

# 2017 ANNUAL REPORT



## Transforming Communities with the Urban Poor

Dear Friends,

The mission of Servant Partners is to create churches that seek to transform their urban poor communities. The transformation we envision involves the individual, the Christian community, and the larger society. Two of the major strategies that allow us to work for change at these various levels are church planting and community organizing. We plant churches because we need Jesus for our salvation and for our transformation. We organize because, as the body of Christ, we are called to live out the kingdom of God on earth, especially in regard to the poor and oppressed. In seeking to change systems of oppression, we find that community organizing is one of the most empowering and effective tools.

Both church planting and organizing begin the same way: through conversations with our neighbors. As we strive to get to know our neighbors and understand their stories, we can invite them into God's story and hear their hopes and fears about their communities. For this year's annual report, we share a few stories about how Christians in our ministries have expanded God's kingdom and challenged powerful systems that have hurt their communities. Each effort started with a conversation, perhaps even years ago, but over time engaged the whole community into action. Through their efforts, these Christian leaders saw the kingdom of God come a little more fully. The spiritual transformation of individuals in Jesus bears fruit in the transformation of communities and cities, to God's glory.



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In Christ's hope,  
*Derek and Lisa Engdahl*  
GENERAL DIRECTORS, SERVANT PARTNERS

*Right: dresses hanging on Zahra's new storefront; below: Zahra and Samaira interact with employees and customers.*



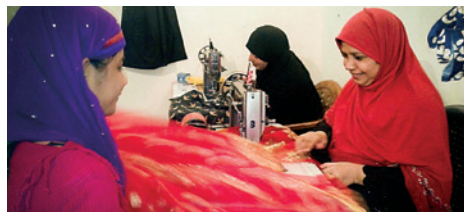
## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

### SOUTH ASIA ZAHRA'S NEW DRESS SHOP

The clatter of a storefront gate rolling open cuts through the still morning. With a flurry of bright color and sparkle, a woman proudly hangs gold, magenta, and turquoise dresses out at the front of the store to display. Zahra's new dress shop is finally open for business.

Zahra first met Samaira three years ago. Zahra's family was barely getting by, and her children were showing signs of malnourishment. In the South Asian community where Zahra and Samaira live, that's not uncommon. There, Servant Partners funds, trains, and coaches local leaders like Samaira and her husband Rohit as they transform urban poor communities by investing in the most available, responsible, and spiritually responsive group in their region: women. Samaira and Rohit's diverse ministry has catalyzed over 100 community-based, self-help groups that incorporate microfinance business development, business skills training, literacy education, advocacy for families without access to food ration cards, and biblical storytelling to help women work together to transform their families and neighborhoods.

Samaira invited Zahra to join one of the newly-formed self-help groups, where Zahra learned the discipline of saving—if only a few pennies a week—from her family's meager income. Recognizing Zahra's potential, Samaira hired her to be one of the project's literacy teachers,



helping other women develop their reading, writing, and math skills.

Zahra had grown up in a Muslim family, at one point memorizing all 6,000 verses of the Koran. Through her long-standing friendship with Samaira, Zahra began learning about Jesus and joined a local house church. Today, Zahra is a mature follower of Christ and leads in one of the associated house churches. She also serves as an officer in the women's self-help network that has continued to grow.

Zahra began dreaming of opening her own business. Despite a few less-than-successful business ventures, Zahra's savings continued to grow. She eventually qualified for a modest microfinance loan to open a small dress shop and put her sewing skills to work. Soon she was able



to hire additional employees. Zahra's shop hums with the sound of sewing machines and jovial conversation. Zahra enjoys how her space brings women together: to work, to have garments made or mended, and to chat about all manner of things, including the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These networked women are transforming more than just their own lives and families; they are changing their whole community. The growing number of self-help groups from the few that Samaira and Rohit started have secured better drainage and clean water access, improved community health and hygiene, and advocated for women's rights. They joyfully serve their neighbors while inviting them into the rich life they have found in community with Jesus and one another.

