

# SERVANT PARTNERS

## An Introduction





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**SERVANT PARTNERS**  
Transforming Communities With the Urban Poor  
[www.servantpartners.org](http://www.servantpartners.org)





# TODAY, ONE BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN URBAN POVERTY.

The world's cities are dramatically expanding, along with the material and spiritual needs of their most marginalized residents. Since 1993, Servant Partners has worked towards Christ-centered transformation in communities around the world. This document is an introduction to who we are and what we do: our mission, spirituality, values, and strategies.

We are a movement centered on Jesus Christ, planted in urban poor communities, and empowered by God's call to love the poor. We are both locals and relocators to our communities. As neighbors, we pursue community transformation by planting churches, organizing communities, and partnering with local leadership. As we join this journey, we are transformed.

While God loves the poor, he hates poverty. Our call is to join God in breaking the stronghold of poverty in the neglected corners of our cities. This conviction compelled us to join Servant Partners in 1998 and move into the inner city of Pomona, California. We were convinced that concern for the poor is a requirement for all who seek to follow Jesus with their whole lives.

**GOD LOVES  
THE POOR,  
BUT HATES  
POVERTY**

God may have placed a similar burden on your heart. You may be from an urban poor neighborhood and desire to remain or return to it, working for transformation as a staff member with us. You may sense a calling to relocate to a marginalized community, connecting your life to that place and people. You may be a student, church member, or professional who wants to break the cycle of urban poverty in a sustainable and honoring way. Wherever your interest lies, we would love to talk with you.

We hope that this introduction gives you a sense of our calling. Please contact us at [recruiting@servantpartners.org](mailto:recruiting@servantpartners.org) with any questions or opportunities for partnership. We look forward to hearing from you, and welcome you on this journey!

In Christ,

Handwritten signatures of Derek and Lisa Engdal in black ink.

Derek and Lisa Engdal  
General Directors  
SERVANT PARTNERS





# GOD'S CALL

God is alongside the poor in  
loving and transformative  
relationship

The Bible is filled with hundreds of verses that declare God's deep love for the poor<sup>1</sup> and faithful work to establish justice on earth as it is in heaven. This is most exemplified in God's own willingness to fully enter poverty and marginalization in Jesus Christ, a poor man from Nazareth.



Jesus spent his life among the poor—living in solidarity, enjoying friendship, tending to their needs, and announcing God’s Kingdom of new life and justice to them. While respectable people of his day often ignored or shunned ‘the least,’ he welcomed them as valued friends and challenged the powerful who exploited the marginalized. He forged a community of social justice and love, inviting the poor to take honored places in his new fellowship. Jesus’ life on the margins also revealed that those who experienced poverty and exclusion were often most faithful and open to life with God. Countless stories in the Gospels reveal that the poor were indeed eager to enter Jesus’ Kingdom and join his ministry of salvation and healing for others.

Jesus’ incarnation and the whole witness of Scripture calls everyone who would love and follow him to join this ministry. With Jesus we are to announce good news, pursue transformative friendship, and labor for justice with the poor.

## JESUS SPENT HIS LIFE AMONG THE POOR

# A world of unequal cities

Over the past century, hundreds of millions of people have left rural poor communities and migrated to the world’s cities in search of a better life. Despite these hopes, many people have encountered profound inequality and injustice instead of opportunity in cities.

Today, over one billion people live in urban marginalized communities<sup>2</sup> around the world. In many communities, social discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and economic exclusion obscure the dignity and gifts of each person.

But just as people on the margins in Jesus’ day were uniquely open to God’s reign, the Spirit is stirring in urban marginalized communities today. As the Gospel is preached, individual lives, families, and relationships are transformed. New movements of Christ followers are forming worshipping communities of healing and reconciliation. And the Kingdom of God continues to grow, renewing and transforming every structure of life in a community and city: the spiritual, economic, political, and social.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible understands the poor as those people and communities who experience a lack of material provision, power, and dignifying relationship. These core needs are God’s intention for all people and are essential for human flourishing. The Bible identifies complex factors that contribute to poverty, including vulnerability that leads to exploitation (Neh 5:5, Psa 72:4), oppressive systems (Exo 1:11, Mk 7:11-12), militarism and violence (Isa 52:4, Rev 18:14-15), demonic influence (Job 1:11), and both personal and communal sin (Lev 19:13, Jer 7:6). We work alongside people and communities with this full biblical understanding.



# Servant Partners seeks to join Christ's call in responding to this global shift by

- Remaining, returning, and relocating among urban poor communities for lives of incarnation and mutual transformation
- Advancing the Kingdom of God by establishing and strengthening communities of Jesus followers that are empowered by the Spirit
- Promoting the common good of communities through close partnership with neighbors in civic engagement
- Strengthening spaces of life-enhancing learning and education
- Supporting the creation of equitable economic opportunities and wealth within communities
- Finding greater healing and freedom from destructive patterns alongside our neighbors
- Nurturing the wellbeing of families and relationships that form the foundation of the community
- Working to improve environmental and public health
- Addressing the political, economic, and legal systems that fail to bring justice and opportunity to communities
- Holding space for the community to express creativity, beauty, and the arts

**REMAINING,  
RETURNING,  
OR RELOCATING  
AMONG  
URBAN POOR  
COMMUNITIES**

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<sup>2</sup> Urban marginalized communities are the communities we are called to live and work alongside. We use the terms urban poor and urban under-resourced similarly. These communities are diverse, ranging from the inner city of Los Angeles to the townships of Johannesburg and the informal settlements of Manila. While this term can be helpful in thinking about communities, we recognize that many people from these places simply think of them as my community or my home. For those of us from the community or with relationships in the community, “urban poor community” may feel too distant or academic a description. We choose to use this term, when useful, to help us name the core of our calling: to cities and to communities that experience marginalization and poverty within them.





# OUR STORY

Servant Partners grew out of a renewal movement within InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. As revival spread across U.S. college campuses in the 1980's and 1990's, hundreds of graduating students relocated into inner city neighborhoods to pursue racial and economic reconciliation. Servant Partners was founded in 1993 to facilitate this work among urban marginalized communities. The African American church's commitment to justice inspired us to engage the oppression of marginalized communities in the U.S. Holistic ministries in the Majority World guided us toward a strategy of transformation in unreached and marginalized urban communities around the world.



