clear that the reason we are called into the ministry of the mission of God in diverse ways is so that there will always be one faction of people coming together and finding strength in each other's vision.

This work of art sits at a crossroads; it sits at the corner of a quite visible divide of the disparity of "to have" or "have not". It sits in the shadow of a mindset of a fabricated illusion of superiority. While its imagery suggests a welcome, the reality of "just across the street" is a stark contrast to the comfort that this picture exudes. We have gathered here because we are a people who are willing to rise against its own system in order to ensure that the command to set people free always remains in operation.

While here, I learned that at the end of the day, if my charity towards those marginalized by systems of injustice does not end with their voices being raised in advocacy for themselves to effect change in the policies which marginalize them, then my charity, while good, is not providing justice. The SENT seminar gave me a deeper and clearer understanding of how Phoenix Outreach can make a positive impact toward change in communities by providing an environment for the justice



involved individual re-entering community to become empowered by envisioning new life through the lens of their needs, and the tools they feel they need in order to challenge the institutional status quo of oppression. This was eye-opening for me, in that this very insight led me to think of Jesus and how He in his time tried to get the people to see that the institution of religious rules or the culture of church was susceptible to becoming an Empire; therefore, even the brick and mortar of the Church must come to realize that service can also take place when policies and

powers change. When policies and powers change, the cry of the people resounds and empowerment begins.

In coming here to the SENT Seminar, I learned that I had taken the first step of my next step toward developing an effective ministry; the first step toward the next step of building confidence for myself and becoming a part of a network of people seeking to find sustainable ways for change and growth to occur. And finally, the personal realization that being called into ministry involves being committed to making a difference and meeting the needs of my community by giving in such a fashion that the end result, which is justice, is not hindered or thwarted.

Phoenix Outreach Ministries seeks to provide an environment where justice involved individuals can become equipped to create stability in their lives and the lives of family. This will be accomplished through educational classes, structured practices of Restorative Justice Models, guided interaction, and spiritual recovery practices. Recognizing each individual's dignity and uniqueness- we believe that by acknowledging every individual's innate power, this program can create practices and community agreements that bind/weave individuals and communities in different social contexts to have common language/reference points in order to choose to live intentionally and purposefully so that collective liberation can be experienced for all people.

The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate