Urban Alliance's 5-C Framework:
Christian Witness

URBAN**ALLIANCE**

Christian Witness Overview

Before Jesus ascended into Heaven He said to His disciples, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* **(Acts 1:8). We are able to join with the disciples and be Christ's witnesses in our local communities.**

Urban Alliance uses a 5-C framework to describe areas of effective and sustainable programming. The concept of Christian witness captures the spiritual impact programs may have on people as they reflect the love of Christ. When we reflect God's love through words and actions we act as witnesses to Christ.

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What Does it Mean to Be a Witness?

A witness testifies to what they have seen or heard, or verifies what is true. According to the Billy Graham Gospel Association, Christians have been commissioned by Christ to be witnesses to the following:

The Gospel
"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The Divinity of Jesus and That He Is the Savior of the World
"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

The Love of God
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

The Forgiveness of God
"He commanded us…to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

Urban Alliance's 5-C Framework

Capacity is the degree to which programs have mechanisms in place to effectively operate.

Core services are the key offerings of a program.

Culture is comprised of program values, quality of relationships, service procedures, and characteristics of the program environment.

Connection occurs when a program links people to resources in the community.

Christian witness is reflecting the love and truth of God through words and actions.

What Does it Mean to Be a Witness?

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:42, 43).

The Hope of Eternal Life
"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

Each believer is called to be a witness for Christ within their sphere of influence. They are called to share God's love with the people they interact with in various contexts such as work, family and neighborhood or community involvement. Similarly, Christian programs have an opportunity to be witnesses as they meet people's needs, offer support and help people make changes in their lives. This more holistic approach allows them to address practical and spiritual needs simultaneously and make a deeper and more enduring impact.

What Are Characteristics of a Strong Christian Witness?

There are many ways a program can have a strong Christian witness among the people they serve. Some ways are more obvious and others are subtler. Each program needs to discern the strategy that best fits their programming. For the purposes of Urban Alliance's 5-C framework, there are four key elements involved in Christian witness:

Love: Key staff and volunteers know Christ and seek to show Christ's love as they interact with the people they serve

Scripture: God's Word is shared through programming to offer hope and encouragement

Prayer: The power of approaching God through prayer is recognized, and staff and volunteers pray for the people they serve

Discipleship: There are opportunities for people to engage in relationships that support spiritual growth

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What Are Characteristics of a Strong Christian Witness?

The following sections expand on each of these characteristics:

Love: Key staff and volunteers know Christ and seek to show Christ's love as they interact with the people they serve.

God is love (1 John 4:8)! Therefore, a program cannot act as a witness to Christ without love. Love takes many forms. It can be shown through kind words, caring actions or gestures, hope for another person's situation, or an acknowledgement of a person's worth and potential. Scripture offers the following description of what love looks like as it is lived out:

 "Love is <u>patient</u>, love is <u>kind</u>. It does <u>not envy</u>, it does <u>not boast</u>, it is <u>not proud</u>. It does <u>not dishonor</u> others, it is <u>not self-seeking</u>, it is <u>not easily angered</u>, it keeps <u>no record of wrongs</u>. Love does not delight in evil but <u>rejoices with the truth</u>. It <u>always protects</u>, <u>always trusts</u>, <u>always hopes</u>, <u>always perseveres</u>. Love <u>never fails</u>." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

In fact, love is more important than even the most powerful spiritual gift. Without love, spiritual gifts are considered worthless.

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

In order to show God's love, a person must be filled with God's love. This happens as they grow in their relationship with God and more fully experience His love.

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses

knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Imagine how it would feel to be served at a program where staff and volunteers were so filled with God's love that it overflowed into their interactions with others. God's love is powerful and transformative. Programs that overflow with the love of God will have a deeper spiritual impact on the people they serve and will lay the foundation for sharing Scripture and offering opportunities for prayer and discipleship.

<u>Considerations:</u>
- How many of your volunteers and staff are Christian?
- How many staff and volunteers have a healthy understanding of God's love and seek to be filled with His love?
- Do staff and volunteers interact with the people you serve in ways that reflect the Bible's description of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8?
- Do the people served through your program share that they feel love, warmth or care as they receive services?

What Are Characteristics of a Strong Christian Witness?

Scripture: God's Word is shared through programming to offer hope and encouragement.

Scripture refers to the sacred text contained in the Holy Bible. Christians believe that the Bible is "God-breathed" which means that just as God breathed life into Adam, He also breathed life into Scripture.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Every word contained in the Bible is true and is as necessary to a healthy life as food and nutrition. In fact, Jesus said, *"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). God's Word is an important tool that can be incorporated into programming to help people understand the Gospel and to offer hope and encouragement.

