

Compassion Evangelism Impacts Millions for the Kingdom Worldwide

The story of the five loaves and two fish isn't simply one of Doug Stringer's favorite passages in the Bible. It has become an instruction manual for the human compassion ministry he founded nearly three decades ago—Somebody Cares America/International.

A small organization with only eight regularly-paid staff in its Houston, Texas, office and limited financial resources, Somebody Cares follows the principles Jesus implemented in biblical times to turn a little into abundance to help the poor, the destitute and those devastated by natural disasters.

It has become known as a coalition and network of organizations and churches impacting communities through prayer initiatives, compassion outreaches, leadership training and responding in times of crisis.

From Houston to the four corners of the world, from urban to foreign missions, from inner cities to unreached people groups, Somebody Cares helps to transform lives through united efforts of prayer, tangible expressions of Christ and community transformation through kingdom collaborations. In what has become known in SCAI's circles as "compassion evangelism," the organization and its network of ministries and churches extends God's tangible love in the form of food, clothing, shelter, financial resources and the comfort of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those hungry for a better life.

Although Stringer's compassion ministry began in the early 1980s, Somebody Cares was birthed as its own entity in 1994.

Following the story in Matthew 14—when Jesus fed more than

5,000 men, not including women and children, with only five loaves of bread and two fish—Stringer doesn't concern himself about a lack of resources when faced with what looks in the natural to be an insurmountable task to help those in need.

He remembers what Jesus did for the 5,000 and how he did it—and then he puts his full trust in God to come through.

“You look at what Jesus said. He said, ‘feed them,’” Stringer says, referring to Matthew 14:16 (NLT). “And then the disciples said, ‘We don't have anything. How can we feed them?’ The point is, Jesus didn't ask them, do we have enough? He didn't ask them about what they had; he said, ‘feed them.’ And that is what we are committed to.

“For us, we're simply being obedient, and simple obedience is the highest form of worship,” Stringer continues. “The first time the word worship is ever used in Scripture is not in the context of singing or with instruments. It's a context of obedience. If we simply just take what we have and offer thanksgiving, God will multiply the loaves and the fishes. After He did that, they had more than enough. It is a principle we have seen everywhere.

“It's compassion, but you don't just do compassion without having the wisdom of God or the heart of God.” According to Stringer, “It's about being a part of something bigger than yourself. It's not about who gets a pat on the back or who gets the credit. It's just about helping people, and when you do that, you see the kingdom advanced. People's lives are changed, impacted, and you ultimately leave equity for God's kingdom. That's when people will become more curious to the gospel. If you see the tangibility of the gospel, then the loaves and fishes principle goes into full force.”

Stringer and his team are fully aware they cannot fulfill that mission on their own merit. If they are to leave “kingdom equity,” as Stringer calls it, in the areas they serve, they

must rely on other organizations and churches to partner alongside Somebody Cares to bring God's tangible love to those who desperately need it.

With limited staff in Houston, carrying out the organization's kingdom commitment would seem impossible. But Stringer says we serve the God of the impossible, and it's not simply about what happens in Houston.

The entire vision of SCAI is based upon what he calls "relational equity." It's the relationships Stringer has built with church and ministry leaders over the past 40 years that has allowed SCAI to grow exponentially.

Another important relationship Stringer cultivated many years ago was with Paul Tan, the senior pastor of City Blessing Churches in Los Angeles and the president and apostle of City Blessing Churches worldwide.

Still another crucial relationship Stringer formed is with Jack Hayford, the former senior pastor of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, and former president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Hayford invited Stringer to speak at a Love LA pastor's gathering that year, and that trip helped Stringer to network with other attending pastors and ministry leaders and to ignite their interest in SCAI's mission.

Stringer also connected with Daniel Bernard, a former missionary to Nigeria who returned to the Tampa Bay, Florida area. He started Bay of the Holy Spirit, a network of churches and ministries that realized Somebody Cares Houston was a model they could implement in their area. In 1997, Bernard contacted Stringer and asked if they could officially become a chapter and called it Somebody Cares Tampa Bay. He invited Stringer to meet with 120 pastors to officially launch Somebody Cares Tampa Bay.

