



Compassion Coalition

Ways to Connect with Pathways out of Poverty

"The answer to solving poverty has to go beyond finances. It has to go beyond educating people to lifting them up, to letting them feel that God loves them and they are worth something."

~John Winters, Pastor of Missions and Outreach, Fellowship Evangelical Free Church

Make a Difference through Prayer

- Pray that more affluent Christians in Knoxville would "be openhanded toward the poor and needy" in our midst, and "give generously and do so without a grudging heart" (Deuteronomy 15:11,10).
- Pray that the needs of the poor will be met in a respectful way that empowers people to become self-sufficient whenever possible, rather than putting people down or enabling dependency.
- Pray for courage and grace for those who are undertaking difficult steps toward greater self-sufficiency – returning to school for a GED or vocational training, learning English, developing budgeting skills, fighting an addiction.
- Pray that organizations serving those in poverty will continue to have sufficient funding and volunteers to continue their services, even (especially) in tough economic times.
- Pray for wisdom, compassion, and dedication for staff and volunteers serving those in poverty, that they will reflect the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.
- Pray that "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18) will be shared and modeled in a way that brings people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ, and that churches would embrace people as brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of income.
- Pray that generational afflictions that perpetuate poverty, such as addictions and abuse, will be broken and replaced with the hope of God's abundant life (John 10:10).
- Pray for children growing up in poverty to be given the opportunity to develop their full potential. Pray for parents who are anxious and despairing about being able to provide for their children's needs.
- Pray for public policies that will promote wise assistance and enduring justice for those who are poor.

Make a Difference through Your Life

- If you are a professional (e.g., medical, dental, real estate, accounting, legal, or other specialized skills), consider donating your services to organizations that serve those in poverty.
- Even if you are not a professional, or if you wonder if you have what it takes to help families in poverty: be assured that anyone can make a difference if you serve humbly with compassion, conviction and commitment!



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- Make compassion a family habit. Educate your children about the needs in their own city and around the world. Encourage them to share their toys and clothes with children who are less fortunate. Volunteer together as a family, and talk about demonstrating the special love that Jesus had for those who are poor.
- Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." One simple goal for families is to match their budget for "extras" for themselves, with an equal amount for meeting the needs of neighbors. For example, if you go out to dinner, set aside an equal amount to fight hunger in Knoxville or around the world. If you buy a new home entertainment center, set aside a matching donation for a homeless family.
- Rather than selling your used car, furniture, appliances or electronics, consider donating them to an agency such as the Compassion Coalition Furniture Ministry or Angelic Ministries.
- Be sensitive to those you cross paths with who may be struggling with poverty but would never admit it—the elderly widow living on your block, the kid in your child's class with the coat one size too small, the coworker whose hours were cut back, the single mom who works at the coffee shop, the parents of a disabled child in your church with mounting medical bills. Ask God to help you reach out in a way that offers support while preserving their dignity.
- If you or someone you know is in need of groceries, see www.compassioncoalition.org for a current listing of Knoxville area food pantries.

Make a Difference Through Your Church

- Does your church have a benevolence fund to meet the critical needs of people who come to your church asking for assistance? Compassion Coalition (865-251-1591) offers training for churches on benevolence policies.
- The demand at area food pantries is increasing faster than they can keep pace. Stop hunger in Knoxville by collecting food for a food bank (call to find out what is needed; fresh fruits, vegetables and meats are often in short supply), hosting a food pantry or hot meal at the church, or sponsoring a Kids Café (contact Second Harvest, 865-521-0000, for information).
- Consider forming a collaboration with several churches in your community to coordinate your benevolence efforts and avoid duplicating services while increasing your capacity to address needs in the community. (See the story of Fountain City Ministry Center in Section IV).
- Commit to opening your doors as a welcoming church home to a financially struggling single-parent family. This means making a long-term commitment to walking alongside this family with practical assistance, childcare, mentoring, spiritual nurture and unconditional love.
- The stress and anxiety associated with poverty can be overwhelming. Personal care often takes a back seat to mere survival. Sponsor a ministry to families in poverty designed to alleviate stress in healthy ways, and to help people look and feel their best:



