

How to Become a Missionary to Victims of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is on the rise, and followers of Jesus are on the frontlines of freeing its victims.

Calvin Fanning, a former church-planting missionary with the Assemblies of God, is one of those called to this critical ministry.

“The inspiration for shelter planting is borrowed from church planting,” says Fanning, director of shelter mentoring at The Samaritan Women’s Institute for Shelter Care, on the *Charisma Connection* podcast.

Fanning says that any Christian called to this challenging expression of ministry can “plant” a shelter. The Institute for Shelter Care, based in Baltimore, Maryland, has a three-year shelter training and mentoring program that takes mentees through the process of starting a shelter “from start to finish,” says Fanning, addressing topics such as raising funds, choosing board members, selecting your property, training staff, deciding on group activities for the residents and selecting the types of therapy the program offers victims.

“Typically there’s a turning point for shelters,” he says. “Many of them open too soon, without having a defined program in place or trained staff. Usually in the first three months, there’s a stunning realization about the depth of trauma these victims have experienced and the darkness of this evil. It can be overwhelming.”

He compares the process to parenting.

“We liken it to having your first child; every moment is a potential new experience or new challenge.”

Fanning sees the call to plant a shelter akin to the call to plant a church or to engage in foreign missions.

“I often compare it to committing your life to foreign missions,” he says. “It is such a big commitment. Believers who want to get into this ministry need discernment as they enter into this foreign mission field.

“There are even cultural and language barriers when you’re working with a population that’s so far removed from your experiences. There’s certainly some shock involved, and I always recommend preparing yourself as much as possible by reading some of the stories about victims and what their life was like and how truly difficult it is to reintegrate into what we would call a ‘normal’ lifestyle.”

While God calls individuals to this work, He also leads churches to fully engage, not just give financially. The Institute for Shelter Care calls on churches to “put their time, talent and treasure toward creating shelters or supporting an individual who feels called to plant a shelter,” Fanning says. “The church can nominate or identify people in their congregation who would be well-suited to this, or they can, as a church entity, take it on as a church-wide project.”

Those who sense a call will need to educate themselves about the problem. One good place to do that is , a website from The Samaritan Women full of resources to explore.

Listen to this *Charisma Connection* podcast interview to learn more about the requirements to participate in the mentoring program and how shelters are contextualized to different environments across the country.