



**5 Percent Shift  
Christmas Season Ministries**

## Case Example 1

### Christmas Store Offers Presents And Pride

#### Background

The Clifton Ave. Church of God in Springfield, OH is a church, “in the heart of the city with a heart for the city.” The church exists in the neighborhood with the highest concentration of poverty. Seeing their neighbors struggling to provide for their children at Christmas time, they ran for generations a Christmas basket program that matched parishioners with needy families. The parishioners would learn the age and likes of the children and youth in their designated family and would shop for gifts for them. These gifts would then be wrapped and assembled and given to the parents a little before Christmas day. Sometimes, the parishioners would notice a mix of emotions when they gave the gifts the parents. People were grateful for the help, but sometimes these generous gifts also served as painful reminders of what felt to the parents as their failure to provide.

#### The Christmas Store

So the Clifton Ave. Church of God, in a joint initiative with the local neighborhood association, decided to start an alternative model -- the Christmas Store. Since 2013, the Christmas Store has been opening up the first week of December and operating limited hours through the Christmas Dinner celebration on the second Saturday of the month. Housed in several rooms of the church, the Christmas Store offers neighbors (parents, children, and residents) the chance to come and purchase new toys, games, books, clothing, and more, all at hugely discounted prices. In this way, neighbors get to have the same shopping experience as their better off peers -- they get to personally select the appropriate gift for their family member and buy it. This approach meets the immediate need while maintaining dignity and pride. Where appropriate, neighbors that did not have the available money to purchase the discounted toys could “pay” in service hours at the Christmas Dinner.

#### How Does it Work?

Prior to the opening of the Christmas Store, the church and neighborhood association solicit donations of new gifts from the community. These gifts are then set out in a store-like set-up in various rooms. Each room is assigned a value -- a 1 ticket room for the cheaper items up to a 10-ticket area for more expensive items like bicycles. The Christmas Store hours are advertised through the local schools. When neighbors come to the Christmas Store, they are warmly greeted by church and neighborhood association volunteers. They purchase the number of tickets that they feel they need -- 1 ticket for \$1. They then are free to visit the rooms, make their selections, and purchase items using their tickets. As one guest said with tears of re-lief in his eyes, “Most of what I earn goes into paying for medicine for a kidney condition. I only had \$12 to spend on Christmas for my three kids. Because of this store, they all will get something good.”

#### Before

Parishioners were paired with a needy family and purchased gifts for the children.

#### 5% Shift

Volunteers from the neighborhood and the church operated a store that sold new gifts. Neighbors were able to select and purchase items.

#### Impact

Needy families were able to provide for their children in a way that maintained their sense of dignity and pride as image bearers of Christ.

#### Questions for Reflection

How might your congregation consider ways to foster human dignity when engaging families impacted by poverty?

Where could you be more relational instead of transactional?

## Case Example 2

### Collaboration At Christmas: The Gift That Keeps On Giving

#### Background

When Mika CDC told donors their community leaders were transitioning their adopt-a-family program to a Christmas store, everyone was relieved. It was so much easier for donors and volunteers to buy unspecified gifts rather than to match exact requests and to make sure every family got all the right gifts. In this new strategy, each church was given an age group (babies, teens, adults, etc.) to buy for instead.

#### Setting Up the Christmas Store

Mika CDC is part of a network of neighborhood leaders who meet with local churches each July to start planning their event. They host their one-day Christmas store at a different neighborhood church each year. Neighborhood leaders have determined the criteria to shop and also put together the application.

The primary criteria is families who have experienced a “hardship” within the last year, such as family members jailed or deported, serious illness, or loss of job. Neighbors and local schools can also nominate other families that they feel would benefit from the shop. This process also eliminated the dreaded October calls from families asking to be “put on the list.” After application, families receive a home visit and a check to confirm that they are not receiving toys from another program.

#### How Does it Work?

Each year, 100-150 families receive an invitation to shop and are designated a time slot (1 hour each). The invitation also provides them tickets for household members (2 tickets for 2 adults and every child under 18). Their Christmas Store is a big event with food, childcare, and live music. Mika CDC partners with Verizon, whose employees come and set up the store, using their retail expertise as a fitting community service project. All items cost \$3 and a ticket. This system makes pricing a breeze, while still limiting shopping so merchandise is available for those in later time slots.

#### What Happens After?

The money Mika CDC and partners net from the Christmas Store is divided between (1) the neighborhood leadership committees and (2) the Parent/Teacher Associations of the schools that partner on the Christmas Store project. In this way, the schools and neighborhoods continue to benefit from the store. Through the availability of additional funds, other community needs are met, whether school supplies for under-resourced youth or to purchase supplies to put in a community garden.

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*To purchase their guide to setting up a Christmas Store, go to [www.fcsministries.org/ebook/pride](http://www.fcsministries.org/ebook/pride)*

*To learn more about Mika CDC or FCM, visit: [www.mikacdc.org](http://www.mikacdc.org)*

#### Before

Churches all did their own Christmas programs.

#### 5% Shift

Local churches came together in a network to contribute to a Christmas Store event run by a local Christian non-profit organization in partnership with neighborhood committees and school parent groups.

#### Impact

People were served at Christmas in a celebratory way. Churches had less hassle and more impact.

