

# HERE'S LIFE INNER CITY'S 2009 "TWO WAVES REPORT"

*The following report comes from Here's Life Inner City's experience and observations. Over the past few years, we have begun to see two, converging waves – one of interest in serving the poor amongst Christians and one of unprecedented need. We hope you will find this report helpful in your work:*

## WAVE OF INTEREST AMONGST EVANGELICALS

One upsurge we are seeing is the **wave of interest in ministry to the poor among Christians**. Christians from every background seem to be looking for ways to express compassion for the poor and interest in social action. This interest is reflected in recent statistics, studies and media reports:

Poverty and homelessness have become a primary focus for evangelicals. In October 2007, in an effort to better understand perceptions preceding the 2008 election, *CBS News* asked white evangelical Christians to choose which issue called for the most evangelical involvement. More respondents answered that Christians should get involved in working to end poverty and hunger than they did for any other issue. This place of prominence among Evangelicals showcases the primary wave of interest discussed in our proposal.

*"White Evangelicals, the Issues and the 2008 Election."* CBS News. Release Date: October 18, 2007. Accessible at: [http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/CBSNews\\_poll\\_evan\\_101807.pdf](http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/CBSNews_poll_evan_101807.pdf)

Building upon this, Dave Donaldson, the founder and president of Convoy for Hope, had this to say about the unprecedented wave of interest in poverty and homelessness among Evangelicals: "Jesus called upon us to care for the least of these. Many of our evangelical churches have cared the least and now there is a sea change. I'm seeing compassionate conservatives like myself that are looking to rebrand and expand the pro-life image to protect not only the child in the womb but the child fighting to survive in the slums."

*"Faith, Anti-Poverty Leaders Want National Budget to Assist Poor."* *The Christian Post*. Release date: April 2, 2009. Accessible at: <http://www.christianpost.com/Society/Politics/2009/04/faith-anti-poverty-leaders-want-national-budget-to-assist-poor-02/page2.html>

This ideal carries over into other studies conducted on evangelical involvement in poverty reduction. An online poll conducted among "980 self-identified

‘evangelical/born again’” Christians found that nearly 60% of respondents favored an evangelical agenda that included alleviating poverty, amongst other more progressive issues. Additionally, 80% of evangelical/born again Christians said that reducing poverty was either the “most important” or a “very important” action point.

*“Beliefnet Poll: Evangelicals Still Conservative, But Defy Issue Stereotypes.”* Beliefnet. Release date: January 2008. Accessible at: <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2008/01/Beliefnet-Poll-Evangelicals-Still-Conservative-But-Defy-Issue-Stereotypes.aspx>

In 2008, evangelical leaders became increasingly vocal about global poverty and the need for leaders to intervene. *The Christian Post* reported that prominent American evangelical leaders called for motions from the United Nations, the U.S. government and Christian citizens to combat poverty and homelessness around the globe. According to these leaders, the church had previously overlooked issues pertaining to poverty. As per the *Post*, the leaders said, “...a growing number of evangelical churches are beginning to understand that addressing poverty is part of the biblical mandate of loving one’s neighbor.”

Rick Warren, the California-based pastor and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, mirrored the call for increased evangelical involvement when he said, “I deeply believe that if we as evangelicals remain silent and do not speak up in defense of the poor, we lose our credibility and our right to witness about God’s love for the world.” During Saddleback’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, Warren made poverty the number one “giant problem” to be tackled, as it affects millions of individuals around the nation and the globe.

*“Evangelicals Make Case for Bolder Poverty Response.”* Christian Today. Release date: September 24, 2008. Accessible at: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/evangelicals.make.case.for.bolder.poverty.response/21491.htm>

*“Evangelicals Embrace New Global Priorities.”* Beliefnet. Release date: June 2005. Accessible at: <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2005/06/Evangelicals-Embrace-New-Global-Priorities.aspx?p=2>

The issues of poverty and homelessness have become so important to the evangelical community that individuals with pronounced ideological variance have converged to encourage the U.S. government to better assist those in need. In early 2009, Sojourners President Jim Wallis and former George W. Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson officially announced a new Christian coalition intended to combat poverty. While the two share widely divergent opinions on sociopolitical issues, poverty’s importance has yielded an unprecedented bond. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the union “...will present recommendations for federal policymakers on tackling poverty.”