There are a number of different ways programs can incorporate Scripture into programming:

- **Visual messages:** Scripture can be incorporated into program decor. For example, a food pantry may hang wall art with encouraging Scriptures or a care ministry might have a pillow embroidered with a Bible verse. Scripture can be incorporated into the décor of any type of program and also helps to create a positive program culture.
- **Handouts:** Programs can offer Bibles, Christian books, flyers, tracts or other printed materials that contain Scripture and reflect Biblical truth to people they serve. In this way, programs are providing information to people to help them grow spiritually. Of course, it is always important to carefully read any materials that will be distributed to ensure the content is consistent with the Bible.
- **Background music:** Consider playing worship music or music by Christian artists during programming. For programs that require a quiet environment, such as counseling sessions or class settings, music

may be played before or after programming is offered. Music can be played in the background during programs where background noise is permitted, such as community meals, food pantries or children's play groups.

- **Invitations to events:** Staff and volunteers can invite people to church services or other events where God's Word is shared more directly. Invitations can be made casually through person-to-person interactions, by handing out invitations or flyers, or through a large group announcement.
- **Intentional Conversations:** As relationships between staff, volunteers and people served grow stronger, staff and volunteers will know more about each person's life situation and there will naturally be more opportunities to share Scripture to offer hope and encouragement. However, these types of interactions will not occur unless staff and volunteers are intentional about initiating them and making themselves available to engage in a deeper way with the people they serve.

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- **Direct Teaching:** Many programs have the opportunity to offer direct teaching that incorporates Scripture. Examples include, youth groups that offer teaching on various topics during meetings or a support group that teaches about healthy coping using Scripture.

As you share Scripture in various ways, pray that it will accomplish God's will in each person's life. In the book of Isaiah it says, *"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11).

Considerations:
- Does your program share Scripture in any of the ways described above? Are there additional strategies that might be incorporated into programming?
- Are there certain scriptures that are particularly important to share with the people you serve? Which ones and why?
- Are there more relational approaches that can be used to share Scripture such as through conversations or direct teaching?

Prayer: The power of prayer is recognized, and staff and volunteers pray for the people they serve.

Throughout the Bible believers are called to pray. Ephesians 6:18 says, *"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."* Jesus modeled this and regularly spent time alone praying to the Father. Christian author Robert Velarde defines prayer as, "a relationship, wherein we humbly communicate, worship, and sincerely seek God's face, knowing that He hears us, loves us and will respond, though not always in a manner we may expect or desire."

Jesus teaches about prayer in Luke 11 by sharing a parable:

"Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

By praying, we can be the person in the parable ringing the doorbell to get help for others. Even though the person inside was tired and initially didn't want to be bothered, because of the friend's persistence or "shameless audacity" he eventually gave what was needed. If this cranky, tired person was willing to help, how much more will God do? He is never irritated, doesn't sleep and has nothing but love for His children.

What Are Characteristics of a Strong Christian Witness?

There are a number of different ways programs can build prayer into their services. These include:

Praying for: Staff and volunteers can be intentional about praying <u>for</u> the people they serve. Ideally, this involves knowing each person, their life situation, their felt needs and letting the person know they are being prayed for. Additionally, staff and volunteers can use some time at team meetings to pray for their program and the people they serve. Or, the names of people they serve can be divided among staff and volunteers who commit to praying for them regularly.

Praying with: Staff and volunteers can also be intentional about praying <u>with</u> the people they serve. Matthew 18:20 says, *"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."* This involves at least two people praying together, one of whom is a person served by the program. In some cases, a staff or volunteer might pray for a person's life situation or a known struggle, but in other situations they might praise and thank God together or intercede on another person's behalf.

It is important for staff and volunteers to take initiative to offer prayer, as opposed to waiting for a person to ask. It is also important for staff and volunteers to understand that people have varying levels of comfort when it comes to prayer. Some people may prefer not to be prayed for in person but are happy to share prayer requests. Others may have different religious beliefs or negative associations with God or prayer and may prefer not to receive prayer. It takes wisdom and discernment to know how and when to offer prayer and how to adjust if a person appears uncomfortable.

Encouraging people to pray: Staff and volunteers can also encourage people to grow in their prayer life. This can look a number of different ways depending on the unique dynamics of the program. For example, a program might provide a prayer journal or prayer devotional to each person and encourage them to seek God in prayer. Through conversation, staff and volunteers might encourage a person to continue praying for a situation and share truths about God and

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the power of prayer. Or, they may more directly teach about prayer through a class or workshop. Again, it is important to be sensitive to each person's comfort level and not force a person to engage in prayer.

Considerations:
- Do staff and volunteers pray individually or as a group for the people you serve?
- Are there opportunities for the people you serve to share prayer requests and receive prayer from staff and volunteers?
- Are there opportunities for the people you serve to learn more about prayer or grow in their prayer lives?
- Are staff and volunteers sensitive to each person's comfort level with prayer and willing to adjust their words and actions accordingly?

Discipleship: There are opportunities for people to engage in relationships that support spiritual growth.

A disciple is a person who embraces Jesus as Lord and Savior and follows His teachings. In order for this to happen, a person needs to first accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and then be taught how to think, feel and behave as a Christ follower. Christians can help unbelievers become believers by sharing about Christ. And, every Christian has the opportunity to help other believers grow to greater maturity. Discipleship is a process, not an event, which continues throughout a person's life.