Though Servant Partners began with a call to global mission among marginalized communities, our early years were spent alongside inner city communities in the U.S. We sought to serve faithfully in our own contexts, before moving to the ends of the earth. Over the years, Servant Partners teams have worked with these communities to strengthen or plant churches, create nonprofits and community groups, and provide robust opportunities for training.

Since 1995, our internships have developed emerging leaders, who learn to love those on the margins by living, ministering, and studying in urban marginalized neighborhoods. In the late 1990's, God led us to expand our ministry into the cities of the Majority World. In 2003, we began working with the leaders of other national movements to initiate community transformation ministries throughout the Majority World.

Today, we live and work in nearly two dozen cities around the world to plant churches, expand the capacity of leaders, and organize communities. In 2020, we began a ten-year initiative to build, strengthen, and bridge our ministries around the world. Vision 2030 focuses on empowering under-resourced leaders, supporting existing staff, and catalyzing national movements. We are currently serving in North America, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.



Drawing inspiration from the African American church and Majority World holistic ministries, Servant Partners formed to facilitate transformation in urban marginalized communities through church-planting, community organizing, and leadership development.



## Purpose Statement

**SEEKING JESUS  
TOGETHER BY  
LIVING AND  
SERVING AMONG  
THE WORLD'S  
POOR**

## Mission Statement

**CREATING  
CHURCHES THAT  
TRANSFORM THEIR  
URBAN POOR  
COMMUNITIES**





# VALUES

**A**s a movement that joins God's Kingdom alongside urban marginalized communities, the following values form and guide our ministry. In all that we do and all of who we are, we hope for these values to be evident. As a people on the journey with Jesus, constantly being transformed, these values also provide a vision of the people and ministry we seek to become by God's grace.





# Our Core Values

- JOY IN GOD
- INCARNATION
- SERVANTHOOD
- MAKING DISCIPLES
- JUSTICE
- TRANSFORMATION

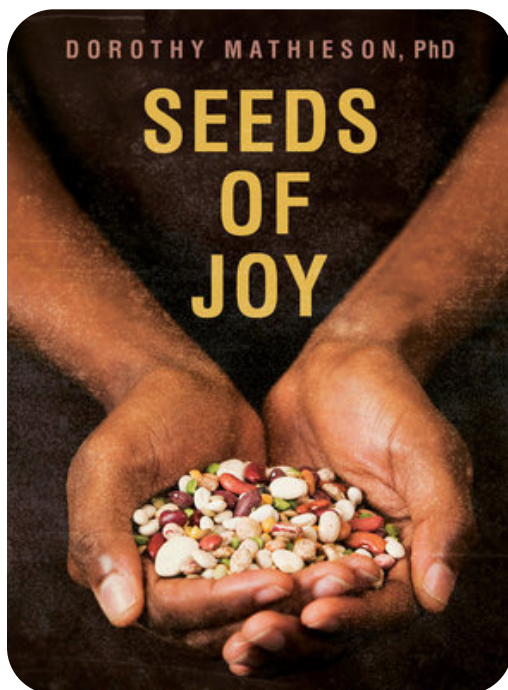


# JOY IN GOD

*"For the sake of the  
joy that was set  
before him..."*

HEBREWS 12:2

We believe that we are created to enjoy and rejoice in God, and be satisfied in him as we seek God's Kingdom and live under God's Lordship. This joy is ours in the present, as well as the future. Jesus teaches us to keep his commandments and abide in him, so that his joy will be in us, and so that our joy will be full (John 15:1-11). Even in a prison cell, faced with the prospect of death, the Apostle Paul was filled with joy and rejoiced knowing that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). The author of Hebrews exhorts us, as we run our own race, to look to Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross (Heb 12:1-3). In our calling to communities where the "cross to be endured" can be heavy, experiencing true joy in Jesus sustains us while guarding us against false motivations, bitterness, and worry.



**"... BY FIRST SECURING  
OURSELVES IN JOY-FILLED  
COMPANIONSHIP (WITH  
PEERS-IN-HEALING AND WITH  
JESUS HIMSELF), WE CAN  
SUCCESSFULLY MOVE  
THROUGH PLACES OF GREAT  
PAIN AND ONWARD INTO  
MORE HEALING."**

Dorothy Mathieson, an intercultural minister, devoted her life to helping others cultivate joyful connection to God, others, and themselves, especially in urban marginalized communities. Her accessible and profound tools were published in *Seeds of Joy* ([Servant Partners Press](#)).

*"The Word became  
flesh and lived  
among us."*

JOHN 1:14

# INCARNATION

God moved into "the neighborhood," coming in flesh to live among us and demonstrate God's Kingdom. We choose to live among urban marginalized communities as Jesus did through the power of God's Spirit. We do this as people of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

For those of us called to serve and live where we grew up or where our families are from, incarnation may mean deepening the relationships that already exist or returning to the community after many years away. For others of us called to relocate to another community—perhaps on the other side of the world—incarnation may look more dramatic, but the value is the same. We are called to share our lives with our neighbors, celebrating joys and holding sufferings together. We believe that we come to understand what God is doing in the lives of our neighbors as we walk alongside them in interdependent, day-to-day relationships. We seek to establish churches that embody authentic Christian community and discipleship from this presence with our communities.



"I SAW THE NEEDS OF MY  
COMMUNITY AND  
UNDERSTOOD THEM  
BECAUSE I WAS A CHILD OF  
THE COMMUNITY AND I WAS  
RAISING MY CHILDREN IN  
THAT COMMUNITY."

Annabel Levya, SP staff serving in her  
community of San José, CA

*"The last will be  
first, and the first  
will be last."*

MATTHEW 20:16

## SERVANTHOOD

The nature of true authority is servanthood. God himself is a servant-leader who works on behalf of those who trust in him. Jesus willingly chose into great costs and personal suffering in order to benefit humanity. He became the servant of all, took the lowest position, and taught that doing so was the path to greatness in the Kingdom of God—the last will be first. He described himself as a “good shepherd” who cares for his sheep, and lays his life down for them. He calls us to follow his example of being good shepherds of others, and becoming the last of all and the servant of all.

By deeply experiencing Jesus as our servant and good shepherd, we are enabled to be servants of others, rather than using our position for our own benefit. Following Jesus among our neighbors means becoming servants in practical and honoring ways. We say ‘yes’ to Jesus’ invitations, laying down our own lives for others, and choosing into

inconvenience and suffering for their sake. When we do this, we discover the surprising gift of God's kingdom—that in being humbled we are honored by God, that in losing life we receive a fuller and beautiful life than we could have imagined.

