

## THE CATALYST: ONE BY ONE LEADERSHIP

by Barbara J. Elliott

### Introduction: Setting the Context

Fresno lies in a region so distinctive it is identifiable from outer space: California's Great Central Valley stretches 400 miles, the breadbasket of the state. Fresno's topsoil is a mile deep and richly fertile, but the region is economically poor and relatively isolated. In 1983, Fresno placed last in a survey of 273 American cities rated on "liveability."<sup>1</sup> From there, things got worse.

Fresno experienced a demographic windshear with an influx of immigration through the mid-1980's and 90's by Latino refugees from Central and South American countries, waves of Lao, Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees, in addition to streams of the poorest from Mexico, all flocking to jobs as service workers and migrant laborers for the harvest. Suddenly what had been a sleepy agricultural town was popping with a baby-boom of prime-crime youngsters.<sup>2</sup> Fresno ballooned to the sixth largest city in the state, with 125 active youth gangs and the highest per capita rate of violent crime in California in every category except murder. (Oakland held that distinction.) Fresno's face is racially diverse today, with roughly 40 percent of the population Latino, 11 percent Asian, 8.5 percent African-American, 3 percent multiracial, and 37 percent white. The city's current population is about 500,000, with nearly a million in the county.

In 1993 Fresno was dubbed the car theft capital of the world, with 13,000 vehicles stolen every year in a city of then 300,000 residents. Poverty was rampant, murder became common, unemployment was double digit and teen pregnancy soared. The schools struggled to teach kids who spoke 90 different languages, with many whose parents spoke no English at all.

H. Spees, the CEO of One by One Leadership recalls, "In the early 1990's, Fresno was losing its soul. I felt it most profoundly as I watched two kids die on two separate occasions, both by gang-related gunshot wounds to the head. Feeling this loss of civic soul deeply in my own soul started me on a journey that has included conversations with literally thousands of people, moving our family residence to one of Fresno's forgotten neighborhoods, and sensing a direct calling to build hope through thoughtful work with others."<sup>3</sup>

The work of One by One Leadership was born in its earliest embryonic form from a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational pastors' retreat in the mountains to pray for the city. What emerged from desperation was a conviction that civic

leaders from the government, police, business, and faith community needed to join forces to work to renew the city together.

This case study is based on 38 interviews with partners in civic renewal in Fresno, including the city's director of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, the director of facilities development for a new regional medical center, the lead chaplain of the Sheriff's Office, the director of United Way, two school principals, seven pastors, three lay leaders, three businessmen, four leaders of faith-based organizations, job coaches, mentors, community organizers, a former gang leader, staff members of One by One Leadership, and others who collaborate with their work city-wide.

What has emerged is a picture of One by One Leadership as part of a movement that equips and relationally connects diverse leaders throughout the city who are committed to civic renewal together. One by One has been a catalyst sparking multiple new initiatives bringing greater health to the Fresno community.

### **Genesis of a Movement**

Seared by the L.A. riots, and awakened to the potential for similar outbreaks in Fresno, two pastors named Bufo Karraker and G.L. Johnson convened a group of 12 civic leaders in Fresno. These two men had long pastored large congregations, and each brought 35 years of history and relationships to the table, along with a commitment to each other and to the city. They were able to gather together a diverse group including the mayor, chief of police, sheriff, business and church leaders. H. Spees and Gordon Donoho, who are now with One by One Leadership, were among the prime movers birthing this vision. When the group met the second time, Christian community development guru John Perkins delivered a hard-hitting challenge to the city's leaders to renew together. The group decided its mission was "releasing God's resources through reconciled relationships for the rebuilding of our city." To avoid any proprietary claims, they called the group the "No Name Fellowship."

Its method was 3 E's: Exposure, Exchange, Embrace. This movement pulled together people from diverse sectors to meet in the hot spots of the city, such as a rescue mission, an inner-city school, or a jail, to hear from a leader on the front lines. Pastors, government officials and business leaders exchanged thoughts on the problem over lunch on site, and brainstormed potential solutions. At one point, Chief of Police Joseph Samuels challenged the group to do a "cops and clergy ride-along." On a Friday night, 60 businessmen and pastors rode the night shift in police cars, as they sped to shootouts and robberies. Some saw youngsters die. The effect was galvanizing.

Eventually, the relationships built and ideas sparked through the pastors' retreat and the No Name Fellowship led to several creative new initiatives that have borne tangible fruit. A participant in the initial mountaintop prayer retreat, Rev. Roger Minassian, felt called to leave his pastorate in 1993 and launch into the unlikely task of finding employment for gang members. Since then, Hope Now for Youth has placed 800 gang members in jobs with 230 businesses. From cleaning streets for the City of Fresno to sterilizing surgical instruments at Children's Hospital Central California, gang youth and their families have left crime and violence for dignity in the American mainstream. Attending a lunchtime Hope Now Bible study at his first real job with benefits, one young man said, "You can't understand how much my life has changed since God became part of my life. I have motivation, a better attitude and I believe I have a future."

Other initiatives spawned from the retreat and the No Name Fellowship include a collaboration called Care Fresno, a relocation effort in the downtown neighborhood known as Lowell, and the group that later became One by One Leadership.

### **Care Fresno**

This program was forged through a partnership among the police department, pastors and local apartment complex owners in distressed neighborhoods. Its goal is to abate the concentration of crime. The owners offer one apartment free of charge, which local churches "adopt." The church provides on-site youth and after-school programs, tutoring, music lessons, and adult education. The police, who also serve on the board of Care Fresno, have cracked down on drug traffickers and stepped up protection in the involved neighborhoods. Today 25 apartment complexes housing 10,000 people in Fresno are serviced by this partnership, which has reduced crime by a remarkable 65-70 percent in these complexes.

### **Relocation**

Another initial outcome of the No Name Fellowship was that a number of families, including those of H. Spees and Randy White, decided in the early 90's to pick up their children and move from nicer, high-income, low-crime neighborhoods into Lowell, the multi-racial region of Fresno with the highest crime and lowest income. H. had spent 11 years working in Mississippi with John Perkins, and was firmly committed to renewal through living in the community he served. He and his wife and family agreed to the move into Lowell,

even though it meant challenges for all of them. Since then, another 15 families have joined them, while other long-term Lowell residents have decided to tough it out and stay. In addition to the families who have joined this relocation effort, eight new ministries have a visible presence in the neighborhood.