For the purpose of this booklet, discipleship opportunities are defined as ongoing opportunities in which a person can engage to grow spiritually. These opportunities occur in a predictable way over a period of time with a goal of spiritual growth. It is important for programs to consider what structure or strategy, listed here, will best support the spiritual growth and maturity of each person served:

Connecting to church programming. Some programs focus on meeting a particular need such as hunger.

Instead of building in a new component to support spiritual growth, some programs encourage people to participate in church events or programs that are already in place. For example, a food pantry may regularly invite men and women to join Bible studies organized by their church. That way, the pantry does not have to add a new component to their programming, but is intentional about connecting the people they serve to existing church discipleship opportunities.

Offering group discipleship opportunities. Some programs may want to include group discipleship opportunities as part of their programming. For example, they may choose to engage a group of people who will meet regularly and grow spiritually. If this is the case, it is important to identify strong staff or volunteers to lead the group. Effective group leaders are mature in their faith, relational, organized, able to make and keep commitments, have the time to facilitate the group and engage relationally with members, and are able to commit to being engaged for the duration of the group. There are many excellent existing curriculums that can be used in these settings and purchased for a nominal price. Group opportunities usually occur in one of the following forms:

- Bible studies: The focus of a Bible study is to learn more about the Bible or better understand topics from a Christian perspective.
- Prayer groups: Prayer groups meet regularly to pray for members, other people and relevant situations.
- Support groups: Support groups are usually organized around a common life situation or struggle among members (e.g. addiction, single parenting, children with disabilities or medical conditions). Support groups offer emotional support to members, but can also be used to help people grow spiritually when discipleship is also a common goal. When this is the case, Scripture is often shared, prayer is incorporated and group members desire to grow personally and help other members grow in their faith.

What Are Characteristics of a Strong Christian Witness?

Offering one-on-one discipleship opportunities.
Programs can also offer one-on-one discipleship relationships where a mature believer is paired with a newer, younger, struggling or less mature person, and the pair meets regularly. Most one-on-one discipleship relationships can be defined as either mentoring or coaching. However, in order for the relationship to be considered discipleship, spiritual growth must be a goal. Mentoring and coaching relationships that exist without this goal may have a positive impact on the mentee or client, but would not be considered discipleship. There are a few important differences between these types of one-on-one relationships:
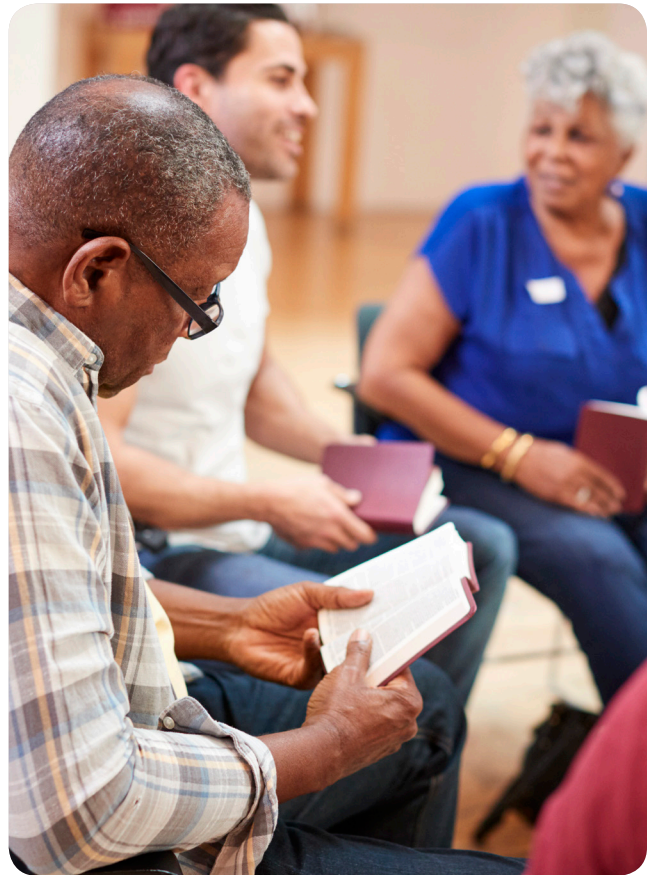
- Mentoring: The focus of a mentoring relationship is relational and often involves sharing personal information and emotional support. Mentoring is often longer-term than coaching.
- Coaching: The focus of a coaching relationship is more functional. Through the process of coaching, a person sets goals, makes a plan to accomplish their goals and is connected to resources that will help them accomplish their goals. Coaching is often shorter-term than mentoring.

Considerations:
- What strategies does your program use to share the Gospel or help people grow spiritually? What strategies might you use in the future?
- Do you use any of the strategies noted in this booklet, such as connecting people to church programs or offering group or one-on-one discipleship opportunities? What is working well? Where are you experiencing challenges?
- What can you do to build on or strengthen the strategies you are already implementing?

References

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Notes