*"Go and make disciples  
of all nations."*

MATTHEW 28:19

## MAKING DISCIPLES

At the end of Matthew, Jesus commissioned the twelve to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all he had commanded. We believe this call is for Jesus' people throughout every time and culture. God's deep love for urban marginalized communities compels us to join with the Spirit's work of inviting neighbors to follow Jesus deeply in every aspect of their lives. Our hope is not simply conversions, professions of faith, or church goers, but disciples who are growing in obedience and maturity in Christ Jesus. We work to see faith communities formed of such disciples. This discipleship is central to all our work of community transformation and reminds us that we do not seek justice and liberation apart from God, but as the people of God we seek the Kingdom and the King.

*"For I the LORD love justice."*

ISAIAH 61:8

## JUSTICE

God cares deeply about social and economic justice. God challenges the powers and systems that oppress the poor and marginalized. Justice is foundational to God's character and the nature of God's Kingdom. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy as the one who proclaims justice to the nations and brings justice to victory (Matt 12:15-21).

God requires his people to do justice, and to work for justice in society. We must identify unjust relationships, structures, and ideologies that contribute to poverty and oppression, turn from any oppression we participate in, and call for repentance from those who oppress the poor. We recognize that justice and repentance requires reparation and healing. The work of justice must honor the leadership and experience of those who are oppressed. We seek to support the leadership and organizing of local communities so they can respond to issues of injustice sustainably.

**THE WORK OF  
JUSTICE MUST  
HONOR THE  
LEADERSHIP AND  
EXPERIENCE OF  
THOSE WHO ARE  
OPPRESSED**



"Seek the welfare  
of the city where I  
have sent you."

JEREMIAH 29:7

# TRANSFORMATION

God hears the cries of the urban poor and works to make their lives and communities better. He calls his followers to work for transformation—not only of individual lives, but of communities, systems, and entire nations. Transformation is a future vision and a present practice; God's ultimate plan is to have his Kingdom come in its fullness, transforming all things.

We strive to bring about structural changes in the larger society that makes up the context of poor neighborhoods. We are committed to entering this arena when we believe some practical good can be done for our neighbors. We are committed to none but the politics of the Kingdom of God and seek to avoid identifying ourselves with any social or political group. In our advocacy with communities and our work for structural change, we seek to conduct ourselves with humility, patience, peacefulness, honesty, and integrity.



Servant Partners works towards holistic transformation of communities with approaches that express our *Nine Signs of Transformation*, including Jesus Communities, Civic Good, Lifelong Learning, Wealth at the Bottom, and more.





# A Deeper Look at Our Values

- WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD
- WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT OURSELVES
- CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR LIFE TOGETHER



# WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD

## God is Reconciling All Peoples to Godself and to Each Other

God created all people for deep and loving relationship. But our sin has destroyed our relationship with God. Our sin has also damaged our relationships with each other and led to hostility and injustice across the divisions of race, gender, culture, and class.

God responded to this pervasive sin through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection. Only through this sacrifice and new life are people able to live in restored and right relationship with God. Likewise, the love and power unleashed at the cross is the only means by which we are empowered to be in right relationship with our neighbors. Through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are able to live in repentance, reparation, and reconciliation with others.

In response, we emphasize the Biblical understanding of Jesus' atonement as a work of personal salvation, justice, and reconciliation. Through his death on the cross, Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility and reconciled both the world to himself and people to one another. As a result of God's work, we have access to this redemptive power. Pursuing justice and reconciliation with one another across existing divisions like class, race, and gender is an essential aspect of reconciliation with God. In the abundant overflow of God's love for us and the entire creation, we are drawn to loving and restored relationships with others.

**POVERTY IS A  
DISTORTION  
OF THE FULL  
AND RIGHT  
LIFE GOD HAS  
INTENDED FOR  
EVERYONE**

## God has an Intense Concern for the Poor and Oppressed

Poverty is a distortion of the full and right life God has intended for everyone. The Bible explains there are many causes of poverty. Some poverty can be a direct result of an

individual's sinful action. Other poverty comes as the outcome of a crisis beyond the control of a person or community. However, most poverty in this world, according to the scriptures, comes as a result of oppression and exploitation—human beings and human systems not being in right relationship with one another, but rather using one another in dehumanizing ways.

We believe God is deeply grieved by this human experience of poverty. We believe God is profoundly angered by the deeds of those who oppress others through unjust actions or oppressive systems. However, God's intense concern for people who experience poverty and oppression does not in any way lessen his love for the remaining minority of humanity—the non-poor. We must value all people while maintaining that God has a special concern for the poor and oppressed.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT OURSELVES

### God's Word and the Holy Spirit are Our Primary Source of Authority

The Bible is our primary source of insight regarding God, the Body of Christ, and the world. God's word is authoritative and heart renewing. We also depend daily upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, comfort, and power over our sin as well as the evil we encounter. This dependence on the Holy Spirit is demonstrated through prayer.

### Losing Our Lives for the Sake of the Gospel Guides Us

In all that we do we seek to follow Jesus' example of losing his life for the sake of the Kingdom. We live sacrificially, risking our lives and the approval of others for the sake of the gospel. We can willingly lay down our finances, possessions, decision-making, and ministry opportunities knowing that Jesus invites us to take up a fuller and more abundant life in exchange. This mysterious promise of new life out of death is our hope in every sacrifice. We will depend upon God's grace and power so we may live sacrificially with one another



in our relationships with neighbors, teammates, families and marriages. We seek wisdom from God and from one another in exercising this principle.

## The Heart of our Work is Seeking Justice with the Poor and Oppressed

We all are called to seek justice alongside our neighbors who experience poverty and oppression. Some of us will be called to live among the poor in order to express God's desire to be with the poor, God's desire to serve those least among us, and God's desire to bring transformation to poor communities. Others of us will advocate in partnership with marginalized communities in order to elevate their concerns to those in power, both within the church and in the public arena. Others of us will serve in organizational roles to equip and sustain direct incarnational work within communities. We will honor one another as servants of Christ regardless of the way we are called to serve, keeping at the center of all we do justice for our neighbors and brothers and sisters who experience poverty.