Stringer also connected with Marlene Yeo, a pastor who worked

with homeless children in the New England area. Yeo is now the executive director of Somebody Cares New England.

“It’s all about relational equity, mending the net. Every one of our chapters is autonomous,” Stringer says. “They have a license and an agreement with us to carry on our core values and not to misuse them. It becomes a ‘spiritual fathering’ or mentoring. We are just the command center in Houston.”

Since 1994, chapters have been established worldwide in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Fiji and Aberdeen, Scotland. In the U.S., chapters have been birthed in Puerto Rico, San Antonio, Texas; Haverhill, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland; Denver, Colorado; Jasper and Newton Counties in Texas; Tampa Bay, Florida; St. Augustine, Florida; Citrus County, Florida; Pasco County, Florida and Hernando County, Florida.

SCAI also has affiliates called Love Botswana in Africa; Love Bought International, ministering to orphans in Colombia; and Coreluv for Orphans in Haiti. SCAI has had significant ministry and ongoing relationships in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Middle East. It also has centers in Texas cities and regions like Brownsville, Denison, the Rio Grand Valley and Brazos Valley.

Save Our Streets Ministries in Bryan, Texas, also helps to facilitate Somebody Cares Brazos Valley. Medical Missions International is an official affiliate as well as many others.

“With that many affiliates and chapters, you can see why the needs of hundreds of thousands are met,” Stringer says.

Because “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28, MEV), some SCAI chapters have arisen out of crisis situations. After Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico in September 2017, Stringer formed a strong relationship with Rey Matos, pastor of Catacumba 5 church in Anasco.

After that deadly Category 5 storm struck Puerto Rico, Stringer partnered with Matos, and through the FEMA office there and several other disaster relief organizations, sent shiploads of resources and medical equipment to help the devastated people on the island. Some parts of Puerto Rico are still recovering from the storm, and through Stringer's relationship with Matos, people are still receiving aid spearheaded by SCAI.

Quick Response

When a need is identified or a crisis situation arises, that's when the network of ministries and churches go to work with lightning efficiency. Conference and Zoom calls are set up with Stringer and his teams to discover exactly what the needs are, and strategies are established to meet those needs, including how the costs will be covered.

As soon as strategies to attack the need are put in place, churches and ministries are contacted, and God's works are set in motion.

"It's incredible that, most times, we start with nothing, but we're able to find men and women of peace in communities who really want to help," Stringer says. "People come out of the woodwork, so to speak, to serve. So, it all starts with availability.

"That's when you start leveraging the local churches and people in the communities." Stringer continues, "Every hurricane, every natural disaster that we are called about, it's amazing how so many churches want to come alongside and help, some as distribution centers. Resources just seem to come pouring out."

Stringer says, "We get the inertia, the momentum, going. This is another place where you see Jesus' principle of the loaves and the fishes get started. The need becomes identified, and then you simply become obedient to God's Word, and you trust

that He is the one who is going to meet the need. It's an incredible principle."

Disaster Relief

While compassion evangelism was originally intended to be the staple focus of Somebody Cares, the organization has become well known for its efforts in disaster relief. When the Indian Ocean tsunami wreaked major havoc in 14 countries in 2004, Somebody Cares was on the ground soon after.

When the 2010 catastrophic magnitude-7.0 earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti, Somebody Cares organized relief efforts from distributing food to coordinating the building of temporary houses for numerous families whose homes were destroyed by the quake. Thousands of hot meals were provided along with groceries and clean water, as well as bringing encouragement to hundreds of pastors.

SCAI has been instrumental in helping many other cities and regions recover from destructive natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, Hurricane Rita in September 2005, Hurricane Harvey in August 2017 and Hurricane Laura in August 2020.

More recently, SCAI responded to cries for help during the harsh winter storm that hit its own home state of Texas in February 2021. The storm caused major power outages, resulting in burst pipes throughout the state, which cascaded into water outages. That, coupled with icy roads, also shut down businesses and schools.

In the months following, many remained without drinkable or running water, and families were on two-month waiting lists for plumbers and plumbing supplies. Somebody Cares equipped churches and ministries to distribute food, water and other supplies to individuals and families who suffered in the aftermath of the unusual winter storm.