This was a tough task even for the stout-hearted. Randy White, who heads Intervarsity for Fresno, says in the early years after the move he collected gun shell casings in his yard and “prostitutes who had been shot would come up to the door bleeding.” There were ten murders on his street. Tom Sommers, an insurance executive who now chairs the No Name Fellowship, recalls, “When I heard about what H. and Randy were doing, I thought they were crazy.” Randy bought an old house with enough room to do ministry in it, and founded a tutoring program for grade school kids called Wise Old Owl, which has met there ever since. Now, 100 kids participate each week. He also oversees the Pink House, a residence offering a one-year opportunity for college students in Fresno to learn leadership skills and do urban ministry, while learning to live together in community. Some of the students who have gone through the Pink House program have now returned to the neighborhood as residents and as teachers.

The neighborhood has improved noticeably. Teams of volunteers have repainted more than 25 houses, graffiti has been removed, the blight has been abated, and crime has dropped by more than 50 percent.

### **From No Name to One by One Leadership**

After several years, the No Name Fellowship concluded that it was critical to maintain its relational character, but that there was a need for organizational capacity to carry forth further initiatives being birthed. So a new, action-oriented arm of this coalition was created in 1994, initially as the Fresno Leadership Foundation, now re-christened One by One Leadership.

A delegation including the mayor, chief of police, a school administrator, Gordon Donoho, H. Spees and pastors Bufo Karraker, G.L. Johnson, Paul Binion, Roger Minassian and seminary professor Dr. Jim Westgate traveled to Pittsburgh to see the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation in action. They came back convinced that the Leadership Foundation model was the best way for them to engage in civic renewal through what H. Spees calls a “multi-sector stewardship for the soul of the city.” One by One Leadership has since become an accredited member of the Council of Leadership Foundations, a growing group of 25 similar organizations nationally. One by One Leadership, led by H. Spees as CEO, currently has a budget of \$2.2 million and a staff of 30 full-time and 2

part-time employees, as well as 85 volunteers.

One by One Leadership effectively fosters overlapping circles of influence, based on relational intentionality. Within these circles of relationships, trust has grown, and with that, a willingness to engage the community together. Because the circles are deliberately diverse, people from the government, schools, businesses, law enforcement and the faith community have been brought into relationship with each other, bridging very different sectors of the community. These people are from different races and denominations and would not ordinarily cross paths, but their shared commitment to seek solutions for the city has led to productive cooperation. The fruits of these relationships are tangible in programs, which result in changed lives.

One by One Leadership engages in capacity building as a faith-based intermediary by providing a hub, a nucleus of staff, who go out and engage other civic partners to address a specific community issue. The role One by One plays is that of a catalyst, facilitator, trainer, and equipper for the other civic partners, whether they are drawn from the churches, the neighborhoods, the schools, or the streets. The programs One by One is involved in are not their own; rather, they provide a staff person or a team who serve as a moving hub, conveying a philosophy of civic renewal to a broader circle of other stakeholders in the community, while collaborating to mobilize and equip these partners.

The current activities of One by One Leadership center around four areas of service:

- ❖ Capacity building for congregational and faith-based nonprofits;
- ❖ Mentoring of at-risk youth and families leaving welfare;
- ❖ Neighborhood-based community development; and
- ❖ Improving academic outcomes for inner city public school children.

## I CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CONGREGATIONAL AND FAITH-BASED NONPROFITS

### City as Parish (CAP)

Fresno and Pittsburgh are two cities that have embarked on a joint pilot project to train parishioners in churches to move their people into action, out of the pews and onto the streets, to do outreach in their own community. It is a process that changes the culture of the church, while mobilizing the strengths of a slumbering giant.

City as Parish is a strategy for equipping the church across denominational lines and deploying members throughout the city as one body. The equipping process allows people to discover their gifts, and based on that, to move out and serve in unity with other believers throughout their city. It is centered on Ephesians 4:16: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." The CAP concept stems from a theology of the city that sees "one church, but many branch offices," as CAP director and trainer Don Simmons explains it. Fresno and Pittsburgh are two cities that have embarked on a joint pilot project to train parishioners in churches to move their people into action, out of the pews and onto the streets, to do outreach in their own community. It is a process that changes the culture of the church, while mobilizing the strengths of a slumbering giant—by building the capacity of individual parishioners and their churches, releasing their resources into the community.

The Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation and One by One Leadership have taken on an intermediary role in the faith community of their respective cities, which is unique in America. They have set out, through CAP, to mobilize a critical mass of churches and parishioners in their respective cities through a systematic process of community

building and equipping. CAP in Fresno is currently training teams from twelve churches, whose membership totals nearly 14,700 people. Leadership teams from 62 churches have been equipped since the project began. Participants receive weekly training totaling 50 hours, then, in collaboration with their own pastors, parishioners engage in ministries either within their own church or



outside it. A total of 4,100 parishioners have actually engaged in ministry since their training, and are now deployed throughout the community. In Fresno, CAP trainees have gone to Care Fresno, Covenant Mentor Center, the Samaritan Women's Home for women leaving prison, Poverello House homeless shelter, Fresno Rescue Mission, and the Evangel Home for Families, as well as the Fresno Unified School District, local libraries, and apartment complexes, among others. To assist people searching for the right place to serve, CAP has created a web-based volunteer recruitment system called Volunteer Connect. It links non-profits service opportunities with people willing to volunteer.

This kind of training is needed, as Pastor Jim Franklin confirmed: "CAP is providing resources that would not be available, particularly to smaller churches." But it is proving valuable to churches of all sizes. "Our senior pastor had a vision," says Terrie Purgason, Pastor of Equipping Ministries at Fresno First Baptist Church (a 700-member congregation that has consciously recommitted to its location in the central city rather than relocate to the suburbs). "He wanted to transform the church from being committee-based to a gift-oriented style. When people discover their style and gifts, then see a need for those talents, they just come alive. That's the great thing about CAP, it helps you see the big picture." The process is engendering ripples of transformation within the faith community. Purgason says, "It changes the mindset of pastors to release their people into the city. We are moving people outside the doors of the church."