**WE ARE CALLED  
TO SEEK JUSTICE  
ALONGSIDE OUR  
NEIGHBORS WHO  
EXPERIENCE  
POVERTY AND  
OPPRESSION**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR LIFE TOGETHER

We rejoice in God who has first loved us. Christ has commanded that out of this love we are to love him and our neighbor. We therefore aim to be part of a community which is empowered to love one another by the Spirit of God. This life-giving love will be reflected in the following ways.

# Gathered Around the Word

As a community, we gather around the Word of God. Our commitment to scripture allows us to 'do theology' together. We strive to apply the Word to our actual experiences, allowing God to speak fresh and living perspective into our lives and ministries. The Spirit speaks through our diverse experiences and readings of the Word, helping us to know and obey a fuller vision of God's truth than we could know individually or merely among those we have the most in common with. Because the scriptures emerge from experiences of injustice, struggle, and hope, we recognize its power to resonate with and guide each of our communities.

## Justice and Reconciliation

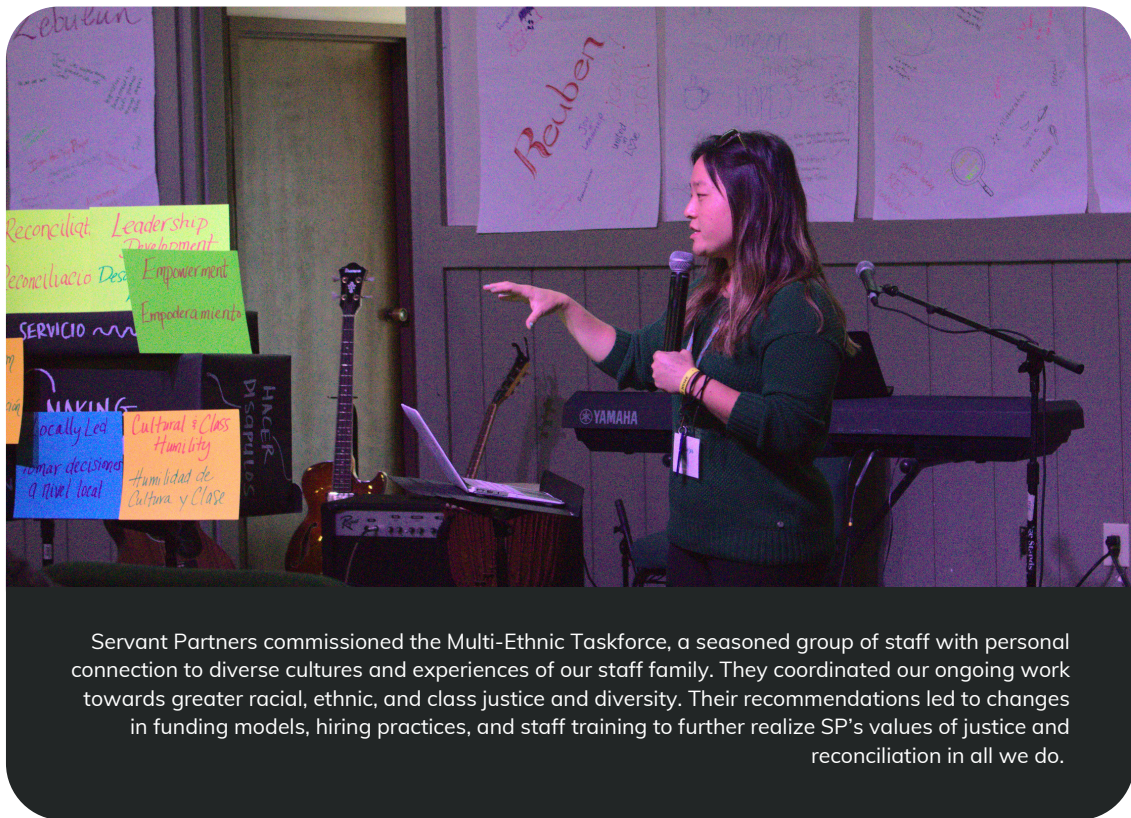
That all people are created in God's image and loved as God's precious children is at the core of our life together. Yet, we recognize we have also been shaped by injustice and sin that distort God's plan for a beloved community. In view of this, we commit to be a community always seeking fuller justice and righteousness in our relationships, structures, funding models, and life together. Instead of conforming to the patterns of this world (Romans 12:2) in regards to race, culture, class, and gender, we seek to become new creations in Christ that welcome and celebrate the dignity and contributions of all people.

**WE REJECT THE  
IDOLATROUS  
HIERARCHIES OF RACE,  
CULTURE, CLASS, AND  
GENDER AND THE  
PERSONAL AND  
SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE  
THEY HAVE SUSTAINED**

Recognizing that, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," (Galatians 3:28 NRSV) we reject the idolatrous hierarchies of race, culture, class, and gender and the personal and systemic injustice they have sustained.

Instead, we celebrate the gifts and beauty of every culture that will be gathered in God's Kingdom. We denounce the lie of racial superiority and seek to uproot the idolatry of racism among us. We call those with greater power and wealth to bind their lives to marginalized communities through mutuality and incarnation. We joyfully invite those who have experienced exclusion and marginalization to tell their stories and lead with their full gifts among us. And we celebrate and honor women and men as full and equitable partners in life and ministry. When injustice is done among us, we will offer correction in love, confess, and repent. Where necessary we will reform structures and make reparation, so that reconciliation is possible. All of this is done in obedient hope and empowered by Jesus' great mercy to us. We pray that through our community's pursuit of justice and reconciliation—love put into action—the world may know that Jesus was sent by the Father (John 17:21).





## Vision for Spirituality & Rule of Life

As a community of disciples, we commit to a common vision for spirituality that forms and guides our lives and ministry. Our vision, drawn from Jesus' declaration in Luke 4:18-19, emphasizes the four streams of our spirituality as a community:

- Our relationship with Jesus
- Communicating the Gospel
- Seeking justice
- God's Kingdom rest and restoration

Recognizing that our journey is both personal and communal, each Servant Partners staff discerns which of these streams to focus on each year. We also commit to a specific rhythm of spiritual practices, a rule of life, as a community:

- Time each day for connecting with Jesus through personal worship, prayer, and scripture
- Weekly days of sabbath rest
- One day per month for retreats of prayer

- An annual guided retreat to reflect on our relationship with God using the Rule of Life
- A sabbatical season every seven years

In addition we commit to invest our lives deeply in others by mentoring two people each year. We also commit to study the scriptures individually, on our teams, and as a movement when we gather.

