

## The other side of child sponsorship

**Compassion UK reveals how the added beneficiaries of child sponsorship programmes are the sponsors themselves, and how UK churches can be transformed by the act of giving together.**

First and foremost, child development charities exist for the benefit of the children they help who live in extreme poverty. But what about the benefit to the sponsors? For some reason it feels like we shouldn't shout about these. We feel that our giving should be purely sacrificial; if we gain anything in return then something isn't right.

Never mind that this is not what the Bible says, that Jesus teaches us to expect 'a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over'? (Luke 6:37) In the build up to Compassion Sunday in September when hundreds of UK churches will be raising awareness about child poverty, Compassion UK wants to celebrate not only the good its programmes do for children, but also the positive impact on sponsors and their churches.

Compassion enables an individual sponsor to support a child in any of the 26 countries it works in – financially and through letters, prayer and even visits. Alternatively, a congregation can form a church-to-church link in just one area; a parish in Bradford might commit to children in a single slum in Brazil, working all the time through the local church.

Evidence suggests that the result is transformative for both churches. Firstly, everyone in the UK church is given the chance to participate in mission and to have ministry to the poor. Secondly, if there are a number of sponsors in a church, the resulting sense of unity can be radical; a church can then truly experience what the Bible says is like 'precious oil poured on the head' (Psalm 133:2). And for those leaders concerned that their congregation would put less in the offering basket as a result, Compassion can tell many stories of how tithing actually goes up!

Finally, there's the benefit of what UK churches stand to learn. God can teach us wonderful things through children; the Bible calls us not to look down on the young but learn from their example 'in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity' (1 Tim 4:12). And it's even better when there's a church-to-church link. Through mutually respectful and beneficial relationships, UK churches are receiving at the same time as giving.

As one church pastor remarked after a recent visit to his partner church in El Salvador, "They are the experts—they know way more than we do—about reaching their community with limited resources and in tough circumstances. They're already grappling with the same questions that we'll have to address in the near future: How do you reach the community when you're not at the centre of your culture?"

*To find out more about Compassion Sunday and how your church can get involved, please visit [www.compassionsunday.org](http://www.compassionsunday.org).*

For a full story and images, please contact Jemima Lewis: [JemimaL@compassionuk.org](mailto:JemimaL@compassionuk.org).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/spring/church2church.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/spring/church2church.html)