

Living parables

BY REBECCA GRACE

It's that time of year again, the time when I begin searching for the perfect shoe box to fill with small gifts that will be shipped to a needy child this Christmas. I find joy shopping for goodies to put in my special box because I know I'm helping one of "the least of these."

So why is it that I'm apt to help the needy only at Thanksgiving and Christmas? What about the rest of the year? Shouldn't my life be a reflection of my Savior who "came not to be served but to serve?"

It was Christ who washed His disciples feet, then said to them: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15, ESV).

In his song, "The Basin and the Towel," singer/songwriter Michael Card wrote:

*In any ordinary place,
on any ordinary day,
the parable can live again
when one will kneel and one will yield.*

The following are living parables, ordinary people who knelt in prayer and yielded their lives in obedience to the Savior.

A clinic for Christ

Dr. Robert Campbell is an internist and pediatrician who has been a physician for nine years. In November 2007 after three years of praying, he and Dr. Grant Scarborough, also an internist and pediatrician, co-founded Christ Community Health Services Augusta Inc. (CCHSA) and opened Christ Community Clinic in Augusta, Georgia.

Christ Community Clinic is a comprehensive primary care nonprofit medical clinic that provides both inpatient and outpatient services for children and adults.

"We try to make primary health care available to anybody in our community despite their ability to pay," Campbell explained. "Right now, 70% of our patients

are uninsured, and we see these folks based on their income and the number of people they have in their household. We slide their fee up or down based on a federal poverty guideline."

When it comes to caring for patients who are homeless, the clinic absorbs all of the cost. The doctors are able to get lab work done at a local hospital for an inexpensive fee. They also try to prescribe medication off the \$4 plan at specific pharmacies and then utilize state foundations and pharmaceutical companies' charitable programs.

"We're using all of our resources and gifts to care for people around us and make our professional services accessible," Campbell said. "In fact, ... the only income we take out of the clinic itself is the cost of our malpractice, health insurance and all our professional fees."

Campbell and Scarborough work seven days a month as hospitalists. They live off what they earn during those seven days. That's what pays the bills and offsets other costs. But neither chooses to live the wealthy lifestyle typical of many physicians.



Grant Scarborough and Robert Campbell

"Even modest living for a family-care physician will prohibit you from being able to care for the poor," Campbell said.

It's easy for a physician to live in a way that he can't afford to take care of the poor because his money is going toward a big house, nice cars and other material possessions.

"We disciple young medical students

and show them the realities of medical economics and how to basically live lives of missionaries in our own country," Campbell said. "We teach them to think like a missionary."

In other words, "We try to get folks to just think outside the box as far as how they structure their lives so they can be freed up from the worries of the world and the pursuit of wealth that tends to choke us out and make us ineffective for the Gospel," he added.

Living sacrificially to advance the Gospel began making sense to Campbell while he was in medical school. The influence of ministries such as the Christian Community Health Fellowship, Christ Community Health Services, the Christian Medical and Dental Associations and Medical Campus Outreach, help Campbell apply this understanding to his vocation.

"Understanding your own brokenness ... and need for a Savior ... [is] absolutely essential for being able to genuinely, with transparency, communicate the Gospel into other people's lives," Campbell said.

Campbell explained that those who share the Gospel well do so out of a heart of brokenness because they have rightly understood their own spiritual poverty apart from Christ and rely fully on the work of Christ on the cross for any goodness they have before God.

Sacrificial love and deeds of compassion are marks of salvation, not the means of salvation.

"Just merely desiring to reflect the character of God in our lives and in our daily activity should drive us to intentional deeds of compassion," Campbell added. "You have to weave ministry to the poor into the fabric of your everyday life. ... This is not something you do in retirement. This isn't something you do once a week."

That's why Campbell and Scarborough live to share the Gospel daily in word and deed, whether it's through office appointments, hospital visits, free community health fairs or student immunizations in a local public school system.

"Relationships are really what guide us," Campbell said.

Building genuine relationships with patients allows the doctors to speak truth

to their patients while sharing in their suffering and joy.