We believe that to take on the character of Christ, God has given spiritual disciplines like these for our transformation. Worship, prayer, sharing the Gospel, seeking justice, and sabbath are central to the life and ongoing transformation of our community. As Jesus taught, these disciplines were created and inspired for people and not people for the discipline (Mark 2:27), so we seek to practice them with grace and flexibility. We recognize that our participation with God's transformation is essential, and that only by God's Spirit can we take on the likeness of Christ in our lives and ministry.

Our Vision of Spirituality & Rule of Life can be found at [www.servantpartners.org/resources](http://www.servantpartners.org/resources).



As an organization and individuals, Servant Partners staff commit to four streams of spirituality and related practices.

# Discipleship

The scriptures make clear that following Jesus is not a one-time event, but rather a life-long journey. We believe that, with Christ and each other, we will always work out our salvation, putting off the old false self, and taking on the new true self. We must always be learners and students of Jesus. Through discipleship we will become people who can participate in God's justice and healing in the world.

We will build communities that emphasize discipleship. We will form relationships in which people are consciously influencing one another to be more Christ-like. This will involve accountability, confession and humility. While on the journey of discipleship ourselves, we will boldly follow Christ's command and seek to reproduce his values in the lives of other disciples.

**THROUGH  
DISCIPLESHIP, WE  
WILL BECOME  
PEOPLE WHO CAN  
PARTICIPATE IN  
GOD'S JUSTICE AND  
HEALING IN THE  
WORLD**

# Servant Leadership

We believe that servant leadership is the primary way authority and power should be held in the Christian community. Therefore, we root our leadership and influence in the gifts of the Spirit and sacrificial service, and not in seniority or privilege. We believe the Christian community is to be led by those whom God has gifted with apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching gifts. But just as importantly, each person in leadership must demonstrate Christ's servant heart and posture.

Decision-making will be done prayerfully and by consensus as much as possible. Whenever possible, decisions will be made by and in consultation with the people most affected by the decision. Leaders will seek to make decisions based upon what is best for the whole community as well as the good of the individual. However, when a course of action is not soon apparent, leaders will make decisions which will advance the mission as a whole while staying true to the community's purpose.

Those affected by decisions will deal respectfully with their leaders. While complete agreement is neither possible nor expected at all times, mutual submission will mark our teams and communities.



# Shared Leadership

We are committed to developing leaders within our organization, inviting every person to lead in alignment with their gifts, calling, and faith. To nurture leadership, training is provided to all staff throughout their seasons of ministry. We will continually look within the organization for leaders who can be challenged to take on greater responsibility.



Servant Partners staff receive foundational training in areas ranging from church planting and community organizing, to trauma-informed ministry and economic development through our learning platform. As a learning community, we are always growing in our leadership and ability to serve alongside our communities.

# Global Partnership

We believe that the churches of the Majority World and Minority World are called into mutual and loving partnership for the growth of God's Kingdom. This global partnership acknowledges that God has richly gifted his family with every blessing and resource. We will pursue just and equitable distribution of God's resources so that more urban marginalized communities can experience God's transformation. Recognizing the Spirit's movement and vitality among the churches in the Majority World, we will work to catalyze and collaborate with national movements that seek community transformation in cities throughout the world. We will pray and work for a global family of ministries that are uniquely able to minister in their respective cultural and geographic regions.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR PRESENCE IN COMMUNITIES

## Learning Language and Culture Among Our Neighbors

Every community teaches unique ways of communicating, relating, and seeing the world. In order to build trust and honor our neighbors, we must also learn the unique language and culture of the community. For Servant Partners' staff serving in their own communities, this process of learning has happened naturally since childhood, making them experts and authorities. For staff relocating into another community, this learning happens similarly. We enter a community like a little child, not understanding how to communicate, relate, or understand the world around us. Our neighbors are the wise teachers and supportive family that guide and instruct us. Like children, we can approach this learning with curiosity, wonder, and a sense of humor, confident that God's image marks every neighbor and is uniquely revealed in every culture. While academic study can help us, learning from our neighbors and community is a key posture and strategy.

## Team Modeling and Creative Partnership

Working in teams allows us to demonstrate authentic Christian community to our neighbors. Because God reconciles people to God and one another in a community called the Church, teams are an essential witness to God's Kingdom. In addition, we seek to build teams with diverse cultures, experiences, gifts, and skills, where everyone can offer themselves and build one another up. This creative partnership of people can be more effective than any individual person, no matter how gifted or experienced.

**TEAMS  
ARE AN  
ESSENTIAL  
WITNESS  
TO GOD'S  
KINGDOM**

# Specific Community Focus

We work within specific geographic areas of a neighborhood. This approach gives us boundaries for our work, allowing us to be deeply present with that place and people. We seek to remain attentive to the neighbors, opportunities, and assets before us. We choose new cities and neighborhoods based on direction from God, discernment with the community itself, and calling from Servant Partners staff.



People interested in starting new SP sites can use resources like the Assessment Tool Kit to better discern God's leading, as well as timing and strategy for starting new works within a community.

## Relational Evangelism and Discipleship

Following Jesus' model of deep presence and relationship with people, we commit to a relational model of evangelism and discipleship. Our staff invest their lives to build mutual and trusting relationships with neighbors. These relationships become the most effective space for inviting others into a transformative relationship with Jesus, becoming life-long disciples.

Out of deep relationships, we invite neighbors to follow and worship Jesus in culturally meaningful ways and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is essential to all our evangelism and discipleship. As neighbors hear the story of God in contextualized ways, they encounter Jesus and are invited into obedience and faith. . As people ministering in the power of the Spirit, healing, deliverance, and bold proclamation also follow our invitations to faith and teaching of Scripture. When people encounter the powerful love of the Living God, they discover a Kingdom that transforms every aspect of life and the community.



Each SP staff commits to deeply investing in the lives of two community leaders each year. This is a natural way to invite neighbors into relationship with Jesus and into deeper discipleship.





# Nine Signs of a Transforming Community

1. JESUS COMMUNITIES
2. CIVIC GOOD
3. LIFELONG LEARNING
4. BREAKTHROUGH TO FREEDOM
5. WEALTH AT THE BOTTOM
6. WHOLE FAMILIES
7. HEALTH FOR ALL
8. SYSTEMS THAT WORK
9. BEAUTY AND CREATIVITY

# JESUS COMMUNITIES

## Reproducing, Transformational Communities of Jesus-Followers

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.