**PRAY** for Servant Partners, our staff, and the communities where we work. Join our mailing list at [servantpartners.org](http://servantpartners.org) to get regular updates on our work and prayer requests.

**FOLLOW** us on Facebook ([/servantpartners](https://www.facebook.com/servantpartners)) and Twitter ([@ServantPartners](https://twitter.com/ServantPartners))

**PARTICIPATE** in one of our internships. There are short-term domestic and international opportunities, in addition to our two-year program. Email [internships@servantpartners.org](mailto:internships@servantpartners.org) for more information.

**GIVE** online at [servantpartners.org](http://servantpartners.org)

**JOIN US!** Work to break the cycle of urban poverty. Email [join@servantpartners.org](mailto:join@servantpartners.org) to learn more about joining Servant Partners staff.



Right: Jen and her daughter at a demonstration; far right: signs used in community demonstrations at the Jefferson Drill Site; below: Richard (left), Kevin (right), and Kevin's sons plant a tree opposite El Rey Market; bottom: a community demonstration at the Jefferson Drill Site



## NO SMALL GOD

SOUTH LOS ANGELES, CA

A SMALL CHURCH HAS THE FAITH TO TAKE ON GOLIATH

After the 1992 Los Angeles riots that followed the acquittals in the Rodney King beating trial, Richard Parks moved into South LA with a group of friends. Kevin Blue and others joined Richard over the next three years. Their prayer group and Bible study slowly grew into what now is the Church of the Redeemer. Richard later launched their associated non-profit, Redeemer Community Partnership, working to holistically improve and enrich the community.

Being a multicultural community pursuing Kingdom-oriented transformation in its corner of the inner city was always central to the church's vision. Jen and Kevin Blue are on staff with Servant Partners and serve as two of Redeemer's pastors. The pastoral staff team and church members come from a varied mix of Latin, Black, Asian, and White ethnic backgrounds. Some members are working class, some are very poor, and some have upper-middle class economic resources. Their call to be a neighborhood-based, cross-class, and cross-racial community was no simple task, and it took years to develop. "We didn't see fruit for a long time, but through our patient endurance as a community, God has brought forth change from seeds of faith," shares Kevin.

In the early years of Church of the Redeemer, neighborhood safety was at the forefront of the congregation's



concerns. Local shop Lucky Liquor spilled public intoxication, gang violence, and prostitution into the surrounding neighborhood. It quickly became a focus of the church's organizing efforts; local residents from Redeemer formed block clubs and brought their neighbors together to change what was happening on their street. The store closed and was replaced with El Rey Market, a Central American grocery store.

These early struggles in their life as a church were like King David's early lion-and-bear encounters; they would prepare Redeemer with the kind of faith needed to face a Goliath. In 2013, Richard learned of plans for new work on the Jefferson Boulevard oil and natural gas extraction site just a few blocks from his home. Thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals would be trucked in and injected into the ground with massive machinery, a noisy extraction method called acidization.

Drilling operations across Greater Los Angeles extract oil and natural



gas belowground. Extraction sites in close proximity to wealthier residential neighborhoods are often heavily regulated for safety. Sites located in poorer zip codes, like the one on Jefferson Boulevard, fail to give surrounding residents the same protections that wealthier neighborhoods demand and receive.

.....

You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.  
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

— ISAIAH 58:11b-12 (NIV)

.....

Sentinel Peak Resources, the current owner of the Jefferson drill site, operates 36 oil wells on a 1.86 acre site right in the middle of a residential area. The nearest home is three feet from the site's exterior wall. Neighbors have suffered from noxious fumes, prolonged loud noises, headaches, nosebleeds, and respiratory illnesses like asthma. The chemicals involved in oil extraction at this site are also known carcinogens and endocrine disruptors, meaning they increase risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and damage to the reproductive system in present and future generations.