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- haircuts, spa treatments, access to a gym, fun family nights.
- Launch a ministry focus on children in poverty, helping to ensure that all children get a great start on life regardless of family income. Talk to service providers in high-poverty areas about how your church can help make a difference in nutrition, health care, early childhood development, child care, and equipping parents for work success.
 - Be aware that poverty is more prevalent than it may appear, even in more affluent neighborhoods. Look for "hidden" pockets of poverty in your church's area – e.g., immigrants, elderly on fixed income, spouses of soldiers, recent divorcées, workers commuting to low-wage service jobs. Connect with a nonprofit that is meeting the needs of these groups.
 - As your church serves those who are poor, look for the gifts they have to offer back to your church and to the community. As appropriate, invite the people you serve to contribute their time and talents as a volunteer with other church ministries.
 - Be sensitive to the dignity of lower-income church attenders. Are there subtle "class barriers" in how people are expected to dress, or what people are expected to give? Are lower-income youth excluded from church activities with a price tag, such as mission trips? Does the church offer ways to get involved with serving the community other than attending fundraisers or buying items to donate? Poor families in the church want the chance to serve others too!



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Make a Difference as a Volunteer

Knoxville offers abundant opportunities to get involved in supporting people on pathways out of poverty. Connect with a ministry that touches your heart and jump in!

[A Hand Up For Women](#) (Knox County Christian Women's Job Corps): 865-219-0104, <http://www.ahandupforwomen.org>

Provides services and relationships that empower women to move toward economic self-sufficiency and to realize their potential in every area of life. (Adult volunteers only.)

- Women: Serve as mentor to a participant, providing support, encouragement, and accountability throughout her time in the program and beyond.
- Lead classes on life skills, financial management, or job readiness.
- Teach basic computer skills like Microsoft Word and Excel and how to navigate the internet.
- Prepare a meal for participants, work in the clothing room, or help staff with mailings.

[Between Jobs Ministry](#) (Central Baptist Church of Bearden): 567-3423 or 389-7687, mblutitle@aol.com or curt.hall@knology.net

Focus is on helping those between jobs, those whose job is at risk, those anticipating making a career transition in developing a winning strategy for finding their next job. This is done through offering information to help construct a resume/cover letter, finding a job in a tight labor market, assessing skills, strengths, accomplishments to present a total package for success in getting that next job, and to undergird the participants in the program with love, prayer and support.

- Review and critique resumes or cover letters; assess transferable skills, strengths, and accomplishments.
- Provide one-on-one counseling to help participants see themselves in the best manner and present their best selves to a potential employer.
- Provide the ministry with job leads; contact potential employers about the benefits of looking to faith-based ministries as a pool from which to look for potential employees.
- Help the ministry with aspects such as developing and maintaining the website, obtaining non-profit status, and expanding educational training offerings for the general public.
- Share a success story or present a career-related topic at a bi-monthly meeting.

[Christian Automotive Ministries](#) (Hands & Feet Ministries): 865-544-3060, www.handsandfeetministries.org

Demonstrates the life-transforming love of Jesus by serving the basic automotive needs of single parents, senior citizens, and low income families. Welcomes the opportunity to

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collaborate with or provide training to other organizations and churches.

- Register and interact with guests while they are waiting for their vehicle to be serviced, which includes opportunities for prayer and evangelism.
- Provide free oil and filter changes, vehicle safety inspections, and honest repair advice.
- Send notes of encouragement to staff, volunteers, and guests.
- Lead activities for children during car care.
- Groups: Collect automotive supplies like oil and oil filters.
- Families / groups: Prepare and serve food to guests on a Car Care Saturday, or offer free car washes.

Christian Men's Job Corp (Angelic Ministries): 865-523-8884, www.knoxcmjc.com
Equips men seeking a better life by matching them with trained Christian men who will walk alongside them as they travel the road from dependency to self-sufficiency.

- Men: Serve as a Christian coach/mentor for a participant.
- Offer job training or skills development.
- Provide job opportunities for participants.
- Families / groups: Provide a meal before the evening class.

Compassion Coalition Clearinghouse: 865-251-1591 x 5, www.compassioncoalition.org
A helpline for people in distress such as single mothers, isolated elderly, stranded travelers, or the recently unemployed. Offers encouragement and hope to callers by providing information and referrals to agencies that can help, and seeking to connect them with a church.

- Minister to callers for a 3-hour shift, 2 to 4 times per month, in the West Knoxville office.
- Help staff with clerical duties and keep the resource database up to date.

Furniture Ministry (Compassion Coalition): 865-251-1591 x 3, www.compassioncoalition.org

Coordinates the delivery of good quality, used furniture to neighbors in need through a collaboration of churches and ministries. Delivery teams talk with furniture recipients about their spiritual lives, offer to pray with them, and share copies of God's Word.