Botocan Bible Christian Fellowship in Manila, Philippines is planted in the heart of a vibrant urban community. Led by local Filipino leaders, this Jesus community practices a model of discipleship that resonates with the cultural identity and close-proximity of neighbors in Botocan. As a new generation of leaders are developed, the church dreams about planting in other communities and developing a Filipino movement among urban marginalized communities.

Hope Community Church in East Los Angeles, CA, USA is being planted by a pastor from the neighborhood and a local Servant Partners team. SP staff serve alongside the planting pastor to reach families, schools, and residents of a housing project in the neighborhood. The majority Latino ministry team shares a culturally meaningful gospel in the historic Latino community.





# CIVIC GOOD

## Increased Civic Participation for the Common 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, community organizing groups, volunteer activities that serve 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.



In Philadelphia, PA, USA, the SP team has worked to strengthen civic participation by building the capacity of neighborhood organizations and forming their own community organizing group. A growing coalition of block captains, local leaders, and programs regularly collaborate in voter-registration, community clean ups, and infrastructure improvement.

In Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, SP staff and interns collaborated with the local Chinese community and housing advocates to prevent displacement due to gentrification. Together they advocated for community-centered development and preserving the cultural heritage of their neighborhood.



# LIFELONG LEARNING

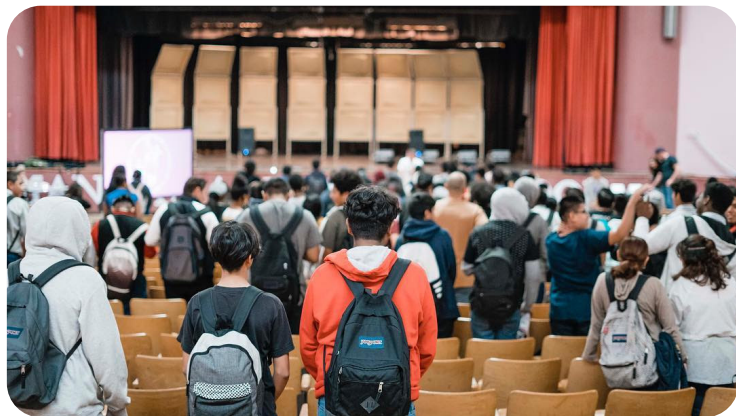
## Improved Accessibility to Life-Enhancing Education

While a few urban poor communities offer some educational opportunities, even the best opportunities tend to use an approach that delivers information—rather than engaging learners in ways that help them actually improve their lives. A transforming community offers people affordable educational services that respect the dignity of the learners and increase their ability to reflect on their lives, take action, and improve their career opportunities.



In the Middle East, an urban refugee community is drawing on its own resources to offer life-enriching training at a community center. Community members are invited to develop their own gifts and assets to improve the lives of others. As a result, vital tools in language, psycho-social wellbeing, and civic engagement have spread throughout the community.

In Lincoln Heights, CA, USA, the SP church plant has developed an innovative approach to supporting local students. High school athletes receive academic support and mentorship from Christian leaders who also coach them on the field and court. Each year, dozens of students go further academically and athletically while receiving discipleship from a trusted mentor.





# WEALTH AT THE BOTTOM

## Expanded Opportunities to Achieve Economic Sufficiency

Economic sufficiency in an urban poor community means that more and more people are integrated into the mainstream economy in the city and have the opportunity to provide a living for their families. Rather than sustaining themselves “under the radar” in the informal economy, 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 classes that create opportunities for income growth and greater productivity.



SP staff are working to bridge the gap between training and stable employment in Philadelphia, PA, USA through the Ignite Philly welding program. With former apprentices now teaching the program, neighbors develop technical and relational skills to access good-paying work in the city. Many neighbors are discovering the joy of learning a trade, meaningful work, and a spiritual community.

In South Asia, local women organized nearly 120 economic empowerment groups that helped them learn to save money, open bank accounts, and start small businesses. These groups helped them overcome economic marginalization, demonstrate financial solidarity and support to one another, and jumpstart significant economic activity in their region.



# BREAKTHROUGH TO FREEDOM

## Increased Spiritual and Psychological Health and Freedom from Destructive Patterns

A transforming community supports people in the journey to greater freedom and healing. In many communities, traumatic experiences—both individual and communal—strain relationships and lead to destructive patterns like addiction or decreased mental health. At times, the presence of spiritually harmful forces like the occult further hold people in bondage. Through resources for healing and recovery, community members can interrupt harmful patterns and develop their spiritual and psycho-social health. Approaches that are trauma-informed, community-based, and centered on the healing presence of God lead to a breakthrough to freedom. We can apply some existing models of effective programs, but it will take fasting and prayer to create the spiritual environment where those seeking change have a strong enough desire to commit to their lives to it.



In Managua, Nicaragua and Mexico City, Mexico, SP staff have developed a grass-roots holistic healing ministry called Grupos Vidas. The ministry focuses on training community leaders in focused prayer for emotional and spiritual healing. As a result, over 300 community leaders have experienced deeper freedom and gained resources to promote emotional and spiritual health throughout their families and communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SP staff trained dozens of grass-roots leaders in Latin America, Europe, and North America in joy-building prayer tools. These leaders then brought the tools for spiritual resilience into their communities and relationships, enhancing community wellbeing.

## HOPEFUL ACTION

JOY-BUILDING & RESILIENCY

[servantpartners.org/training](https://servantpartners.org/training)



# WHOLE FAMILIES

## Increased Family Health and Well-Being

A transforming community helps families free themselves from domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other destructive patterns. Families in urban marginalized communities have often experienced migration or displacement in arriving to the city. These changes create shifts in culture and values of the older and younger generations. Traumatic experiences strain family relationships and impact future generations. Through support and recovery groups, family social services, and youth development, families have an opportunity to navigate challenging experiences and discover the resources God has given them to thrive as whole families.



In Oakland, CA, USA, SP staff facilitate a marriage resilience group for a diverse group of ministry leaders. As the marriages of local leaders are invested in, the resources and impact spread throughout congregations and communities across the city.

In Manila, Philippines, a SP staff trained as a mental health counselor was appointed by the local government to serve and advocate for women and men experiencing domestic violence in the community.