When Richard and Servant Partners intern Niki Wong learned that the Jefferson drill site had been endangering the health and safety of their neighborhood for decades, they set to work. Though they faced a giant multinational oil corporation, they had faith in God's power and did not hesitate. Redeemer Community Partnership networked with Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling (STAND-LA) to begin a four-year process of increasing public awareness, organizing residents, collecting public testimonies, filing a Nuisance Abatement Petition, and coordinating multiple on-site demonstrations.

On October 13, 2017, the City of Los Angeles placed some of the most stringent operating regulations in the nation on the Jefferson site. This South LA community finally had the same protections that wealthier, Westside neighborhoods had been afforded decades ago. Everyone in the neighborhood celebrated this unprecedented victory with tamales and agua frescas. But their work hasn't

ended; just this winter the community had to fight back Sentinel Peak's attempt to appeal the city's decision, and though they were successful, they anticipate that Sentinel Peak will continue to resist compliance. Still, their faith stands strong. "Stories like David and Goliath are preserved for us so that we know that God can do this," Kevin explains. "And as you can see," Jen continues, "this is no small battle we're up against. But our God is no small God."

## CULTIVATING HOPE

POMONA, CA

### A CHURCH'S GRASSROOTS WORK TOWARD A GREENER FUTURE

The hazy morning light washes over a rare community garden in Pomona, California, where a gentleman sits most mornings enjoying his cup of coffee. He takes in the scene: grass creeping into his neighbor's gardening plot, meandering rows of seedlings planted by child-sized hands after school. It's more than just a quaint scene. It's a sign of God's shalom and a cleaner, greener future to come for this community.

Nine years ago, this same lot was vacant, filled with trash, needles, and prophylactics—remnants of the prostitution and drug transactions on the street. But across the street was First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, a Servant Partners ministry partner site. Pastor Pablo grew fed up with seeing it every day and sent a letter to the city requesting permission to revitalize it. Drew, the church custodian, worked with the city, the church, and countless volunteers to

clear the land of needles and broken glass, transforming it into a community garden. Neighbors now rent plots to grow fruits and vegetables of all shapes and colors, and Pomona Hope, a community non-profit started by the church and Servant Partners, incorporates the garden into their program. The corner saw a 40% drop in crime once the garden was planted.

Pomona has been challenged by violence, unemployment, and environmentally hazardous industries. A massive waste transfer station and more than two dozen recycling facilities sort and hold trash from the whole region. These facilities and the many diesel trucks needed to service them have been long-standing threats to public health and safety, breeding rodents, poisoning the air and water table, and creating daunting fire hazards.

Derek and Lisa Engdahl, long-term residents of Pomona and the General Directors of Servant Partners, have worked for years in community organizing through First Presbyterian Church's partnership with the broad-based organizing network ICON-IAF. In 2012, Lisa, SP board member Tom Hsieh, and local graduate student Carla Dhillon founded Clean & Green Pomona, a grassroots organization of residents working for environmental justice and public health.

"Initially, many residents felt hopeless, saying, 'You can't do anything to change things,' and 'It's not worth fighting,'" Lisa explains. "In situations of oppression and corruption, people lose hope and learn to settle." As the community began to share their stories and experiences, deeply-buried pain began to surface. The stories were heartbreaking. A local teacher contracted asthma after years





Left: Center Street Community Garden and First Presbyterian Church of Pomona; below: Clean & Green tree planting day at San Antonio Elementary; bottom: environmentally hazardous industries plague the city of Pomona.



of working at a school in the industrial heart of the city. Three students at her school developed childhood cancers.