- Help with clerical duties throughout the week, or assist at the warehouse on Saturday mornings.
- Volunteers with trucks and trailers are needed to pick up donations.
- Groups: Assemble a team to deliver furniture on a rotating basis, about once a month.

Hope Initiative (Cokesbury United Methodist Church): 865-246-0437, www.cclive.org
A mentoring and tutoring program that offers families in financially challenging



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circumstances hope, healing, and redemption through faith in Christ and the development of healthy relationships.

- Mentor a child or an adult for a 22-week commitment: 10 weeks of attending the program with the family on Tuesday nights plus 12 weeks of follow-up phone calls.
- Tutor children in their schoolwork or assist adults with GED preparation.
- Groups: Participate in the dinner ministry by preparing or serving meals.
- Families: Create a loving and welcoming atmosphere by serving as greeters and interacting with the children during the program.

Knoxville Area Urban League: 865-524-5511, www.thekaul.com

Works to enable African Americans and other disadvantaged groups to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights.

- Become a mentor to program participants.
- Assist with workforce computer classes or job readiness classes.
- Help with general office duties.

Legal Aid of East Tennessee: 865-637-0484, www.laet.org

Gives free legal advice on certain kinds of civil cases. Ensures equal justice for elderly, abused, and low-income people by providing a broad scope of legal assistance and advocacy.

- Invite Legal Aid representatives to speak to agencies, community groups and churches about the legal rights of individuals in poverty.
- Are you an attorney or paralegal, or studying to become one? Consider volunteering on a long-term basis. Access to legal aid might prevent a low-income family from being unfairly evicted or cut off from food stamps.

Making Money Work: 865-251-1591 x 2, www.compassioncoalition.org

A collaboration between Compassion Coalition partner churches, Knoxville/Knox County CAC, and the Knoxville Utility Board. Churches host weekly classes on financial management for people who need assistance with utility bills.

- Lead a class at one of the various sites (teaching materials are provided).
- Serve as a mentor to someone who attends the class.
- Donate supplies for the class such as calculators, paper, and pencils.
- Churches: Become a host site for a class.

Operation Backyard (Knoxville Leadership Foundation): 865-524-2774, www.klf.org

Provides free home repair services for low-income homeowners in Knoxville, connecting those in need with the materials and volunteers that can make a difference.

- Sign up for a weekend home repair service project (in the spring, summer or fall). All materials are provided but volunteers should bring small hand and power tools and make arrangements for their meals.

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- An exciting opportunity for students in 7th-12th grades: spend a week camping out with other youth at an inner-city church while serving those in need! Building materials (except tools), meals, lodging and programming are provided.

The Restoration House: 865-300-6806, www.therestorationhouse.net

Helps restore single mothers and their children back to God's good intent for their lives by providing supportive transitional housing and mentoring in a safe learning environment, and a personalized, guided plan.

- Assist single mother families by providing childcare, financial literacy training, or vehicle or facility maintenance.
- Donate personal and household items needed by mothers moving into or out of The Restoration House.
- Individuals, families, or groups: Join a team of mentors that walk with single mother families for up to two years. Time commitments include weekly contact, a social activity once a month, and quarterly participation in Family Nights.
- Churches – can you provide one complete mentor team of 8-12 mature Christians to minister to a single mother family?
- Families / groups: Sponsor a quarterly Family Night dinner party or a work day for the housing units.

Second Harvest Food Bank: 865-521-0000, www.secondharvestknox.org

Works to eliminate hunger by providing food, services and education and attacks the root causes of hunger through education and nutrition.

- Assist staff with administrative tasks or with special events.
- Help out around the warehouse.
- Families or groups: Sort and repack food donations.

Single Mom Outreach (Fellowship Evangelical Free Church): 865-803-7039

A ministry to inner city single moms and their children who face especially difficult economic, social and emotional challenges. Shows the love of Christ and invites a love for Christ that produces changed lives for moms and their children.

- Lead a craft or Scripture lesson for the kids or the moms at a bi-monthly meeting.
- Groups: Commit to meet clothing, transportation, or childcare needs for a particular single mom family for a specified time period.
- Families: Spend time with a single mom who has children about the same age.

Water Angel Ministries, Inc.: 865-524-5194, www.waterangelsministries.com

Meets the physical needs of those who are poor and homeless while encouraging a personal relationship with Christ.