# HEALTH FOR ALL

## Improved Environmental and Community Health

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 promote public health are crucial parts of an urban poor community that wants to improve the quality of life for its residents. Addressing the disproportionate environmental burdens experienced by urban marginalized communities is vital to community health. Creating clean neighborhoods, green spaces, and healthy environments outside the home are essential elements of a sustainable community.



In the Zandspruit community of Johannesburg, South Africa, SP staff and community leaders have catalyzed a women's fitness club and a men's cycling group to improve community health. As community members exercise and nurture physical wellbeing, they strengthen relationships and empower one another towards healthier relationships and lives.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the SP North Africa team partnered with local textile producers to sew and distribute 3,300 medical grade masks to high-risk community members like healthcare workers, the elderly, and people incarcerated.





# SYSTEMS THAT WORK

## Presence of Political, Economic, and Legal Systems that Work for the Poor

Most systems that govern an urban poor community are based on consolidated power that serves the few. A transforming community develops systems that serve everyone, including those who are marginalized and cannot speak for themselves. Transformed political systems seek to include those who do not already have a voice. Transformed economies empower under-resourced neighbors to access capital, materials, and opportunities. Transformed legal systems provide justice to the most vulnerable community members.



The SP team in South Los Angeles, CA, USA organized with Redeemer Community Partnership, a community-based organization and partner ministry, to stop active oil and gas extraction happening in a dense urban neighborhood. With a diverse coalition of community leaders and grass-roots organizations, they reformed racist environmental and zoning policies and won the closure of the drill site.

In Pomona, CA, USA, SP staff have worked for decades to organize neighbors and shape community institutions and political systems for a more just and flourishing city. In partnership with community leaders, SP is working for police reform, regulating polluting businesses, and addressing inequality in the city.



# BEAUTY AND CREATIVITY

## Increased Access to Creative and Artistic Education and Expression

Because we are made in our Creator's image and likeness, we are endowed with creativity and a love for beauty. In a transforming community, beauty, creativity, and artistic expression flourish on an individual and communal level in a way that serves individuals and the community as a whole. Various arts and forms of beauty and creative expression are used to transform the demeaning ugliness of poverty, to deepen empathy with others, to empower people's voices, to refine our imaginations, and to create times and spaces for internal reflection, joy, and healing. Through creative expression and the arts, we seek to more truly and clearly see the world as it is, as well as the world as it should be, with God's shalom and kingdom coming.



During COVID-19, a SP staff member trained in trauma-informed art therapy conducted several trainings with a diverse audience on art as a tool of lament. As participants wrote, colored, and expressed grief from their seasons, they were able to practice a collective truth-telling, making meaning amid loss.

In 2021, Servant Partners Press began publishing *The Mural*, a quarterly arts magazine that elevates creative expression and beauty in our communities around the world. The magazine invites neighbors in marginalized communities to create and share beauty through commissioned pieces and collaborative projects ranging from visual arts and poetry to dance and music. You can view it [here](#).







# STRATEGY

**T**he holistic transformation of a community is complex and requires many approaches. Our strategies provide a roadmap towards community transformation. Instead of a rigid external structure, our strategies are flexible and always informed by the community itself. Every Servant Partners team discerns with neighbors and the Spirit how to best contextualize these strategies. A clear strategy, with tools and ways to measure our impact, helps us join God and neighbors in meaningful and sustainable change.



# PRAYER AND INTERCESSION

Recognizing that God is always at work in our communities, we ground our ministry in prayer and intercession. Instead of relying only on strategies or our own ability, we listen and discern what God is doing in our neighbors and community, in order to partner with the Spirit's movement. The realities of poverty, injustice, and violence remind us that our battle is not against people or even systems, but the spiritual powers and principalities that are in rebellion against God. Intercession is the weapon God has given us to uproot the works of the enemy in our communities, planting seeds of God's Kingdom in their place.



Every Servant Partners staff builds a team of 3-6 intercessors to support their ministry. The team meets on a regular basis to worship, intercede, and listen on behalf of the SP staff. Intercessors are valued partners in ministry who hold up staff through the rigors of life and ministry. Intercessors from across our movement occasionally gather to fellowship, train, and intercede together at our Prayer Summit.



# CHURCH PLANTING

We focus on planting and strengthening reproducible and culturally meaningful expressions of the Church. These expressions must resonate with the heart and spirituality of each community. Instead of seeking to export an expression of the Church from any one culture, we depend upon the Spirit and local Christians to inform and guide our church planting.

We commit to work in collaboration with existing local Christian churches. When possible, we work in partnership with and under the leadership of Christian churches in the community and leaders who are already pursuing transformational church planting among the urban poor. When this is not possible, we are committed to building relationships with local Christians in order to model our missional values and encourage new ministry among the community. In all cases we seek to encourage local partnerships with a goal of catalyzing movements of transformational church planting among the urban poor.



Through the power of the Spirit and the wise leadership of local believers, SP's partnering movement in South Asia has established 160 house churches. These churches, led by women, are transforming 100 communities through a holistic ministry that proclaims the gospel, provides economic empowerment, and educational opportunities.

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

The foundation of our transformation strategy is community organizing. We use a community organizing model that focuses on identifying key leaders in the community and gathering them to discuss opportunities and needs. Leaders are trained and equipped to draw on community assets in responding to opportunities and needs. This model of organizing helps build God-given power in a community while strengthening relationships so ongoing transformative work is possible. We commit to local leaders shaping the work of organizing so that the community itself leads meaningful change.

Through this work, a healthy civic life is developed in the community. Christians participate with other groups and institutions to promote the common good, always acting as a prophetic witness and conscience in the community. Because no political movement fully aligns with God's Kingdom, we avoid any partisan affiliation, preferring to build diverse coalitions with neighbors focused on addressing everyday challenges and opportunities in our communities.

Some systemic change will require engagement with structures outside of the community that deny justice or harm our neighbors. We prophetically advocate with our communities to government, business, and other power-holders. We seek to build bridges between people on the margins and those at the center to work collaboratively toward justice and the common good, while equipping neighbors to effectively advocate for themselves.



In Bangkok, Thailand, a local leader partnered with Servant Partners to organize her community allowing the 25 families to collectively purchase land, relocate their community, and build wealth after they were displaced.



