

HOW TO SEE GOSPEL IMPACT THROUGH JUSTICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

By: Bruce Strom

Pastor Tom knew Jesus changes everything. But in a world growing indifferent to Jesus, how could he engage the community where God placed the church? How could he encourage those in the church to be missional outside its walls? Without that, would neighbors even notice if the church closed tomorrow?

Pastor Karen wondered how her church could pursue the justice of the Kingdom in culturally relevant ways. She loved the book studies and discussion groups, but how could she get people to engage poor and marginalized communities in their backyard?

Pastor Dale knew justice was God's heartbeat, but how could he show that? He knew churches were known more for the opposition to what is wrong in the world rather than trying to roll up their sleeves and do something about it. He wanted to do something. But what?

How About You?

Can you relate? I can. As the son of a pastor, former youth pastor, licensed pastor, elder, Bible study leader, Sunday School teacher and someone who has served probably every role in a church (even janitor), I love the church.

We all know the church is the body of believers representing Jesus as they advance His Kingdom in this dark world. But as a practical matter how can we do that?

One way is through legal aid ministry. While I grew up in the church and have continuously served the church, I am a lawyer by profession. I built a large, successful private law practice with multiple offices across the Chicago area. I represented hundreds of churches and two church denominations. I taught legal issues in both a leading seminary and university. But God called me out of private practice to start a legal ministry for poor and vulnerable neighbors.

Administer Justice began in a borrowed 8x10 office. I was alone. No large staff or gorgeous law offices. No income either. My wife stayed home with our newly born twin sons. What was I thinking!? Even my pastor father questioned my wisdom. But God is bigger than our doubts, fears and anger.

I stood in that little office shaking my fist at God for taking away my identity and livelihood. I believed it was too much to ask. I stood over a printer unable to print an envelope because I always had a large staff that did that for me. Now alone I cried out to God - "What am I doing here?"

And God answered.

He said, "My will. For whatever you do for one of the least of these, you do unto me."

I fell to my knees and wept. Since that day it has been my joy to pour every ounce of energy into advancing the gospel and justice for hurting neighbors. Administer Justice grew over a decade to become the second largest Christian Legal Aid in America, a large staff with large offices working with many churches equipping hundreds of lawyers and support volunteers to serve over 10,000 people annually across the Chicago area.

A few years ago God tapped me on the shoulder and told me he wasn't finished. He wanted me to expand the opportunity for legal ministry across America. Moody published my book, *Gospel Justice*, and I once again launched into the unknown with no salary. But God is bigger. He provides. Three years later we have raised significant sums, have several staff, and are serving in more than 60 site locations across the country. We work across all denominational lines. We find the gospel and justice unite us where other issues might divide us.

Pursuing God's Call

My friend Rich Stearns at World Vision kindly states, "As Christians we are called to 'loose the chains of injustice...to set the oppressed free.'" By stepping away from a lucrative career to fight the oppression of the poor, Bruce Strom gives an inspiring example for fulfilling this call."

Rich had a conversation with Pastor Max Lucado about the challenges facing our world. He said, "Simple solutions simply don't exist...Most of us don't know what to do, but someone does! Some people are pouring every ounce of God-given wisdom into the resolution of these problems. We need specialist organizations." Administer Justice is one of those specialist organizations. The Lord has allowed me to pour nearly three decades of legal and ministry experience into creating systems that allow your church to easily enter the community with the gospel and justice. Once you do, the community knows you exist. You become a go to resource for those in the community and the opportunity for eternal impact is significant.

Here's the question: Is the call of your church to reach the lost?

If it is then ask yourself whether people in your community are more likely to walk in off the street to see a pastor or to see a lawyer?

Helping Sheila

Sheila never would have stepped foot in church. As a chain smoker with tattoos, she didn't think church people would accept her. She didn't really give much thought to God. She thought she was a good person. But on this particular Saturday morning she stepped foot inside a church. She needed legal advice.

She was surprised by how kind everyone was. No one judged her. They offered her food and coffee while helping her with forms. The lawyer asked if she could pray for Sheila. No one had ever done that. She felt stirring she could not explain as the woman prayed. Sheila poured out her heart to the kind attorney.

Sheila's mother died following years of care. The mom recognized her devotion and left the home to her. Sheila has a brother. The mom knew her son was in jail most of his life and did not want to give him money, but the brother accused Sheila of cheating him out of the inheritance. The fight over the estate left the brother angry and he threatened to kill Sheila. Before he could carry through, he wound up in jail for other reasons. But Sheila was paralyzed by fear.

Sheila isolated herself and couldn't work. When the cash ran out, the home went into foreclosure. That is what brought Sheila to the church. Sheila was certain the brother would be released any day and kill her. She knew there was some equity in the property and wanted to roll that into another home. But she wanted to put that home in a blind trust so her brother could not find her.