- Help people meet life goals by helping them prepare for their GED, get into an



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- apartment, or train for and find a job.
- Participate in the Shining Star Club, an outreach to homeless and inner-city children that takes place on the first Saturday of each month.
 - Groups: Participate in the weekly Sunday service through personal testimonies and/or music.
 - Families: Serve lunch together, or work in the clothing room, the food pantry or the children's area on Sunday afternoons.

Additional organizations that help provide pathways out of poverty:

Many of these organizations welcome volunteer support for fundraising, office work, donations of food or personal items, or connecting with clients. Also see www.compassioncoalition.org for a current listing of Knoxville area food pantries. There are plenty of opportunities to serve, and the need is growing!

Angelic Ministries: 865-523-8884, www.angelicministries.com

Extends the love of Jesus to those who are poor and struggling, through food, clothing, furniture and household items, counseling services, vocational training, and other forms of assistance, as well as opportunities for Bible study, prayer and worship.

Destination Hope (Lost Sheep Ministry, Teen Challenge, Jesus Centered Ministries, and A Hand up for Women): www.jcmmissions.com/DestinationHope.html

A collaboration of four Christ-centered ministries sharing a common mission: to assist and mentor women until they are spiritually strong, financially capable, self-sufficient, and ready to give back to others. (See the story about Destination Hope in Section IV.)

Families First (Tennessee Department of Human Services): 865-594-6151, www.state.tn.us/humanserv

Provides temporary cash benefits to financially struggling families with children, while emphasizing work, training, and personal responsibility. Participants follow a Personal Responsibility Plan and develop an individualized career plan based on their needs and skills, leading toward financial independence for the family.

Green Thumb Program (Community Action Committee): 865-546-3500, www.knoxcac.org

Promotes home gardening by providing free vegetable seeds and plants to eligible gardeners in Knoxville and Knox County.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Project (Volunteers of America): 865-546-4813, www.voa.org

Works with veterans to break down barriers to self-sufficiency; helps clients obtain

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employment by purchasing haircuts, work clothes, and needed tools.

Homeward Bound Program (Community Action Committee): 865-546-3500,
www.knoxcac.org

Provides case management, education, life skills training and housing placement services to help maximize a homeless person's self-sufficiency.

Lost Sheep Ministry: 865-688-9636, www.lostsheepministry.org

A Christian mobile ministry that reaches out to homeless persons, at-risk youth, and other vulnerable individuals to help motivate people to change their lives. Each Wednesday evening under the McGee Street Bridge, the Homeless Bridge Fellowship Program feeds 450-500 people.

Self-Sufficiency Program (Volunteer Ministry Center): 865-524-3926,
www.vmcknox.org

A non-profit, interfaith agency working to restore dignity and productivity to the lives of those who are working poor, homeless or mentally ill in Knoxville.

How to Learn More

- Second Harvest (865-521-0000) offers educational workshops such as "Hunger 101" at the warehouse, and will also bring the program to an agency or group.
- Become familiar with the hundreds of verses in Scripture that address poverty and compassion. See the Bible study resources focused on poverty in the *Faith in Action Study Bible* (Zondervan / World Vision / Outreach) and *The Poverty and Justice Bible* (Bible Society); for a collection of verses relating to poverty in booklet form, see *Poverty and the Poor in the Bible* (American Bible Society).

SIDEBAR

Guidelines for volunteers working with people in poverty:

- As you get involved with ministry with persons who are poor, resolve not to judge them or to make assumptions about why they are poor. Rather, ask God's grace to listen, pray, show respect, model God's love, and be open to the gift of friendship.
- Although our culture measures people's value by their income, as Christians we are called to honor the priceless worth of each individual created in the image of God. Make an effort to view all people through the eyes of Christ.
- Patience and consistency are essential ingredients in ministry with families in entrenched poverty. Even if you do not see immediate results, choose to be faithful in planting seeds for future generations.
- While we share Jesus' passion to "preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18), recognize that personal faith alone will not lift people out of poverty. People in



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poverty (like all of us) need to be transformed by Jesus, but they also need practical assistance and tools to develop self-sufficiency.

- Also, don't assume that because someone is poor, they must not be a Christian. Many people who struggle for their "daily bread," in Knoxville and around the world, have a deep, authentic faith in Christ. Christians living in poverty often have something to teach their more comfortable brothers and sisters about finding our true security and joy in God rather than our bank account.