

For urban ministry, an oath for compassionate service

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Christians motivated by compassion for the poor need to make sure both mercy and justice guide their actions, said Robert Lupton, based on his four decades of experience in urban ministry.



Robert Lupton “Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy is cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships,” Lupton writes in *Toxic Charity*.

Lupton, founding president of [Focused Community Strategies Urban Ministries](#), has proposed what he calls an “Oath for Compassionate Service,” inspired by the Hippocratic Oath of physicians.

He suggests ministry among the poor be guided by the following six-point pledge:

- Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
- Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.

- Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.
- Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
- Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
- Above all, do no harm.