

Chapter 1

The Purpose and Characteristics of Rescue Missions

Why We Do What We Do

We who work at Rescue Missions long-term, come and stay because we are committed to doing what we are doing. We see reason and purpose in the daily reality. We understand that we are part of God's larger plan to care for the least of these. We know about Jesus' job description in Isaiah 61:1 and repeated in Luke 4:18-19:

"HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED."

Knowing our heritage, and understanding the purpose of the organization where we are employed, enhances our own sense of purpose and direction. Understanding what makes Rescue Missions unique helps to keep us focused on the work at hand.

A Look at the Past

We recognize the Glasgow City Mission in Scotland as the first city mission, founded in January 1826 by David Nasmith.

Nasmith then founded the Dublin City Mission and then the London City Mission, known to be the oldest mission in England. In 1830, he came to the USA for the purpose of setting up missions.

The oldest Rescue Mission in existence in the USA is the Jerry McAuley Water Street Mission, founded in 1872. It is now the New York City Mission on Water Street in New York City. Wall Street banker Alfrederick Smith Hatch donated the building, and the mission initially was named the Helping Hand For Men. Other missions preceding this are not still in operation today because they either became churches or closed for lack of funds.

The term "Rescue Mission" probably had its origin in Syracuse New York when H. B. Gibband opened a mission called the "Rescue Mission." He had worked with centers of information, called Rescue Bands, connected with the Underground Railroad assisting fugitive slaves. To him, the word "rescue" symbolized the sinner fleeing from wrath and from bondage, seeking freedom, pursued by the tempter.

Wikipedia records our objective is "to not keep our clients dependent on handouts but to give them skills and the Christian environment to release them from their poverty, addiction or problems."

Steve Burger said it distinctly: "We are a movement that is going to change America IF we listen to the call of God and we stay with our primary focus that God changes lives. If we are not afraid to tell

anyone, anywhere, anytime. And if we keep on marching we'll do exactly what was done at the turn of the last century." David Nasmith, the founder of our movement, said, "What they said was impossible, I knew to be possible." - Rescue Magazine, August 1998

What's in a Name?

You will notice from the history above that European missions tended to use the word "**City**" in the name. City Mission became the name that indicated the urban thrust. Early in the history in the States, the word "**Union**" was incorporated because there was a great effort to be representing the unity of many denominations working together to meet the needs of the poor. The word "**Rescue**" came into greater use in the last century to emphasize the thrust, and many missions incorporated "**Gospel**" in their name to differentiate themselves from secular ministries. Although the huge majority of missions are all individually autonomous, when you see one of these four words in the name, you are more likely to know they are of the same purpose.

Purpose

What sets us apart from other social service agencies is very connected with our stated purpose. Some staff come to the mission believing they are part of a movement of alleviating poverty. Others come to alleviate hunger. Some have heard that there is an effort to eliminate homelessness. If you will look at your mission's mission statement, you hopefully will see something quite different. There is nothing wrong with wanting to alleviate poverty or eliminate hunger. There are well-meaning people who are dedicated to that goal. But just like there is nothing wrong with caring for abandoned pets at an animal shelter, that is just not the purpose of Rescue Missions.

If we give ourselves to addressing surface issues without dealing with the core problem, we will have little lasting effect. Rescue Missions are about changed lives. Jesus consistently redirected people to the real reason He was meeting their physical need, and it always dealt with the more lasting change.

The Parable of the Sower indicates that there is more needed than sowing the seed, but all the watering in the world won't work on seedless ground. There are ministries that only preach and disciple, without being involved in addressing physical needs. This might work with other populations, but not the ones we serve.

Our identity is very connected with knowing our purpose. That is true for me individually and corporately. As a representative of the Almighty One, I am the bearer of good news along with good things. Rescue Missions attempt to not "get the cart before the horse." There are many methods of distributing good things, just as there are many ways of sharing good news. The methods are not as important as the commitment to do both, in a God-focused way.

The **R – E – S – C – U – E** Model

Release clients from hurtful lifestyles

Educate clients in God's Word, GED, and job skills

Serve our clients, with changed lives as the objective

Cultivate clients' devotion to the Lord

Utilize all available resources to restore broken people

Empower clients to serve God and others

- Malcolm Lee, Rescue Magazine, May 2000, page 18