

Radical relocation: Moving to places of need

From the Editors in the [October 18, 2005](#) issue

After the hurricanes, we heard many stories of church groups that loaded up trucks with supplies for destitute people in the Gulf Coast. Some Christians have been responding to long-term issues of poverty by loading up not supply trucks but moving trucks. They have relocated from areas of privilege to areas of poverty to live among poor people, worship with them, advocate for them and empower them.

John Perkins, founder and leader of the Christian Community Development Association, offers a vision of Christian community. It involves: 1) relocation—moving from places of privilege, such as wealthy suburbs, to places of need, such as decaying inner cities; 2) reconciliation—being a living embodiment of God’s reconciling work in Christ; and 3) redistribution—advocating on behalf of such communities from within, cultivating their innate talents and empowering them to fight for social justice. Perkins’s 3 R’s have inspired hundreds of communities across the country to a form of ministry that is incarnational. (For more on the movement, go to ccda.org.)

Charles Marsh argues that communities inspired by CCDA’s vision are the legitimate heirs of the civil rights movement. In *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (Basic), Marsh gives an outline for an activist faith in a chapter called “Dispatches from the Quiet Revolution.” One such dispatch is about Desire Street Ministries in New Orleans, which operates in an area of town where life was hard even before Katrina. The average annual income is \$6,000. The crime rate is off the charts. In response to such need, white and black volunteers and staff members for DSM share living space, transportation and meals with local residents—who make up half the paid staff. Founder Mo Leverett says he wants to see “Christ’s kingdom advanced as far as possible, especially in areas where we have neglected our Christian responsibilities—in pockets of poverty where great injustices have occurred.”

After Katrina, Desire Street Ministries relocated its offices to Atlanta and its school to Florida, but its Web site announces: “We look forward to linking arms with the body of Christ as we work to rebuild our community.” While others debate the wisdom of rebuilding New Orleans at all—presumably wishing to shift poverty to some out-of-sight location—Desire Street is eager to rebuild and return to its ministry with the poor. City planners would be wise to listen to its gritty wisdom.

Highlighting ministries like those of CCDA and Desire Street or the new monastic communities that are profiled in this issue might seem to be a way of shaming churches that are less obviously radical in their ministry or less committed to a lifestyle of crossing race and class lines. Marsh offers a different way of thinking about the challenge. “Eleven o’clock Sunday may be the most segregated hour of the week as far as any particular parish goes, but it is the most integrated hour of the week as the kingdom goes.” He reminds us that Christian churches are connected. We can feel proud of others’ work. Other Christians’ creativity reflects the goodness of a gift-giving God, who might even give us the gift of going and doing likewise.