



Nathan Montgomery, Executive Director, Salt & Light (Champaign-Urbana, IL)

Nathan Montgomery is co-founder and Executive Director of Salt & Light in Champaign-Urbana, IL. Salt & Light opened its doors in 2004 as a food pantry and clothing closet and quickly grew into the largest emergency food program in the area. After reading the book, “When Helping Hurts” (Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, 2014) and experiencing the failure of one-way giving models to affect lasting change, Nathan led the organization through the process of developing a unique and innovative approach to meeting basic needs. In Salt & Light’s social-entrepreneurial model, participants volunteer at one of their two locations, earning store credit at minimum wage, and use this credit to acquire the resources their family needs. This model is designed to affirm the dignity of individuals by acknowledging their capacity, and further equip and empower them for work and lasting change. The stores are also open to the public, with the dollars spent helping to fund Salt & Light’s programs and services—including the store credit participants earn. Salt & Light is part of the growing nationwide “True Charity” movement, a network of privately funded, charitable organizations with the central mission of moving away from a giving “handout” mentality empowering individuals to use their skills and abilities to connect with work and “earn” the food, shelter, and other materials goods the organizations provide. The True Charity Network guiding model is that the best form of charity comes from a heart of compassion, challenges recipients through relationships and accountability, and measures outcomes – and not merely by how many things are given away.