Introducing the MATUL Program to Servant Partners

Over the next two years, we will be presenting our staff with opportunities to gain expertise in transforming urban poor communities. We will introduce them to the MATUL program. If possible, it would be attractive to our workers if they could take up to 5 courses without making the decision to complete a Masters Degree. I think more people would be interested in completing the Master's Degree if they had personally experienced the benefits of a few courses. While there are a few of our workers who may pursue graduate degrees, most are intimidated by the cost and by the need to leave the field to complete the work. However, if there was an opportunity to take courses while still on the field, they might appreciate the value of the program through their personal relationships with professors and the quality material they receive.

The Heart of an Incarnational Worker

It takes a leap of faith for a person to move into an urban slum. It takes a deeply rooted spirituality for someone to stay there for 10-15 years. We are always looking for mentors who can encourage our people in how to maintain a vibrant relationship with God amid the grinding poverty of an urban slum. Materials and mentors in prayer, Bible study, spiritual direction, and inner healing are of great use to us in helping our workers stay the course for the long term. Furloughs of 3-6 months are often critical times for helping staff re-fuel for their next term. Delivering courses within that timeframe would be very helpful. Professors who are eager to maintain mentoring relationships with students/workers for their next term could make an important contribution to our mission.

The Mind of a Church Planter

Our teams are always evaluating their effectiveness in how to communicate the Gospel cross-culturally and form church planting movements that transform the urban poor communities. We are constantly seeking church planting coaches who know our context and have thought through the many obstacles to church planting. Materials and coaches would be most effective in this area. We appreciate the modular one-week intensive format with the ongoing field-based 10-week supervised practicum in the design of the program. This is exactly what we need.

The Hands of a Development Worker

As the gospel takes root in an individual, a family, and a community, much of what contributes toward sustainable transformation is empowering churches and community members to formulate solutions for themselves. Giving our workers practical skills that can be used to equip local people to solve their own problems is paramount to transformation. There are theoretical paradigms that would be helpful, but most are looking for the nuts and bolts of how to change their community. Learning best practices and learning how apply those to a new context would be an essential part of a curriculum that would attract many of our workers. Short seminars over several years with visiting experts who have actually done the work of transformation and then coaches who can help workers translate what they have learned would be very helpful.

8 Signs of a Transforming Community

We are currently orienting our training around "8 Signs of a Transforming Community" (see below for more details on what these are). After 15 years of trial and error experience working in urban slums,

we drew together our most experienced team leaders and asked them to describe, from the perspective of their urban poor neighbors, what a transformed urban poor community would look like. There were workers from North Africa, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Bangkok, and India. We also reviewed community transformation goals from World Vision and from the Millennium Development Goals. By the end of our week together, we felt that the Lord has taken our picture of transformation in the urban poor context and sharpened it from a 19th century impressionist painting to a 21st century digital photo. As we have shared our findings with workers in other parts of the world, they have responded with enthusiasm.

We expect that this picture of a transformed community will also change as the years go by and we learn more and the urban poor contexts adapt to a changing world. In a few years we may realize there are 10 signs of a transformed community, or we may realize that only 5 of the 8 signs are fundamental. But, for now, we are using them as a way to guide our training processes. We will encourage our workers to seek out courses, mentors, and materials that will prepare them to empower their urban poor communities to develop these 8 signs.

We very much appreciate your desire to provide quality education for those serving the urban poor. We realize you have many factors that influence the development of your programs and that we are only one piece. May God continue to bless urban poor communities through your work.

In partnership in the Gospel,

Will Niewoehner
Executive Director
Servant Partners

8 Signs of a Transforming Community

Reproducing, transformational communities of Jesus-followers (Jesus Communities)
A transforming urban poor community has many groups of 5-20 people who are worshipping Jesus, studying the Word, serving one another, praying, inviting others into a personal relationship with Jesus, discipling others, developing leaders, becoming change agents in their own community, and planting new communities that do the same.

Increased Civic Participation for the Common Good (Civic Good)
Civic participation means local residents are actively involved in the improvement of the community as a whole through increased volunteerism and participation in democratic processes. For example this could include participation in neighborhood groups, actions organized by those groups, volunteer activities that served children, youth, or the elderly of the community, voter registration, etc. When leadership develops from within the community to serve the common good, a society emerges that can no longer be controlled by self-serving political groups.

Improved Accessibility to Life-Enhancing Education (Lifelong Learning)
While a few urban poor communities offer some educational opportunities, even the best opportunities tend to use an approach that delivers information rather than dignifies the learner and helps him/her actually improve his/her life. A transforming community offers people affordable educational services that lend dignity to the learner, increase a person's ability to reflect on his/her life, move him/her to action and assist in career improvement.

Expanded Opportunities to Achieve Economic Sufficiency (Wealth at the Bottom)
Economic sufficiency in an urban poor community means that more and more people are integrated into the mainstream economy in the city which then gives them opportunity to provide a living for their families. Rather than sustaining themselves on income that is "under the radar," the urban poor must have access to the resources (capital, training, materials, etc.) of the wider marketplace. This means not only more jobs, but more bridges to middle and upper class that create opportunities for income growth and greater productivity.