SCAI brought in truckloads of bottled water from the Midwest Food Bank to distribute to families. It also purchased plumbing supplies from out of state to fix leaks for those on fixed incomes, those who lost wages and those who struggled without insurance coverage for the water damage incurred.

Everyday Compassion

Through strong kingdom relationships and networking with organizations that thrive on human compassion, Jesus empowers SCAI to meet felt needs around the world, not only during natural disasters—which Somebody Cares is most known for—but also in everyday life.

For example, in 2008, SCAI learned from Pastor Suliasi Kurolo of World Harvest Center, its facilitator for Somebody Cares Fiji, that there were no dialysis machines in all of Fiji. People who needed dialysis had to travel to Australia or other countries for treatment.

Somebody Cares Vice President Jodie Chiricosta put out the word through their network of the need for a dialysis machine in Fiji and, within days, a ministry partner had provided three fully refurbished machines with spare parts. At about the same time, Stringer had been invited to minister at the City Blessings Churches in Los Angeles, pastored by Tan, who is also founder of the Indonesian Relief Fund and World Blessing Foundation.

Stringer and Tan connected, and City Blessing offered to pay half of the shipping bill for a container to deliver food, medicine and the three dialysis machines to Fiji. Another food distribution organization in Georgia also helped to defer the costs of delivering the machines.

“That’s how the kingdom works—on relationships,” Stringer says. “The machines arrived in Fiji and were donated to the Ministry of Health by the churches of Fiji—which opened new doors of ministry in the nation and provided tangible help to

those needing dialysis.”

A Beacon of Hope Through COVID-19

Somebody Cares has even made its compassionate presence known through the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year. Stringer says out of its Houston office and their “little ministry,” SCAI has distributed well over \$400,000 not only to local residents in need, but also sent additional funds to other cities like Baltimore and regions such as New England and sent some assistance to the Navajo Nation. This does not include other funds sent out to help victims of other disasters.

When the pandemic struck, at-risk children who normally attended school and who depended upon school lunches for a meal every day, began to miss out on those lunches when they were ordered to learn from home. The director of Somebody Cares Baltimore reached out to restaurant owners in the area who were also missing out on income because of the COVID-19 restrictions and, because people identified the need, the need quickly became met.

“We have helped people who have been affected by COVID-19, those who have lost income, with their utilities and with rental assistance,” Stringer says. “That’s not even counting the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of resources we gave away to medical professionals, first responders, community outreach agencies and churches to assist with responses across the country.

“It’s so amazing how God has taken what little loaves and fishes we have,” Stringer says, “The biggest thing we’ve learned through all of this is that if we offer what we have on our own, we’ll never have enough. But, if we offer what we have with all of our thanksgiving to God, we always end up with more than enough. God tends to multiply the fish and the loaves we have when we offer it with an attitude of gratitude.”

Compassion Evangelism Still Going Strong

Stringer says in order to meet the felt needs around the world, SCAI must remain continually creative and stay connected with those who have the same passion to not only provide for felt needs but to spread the gospel of Christ so that Jesus' mission of the salvation of every man and woman becomes a reality.

"When I first started," Stringer continues, "I realized that my heart for compassion was not about just doing good works, which become dead works. My heart for compassion was to find strategic, tangible ways to express Christ. When you meet needs and touch the heart, it opens an opportunity to minister to people beyond the arguing of the mind.

"We've had so many stories and testimonies over the years," Stringer says. "Doing good works can be cumbersome and exhausting. You can have compassion burnout if you are not being fueled by the presence of God. From the very beginning 40 years ago, before Somebody Cares came to fruition, I knew right away that this ministry had to be based in prayer, which is communication with God. It had to be fueled out of his presence.

"I realized that everything we do," Stringer says, "has to be prepared in a place of prayer and a place of worship in the presence of the Lord so that when we are able to minister to people, it comes out of the overflow of his presence rather than just trying to make something happen ourselves.

"And in that place," Stringer says, "is when God will take what little you have and multiply it through relationships with those who are like-minded. That's when the stories of the loaves and the fishes really comes alive."

Shawn Akers is content development editor with Charisma Media.

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