

Intentional Christian communities live and serve among the poor

October 15, 2013

WACO—In one of northern Philadelphia’s most-dangerous neighborhoods, a 20-person Christian group thrives, embracing a lifestyle of radical community.



Shane Claiborne, leader at The Simple Way, speaks to participants at the No Need Among You conference. Shane Claiborne, leader of the 10 households in the Kensington neighborhood, helped found The Simple Way in 1995 as a faith community that lives and serves among the poor.

“We are not a church plant. We are a community plant,” Claiborne, author of [*The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*](#), told the [No Need Among You Conference](#), sponsored by Texas Christian Community Development Network and Mission Waco.

Members of [The Simple Way](#) community commit to alleviating poverty by living among the poor and sharing individual resources with them.

New Monasticism

The Simple Way has birthed and connected many other radical Christian communities around the nation. The New Monasticism movement values living among the poor in dangerous parts of cities abandoned by the affluent.

Most Christians want to help the poor but refuse to invest in their world, Claiborne said—a distinction he doesn't consider biblical. The gospel propels Christ's followers toward people who are hurting, he insisted.

"It takes us to the pain, the poverty and those in need," he said.



Volunteers work with members of Claiborne's community to clean up Phoenix Community Park in Philadelphia. The community lives simply and communally. Members share lawn mowers, washers and dryers, cars—and even their paychecks. Each member of the community gives 10 percent of his or her income to a common emergency fund. A medical collaborative can cover up to a \$150,000 incident for Claiborne's community.

"We share stuff because we have community," he said. "We don't have community because we share stuff."

Discipleship and submission to the larger body of Christ serve as unifying threads of the New Monastic community. The communities are eclectic in faith, with no single denomination ruling the intentional community. Members are encouraged to participate in a local church but do not attend together.

Prayer

Lamenting and praying for social and racial injustice also are central to the heartbeat of The Simple Way community. Claiborne's community meets every weekday morning to pray for the neighborhood and the injustices of the world.

"I think prayer is a really beautiful thing," he said. "For some of us involved in social justice, we forget to pray."

Rather than giving to an organization, community members are encouraged to give only to those with whom they have a direct relationship.

The Simple Way has transformed a formerly dark and dreary neighborhood into a creative display of the beauty of God, he said. Creativity has been restored through inspirational murals and artwork spread across Kensington buildings.

Gardening and the Gospel

Furthermore, the community has taken initiative in gardening and landscaping projects to care properly for God's earth, a value essential to the community.

"To us, it has everything in the world to do with the gospel, because this is a part of how we see God," he said. "We are connecting with God through creation and the miracle of life. ... It's hard to believe in a God of resurrection if we see a lot of death and a lot of suffocation. So, part of

what we do is free up some of that debris.”

Claiborne recognizes other forms of intentional community can thrive, but he yearns for the people of God to come together in unified community with the sole purpose of connecting people to God.

“I can’t help but think it makes God smile when the church comes together and challenges the patterns of this world,” he said. “In the end, it’s not about us. In the end, all of this is to point toward a good and wonderful God that is transforming hearts and streets in the world.”