*“Exclusive: Christian Right and Left Partner on Poverty Reduction Advice to Obama.”* U.S. News & World Report. Release date: February 13, 2009. Accessible at: <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/god-and-country/2009/02/13/exclusive-christian-right-and-left-partner-on-poverty-reduction-advice-to-obama.html>

The group's work can already be seen in our nation's capital. According to *The Christian Post*, in April 2009, more than 1,000 faith leaders and activists convened "...in Washington, D.C., to learn and share the vision of how to reduce poverty by half within 10 years both domestically and globally." In this same article, Wallis called the nation's budget a "moral document." Additionally, he touted the fact that poverty has brought the faith community together, despite inherent differences.

## WAVE OF INCREASED SOCIETAL NEEDS

The current economic crisis has created a second wave -- the **wave of need among the people we are trying to reach**. While much of the news focus has been on the impact of the economic crisis among the middle class, it is not hard for people to understand the tremendous needs that poor people are facing. For every executive who loses his/her job, many support people are losing theirs – cafeteria workers, janitorial staff, etc.

Thus, the working poor are among the hardest hit in terms of their mortgages going into default and foreclosure. Additionally, we are seeing individual families who have never been homeless out on the streets, as foreclosures and job losses increase in frequency. According to *The Christian Post*, "In the United States, the current economic recession threatens to push 10 million Americans into poverty." With the proper resources and movement, the interest garnered in the first wave can be utilized to satisfy the needs yielded by the second:

"In my eight years of doing this I have never come across as many people who've told us they have never been homeless before. It's quite different from what I have seen in the past." This statement comes from Rudy Salinas, the director of community outreach for People Assisting the Homeless in Los Angeles, California. According to CNN, Salinas and other activists who work to alleviate issues pertaining to homelessness and poverty are noticing more families on the street. The current financial crisis, characterized by high foreclosure rates, job losses and budget cuts to homeless assistance programs, is the primary cause of these changes.

*"Bad economy puts more families on the streets." CNN. Release Date: May 8, 2009. Accessible at: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/08/sotu.la.homeless/index.html>*

The stresses associated with the current economic situation are affecting the working class in ways that have not been seen or experienced in decades. In April 2008, CNN reported on interviews the network had with food bank officials from across America. According to CNN, these officials reported that "...many of their customers are working-class people and their numbers are increasing." Bill Bolling, the founder of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, reported that he was seeing more working people than ever visiting food banks. Bolling said, "This is new for us. People are giving up buying groceries so that they can pay rent and put gas in the car."

*"Charities Forced to do More With Less."* CNN. Release Date: April 18, 2008. Accessible at: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/04/18/charity.shortage/>

Americans have been hit hard by the recent current recession, but according to The Brookings Institution, poverty was on the rise prior to the current economic situation. During the 2000s, there were increases in both the number of people living in poverty and the poverty rate. Brookings also noted a key corroboration to the second wave we've been seeing, as it is written that "...today, working-age Americans account for a larger share of the poor than in the last 30 years."

*"Getting Current: Recent Demographic Trends in Metropolitan America."* The Brookings Institution. Release date: March 2009. Accessible at: [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2009/03\\_metro\\_demographic\\_trends.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2009/03_metro_demographic_trends.aspx)

In New York City alone, thousands of families are finding themselves on the streets. In November 2008, the Coalition for the Homeless reported that there were 9,720 families sleeping in city-run shelters. This, sadly, is "...the highest number since modern homelessness began nearly three decades ago." And as the numbers have risen, the potential for aid has declined. In the midst of budgetary alarm, the Coalition reports that New York Governor David Paterson has proposed major cuts in homelessness prevention and in housing programs for the homeless and impoverished.

*"Number of NYC Homeless Families Hits Modern-Day Record."* Coalition for the Homeless. Release date: January 2009. Accessible at: <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/blog/2009/01/number-of-nyc-homeless-families-hits.html>