The process has also helped clergy to design creative solutions to neighborhood problems. As Rev. Willie Nolte, Senior Pastor of First Baptist affirms, "Our community garden is a tangible outcome of our attempt to engage the community through CAP." A blighted drug house stood across the street from Nolte's church, close enough that kids watching from the windows of their Sunday School class could see crack being sold. Heroin syringes were thrown onto church property, and prostitutes walked the street. The church bought the lot and tore down the house. Taking the church members outside their walls, the church's youth groups then converted the vacant lot into a community garden. The church provides the water, while the neighbors plant and care for fruits and vegetables sprouting in individual plots. The parishioners have engaged their neighbors in a new way, and, in Peter Drucker's language, "geography has been converted to community."

The mindset of parishioners is changed as well, as Don Simmons explains. "The transformation is in the pew—the churches own it then. It's the natural next step from the prayer movement." Once the mindset is changed, CAP provides the means for mobilization. As Simmons says, "Some people are asking

for opportunities for service—we provide the onramps.” Scott Gillum, senior pastor of Sunnyside Church, appreciates the way CAP has stimulated his congregation’s growing outreach ministries. “What CAP is enabling us to do is to expand and track opportunities and to evaluate the results of our service.”

## **City Builders Roundtable**

In addition to the CAP project, One by One facilitates a monthly roundtable of faith-based groups throughout Fresno called City Builders. The purpose is to foster relationships and establish a climate of non-competition among faith-based organizations, while encouraging them to affirm and resource each other. They are discovering they are stronger as allies than as competitors.

A training component has been added this past year, to build the capacity of the participating FBOs. Twenty-five participants have already come out for each of two workshops, one on team dynamics and one on grant writing. In addition, California Endowment, California’s largest health-oriented foundation, offered training on how to collaborate with their health initiative. This event drew 50 agencies interested in finding out how to access the \$128 million in funding the Endowment offers. A follow-up video conference allowed six serious contenders to pursue the relationship with the foundation.

City Builders is increasing the capacity of faith-based organizations by enhancing their competence and connectedness. Randy White, director of Intervarsity, affirms that the City Builders process has provided a “steady stream of qualified people to provide training, as well as access to funding.” But beyond that, he sees that One by One Leadership is serving as a catalyst in bringing together faith-based groups from throughout the city and fostering a growth process than intertwines their strengths. “They make things happen that none of the nonprofits alone could. This whole process generates relationships and momentum. It’s like growing the interlocking roots of redwood trees, which grow in shallow soil but produce tremendous stability. Together we are producing things that no one organization could.”

## **Pastors Clusters**

In a movement that began with the genesis of the No Name Fellowship, One by One also gathers groups of pastors from specific geographies in the community, who represent a wide diversity of denominational and racial backgrounds, for fellowship, prayer, and unity in the church. There are currently seven Pastors Clusters throughout the city, involving about 100 clergy spanning the denominational spectrum, from a total of 400 churches in the city. As Gordon



Donoho jested, “where there are two or three pastors gathered together, we are in their midst.”

This relational intentionality is slowly bearing fruit. Pastor Paul Binion, for example, says the relationships formed through the No Name Fellowship, One by One Leadership, and the Pastors Clusters “have moved me from my myopic perspective. I was a very Afro-centric kind of guy, born in a black community, living in a black church, all I wanted was black folk, black, black, black, black, black...And so what the Lord has done is put people in my life who have made me open my perspective.” His church is now attended by Latinos, Asians and Caucasians. “We’re not a black church any more. We are a fellowship of different flavors.” Pastor Binion is now in the process of birthing a Hispanic congregation.

When Pastor Jim Franklin came to Fresno as a newcomer, he found the No Name Fellowship gave him “an avenue by which to engage the community by introducing me into relationships with government, religious and civic leaders it would have been difficult or impossible to meet.” He also found kindred spirits who shared a passion for holistic community renewal. This was a welcome discovery, because the population in downtown Fresno was an eye-opener for this small-town boy. The neighborhood he serves includes former gang members and prostitutes, as well as kids who have been shot, stabbed and raped. Franklin’s church accepted the challenge to welcome these people, and the numbers swelled. To

accommodate the growth, the Cornerstone Church has bought an old vaudeville theater downtown where the Marx brothers and Alice Cooper have performed. Now it is home to a congregation of 3,000. In response to the community’s needs, this church has launched ministries for prisoners, gang

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members, and the homeless. Their food ministry has served 650,000 people and currently supplies 120 agencies throughout the city.

Coming from a small-town Oklahoma Assemblies of God background, Franklin admits he “had to overcome some spiritual prejudice engaging people with a different theological basis.” He found that the No Name Fellowship and Pastors Clusters “gave me an opportunity to engage the city with a common cause, and cross theological and racial boundaries. It liberated me, and made me an ambassador to others, to bring other brothers to the table. It changed me philosophically, allowing me to cross the greatest barrier—the division in the Body of Christ. Now we have the power of unity.”

The spirit of cooperation fostered in the Pastors Clusters is manifested when Franklin sends out teams of 200 volunteers and a huge load of food to a smaller church trying to start a neighborhood feeding program. Franklin says if they don’t have a choir, he brings his, and doesn’t care who gets the credit. “We can empower these churches with our resources if we act like a body.” Some of them have doubled in size with such a boost.

Franklin now chairs the Downtown Pastors Cluster, whose members banded together to put up a billboard and distribute flyers with all of their pictures, and all of their churches’ addresses, urging people to simply go back to church—any church, just go. Their gesture of unity was striking, and it apparently motivated some people to attend who had seldom if ever crossed a church threshold. The pews were noticeably more full.

Another Pastors Cluster from the southeast section of Fresno jointly sponsored a Harvest Festival as a wholesome alternative to Halloween several years ago. What has grown out of that modest beginning is an event that now draws 5000 people every year. The city government has welcomed this as a healthy initiative, and last year volunteered to chip in to cover part of the cost, looking at it as a way for its regular beat officers who volunteer at the event to make positive community connections.

The Pastors Clusters also serve as the nerve center for deployment of CAP trainees, as the combined intelligence gathering capacity of the pastoral community is fairly comprehensive. These two initiatives complement each other by connecting resources and needs, and by allowing the churches to send out trained teams to tackle community problems.

