



### **Get the vision**

Pray that God will give you a vision of how you can minister to your community. If you see a need in your community, a thrift store can produce an excellent revenue stream to provide resources for many types of outreach such as storefront ministry, food distribution, crisis pregnancy center, homeless shelter, halfway house, etc. A thrift store also provides a great service to the community by offering items at an extremely discounted price, thereby allowing people to provide for themselves and their families without spending as much money on necessities such as clothing, shoes, books, household goods and furniture.

### **Get support**

Meet with church and community leaders and solicit their support for your endeavor. Ask them to serve on an advisory board or sponsor the thrift store as a ministry from their church/association, thereby giving your endeavor the 501 c 3 “covering” or you can file for the “non-profit” designation from the IRS as a stand-alone ministry. However, sponsorship by an existing church or association is much easier and involves more people already working for the Kingdom of God. Advisory Board members can help develop a budget, assist with community involvement and also help with locating a site for the outreach. Involving people as Advisory Board members from a varied background within the community brings a lot of different expertise to the table.

### **Get the paperwork**

Check with your local, state and federal authorities for the proper paper work. You will need to comply with local ordinances with an occupancy certificate, business license, etc. and comply with local sales tax office for filing procedures for taxes on goods sold (also state sales tax requirements). If you will use paid employees, you will also need to obtain an EIN (Employee Identification Number) to set up the payroll. You can use a payroll/accounting service or do it yourself with accounting software such as QuickBooks for keeping accurate records. Your sponsoring ministry (church or association) may also be a good resource for the recordkeeping.

### **Get Ideas**

Visit other similar ministry outreaches to see how they are set up and working. You don't need to “re-invent the wheel” and this isn't rocket science. It does take a lot of work, but others have done this before you and each situation is unique, but they all have similarities and you can learn a lot from talking/visiting existing outreach locations. Take the best ideas from each and use them to successfully form the ministry that is needed in your community.

### **Get the location**

Find a location that is easy to access by the public and has ample parking, ingress and egress, sales floor and storage. It is a good idea to start small and then be ready to expand as God increases your ministry. Talk with a realtor or look at empty retail spaces within your community. Pray that God will lead you to the right location with the right price according to your budget projections.

### **Get the word out**

Contact your area churches and association asking them to let you speak to groups or congregations regarding the outreach. Join the local Chamber of Commerce and ask to be featured in their newsletter as well as having a ribbon cutting ceremony upon opening the thrift store. Let your local newspaper know of your plans and request that they do a story on this upcoming community project. Write letters or make personal visits to elected officials and community leaders to spread the work. Distribute brochures and business cards that details information about the ministry. Post flyers in businesses, offices, restaurants and shopping centers listing complete information about the store. Be sure to list contact information such as email and phone numbers on all brochures, flyers and business cards.

### **Get the donations**

Ask for donations several weeks/months before the projected opening of the store. It takes a while to get enough donations to fill up a store, but once your thrift store is opened, you will be amazed at the blessing you will receive in the donations that people will bring to you. As you are speaking to groups and congregations about the ministry, ask for cash donations as "Seed Money" for the ministry to cover start-up costs. Consider a storage place for your donations that are collected prior to opening up your location. As items are collected, they can be placed in this central storage until you are ready to commit to a lease on a location for the store. Then, closer to the opening date, move the stored items to the store location and begin organizing and pricing your items.

### **Get the workers**

Each time you speak about the ministry, ask for volunteers/workers for the store. Plan to have a volunteer/worker training before the opening of the store to give them an overview of the ministry and allow them to choose where they can plug in. Work with your Advisory board to determine qualifications for volunteers/workers. Generally the schedule for volunteers is based on their own availability. Giving them the ability to set their schedule may allow for more persons to be available to the ministry. However, unless your work flow demands it, it may not be a good idea to have all the volunteers show up at the same day/time. Consider preparing a chart of blocks of time on different days of the week that are available for the volunteer/workers and allow them to pick what slot of time they can help. Since you are generating an income stream, you will most likely need to hire 1-2 workers in order to provide consistency in management (one paid worker may include yourself if you have a desire to work in the thrift store). You may want to start with a shorter schedule for hours of operation at the beginning (example: Open Friday and Saturday 9-5) and then increase the number of days you are open after you build your client base. However, you pay the same amount of rent each month whether you are open two days of week or six days a week, so plan to be a good steward of the resources that God provides.

### **Get a sign**

Clearly marking your location with your ministry name may or may not attract customers/clients to your store. However, the general public knows what the words "Thrift Store" means. I have found that the name of the ministry in smaller font and the words "Thrift Store" in the largest font available will generate a lot of traffic to your store. The costs of sign vary significantly. Whether you choose a plastic sign/banner that will only last 2-3 years or you invest in a lighted permanent sign, carefully consider the logo and wording on the sign so that it will have the most impact to get people into the store. The more people you get into the store, the more people you have available to which to minister.

### **Get excited**

You are embarking on a new chapter of outreach for your community. In today's culture, the thrift store provides a safe place for people to seek out ministry that may not feel comfortable going to a church building. You and your workers can be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus in this retail store environment. Plus, the income stream generated by the efficient management of the thrift store will sustain ministry for your community in whatever shape the ministry takes, i.e. church plant, halfway house, crisis pregnancy center, food distribution, homeless shelter, soup kitchen...the possibilities are endless. God has called you for such a time as this to reach out to the lost in new and different ways. If you hear his call, accept the call and step out in faith to accomplish His mission. He will equip and enable you.