Increased Spiritual and Psychological Health and Freedom from Destructive Patterns (Push for Freedom)
A transforming community supports those who seek freedom from addictions, the occult, and other destructive patterns while they develop healthy, sustainable lifestyles that produce healthy relationships. We can apply some existing models of effective programs that help individuals into a healthy, productive lifestyle. It will take fasting and prayer to help create the spiritual environment where those seeking change have a strong enough desire to commit to their lives to it.

Increased Family Health and Well-Being (Whole Families)
A transforming community helps families free themselves from domestic violence, sexual abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, and other destructive patterns. Urban poor families are going through a major paradigm shift from traditional values developed over centuries in their villages to modern urban lifestyles embraced by their children. This produces relational breakdowns that most families do not survive. Through support/recovery groups of every kind, family social services, and youth development, families will have a opportunity to adapt to the changing world around them.

Improved Environmental and Community Health (Health for All)
While taking the health of the individual and family seriously, a transforming community also works together to address the physical well being of the community. Disease prevention, education and direct services that help residents reduce the spread of preventable diseases are crucial parts of an urban poor community that wants to improve the quality of life for its residents. Addressing the environmental degradation in an urban poor community is the partner of public health. Creating clean neighborhoods, open spaces, and healthy environments outside the home are essential elements of a sustainable community.

Presence of political, economic, and legal systems that work for the poor (Systems that Work)
Most systems that govern an urban poor community are based on power that serves a few. A transforming community develops systems that serve those who cannot speak for themselves. Transformed political systems seek to empower those who do not already have a voice. Transformed economic markets create opportunities for the poor entrepreneur who needs capital, materials, and good counsel. Transformed legal systems bring justice to those who cannot find it.

Examples of the 8 Signs of Transforming Communities

Reproducing, Transformational Communities of Jesus followers (Jesus Communities)
        Evangelism
        Discipleship
        Leadership development
        Multiplying churches

Increased Civic Participation for the Common Good (Civic Good)
        Education of government systems & civil rights
        Community organizing (seed projects)
        Creation of Community Based Organizations
        Voter registration, voter education
        Anti-corruption education
        Increasing volunteerism and studying best practices of volunteerism
        Neighborhood watch groups, parental supervision of groups of kids
        Community centers
        Other-focused & servant leadership teaching
        Elder care groups
        Community Council

Improved Accessibility to Life-Enhancing Education (Lifelong Learning)
        Vocational classes
        Computer training
        Tutoring
        ESL
        Kids Ministries – values and leadership education
        Youth Ministries – values and leadership education
        Scholarships
        Referrals to ongoing training
        Aiding people to access the system
        Hosting adult education
        Literacy
        Teaching school teachers
        Book rooms/Mobile libraries/Educational Game room
        Community Business and Education Centers
        Accessibility to e-governance

Expanded Opportunities to Achieve Economic Sufficiency (Wealth at the Bottom)
        Micro-credit programs
        Vocational training
        Savings groups & savings coops
        Small business training and development
        Social enterprise
        Personal financial management
        Accessing and networking with proven business experts
        Business ethics
        Increasing industrial growth
        Placement/training agencies
        Food (or other) Cooperatives

Increased Spiritual and Psychological Health and Freedom from Destructive Patterns (Push for Freedom)

Fasting and prayer
Inner healing ministry
Intensive retreats
Community, live-in programs
Accountability (12 step groups)
Referrals
Psycho-social education (tools to deal with pain and trauma using minimal resources)
Community organizing to eliminate problem sources
Deliverance ministry
Teaching on destructiveness of activities and access to freedom

Improved Environmental and Community Health (Health for All)
Planting trees
Health & Environmental Education
Public health (training) program
Nutrition education
Models of trash removal (for-profit, community based, etc.)
Recycling/composting
Solar energy solutions (LED lighting)
Rooftop or urban gardening (for-profit, community based, etc.)
Clean water projects & rain water harvesting, possibly for-profit
Street Theater Education
Green spaces & community parks
Accessibility to affordable, quality health care
Sports and recreation
Dog & pest removal
HIV/AIDS education
Sex education
Improving health care regulations
Providing health research results to the government or other organizations
Starting pharmacies or clinics (vaccinations, dental)
Short-term medical teams accompanying an ongoing program
Special Needs Programs or referrals to special needs programs

Increased Family Health and Well-Being (Whole Families)
Indicator: reduction in domestic violence, sexual abuse, divorce rate, teen pregnancy and an increase in:
Marriage Encounter Retreats
Support groups
Parenting classes
Counseling
Domestic violence reduction
Encouragement toward abstinence, research teen pregnancy reduction best practices
Development of children's and youth ministries
Anti/Fair Child Labor

Presence of political, economic, and legal systems that work for the poor (Systems that Work)

Improving public education
Housing projects, available and affordable housing
Land rights
Anti-corruption measures
Improving police systems

Influencing municipal development plans and holding people accountable
Better banking systems & access to capital
Transparency and accountability mechanisms (government, organizations…)
Broad-based organizing (organizing institutions) and coalition/network building
Public servant schools
Advocacy
Anti-human trafficking
Improving basic services and infrastructure (brick and mortar)
Child labor
Illegal/Undocumented immigration & discrimination issues
Racism & Reconciliation
Improving health systems
Anti drug trafficking