## II. MENTORING FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH

### Welfare-to-work job coaches and mentors

One of the earliest projects One by One Leadership undertook was assisting families in the transition from welfare-to-work. Their research on “best practices” pointed them toward a model that recruited job coaches from disenfranchised neighborhoods who had succeeded in making it up and out, trained them, and sent them back into the neighborhood to help others make the same transition. One by One forged a partnership with the local Community College, which provided training; the Housing Authority to create neighborhood job centers, which provided space; and the Economic Opportunities Commission. The Workforce Investment Act provided funding, and One by One Leadership provided job coaching.

The program engages CalWORKS clients and matches them with volunteer mentors. This program is the only one One by One runs which is entirely government-funded (through the Fresno County Department of Employment and Temporary Assistance.) There are currently 156 adult participants, who receive job coaching from trained staff members, and if they wish, a mentor. One by One recruits mentors from local churches, who receive 20 hours of training. In collaboration with City as Parish, a pool of potential mentors is being readied as this program grows. So far, 57 mentors have been paired with participants transitioning into the workforce.

Six neighborhood centers have been established, and 11 job coaches have been trained. Eighty percent of the job coaches came through the welfare system themselves, and bring a degree of credibility with them that only first-hand experience gives. The mentors stay with their clients a minimum of six months, during which time they call or visit them each week, troubleshoot problems that may be impeding the job search, and offer encouragement and advice. The coaches convene a roundtable once a month for all their participants to facilitate peer learning and connect the individuals to community resources.

The outcomes of this initiative thus far have been impressive:

- ❖ A total of 400 men and women have been placed in unsubsidized jobs
- ❖ 57 volunteer mentors are currently matched up with participants
- ❖ A total of 15 job coaches and 120 church-based job mentors have been trained, who together have served 800 welfare-to-work participants and their families

Marilyn Gonzalez, a single mother of three and a life-long welfare recipient, completed the jobs program and is now employed as a health aide at Fresno Veteran's Administration Center. She credits her job coach with a significant part of her success. "Paula helped me see what was possible. She helped motivate me and show me what I could do if I try. Beyond that, she's a friend who has helped me in so many ways."

Margarita Correa echoed this experience, as she sat at the table with her volunteer mentor, Barbara Lake. "I know I can talk to Barbara like family. I talk to her like my mom. I call her and I can count on her."

Rose Orta serves as a job coach now, but remembers well what it was like to be on welfare. She tells her participants with conviction, "I was there and made it. You can too."

## **Mentoring High-Risk Youth**

The At-Risk Ministries, or ARMS Network, is a collaborative strategy that was birthed in partnership with the sheriff, the chaplain of Juvenile Hall, the captain of the Police Department, and Youth for Christ. One by One Leadership now nurtures this collaborative effort. As is the case with several One by One projects, staff members interface as a hub for a number of civic partners, providing the infrastructure to keep the coalition in motion. The intermediary function is one of facilitator.

Youth who have been in trouble with the law are taken to camps in the mountains, accompanied by probation officers. On this trip, which offers an intensive outdoor character-building experience, each youth is paired with a mentor. Mentors are recruited from local churches and trained for the relationship with a troubled teen, which they commit to honor for at least six months. Background checks are done on the mentors, who receive 12-15 hours of training for the task. Paula Stewart from One by One matches the youth with mentors, many of whom come from the City as Parish training in their local churches. A modified version of the Search Institute's tool for assessing Developmental Assets is utilized as an intake evaluation.

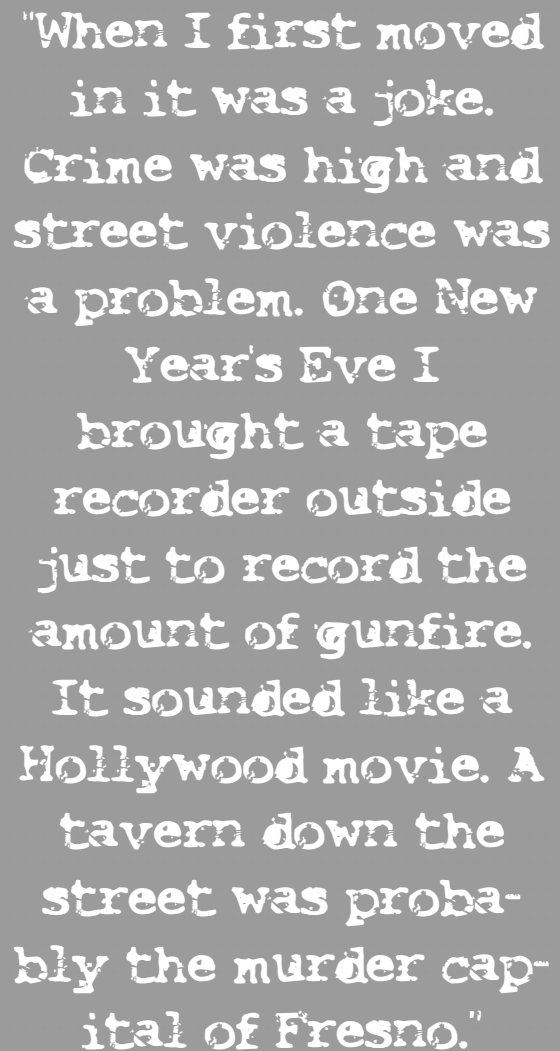
Over the past several years, a total of 240 youths have gone on the camping outing. Juvenile Hall in Fresno has kept the records on all incarcerated youths. Of those youth who are simply released with no further intervention, 70 percent are rearrested in one year. If they go to the county "boot camp" program, the percentage of re-arrests drops to 17 percent. The youngsters who go on the ARMS mountain trip have been drawn from the pool of "boot camp" participants. Of these who have graduated from "boot camp" and gone on the mountain trip and received a

mentor for half a year, only 1 percent have been rearrested. While the pool of participants is small—currently 22 youth, paired with 12 trained mentors—the preliminary evidence indicates that the combination of intensive intervention and sustained mentoring has a strong likelihood of reducing recidivism.