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As neighbors and Servant Partners staff identify key opportunities and challenges facing their community, we encourage creative and practical responses. Because God is at work in every community, providing leadership, creativity, and other assets, unique approaches to transformation are possible. One community may create a small-business incubator. Another may train and mobilize a public health team. While another may build vocational training partnerships between schools and businesses. These approaches draw on the existing gifts and resources of the community, are led by local people, and can be sustained effectively.



A SP staff in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada with a passion for food and relationships realized Chinese seniors and Syrian refugees in the community had amazing skills in cooking and hospitality. Drawing on these gifts, she launched Happy Woman Kitchen, a social enterprise that empowers women from marginalized communities to share their food and supplement their family incomes.

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The most important work of Servant Partners is calling and developing disciples of Jesus, and raising up godly leaders in marginalized communities. Long after programs, initiatives, and even organizations are gone, leaders remain and continue to bless their communities, adapting to every challenge. Only God and people last forever.

When Jesus came to earth to live among us, reaching the whole world with the power of the Gospel, he spent time with God the Father and with people. Although Jesus ministered to crowds as the Good Shepherd, he spent most of time with his close group of disciples. He was with them, he taught them, and he gave them authority. He sent them out to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, to heal and set people free from oppression. Finally, he gave them his very presence—The Holy Spirit, living inside of them.

Servant Partners believes that God is calling people to obedience and raising up godly servant leaders in every urban poor community in the world. Jesus is still with his people, equipping them for ministry. As we serve in marginalized communities, developing local leaders is Servant Partners' strategic priority.



Servant Partners focuses on cultivating and supporting the existing leadership within communities. Local leaders at the Lincoln Heights site offer a training on developing other local leaders throughout the movement.



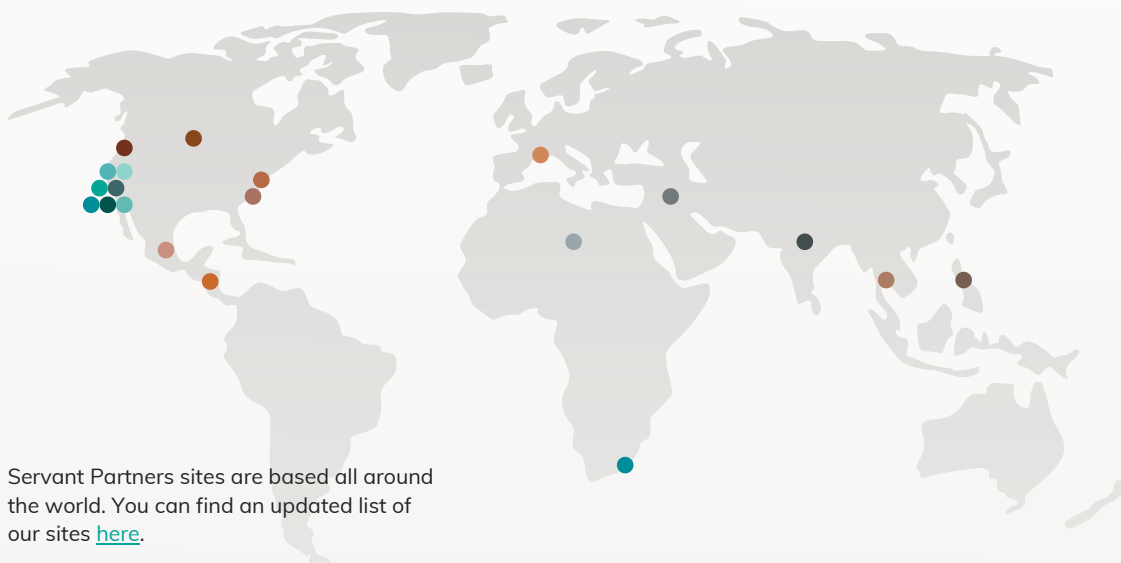
# SERVANT PARTNERS SITES

Each Servant Partners site develops and changes over time as ministry progresses in the community. We place sites in four categories that reflect the unique needs, focus, and support of a site in a given season. For the first 7-10 years, Servant Partner sites focus on establishing presence in a community and discerning how God would have them work for transformation. During this period structures like churches, community organizing groups, and nonprofits are established. With the help of extensive coaching and mentorship, the site grows and becomes a stable ministry, multiplying leaders, with increasing local leadership over the work.

After this initial stage, the site begins moving toward organizational independence as a Ministry Partner I. With effective ministry structures, seasoned leaders, and greater expertise in specific areas of community transformation, the site trains and mentors other leaders and may consider planting or multiplying ministries.

Ministry Partner II sites have matured to a place of organizational independence from Servant Partners. While they are no longer under Servant Partners, they seek to continue in partnership based around common goals and collaboration. While no longer under the authority of Servant Partners, Ministry Partner II sites seek structures of ongoing accountability and support such as a denomination or ministry association.

Finally, community transformation ministries that already exist may seek a collaborative partnership with Servant Partners. These Indigenous Partner sites continue to be locally led with Servant Partners playing a consulting and supportive role.



Servant Partners sites are based all around the world. You can find an updated list of our sites [here](#).

# DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS

Since 1995, Servant Partners Internships have equipped emerging leaders to minister alongside urban marginalized communities. Interns live, learn, and pursue God together in order to discern a call to community transformation.

Internships are based in Servant Partners' communities around the world. Ranging from two weeks to two years, internships are an opportunity for emerging leaders to join the life and work of a Servant Partners' site, contributing to ongoing community transformation and discerning God's call to serve alongside urban marginalized communities long term.

We accept applicants who are seriously considering ministry alongside urban marginalized communities, open to church planting, and working internationally.



Over 60 leaders have entered vocational ministry with Servant Partners or other ministries through the internship. Alumni of the internship also serve in business, health care, technology, education, and nonprofit fields with a commitment to God's Kingdom of justice and compassion.





# STATEMENT OF FAITH

**W**e affirm the Lausanne Covenant, which can be viewed [here](#). We receive the Bible in its entirety, and the Bible alone, as the word of God written, inspired of God and therefore the infallible rule of faith and practice. In view of contemporary theological discussion, we explicitly affirm our belief in Biblical doctrines as they are stated in the historical confessions of the church.



SERVANT PARTNERS

Transforming Communities With the Urban Poor

[www.servantpartners.org](http://www.servantpartners.org)



SERVANT PARTNERS PRESS

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Theological reflections, narratives, and training materials that speak to God's transforming power in the inner cities and slums of our world

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Servant Partners: An Introduction