



EXCERPT



Uncommon Church *Community Transformation for the Common Good*

October 13, 2020 | \$17, 176 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4162-2

In urban ministry, Christians too often treat the poor as goodwill projects instead of people. How can the people of God develop healthy, local, urban churches that will seek the common good of their communities? In this essential resource, Alvin Sanders engages hard truths about urban neighborhoods and provides a model for how to do ministry in difficult conditions.

The Power of the Local Church to Make a Difference

This book is for people who believe in the power of the local church to make a difference in the lives of the urban poor. Many who fight for justice for the poor come from Christian backgrounds. However, the American church has two main problems when it comes to addressing justice for the poor. The first is philosophical: too many Christians treat the poor as charitable goodwill projects instead of as people among whom the church can be God's witnesses. Charity and witness are not mutually exclusive.

Poverty is a condition people live in that needs to be addressed from a godly perspective. In this book, we'll engage hard truths about poor neighborhoods and explore pathways to ministry in those places.

Christ said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). He didn't say he would build a food pantry, a tutoring program, or a community development enterprise. He added, "And the gates of Hades will not overcome it." I am all for good works, but I believe the witness of the church is an undervalued and overlooked asset when it comes to urban poverty.

A healthy church is a holy place, because holiness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. The apostle Peter wrote, "It is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16). We're instructed to be like God—holy in everything we do. Holiness displays the character of God; it means being set apart for service to God. As we do this, we have the privilege of influencing situations for God's glory. A key understanding that many miss when ministering to those who are marginalized is that *holiness is the way to victory*.

Many mistakenly think that the pursuit of holiness happens only on a personal level. But the church is also to pursue holiness socially through God-created institutions. This is where advocacy comes in. Social institutions are permanent and complicated structures formed to meet basic human needs. They are powerful, they endure for generations, and they influence many lives. The church is one of those institutions, sociologically speaking. Pursuing holiness on the institutional level means seeking the common good of a community.

What is *the common good*? It is the answer to two questions. What do those who have put their faith in Christ have in common with those who have not? And what can the local church do to make the world a better place for them? The local church ought to understand differences and act on commonalities. God wants all neighborhoods to flourish, and they can't if institutions don't function well.

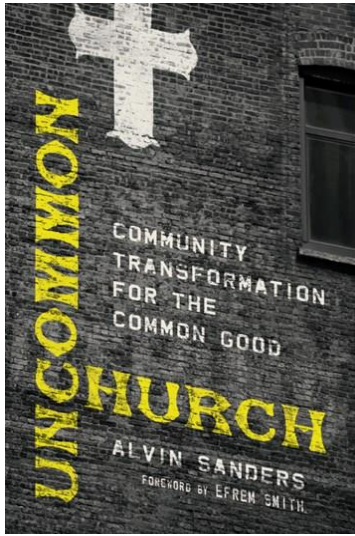


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“Grounded in keen biblical insights, supported by practical strategies born out of experiential wisdom, and replete with stories that are as instructive as they are inspiring, this is a must-have book for anyone desiring to join God’s church-based agenda for healing the brokenness and combating the evil and injustices of our world, especially as they are manifest in the hood.” JR Rozko, national director, Missio Alliance

The second problem—closely related to the first—is theological. Or more accurately, I should say a lack thereof. What I am about to write may trigger a “Boomer alert” moment, but hear me out. Besides, I am not of the Boomer generation but of Gen X—you know, the generation no one cares about! The point is I am old enough to detect a subtle shift.

When I started off in urban ministry in 1991, I believe a huge problem was many had good theology but didn’t live it out well among the urban poor. I’ve noticed we’ve come full circle. Today I see people doing a lot of advocacy in and for poor neighborhoods, but their actions have little to no theology behind them. When this is the case, the local church becomes an afterthought. If we say we are Christian, this cannot be. There is no way around the fact that the Bible makes it clear: the local church is the hope of the world, regardless of where it is located.

—Taken from chapter one, “Advocacy Is Not Enough”



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Q & A



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Alvin Sanders (PhD, Miami) is the president and CEO of World Impact. Author of *Bridging the Diversity Gap*, he previously served as a pastor, church planter, and denominational leader for the Evangelical Free Church of America, leading its All People Initiative. Sanders earned a BA in biblical studies from Cincinnati Christian University, an MA in religion and urban ministry from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and a PhD in educational leadership from Miami University. He and his family live in Cincinnati.

Advocacy Is Not Enough

Why did you decide to write *Uncommon Church*?

Alvin Sanders: When we look at people who fight for justice for the poor, many come from Christian backgrounds. However, in my three decades of working in the space, the American church has a philosophical problem. In urban ministry too many treat the poor as goodwill projects to advocate for instead of people to be God's witnesses among. They are not mutually exclusive.

What is the main message you hope to convey in the book?

Alvin: Advocacy for the poor is not enough. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church." My experience is if healthy churches exist in poor neighborhoods, they become major players advocating for areas that raise the quality of life for the people there. The recent trend is emphasizing advocacy without the church. My distinctive is the emphasis of the power of the local church in poor neighborhoods.

What do you hope readers take away from *Uncommon Church*?

Alvin:

- Advocacy is not enough.
- Poverty is a condition, not an identity.
- Poor people are more than goodwill projects.
- Jesus favors the poor.
- The local urban church plays three key roles in the community: empower, partner, and reach.



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