### III. NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The community of Jefferson lies just outside downtown Fresno, a pocket of poverty and transience peopled largely by Hmong, Laotian, and Hispanic families. It is home to approximately 5000 residents. At Jefferson Elementary School, 98.4 percent of the students' families are at the national poverty level. Many of them are here undocumented. 85 percent of the parents do not speak English. Crime and prostitution are rampant on the streets. Resident Michael Lust, chairman of the recently developed neighborhood association says, "When I first moved in it was a joke. Crime was high and street violence was a problem. One New Year's Eve I brought a tape recorder outside just to record the amount of gunfire. It sounded like a Hollywood movie. A tavern down the street was probably the murder capital of Fresno."<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1990s, Jefferson residents faced a potential initiative that was at once promising and threatening. Community Medical Centers wanted to build a massive Regional Medical Center costing \$320 million, which would cover 58 acres within the 400-acre Jefferson neighborhood. The city had approved the plans in 1995, but the initial design necessitated a housing relocation strategy for residents. That had stymied both city planners and Community Medical Centers. No one wanted a hospital complex bordering a high-crime area to become a Taj Mahal surrounded by a razor wire fence.



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In analyzing the trends for growth and change, One by One sensed the potential in this neighborhood. They began doing on-the-ground community organization training work in 1998, which eventually gave rise to the Jefferson Area Neighborhood Association (JANA). Utilizing the disciplines of traditional community organizing as well as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), One by One Leadership staff began to convene residents at the elementary school to teach them the principles of community organization and engaging the police and city officials to improve their neighborhood. The results were modest, but visible, improvements in the community: new sidewalks and stop signs, graffiti removal, parent patrols to and from school, and cleaner alleys and streets. But equally important was the change in the residents: they were finding their voice, and joined together to claim the neighborhood as their own. They too were turning “geography into community.”

Encouraged by these results, JANA and One by One embarked on a planning process to renew the entire neighborhood, facilitated by urban design architect Pyatok and Associates. One by One brought in a university professor of Urban Planning and others to train the residents in the vocabulary of urban planning and how to interact with institutional leaders. Because many of the residents do not speak English, planning sessions were held with headphones and translators simultaneously giving the proceedings in Hmong, Laotian, and Spanish. The result was a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood, which the city government has approved. These immigrants have experienced the full value of civic participation and democracy in action, probably for the first time.

Bryn Forhan, Vice President of Government Relations for Community Medical Centers, credits One by One with the breakthrough in getting the city to approve the plan. “The housing piece around the Regional Medical Center really needed attention...One by One assessed the need and started to work on the empowerment of the neighbors in this area, a whole neighborhood of people who are lacking in skills and understanding how to engage in the process of defining their own neighborhood.” She explains that although the medical center was committed to “bringing the neighborhood along with them,” the needs of the residents outstripped their capacity. One by One stepped in to give the residents the kind of intensive training and equipping they needed to participate in the process as equal partners.

Fred Burkhart, who became Director of Fresno’s Housing, Economic and Community Development office in 2001, “needed a shift in community paradigm” to accomplish what was otherwise “pretty much impossible for the city to accomplish.” He was looking for partnerships in the Jefferson neighbor-



hood, which the federal government has just designated as part of an Empowerment Zone for the coming nine years. “We found that One by One had been on the ground in force for two or three years, and they had done an enormous amount of spade work, community grassroots level work that would have taken us another two to three years to accomplish. What we found was this organization that had done all of our preliminary work, that was already on the ground, already had community contacts, had an organizational structure which would enable us to deliver product and service in place...So being the organizational speed demon, I said ‘why am I going out there to reinvent this wheel? I have a wheel right here! Let’s use theirs.’”

Burkhart has concluded that the kind of work One by One Leadership does is crucial for civic renewal, because it is active at a level the government cannot engage well. “Their capacity of outreach down into the community is an asset that we as a government are not really equipped to deal with. Our relationship with our constituency, the residents of the City of Fresno, is usually based upon the provision of services—water, sewer, garbage, parking, business licenses, trash pickup, public safety...We are not built organizationally to do work at the level [and] depth of the community that One by One and similar organizations are built to reach. We’re simply not good at it.”

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Bryn Forhan concurs that the intermediary role One by One plays fills a need that only the social sector can. “They are a dynamic and flexible organization, and they were looking for an opportunity. They were working in the neighborhood in a way we could not, or the government could not.” This collaboration has brought the local schools, city planners, housing developers, residents, and Community Medical Centers to the same table, which is producing a solution no one sector alone could have developed.

Beyond One by One’s success in negotiating a solution with Community Medical Centers, its work in the Jefferson neighborhood has fostered other positive outcomes, including:

- ❖ 300 residents have participated in the JANA planning process
- ❖ 12 JANA residents committed to a 3-month educational process to learn about the City Planning Process as it affects Jefferson neighborhood
- ❖ 20 JANA residents participated in a tour to Oakland and Berkeley to observe “best practice” affordable housing projects
- ❖ Residents have been recruited to participate in the making of videos completed in Hmong, Spanish and English to engage others in sharing their vision for the community
- ❖ A Phase I “master plan” for the Jefferson neighborhood has been completed with the collaboration of residents, stakeholders, and urban design architect
- ❖ The first downtown house has been rehabbed
- ❖ A Community Development Corporation (CDC) has been formed to facilitate property development and affordable housing, currently under One by One
- ❖ Agreement has been reached with Fresno Unified School District on the site for a new school
- ❖ The police department has agreed to build a new police substation in the neighborhood

Bryn Forhan of the Community Medical Center waxes enthusiastic about all that One by One has accomplished. “The area has such great needs,” she explains, “because of its unemployment and poverty. It requires attention and tools beyond the regular. It’s a chasm often not addressed, because it’s difficult to engage the population. We’re trying to bring the neighborhood along with us, but there were no services available 24/7 from people who were engaged at the personal level. One by One has done that.”

Community Medical Centers has served up a service that it can deliver well, which is job training for the residents. In a six-month “boot camp” for job readiness, residents learn how to apply for a job, write a resume, go for an interview, or embark on preliminary training to take future jobs that will be created at the medical center in their neighborhood. Central California has a shortfall of nurses, coupled with an unemployment rate of 12-14 percent. The obvious solution: train people in nursing.

