

First responders of last resort

By [L. Gail Irwin](#)

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Whenever something sad or evil happens in the world, I think of the church. I mean, that particular church on the corner, up the street, where there may be a pastor, weak or strong, and a congregation, weak or strong, a little band of pray-ers and lovers and singers and sinners.

I think of what might happen if you knocked on the door of that church and someone actually opened it, in the middle of the afternoon, when you were alone and scared and maybe even bleeding. What would you expect, and what would happen? Would the person inside know what to do for you?

Maybe at least they would let you in and give you a quiet place to sit. Maybe they would offer a phone to make a call, like the ancient rotary phone one of my churches still had in their kitchen (“How do you use this thing?” the teenagers would ask.)

Someone might give you a ride, or a \$15 voucher for gas to get to the next town, like one of my churches offered stranded travelers. If you were lucky, someone might listen to your story, hold your hand and pray with you.

I like to think there was a time when the Church was full of First Responders who were prepared to offer comfort and band-aids and a warm meal to anyone who asked. Today, we are more like a Last Resort—the last stop for the desperate who have been turned away at County Social Services because they don’t have a street address or a credible story. And thank God we are still the Last Resort, because the world needs that. Thank God for those churches who are still patiently, heroically opening their doors to the lost and broken, often in ways nobody notices.

But I am going to confess something that makes me sad: it seems like, as soon as I leave active church work, I am surprised to enter a world teeming with deeds of kindness. All these people who wouldn’t be caught dead in a church are living out here, inviting strangers to sleep on their couches; walking into fires to save the elderly; wrapping tourniquets around crushed limbs.

Where did these people come from? Who made them and showed them how to be so human?

What do they have to teach us church people?

Instead of wondering what we will do when they knock on our doors, maybe we should be knocking on theirs.

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