

# ACTS

Abundant **Communities**



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# LIVING IN ABUNDANT COMMUNITY

Over the last 50 years, our collective national response to poverty has included the constructing of various safety and support programs for individuals and families experiencing economic hardship. Most of these programs have addressed surface needs of families, such as housing or food provision. While important, these services are often fragmented and programs don't have within them the ability to produce sustaining support networks of care. Additionally, the proliferation of professionalized services to the poor have often left community members without imperative or natural ways to engage in building relationships with their neighbors across the community, at all economic levels.

As a result, what our nation experiences is ongoing fragmentation by economic class, race, politics and other forms of polarization, which has impacted not only communities, but also the church. As the church seeks to follow the call to address poverty and restore community, it is finding that its rescue and relief efforts (give a fish or throw a lifejacket) are not alone sufficient. We believe that the church, as the Body of Christ is in a position to provide leadership and be an example of restorative community for our neighbor, city, nation, and world.

Perhaps we need a different narrative about what poverty, prosperity and wholeness really means. In their book *When Helping Hurts*, Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett offered a more complete definition of poverty, which defines it as a brokenness in relationship with God, self, others and the rest of creation. This definition recognizes that God, through the vehicle of relationships, brings restoration to both individuals and community. It also acknowledges that poverty is more than a lack of material resources, and that all humans experience brokenness and can participate in healing.

This new paradigm of poverty (broken relationships) and prosperity (reconciliation and wholeness) goes against the natural tendencies and thought processes of a materially driven culture. In subtle and damaging ways, many ministries have been designed in a fashion that creates consumer-like transactions between individuals and institutions that are materially resourced and individuals and families who are economically unstable that fuels a rescuer complex in the giver and inferiority/ dependency complex in the receiver. Such unintended consequences play out, often unconscious to well meaning Christians desiring to do unto the least, as an imperative in Matthew 25.

These dynamics, which cannot be pursued at the depth required in this document, have sparked an impetus to create tools to assist churches, ministries and Disciples of Christ to pursue holistic poverty alleviation ministry in a relationally based, mutually transformative way.

To that end, ACTS (abundant communities) is a process in design to help churches and Christian faith communities more holistically understand poverty & build relationships that surpass culture & class boundaries in order to experience God's healing, wholeness & reconciliation.



The logo for ACTS (Abundant Communities) features the word "ACTS" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. The letter "A" is orange and contains a white sunburst icon. Below "ACTS" is the text "Abundant Communities" in a smaller, orange sans-serif font.

ACTS  
Abundant Communities

## REFRAME

Shifting your church's view of poverty and poverty alleviation

### EXPAND



SEE THE  
**WHOLE PICTURE**  
OF POVERTY

### LISTEN



**TO YOUR:**  
LEADERSHIP  
CONGREGATION  
COMMUNITY

### MAP



YOUR MINISTRIES'  
ASSETS & NEEDS

## RESHAPE

Equipping your congregation for relational ministry

### EQUIP



FOR MUTUALLY  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS

### PLAN



FOCUS RESOURCES  
FOR GREATER  
IMPACT

### ENGAGE



WHOLE CHURCH IN  
KINGDOM BUILDING

## RESTORE

Cultivating partnerships for community impact

### LINK



WITH OTHERS  
AROUND AREA OF  
MINISTRY FOCUS

### PARTNER



**CULTIVATE RADICAL  
ALLIANCES AMONG:**  
CHURCHES  
COMMUNITY GROUPS  
NEIGHBORHOODS

### IMPACT



**ADDRESS SOCIAL &  
ECONOMIC ISSUES  
IN BROADER  
COMMUNITY**  
**CIVIC STEWARDSHIP**



## REFRAME

In order to have greater influence and impact in the broader community, it is important for church leadership to first assess their current mindsets, ministry practices and capacities to become best equipped for holistic ministry across diverse communities. Reframe is intended to be a time to take a comprehensive view of your church's domestic and global ministry, explore mindsets shaping poverty alleviation ministry, identify your assets and allow the Spirit to stretch your church leadership both individually and together in order to discern how to best partner and engage your community.

## RESHAPE

Once a church has assessed their current mindsets, ministry practices and capacities for holistic ministry, it will be important to finalize and implement a ministry plan in concert with current ministry volunteers and other church and community partners. Reshape allows a church to determine a plan for ministry that places the most investment into approaches that are holistic, relational and collaborative. Reshape also provides a mechanism for equipping your congregation for relational ministry across economic and cultural lines.

## RESTORE

A holistic view of poverty causes us to recognize that there are also community systems and practices in place that do not promote God's mercy, justice and human dignity. For this reason, the church is compelled to speak out and influence culture through the power of relationships. This phase will help equip the church with a format for identifying and collaborating around issues of concern and potential impact. Community engagement will be based on the experiences of individuals involved in ministries and challenges plaguing neighborhoods in the area.

## IN MORE SPECIFIC TERMS, ACTS:

- Begins with leadership. ACTS helps faith based leaders develop a holistic understanding of poverty and realign ministry approaches based on a shared set of principles.
- Focuses on building opportunities for all involved to experience reconciliation in four key relationships (God, self, others, rest of creation/ community)
- Is holistic as defined as realizing the whole as a result of the functioning interdependence of its parts. Church ministries cannot function in isolation from one another or the broader community. In the same manner, individuals are made up of several dimensions so to separate the physical from the spiritual or vice versa, as if each part is inconsequential to one another, would be a mistake.
- Teaches the church and faith based ministries how to effectively listen and engage with the community.
- Builds upon affinities that churches and faith based groups have with their community. (For example: Addiction/ Recovery Ministry, Economic Ministries, Family Ministries)
- Emphasizes development and personal empowerment as opposed to relief.
- Is based on a small group relational format, because real change occurs most effectively through a body of supportive friends.

## ACTS IS NOT:

- An isolated or add on project- it must be a reflection of the DNA of the local church or faith based collaborative.
- Another program or the 'magic bullet.'
- For those who aren't willing to wrestle with their own brokenness (ie: materialism, pride, etc)
- About remaining comfortable or sticking with people who all look and think like me.



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