The idea for training the parents was birthed with Steve Gonzalez, principal of Jefferson Elementary School, which is where JANA meets. His school has become the home of the growing neighborhood coalition. As parents have engaged in JANA and in the classes at the medical center, Gonzalez has noticed a ripple effect on the students. So has John Barber, principal of Tehipite Middle School, which is also in the Jefferson neighborhood and offers adult education to parents. Barber explains, "The JANA project has increased parental involvement. Before with ESL, they started and dropped out. JANA has encouraged them." There are now 31 adults in ESL and 20 in parenting classes, and attendance has remained steady. "Children see their parents repositioning their goals, and see their mom is learning to speak English and use computers, and it has an effect on them. We now see fewer behavior problems, fewer absentees and less tardiness." Gonzalez confirms that academic performance is rising in tandem with parental civic engagement, as unlikely as that may seem. As Bryn Forhan explains it, "Children are doing better because they see their parents making changes. There's a ripple effect, moving up the Maslow scale. Their basic needs are being met. And they are readying to participate in democracy."

**"One by One has given attention to the residents, given them hope, a direct link to information, a sense of empowerment, and creates an environment that changes outlook. They lived in hopelessness and despair and now they see options."**

Beyond that, Forhan sees the neighborhood horizon has been brightened. "One by One has given attention to the residents, given them hope, a direct link to information, a sense of empowerment, and creates an environment that changes outlook. They lived in hopelessness and despair and now they see options." If the community renewal project plays out as planned, the net result for the community will be new jobs, improved educational opportunities, increased police protection, and affordable housing. One outcome now is hope.

#### **IV. IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FOR INNER CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN**

One by One has also used its collaborative strength to bring ministry and civic leaders to the table for community renewal affecting education, leveraging all their resources. One example is the CORAL project (Communities Organizing for Advanced Learning). Fresno is one of five California cities chosen for this project, which will bring \$12 million into the region over the next six years. Working in conjunction with United Way and the Irvine Foundation, One by One Leadership is crafting an approach to develop out-of-school programs that improve student achievement in 12 downtown and west Fresno elementary schools.

Rich Kriegbaum, President of the United Way of Fresno County, explained that this project is attempting to improve the level of learning through out-of-school programs that enhance the capacity of residents, producing learning results in their children that can be verified in improved standardized test scores. One by One Leadership is one of the architects for this strategy, which will build the capacity of neighborhood associations, enhance parent training and adult literacy, and partner with community development corporations. This initiative dovetails with efforts to train and mobilize laity across the city, as Kriegbaum points out. “CAP is building civic volunteerism. We expect that some of that would be channeled into CORAL projects.” Trained volunteers from the churches will be ready for engagement in a way that improves both spiritual and civic health.

A second example of leveraging resources by bringing other players to the table is the California Works for Better Health (CWBH) initiative, which is a collaboration of California Endowment and the Rockefeller Foundation. One by One Leadership and three other community-based organizations in Fresno—Catholic Charities, the Center for New Americans, and the Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development—will receive a total of \$2.4 million over the next four years to improve health and employment development in the area.

#### **Individual Benefits**

The value that One by One Leadership adds accrues not only to networks and collaborations like those just described. It also affects individual organizations and people. For example, Family Leadership Connection is an organization that was initiated under the wing of One by One, but has now been spun off as a stand-alone nonprofit. (It still enjoys rent-free office space with One by One.) Leaders Patty Bunker and Gladys Morris have co-authored a training

book on parenting, based on the Search Institute's developmental assets for youth. This approach teaches parents how, systematically, to foster the development of their children to become whole, motivated, and stable. The curriculum has been translated from English into Hmong and Spanish, and has been used to teach 1300 parents over the past six years. Because parenting is an important piece of the community building strategy, this organization is a key element of the city-wide holistic approach to renewal.

Building the capacity of individual people is an important part of the One by One strategy as well. Socorro Gaeta is one example of a neighborhood resident who has flourished with their training. An immigrant from Mexico with minimal schooling, Socorro has lived in the Jefferson neighborhood for 27 years, where she raised six children. She had seen no improvement in the area until One by One arrived. With their encouragement, she joined the Jefferson Area Neighborhood Association and has become a leader, mobilizing 300 of her neighbors to participate. She now serves on the board of the Community Development Corporation, and is an instructor in parenting for Family Leadership Connection. She is learning English, and has a part-time job at Jefferson Elementary School.

As Socorro puts it, "When they start[ed] sending me to represent Jefferson, I was so happy because I'm thinking, 'Who's me to represent Jefferson? There's more important people.'... I told them, 'You can do better than me.' But I never say no, I go on my way and I'm so happy because I learned for me." One by One sent her to training for ten days to learn how to interface with the mayor, police, and local officials. "I have a big change from that time to now, because I'm involved with the community and the school and the city and Parenting Partners. They call me a key leader for Jefferson." When asked what One by One Leadership has given her, she exclaims with a broad smile, "Ideas!" Socorro has caught fire, and is actively contributing to her community and motivating others to do likewise. Her efforts have given her an earned dignity. "Now I feel like a respectable person," she says.

## **Why One by One Leadership Works**

Field research in Fresno confirms without a doubt that One by One Leadership has been critical to the civic renewal of Fresno. This intermediary has produced remarkable tangible results, begging the question of how to replicate its successes elsewhere. Doing so requires understanding why One by One has been so effective. Interviews revealed at least a half-dozen factors, described below.

**One by One pursues multi-sector collaboration, convening a broad variety of organizations.**

One by One spans the total spectrum of civic engagement, from full government collaboration to full church collaboration. It works in partnership with the government in the Jefferson community renewal, while bridging to the business community at the same time. It works in mixed models, mobilizing volunteers of faith for collaboration with the city in the welfare-to-work and at-risk youth mentoring programs. And it does pure church equipping and mobilization, as in CAP and Pastors Clusters, and other projects such as sponsoring an evangelistic men's retreat for smaller churches that could not afford one. It requires clarity of vision and conviction to work effectively across such a broad spectrum without diluting the faith content of faith-based programs, or transgressing the boundaries of the public sector. But this organization seems to demonstrate the balance and sophistication needed to move in multiple sectors with clarity.