Since opening the doors of their clinic, Campbell and Scarborough have seen 3,000 patient visits and expect 4,200 by the end of the year. They anticipate seeing up to 8,000 by the end of 2009 and 15,000 in 2010.

Presently, the clinic has two physicians and various staff members – including practice manager Sandra Duncan and nurse administrator Karen Hobbs, who were pioneers in this ministry. Plans are to expand the clinic to the renovated Widows Home located on the property of Augusta’s first City Hospital that provided for the “sick poor.”



Tillie Burgin

A mercy mission

For 72-year-old Tillie Burgin, affectionately called Ms. Tillie, her day begins around 3:30 a.m. and ends about 11:00 p.m. She is the executive director of Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex, a Texas-based ministry that functions to share the Gospel and meet

the needs of the local community. The mission’s mantra: “Taking church to the people.”

It has been doing so for 364 days a year since 1986 after seven years of praying in response to a question that kept coming to Burgin’s mind: “If we could do missions in Korea, why can’t we do missions in Arlington?”

Burgin and her family were once missionaries in South Korea.

Today, the mission’s scope of ministry is huge as they provide services for adults and children, including, but not limited to, crisis intervention, conversational English classes, transportation, after-school program, and worship services. The mission even meets food, home, medical/dental and personal needs. Special assistance is given during the holidays through food delivery and a toy store



Dan Rebon

where families can shop at no charge.

“Mission Arlington is here to reach everyone for Christ,” Burgin said. “I do what I do in following the Lord’s leadership and obedience to the Scripture.”

“As Christians, God calls us to serve and share our lives with people,” added Heather Young, 24, who works at Mission Arlington. “Working for Mission Arlington isn’t a job for me or the others that are here. It’s a lifestyle.”

“I believe that the Lord calls each of us to be a missionary in our daily lives,” Burgin echoed. “It just becomes your life. There is no start and stop when you are serving people.”

Contact Information

- ▶ CCHSA
www.christcommunityaugusta.org
706-922-0600
- ▶ Mission Arlington
www.missionarlington.org
817-277-6620
- ▶ His Hands Extended Soup Kitchen
419-562-9760

Getting started

- ▶ Contact your local church to see if they have any ongoing ministries to the needy. If not, pray about starting one.
- ▶ Collect school supplies for needy children in your area.
- ▶ Adopt a widow/widower and spend time with him/her.
- ▶ Regularly prepare a hot meal for a single-parent family.
- ▶ Pray for God to use you.

A church that cares

In the late 1990s, Pastor Dan Rebon, of Bucyrus Assembly of God, in Ohio, saw the basement of the church as a haven for the hungry. After several years of praying, the church officially launched His Hands Extended Soup Kitchen in February 2002.

Chili and chicken noodle soup were the first items served, but the kitchen is now able to offer a variety of food thanks to the contributions of others.

“The first night, we had 20 people, and God multiplied the noodle soup,” Rebon recalled.

Now the kitchen serves from 40 to 120 meals each day Monday through Friday. This small church, with an attendance of about 50 people, is the center of this ministry, but various volunteers operate the soup kitchen. Churches, youth groups, community organizations and others help on a regular basis.

“God has used this ministry to kick-start other ministries in our town to share the vision,” Rebon said.

However, Rebon doesn’t want others to feel like they have to minister in this exact way. Rather he encourages others to pray that God would give them His heart for their individual communities.

A common purpose

No matter who you are, what you do or where you live, Campbell believes: “We’re all on the same planet, and we’ve got the same problems, and Christ has called [His followers] to the same mission. ...”

But there is no fixed formula for carrying out the mission. Campbell said giving money or volunteering time does not automatically make you a servant. Nor does choosing to buy an inexpensive car or a low-priced house mean you’re sacrificing.

Those are actions that result from a change in priorities that begins in the heart, once a person fixes his eyes on Christ in an attempt to glorify Him.

This Christmas, I still plan to fill my shoe box and send it to a needy child, but in doing so I can’t help but apply Campbell’s words to my own life and ask: Why limit my service to the filling of a shoe box each Christmas? How can I glorify God with what He’s put in my hands today ... and every day? 