The legal issues and fear were destroying Sheila. The attorney knew the foreclosure could be put on hold so the house could be sold. She knew Sheila could not get

a protective order on a threat that was years old from a man currently in prison. She also knew a blind trust was unnecessary. Sheila listened and appreciated the specific plan put together which started with the attorney placing a call to the bank's lawyer and Sheila working with a realtor from the church who agreed to cut his commission in half to help.

Sheila would continue to have contact with a phone follow-up justice team member and the realtor. Each person prayed for her. Her fear began to lessen. The attorney stopped the foreclosure and the house sold. A team from the church helped Sheila move. On the day of the move one of the church volunteers shared the hope of the gospel with Sheila. In her new home Sheila prayed to accept Christ. Having heard many prayers she asked the volunteer if she could pray. Sheila grabbed the volunteers hand and thanked God for the church and then prayed for her brother!

Two days later Sheila ran into her brother in a grocery store. Instead of terror, she felt joy and invited him to her new home. Sheila is now a regular part of the church. She continues to pray for her brother's salvation and to seek opportunities to meet with him. Praise God. And it all began with entering a church not to meet a pastor but to meet a lawyer. Through that she met her Savior.

Doing Justice, Loving Kindness, And Walking Humbly

Legal ministry is a powerful way to live out Micah 6:8. Be honest. You don't normally think of lawyers as humble, kind and just. Neither do your neighbors. But the Jewish audience listening to Jesus tell the story of the Good Samaritan were equally shocked. Anyone expects a pastor or church leader to minister but not a Samaritan! Pastors and church leaders are Priest and Levites. Honestly, in the busyness of church, you sometimes miss an opportunity to serve your neighbor. Lawyers are modern day Samaritans. Generally we are not well-liked.

But when a lawyer who could charge hundreds of dollars an hour stops to serve, the impact is significant.

How can your church uniquely engage the community where God has placed you? Honestly a lot of people do food, tutoring and other services. They are needed. But justice is deeper. And justice is unique.

There are over 384,000 churches in America, but less than 300 are involved in legal ministry! Your neighbors need legal help.

The most recent statistics demonstrate 71% of low-income households (42.6 million people) experience at least one civil legal problem including domestic violence, veteran's benefits, disability access, housing evictions and health care. 86% of these neighbors cannot find help. That means 1 person every second in America cannot find help for crushing legal problems. More than 100,000 every day.

Sheila's brother committed a crime and he received a free attorney, but not Sheila. Victims of abuse, exploitation and unfair practices are not entitled to free representation and are left to fend for themselves.

As much as a church wants to help, benevolence funds would be quickly depleted paying legal fees for just one person. But what if you could impact the lives of hundreds of neighbors without any cost to the church?

Partnering For The Kingdom

Administer Justice invites you to become a chapter. That means you operate under our corporate umbrella. We cover your insurance (both malpractice and general

liability), take care of all corporate filings, and allow you to focus on ministry. Once you become a chapter, your volunteer team will receive access to our member area with significant resources and a powerful team of people doing legal ministry across the country. They can join monthly phone calls for prayer and practical support. The church will receive a care package with all the supplies needed, a professional banner, e-mail, and a web page to promote the chapter. You will also receive a custom online volunteer and case management system called Justice Center Online which allows you to operate efficiently and track impact. We will pay for your volunteer leader to travel to see another legal ministry in action and provide orientation training.

Once a year we will also pay for an annual conference called Restore 117 where the church team can meet others from across the country, hear powerful speakers and receive practical tools - www.administerjustice.com/restore.

We front the cost and continue to support the ministry through \$30 administrative fees the team will collect from clients. This provides dignity and value to the client while allowing us to sustain your insurance, database, web site and support.

As a national organization your partnership enables us to

engage broken legal systems and advocate for change.

How To Get Started

God has placed you in a position of influence. All three of the largest Christian Legal Aid's in America were heavily influenced by pastors. One was started by a sermon and the other two by conversations between a pastor and lawyer. Lawyers respect you. Encourage a lawyer to connect with us. Let them know of your support and desire to serve the community with the gospel and justice. Help them see the impact they can have because God gave them a law degree.

The rest of your team will fall into place through a Sunday announcement or through small groups. We will help you build that team which includes:

- Prayer
- Hospitality
- Intake
- Interpreter
- Client Advocate
- Phone Follow-up

This team supports the lawyer. And your lawyer will know other lawyers and once they overcome their fear - largely through your encouragement and the Holy Spirit's conviction - they will gladly invite others to take part.

Justice for the poor is the second most prominent theme in the Bible. The church has historically led the way in health care and education. Now is the time for justice. Lead the way in providing access to justice for neighbors in need.

Let's do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God together.

We want to explore this opportunity further with you.

Please reach out to Judith at jmiller@administerjustice.org to further the conversation on how you can have life-changing impact through legal ministry.