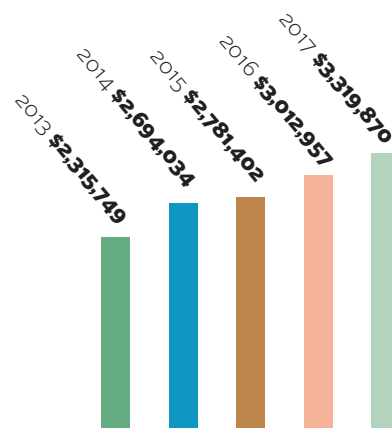
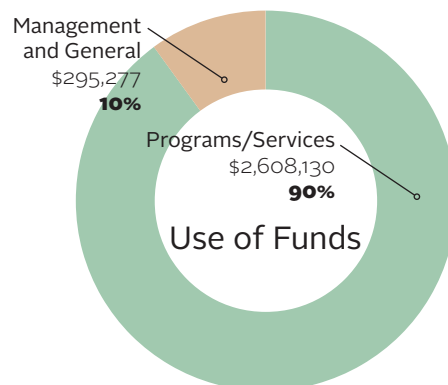
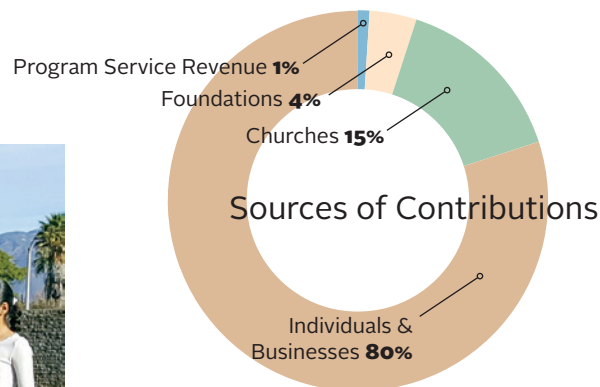
As community leaders connected with the pain of the city, they patiently cultivated that grief into hope. “Justice work deals with pain, anger, and loss,” Lisa shares, “but how you process and cope with those emotions in Christ sets you on a path of transformation instead of destruction.” Lisa has found that the key to advocacy and community organizing work is not letting anger lead to bitterness and vengeance, but letting Christ transform that anger into truth, sacrificial love, and

perseverance in God’s work of restoration, breaking the yoke of oppression, and restoring the streets to dwell in.

When a recycling facility near Mission Boulevard dangerously went up in flames in January 2014, it simultaneously ignited the community into action. That same year, ICON and Clean & Green Pomona proposed a city ban on all new waste, recycling, and pallet facilities; it passed in 2017. Inspired by those results, Clean & Green Pomona initiated other projects. They worked with the school district to replace all of their diesel buses with a new non-diesel fleet, and they are now planting nearly 400 trees at eight local elementary schools.

As the sun gently rises over the Center Street community garden, signs of transformation are all around: the skies above are clearer, the garden boasts rows of green, the after-school students taste fresh-picked vegetables, and across the street, an old church building is full of Christians working to renew their city.

## 2017 FINANCES



We hold to a high standard of financial accountability in all of our projects and ministry, guided by the standards and best practices of ECFA.



## **Voices Rising: Women of Color Finding and Restoring Hope in the City**

Editors, Shabrae Jackson Krieg and Janet Balasiri Singleterry

In 2018, Servant Partners Press will release its fifth title, *Voices Rising: Women of Color Finding and Restoring Hope in the City*. *Voices Rising* is an inspiring and moving collection of essays gathered from more than a dozen of the many women of color who have been serving around the world long-term, on staff or in partnership with Servant Partners. Together their voices resound with hope they have found through Jesus in their own lives, and for the restoration of the cities where they live.

For updates on this highly-anticipated release, follow Servant Partners on Facebook. To learn more about the Press, inquire about group discounts, or order this or our other books, visit [ServantPartnersPress.org](http://ServantPartnersPress.org).



## **TRAINING FOR MINISTRY AMONG THE URBAN POOR SERVANT PARTNERS PRESS**

Currently Available:

**The Great Chasm: How to Stop Our Wealth from Separating Us from the Poor and God** by Derek W. Engdahl

**Thriving in the City: a Guide for Sustainable Incarnational Ministry Among the Urban Poor** by T. Aaron Smith

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