#### Questions for Reflection

How might you begin to a collaborative approach with other churches?

How might you engage neighborhood groups, non-profit organizations, local schools, and parent groups to see what's possible?

## Case Example 3

### An Alternative Christmas Market: Shopping For Good

#### Background

Covenant Presbyterian is known for its wonderful Christmas events every year. A very talented congregation, they do a special Carols & Lights program. Their generosity matches their talent. And for generations, they ran a successful Christmas donation program; that is, until they read *When Helping Hurts*. This study caused them to want to focus their energies in ways that helped the community at Christmas without doing harm. They wanted to do programs WITH people and groups and not FOR them. Out of this aspiration was born the Alternative Christmas Market.

#### The Alternative Christmas Market

“Gather your family and friends and enjoy a different way to celebrate Christmas this year!” reads the Alternative Christmas Market headline. The goal of the market is to capture the generosity of the community during this season of gift-giving. But, instead of encouraging people to exchange “things,” the church asks people to contribute to vetted organizations in the name of someone that they love. It’s a way of offering people the opportunity to make a difference in the community through their giving practice.

#### How Does it Work?

Every year, a select group of 12 or so local organizations with a proven track record of meaningful impact in neighborhoods and schools are invited to participate in the program. These organizations develop a list of opportunities or services that they provide that take \$5, \$25, \$50, or \$100 to accomplish. The church then takes all of the different organizations, and the services they provide, and puts them into a shopper’s guide. They advertise to the community the opportunity to come to a market event on a Sunday in December. At the event, people are able to make contributions in someone’s name to one of the represented organizations in one of the amounts specified above. For their contribution, they receive a personalized gift card that they can then give to someone at Christmas.

A crafts corner makes the event fun for kids while their parents shop, and an international food court is set up. People that are unable to attend the market day itself, have the option of submitting their contributions in other ways.

#### What Happens After?

Once the market day event is over and all of the electronic or mailed contributions have been added, the church tallies how much each organization received in contributions. The partner organizations receive a check to put toward their family and children-serving programs. As one organization stated, “this is really important for us. It makes it possible to run some of our programs that we wouldn’t be able to otherwise.” And, the church gets to experience the blessing of running the program WITH and not FOR the community.

[www.springfieldcovenant.org/alternative-christmas-market](http://www.springfieldcovenant.org/alternative-christmas-market)

#### Before

Parishioners purchased ‘things’ for their friends and families at Christmas time, as pushed by the broader social and industry trends.

#### 5% Shift

The options of purchasing ‘social good’ for their loved ones was added. And, it was done in a festive environment around food, crafts and celebration.

#### Impact

The partner organizations received needed funds to support their neighborhood and school programming. And the church could have an impact WITH them.

#### Questions for Reflection

How might you use the generosity that the blessings of the Christmas season for social good and community building?

How might an alternative market work for you?

## Reflection

### At Your Table:

#### Introductions and Personal Reflection (15 Min)

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following question:

- When you were growing up, where did you most feel a sense of community and belonging?
- If time allows, ask for reflections on common themes across people's individual experience of community and belonging.

#### Reflect on Your Christmas/Thanksgiving Ministries as a Community (30 Min)

Explore people's sense of community within the organization:

- As staff or volunteers, do we feel like members of a community together? Are we united as an "us" or divided into separate camps of "us" and "them" (whether by program, location, etc.)?
- Do we engage with ministry participants as members of the same community we are part of?
- Are participants part of the "us," or are participants a "them"?

Explore the value people place on community-building in the work:

- Do the examples of the difference made by building a sense of community in the three case studies in the report offer any parallels to our organization and programs?
- If we were to emphasize community building more, what benefits or impacts could we imagine being possible?

#### Begin to Explore Strategies for Community Building (30 Min)

Reflect on the three case studies to consider community building activities your organization could undertake:

- What "community building" activities do we currently have in our organization?
- Are they focused on staff, "clients", board, volunteers, or some combination?
- What are the benefits or impacts of these efforts?
- If we were to do more community building, how might we restructure an existing program to achieve that goal?
- Note the groups ideas in the appropriate box on the Four Components of Community handout.
- Are there additional ideas or categories of community building that could be addressed?

#### Closing and Evaluation (15 Min)

What is one thing that you liked and one thing that you would change about the conversation.

## Four Components Of Community

### Assess Current Projects

### Brainstorm Possible Shifts

#### Membership

Feelings of belonging and identification

Who participates in the program?

Do they see their participation positively to the program and to each other?

**Build collective identity and connection between** members.

Listening first to discover strengths and build upon them

#### Influence

Individuals influence the community, and vice versa

How do participants have influence over the program and its outcomes?

**Promote self-governance.** Allow space for members to provide leadership in program planning -- operating your program WITH others.

#### Fulfillment

Physical and psychological needs are met

Does the program also pay attention to other human elements the physical and psychological?

**Focus on the whole person.** Recognizing the interconnected parts of members and their communities (intellectual, relational, emotional, financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs and gifts).

#### Connection

Connect positive affects of membership to the broader community

How are participants' successes celebrated?

How are participants asked to support others?

**Cultivate the values of reciprocity and mutual support.** Build diverse social networks to decrease isolation and increase diversity and inclusion.