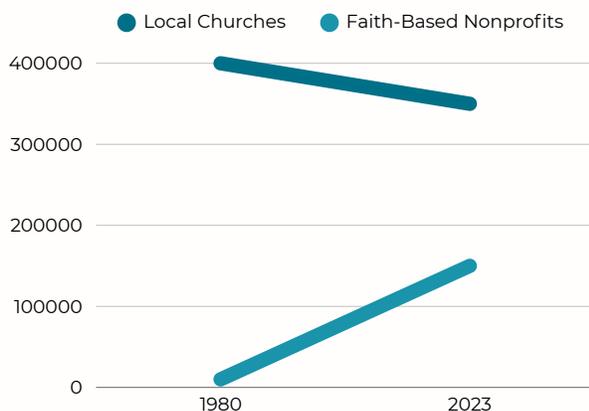


From Crisis to Commission:

How Life Ministries Could Make Disciples & Save the Church



"I published *The Church and The Parachurch: An Uneasy Marriage* in the 1980s," Dr. Jerry White, President Emeritus of The Navigators, shared. "At the time I estimated there to be 10,000 faith-based nonprofits in North America. I predicted that this number would double in 20 years, but I was wrong." Jerry paused, as the following graph appeared on the screen:



The room chuckled as we realized that Jerry wasn't wrong at all; he just didn't know *how right* he would be. Who could have predicted that in a span of 40 years, faith-based nonprofits would increase more than ten-fold, from 10,000 to 150,000? Perhaps even more unexpectedly, in the same amount of time, the number of churches decreased sharply, down to 350,000.

Scott Harris, Vice President of Church & Global Engagement for Mission Increase, and the primary facilitator of our meetings, began his comments. "The missional energy of the church has left the building," he concluded. He went on, "The church has structured itself around shepherds and teachers, and now the missionally-minded have gone elsewhere."

Much could be written about the ecclesiology of "church" and "parachurch." However, this is not that article. Rather, as the former director of a PRC, I want to encourage you – current PRC

leaders – with the opportunity that your ministry has to powerfully impact the state of discipleship and the Church in North America.

You may already know these numbers: In addition to church buildings closing, fewer and fewer adults are regularly reading their Bibles. Self-professed Christians are rarely sharing the Gospel, and syncretism (the mixing of unbiblical beliefs with Christianity) is far too common, even amongst pastors. Some have estimated that only 3-5% of church growth is coming through new conversions, and that 1.5 million dollars in church budgets is spent for every new baptism. In most churches, new attendees are most likely simply transfers from other local churches. (See: Lifeway, Barna, Ligonier and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for the most up-to-date statistics regarding the Church and state of the Christian discipleship in North America.)

"The missional energy of the Church has left the building."

– Scott Harris, Mission Increase

However, in the midst of Church decline in North America, voices like Scott's are drawing attention to the fact that faith-based nonprofit ministries are opening at an unprecedented rate. Is this trend missionally significant for evangelism and discipleship in the United States? I think so. But, lasting Kingdom impact won't happen by default; it requires intentionality. Chris Gough, Director of City Gospel Movements, found this: "In a survey of Seattle-area faith-based nonprofits, 100% of them said that discipleship and evangelism are high values. However, only 4% said they knew how to implement."

In global missions, much attention is given to “entry fields” – strategic spaces for connection that give way into opportunities for the Kingdom of God to advance. In our domestic context, faith-based nonprofits are incredible entry fields for great Gospel transformation in our cities.

Here are five reasons why I believe faith-based nonprofit organizations often possess the right “DNA” for effective domestic missions:

1. Discontentment. *Nonprofit leaders tend to have an awareness that something is “missing” from the prevailing expressions of church, which then motivates their specific work. For example: providing for the orphan, comforting the sick, or feeding the homeless.*

2. Gospel Motives. *This discontentment is often birthed from conviction rooted in the Word of God and in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. There is a Godly desire to bear witness to the ministry of Jesus.*

3. Self-Sacrifice. *Nonprofit staff and volunteers typically “count-the-cost” for their work. In lower pay, in under-resourced initiatives, in emotional investment, and in their time, those serving in these settings are choosing to lay their lives down for a worthy cause.*

4. Missional Momentum. *Faith-based nonprofits are missionally active outside of traditional church walls. Although they can carry their own bureaucracy, there is a level of empowerment and missional independence already present in these environments.*

5. PIPSY Access. *Many have written about “PIPSYs” (poor, internationals, prisoners, sick, youth) as being fertile soil for sowing Gospel seed. Nonprofits have natural levels of access to open and ready populations.*

When I became the director of a pregnancy resource center in 2019, I experienced first-hand the reality of the list above. However, I also quickly came to realize that PRCs are special. Unlike other client-serving nonprofit ministries, pregnancy centers hold unique potential reach people with the transformational hope of Gospel.

Here’s why your pregnancy resource center is **uniquely** positioned to make a Gospel impact in your community:

1. Uniquely Relational. PRCs meet men and women during one of the most vulnerable moments of their lives, and often have the privilege of hearing someone’s story over the course of several hours and multiple follow-up appointments, spanning months or even years. This naturally lends itself to sharing Gospel hope and engaging in long-term discipleship.

2. Uniquely Inclusive. PRCs’ clientele span socioeconomic lines. While many nonprofits have specific brackets for service eligibility, pregnancy affects everyone. PRCs serve a wide span of ages, nationalities, income levels, and educational backgrounds.

3. Uniquely Spiritual. PRCs are most often openly faith-based and cognizant of spiritual forces, with a mission/vision statement and list of core values that place a high priority upon the Gospel. Because of this, the culture of PRCs tends to be highly dependent upon prayer and already open to boldly sharing truth.

4. Uniquely Connected. PRCs tend to be connected nationally, yet autonomous locally. It is not difficult to spread training and share encouragement, yet local leaders are able to implement new vision without hindrance.

5. Uniquely Responsible. Lastly, PRCs minister at the crossroads of an issue that rests almost entirely upon the Church’s shoulders. It does not require a Christian to care about the hungry, but it does require the Spirit of God to care for the unborn. It is our duty to minister where others will not, and God blesses this.

Hurting men and women are longing for Good News, and obedience to Jesus demands that we share. Let this be your encouragement: Amidst spiritual decay and church decline in North America, you are uniquely positioned to make a Gospel impact in your city. In addition to wearing the labels “nonprofit,” “ministry,” and “PRC,” add “entry field” to your list. Pray unceasingly. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Abide with the Vine. Embolden those around you to do the same – whether your staff, or your clients. Together, let’s share the Gospel, make disciples, and eagerly await the day when Christ restores all things.

Shannon Moloney is the executive director of Joshua House and formerly a PRC center director. Established in 2025, Joshua House is strengthening the potential of life ministries to make disciples in their cities, in partnership with local followers of Jesus.