

# Pope inspired Baptists who work with marginalized

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DANVILLE, Va. (BNG)—Pope Francis' historic visit to the United States energized immigration activists in a speech to Congress and gave hope to prison inmates in Philadelphia. But even before arriving on U.S. soil, the pontiff also inspired those who work in urban and church ministries.

He did it with his overall example but also with a concise statement while celebrating Mass in Havana, Cuba, Sept. 20.

“Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people,” Francis preached.



Joshua Hearne Among those cheering the comment were Baptists like Joshua Hearne, who wasn't even there.

“My first response was, that's a really concise way of putting it,” said Hearne, executive director of [Third Chance Ministries](#) and leader of [Grace and Main Fellowship](#) in Danville, Va.

Hearne, his wife, Jessica, and their colleagues minister directly to the homeless and prisoner populations in the area. They hold worship services and Bible studies in their homes, take in homeless people and confront

slumlords in the city.

The common denominator in these and other ministries, Hearne said, is a one-on-one connection with those being served.

“We are called to build relationships and communities,” he said.

That’s why the pope was on target with his statement in Cuba, Hearne said. “Relationships are made up of people, not ideas.”

It’s easy to fall into seeing it the other-way-around because ideas and ideologies are easier to conceptualize, Hearne added.

“Whereas people are very messy, and you don’t know how all the parts fit together,” he said.

Francis has been an ally to those who work with the poor and others on the margins of society, Hearne said.

“He has started a lot of conversations for what we are doing and through his insistence on a very personal approach to ministry,” he said.



Brent McDougalThe pope’s comment and his teachings on immigration also provided a wake-up for churches and pastors, said Brent McDougal, senior pastor at [Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas](#).

The church is known for its ministry outreach to surrounding Hispanic communities and its efforts to welcome Hispanics into its congregation and

leadership.

The attention generated by Francis' Cuba and U.S. visits has been welcomed by those who share his views on the environment and refugees. But it's also turned a spotlight on American pastors, McDougal said.

"The pope's stance on these issues has become a little bit of a clarion call within congregations: 'Why can't our pastors speak more to these issues? Why can't you be more open about these things?'" he said.

McDougal described Francis as "somewhat of a prophetic voice" who has made him feel "a sense of appreciation for the way he weaves theology and activism together—especially in helping the poor and marginalized."

The pope's statement about serving people instead of ideas and ideology describes Cliff Temple's ongoing ministries aimed at meeting the practical needs of local neighborhoods and families, he said.

"That (statement) is a reminder that Jesus came not to bring about a new doctrine or even a new religious system," McDougal said. "He came to seek and to save the lost, and he came to bring good news to the poor."



Marianna Neely Harrelson Francis' declaration of people over ideas also applies on the congregational level, said Marianna Neely Harrelson, pastor of [Emmanuel Baptist Fellowship in Lexington, S.C.](#)

For Harrelson, that means taking a people-first approach to ministry that

focuses on the struggles they face in trying to live as Christ's followers, she said.

"I believe this is what Jesus did as well," she said. "He listened to them; he touched them; he healed them. If we start with these three things rather than ideologies, we'll be closer to being Christ-followers ourselves."

Francis also is showing ministers how to lead more gospel-centered lives and ministries, Harrelson added.

"In the Baptist world and in the world of ministry, we have many pastors and ministers who are living in opulence, while the people to whom they minister can't pay their bills and while our country is still wracked with poverty," she said.

"By refusing some of the perks of the papal life, Pope Francis is showing us that to lead and to minister means to serve and be present with those who are suffering the most."