One by One Leadership has proven effective at bringing together a broad variety of organizations, and serving as a facilitator and catalyst among them. As Rich Kriegbaum of the United Way observed, "Their strength is awakening the community. One by One advances and enhances the civic efforts of the church, extending into the entire community. Faith-based organizations do what they do for their specific area—sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry—but One by One does it across all those areas. No one else does this." By collaborating with the No Name Fellowship and the broad swath of civic partners who convene there, new initiatives have been birthed to meet the changing needs of the community. One by One Leadership then gives them "legs."

**One by One emphasizes strong relationships, leading to initiatives that have staying power.**

One by One Leaders and staff cultivate, intentionally, strong relationships in a number of different circles—including the mayor's office, the schools, the police, the churches, and the business community—and nurture them, continually introducing people to one another and fostering the relationships. They are keeping a number of plates spinning throughout the city, returning to give the pole a twist every week. By providing a staff member whose job it is to keep the relational coalitions in motion, they are able to serve as a catalyst for action that grows from relationship and trust.

It is no accident that most of the major players throughout the One by One network simultaneously serve in several circles. Many of the pastors who are



## Lessons Learned

One by One Leadership has been nimble to reposition itself, based on its discoveries along the learning curve. Early on, they launched an effort to raise funds for a group of faith-based organizations in the city, and to make grants to them. Jim Westgate, who was then co-leading the organization, explains, “It was a kind of Christian United Way.” They raised and re-granted close to \$200,000 to other groups, but found that it created a negative dynamic. “It led to a kind of competitive spirit among the faith-based groups which was not what we intended. We concluded that we did not want to do anything that would divide. So we tried to revamp our strategy to build up in unity instead.” Collaborative projects and leadership training were born out of this frustration, and have yielded a more interwoven strategy that equips FBOs to obtain their own funding, while cooperating on shared strategies.

At this point, One by One was a pure intermediary, not offering any direct services itself. It discovered that it is extremely difficult to find funders who want to invest in intermediary work alone. So One by One decided to embark on a mixed model, working to provide some direct services with tangible (and fundable) results, while continuing to serve the intermediary function in the background.

Another lesson crystallized out of the early attempts at community renewal. Some of the initial projects in Lowell produced results they were not happy with. Teams of people had been mobilized from outside to come in and repaint houses, working with the local residents to scrape and prep them. Globe street lights were put up. But because the impetus did not originate with the residents, they were not enthusiastic about maintaining the lights or the houses. One by One concluded that any efforts which were “outside in” were not going to yield lasting fruit. They backed off to reconsider what an “inside out” strategy would look like to empower residents to take responsibility for their own neighborhood. The Jefferson neighborhood project was born out of this learning process.

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part of the No Name Fellowship also meet in a Pastors Cluster and serve on the City Builders Roundtable, for example, while their parishioners are active in CAP. A number of high-profile city officials are professing Christians in the No Name Fellowship. The weaving together of varying strands is deliberate, and the relationships that have grown make it possible to function as a community, or as a body.

New initiatives are birthed from friendships, which means they are much more likely to bear fruit over time. Randy White put it this way: "One by One has created relationships, which are more important than programs. They are building something that can last. I can go out into my back yard and plant an orange tree, and it will put down roots and produce oranges year after year. Or I can go and buy a sack of oranges at the store. One by One is planting trees."

**One by One Leadership intentionally emphasizes racial and ethnic diversity as they assemble staff and the Boards of Directors of the various cooperating organizations.**

Because the population in Fresno spans Hispanic, Asian, black and white, leadership has been drawn from these groups. Cultural competence is crucial to the mission, and the result has been active recruitment of diverse talent. John Perkins drove this point home at a recent One by One conference. "We need to raise up Hispanic, black, white, Asians—people who do not forsake their racial identity, but don't let their race interfere with their mission in society...Jesus intended the church to be black and white, Jew and Gentile together, so that the world will know that there is a miracle of reconciliation. We need to be a model of God's reconciling power."

One hallmark of One by One's approach is the value they place on mobilizing talent from the neighborhood served. This also reflects John Perkins' approach: "We know that outside people can't fix broken communities. The people with the problem have to accept responsibility themselves. It might just be that the broken themselves have the solution, and what they need is our love and support." One by One has been creative in drawing from the populations served, hiring former welfare recipients to work with families now transitioning from welfare, and a former gang member to reach out to those still involved in gangs, and their families.

### **One by One equips "from the inside out," causing those trained to become trainers and mobilizers of others.**

One by One serves as an equipper to give people the training they need to create widening circles of competence. Every leader trained by CAP goes back into his or her own church ready to create an equipping culture to mobilize scores of others. By providing community organization training and urban planning instruction to the residents of the Jefferson neighborhood, One by One Leadership has built up their personal capacity and competence, while empowering them to engage in the process of renewing their own neighborhood. By providing networking opportunities and capacity-building training to leaders of faith-based groups city wide, an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competition has been fostered. The value-added of One by One is the capacity that has been built in the individuals, as well as the institutions that serve them. This approach is transformation from the inside out. While some of the outcomes are already visible, probably the best are yet to come.

"We know that outside people can't fix broken communities. The people with the problem have to accept responsibility themselves. It might just be that the broken themselves have the solution, and what they need is our love and support."

**One by One provides “on ramps” to help individuals connect to meaningful community service opportunities.**

**"The usefulness of a movement like this is that it's difficult for church folks to get involved in poverty and community development efforts. This is an opening. One by One provides an escort service into the city, a way to go places you wouldn't be able to otherwise. Now there's a mechanism for what amounts to foreign ministry on the domestic scene."**

One of the difficulties for the ordinary citizen, or the person in the pew of a local church, is to find a way to engage his or her own community at the flash point of need. One by One Leadership is providing on-ramps for people who want to engage, by offering specific ways to use their time and talents. It provides a clearinghouse of opportunities, as well as a framework of accountability for collaborating ministries. Taking on the whole community is an overwhelming task, but this way an individual can assume a particular responsibility and know that it will be both manageable and meaningful. As Dr. Jim Aldredge, professor at Fresno State University, put it, "The usefulness of a movement like this is that it's difficult for church folks to get involved in poverty and community development efforts. This is an opening. One by One provides an escort service into the city, a way to go places you wouldn't be able to otherwise. Now there's a mechanism for what amounts to foreign ministry on the domestic scene."

**One by One is a cross-cultural interpreter, and knows how to speak multiple languages.**

One of the capabilities of an effective faith-based intermediary is serving as a

cross-cultural interpreter. Not only does Fresno have 85 different ethnic groups, it also has multiple layers of culture among its government, civic, and business leaders. It takes a certain talent to speak the language of the market

with businessmen, the language of religion with pastors, the language of the street with gang-bangers, the language of civic renewal with government officials, and the language of outcomes with foundation executives. But to be an effective faith-based intermediary, it is necessary. And One by One is proficient in this area.

Because they are moving in many circles, groups like One by One get a view of the city that spans the highest to the lowest levels. This allows them to serve as the connective tissue of the whole body. They can reach from homeless shelters to suburban churches, and from city hall to the streets. As Fred Burkhart pointed out from his vantage point in city government, "Faith-based groups operating at the grassroots level are the troops on the ground at the farthest point out into the community. [T]hat's where increasing their capacity and giving them levels of empowerment to assist with the delivery is critical." As an intermediary between the people on the street and leaders in government and business, One by One gives the disenfranchised a voice, while providing access for public servants to the people they are attempting to serve.

## CONCLUSION

Soon after One by One Leadership's CEO, H. Spees, moved into the Lowell neighborhood, a neighbor's son was innocently walking near a gang conflict, and was struck in the head by a stray bullet. This generated both anger and a firmness in Spees, who concluded, "This is unacceptable for my neighbor's son to die walking home from school." A city can be blessed with desperation, and some of the fortitude that was forged in this tragedy has urged on One by One Leadership in its service to the city.

One by One Leadership has concluded that solutions to the problems of the neighborhoods are to be found right there, in the neighborhood. Their strategy is to equip grassroots leaders, give them organizational tools, and connect

**"Faith-based groups operating at the grassroots level are the troops on the ground at the farthest point out into the community. [T]hat's where increasing their capacity and giving them levels of empowerment to assist with the delivery is critical."**



them in relationship to people from all strata of the city. One by One moves from the mayor's office to police headquarters, from the university to the

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homeless shelter, from foundation suites to drug tanks, without missing a beat. They speak the languages of all these players, and build relationships among them. They have brought together pastors from all over the city to embrace the community as one body, while equipping the laity to mobilize the slumbering giant of the church.

Serving as a faith-based intermediary, One by One Leadership has embarked on a strategy to systematically build capacity across several civic sectors of Fresno. It is unusual as a faith-based group to have a presence both in the clearly evangelical church community, where faith is explicit, as well in the public square, where it is not. However, One by One Leadership has a consistent core anchored in faith that serves as its motivation, but which is manifested in a way appropriate to the forum. Spees makes a case for developing approaches appropriate for either private or public space, because he asserts that "American public space is theistic and moral,

but not Christian or spiritual." He is convinced of the rightful place of evangelization and personal transformation that comes through in private space, as his organization demonstrated in collaborating to bring the Billy Graham Crusade to Fresno. Spees explains, "We need to embrace our role in this larger movement in America of restoring community, restoring the common good, taking our place as good citizens in that process. So what that means is that we can draw upon legitimately Judeo-Christian and, specifically, Christ-centered core values. And we can draw upon the values of civil society. Both are legitimate."



One by One has served as a mediating institution between the city government, the Community Medical Center, and the residents of the Jefferson neighborhood, producing results that neither government nor business could. By facilitating a neighborhood renewal process, One by One has empowered low-income residents to “turn geography into community.” In serving as a bridge between government employment workers, Juvenile Hall, and the churches, they have paired people of faith with at-risk youth and families in need. Because One by One serves as an intermediary between the mayor’s office, school principals, the police, faith-based leaders, housing developers, the community college, pastors, foundations, and urban planners, initiatives have blossomed which no one of these sectors could have produced alone.

One of the more subtle changes in the city that One by One has produced is a shift in the culture. Ten years ago in Fresno, it was rare for a person in public office to talk about his or her faith, or to seek an alliance with faith-based groups. But with the steady influence of the No Name Fellowship and One by One Leadership, a group of leaders has been nurtured who in later years have come forward to assume influential posts, and publicly but appropriately acknowledge their convictions. Fresno now has a mayor, chief of police, superintendent of schools, and fire chief who are all professing Christians. The cooperation between these officials and the faith community has contributed to the success of a number of the civic initiatives over the past decade and has been complemented by the support of public officials from other faith persuasions. Racial and denominational reconciliation fostered by One by One has made it much easier to mobilize people of faith and people of good will throughout the city to work together.

**Because One by One serves as an intermediary between the mayor's office, school principals, the police, faith-based leaders, housing developers, the community college, pastors, foundations, and urban planners, initiatives have blossomed which no one of these sectors could have produced alone.**

While Fresno may have had the dubious distinction of being named “least liveable” American city in 1983, that has all changed. Affirmed by the National Civic League’s award as All America City in 2000, with its faith-based initiatives highlighted in the city’s winning application, Fresno is now one of America’s most promising examples of comprehensive civic renewal anchored in faith.

### One by One Leadership Outcomes at a Glance

- ❖ Trained equipping teams from 62 churches, with 4,100 individuals now actively engaged in outreach throughout Fresno
- ❖ Placed 400 welfare-to-work participants in jobs
- ❖ Trained 15 job coaches and 120 church-based job mentors
- ❖ Leveraging \$14.4 million in new grants into the community over the next 5 years
- ❖ Capacity-building training for 25 leaders of faith-based organizations
- ❖ Built relational bridges among 100 clergy of different denominations
- ❖ Mobilized neighborhood coalition to facilitate implementation of \$320 million project
- ❖ Took 240 at-risk youth camping to build character, reduce recidivism
- ❖ Cross-pollinate 75 civic, government and faith leaders every month

### ENDNOTES

- 1 “What Does God See When He Looks at the San Joaquin Valley?” Briefing paper prepared for Billy Graham on Fresno (unpublished), p 4.
- 2 Ibid, p. 5.
- 3 H. Spees, *Soul of the City*, Vol. 1, (Fresno, CA: One by One Leadership, 2001), p. 1.
- 4 Ibid, p. 5.