

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE PAPER: EXAMPLES**

The following paper came from a discussion by the Executive Committee of Assemblies of God World Missions and their concern for the rise of social justice as a driving force for many entering the mission field. It was then decided that the missiological committee would address this issue. The committee would look at a theological basis for social justice to answer the question, "Where should we be?" as well as gather real-life cases to focus on answering the question of, "Where are we?"

In this paper, the second question is addressed by examining the six regions of AGWM and International Ministries. In the context of social justice/compassion ministry three examples are presented from each. These positive examples reflect the healthiest missiology in regards to ministry in places where there is an existing church, emerging church, and no church.

From the following examples, themes, points, and ideas emerge that are currently framing our best social justice/compassion missiology.

### **AFRICA**

#### **Africa Example #1 – Benin (Established Church)**

The Benin Assemblies of God church has over 1000 local assemblies in all areas of the country and over 600 pastors. In 1998, God spoke separately to the president of the Benin AG Women's Ministry and AGWM personnel about establishing a technical school for young women at risk, to be called the Ruth Center. This included girls and young women who were being forced into marriage, orphaned, used in immoral voodoo rituals, and who were to be sold as victims of human trafficking.

The Benin Women's Ministry purchased the land and dug a well. In 1999, Michigan WM's raised the funds needed for the first 3 buildings. These were used as classrooms and dorms when the center opened in 2003.

On an ongoing basis the Benin WM's in each region of the country provide the food, clothing, dishes, etc. needed for the girls. They hire teachers, including someone to teach the girls to read and write French. They have found a sponsor in Sweden who helps purchase sewing, knitting and weaving machines and also provided the funds for an additional dorm.

There are plans in place to raise additional funds to add a second story onto the dorm, allowing it to have a capacity up to 100 young women.

At times, teams from the States have come to teach everything from health care to computer skills.

There is no monthly support of the Ruth Center on the part of AGWM. There may be an occasional gift to allow the school to buy meat, but the majority of the support comes from the national women.

This year will see the 10th graduating class for the Ruth Center. There have been 290 girls who have completed the 3-year program. These include young women from every

region in Benin, including Muslim girls who have come to know Christ as Savior. There is now a vibrant church in the nearby Muslim village because of the Ruth Center. There has been an 83 percent success rate for graduates, meaning they have become involved in a local church, started a business and are able to support themselves. Many have married Christian men. This is a wonderful thing, as these girls were formerly considered the throwaways of society.

The Ruth Center fits well into who we want to be as a mission. Through its efforts to serve, it has been reaching the lost and helping to plant the church, as well as strengthening local churches.

Without the Ruth Center, these young women were doomed to a life as victims of human trafficking. Now they are strong, independent, confident, Godly women who contribute to their church and community.

### **Africa Example #2 – Senegal (No Church)**

The North of Senegal is an area dominated by Islam. Most church planting efforts in the north have met with little success. After having served in St. Louis in the North of Senegal for seven years, God put the idea of a primary school on the heart of AGWM missionaries. They were responding to a felt need for affordable, quality education for local peoples with the goal of building relationships in order to plant the church. (Much of public education in West Africa is poorly staffed, and the students meet with little success.) God opened the doors to purchase property in a poorer neighborhood of the community and a school building was built. It took five years to build a strong student body. Today the school is totally self-supporting from the income of tuition paid by the parents. All students are exposed to the Gospel on a regular basis. There are community outreaches that clearly declare the message of Christ. An added bonus is the immediate creation of a community of believers. Since only Christian teachers from the south are hired to teach at the school, an immediate beginning of a church was created.

As people come to faith they are not isolated and alone, but rather they have a community they can call their own as they face persecution for their decision to follow Christ. As the community has been served, numerous doors have been opened for evangelism and relationship building. There are very deliberate efforts to present the Gospel. We see an integration of service that has led to evangelism and several conversions as well as great potential for the future with all the kids who have heard of the love of Jesus.

AGWM personnel have recently started a second school in conjunction with the Senegal Assemblies of God in the town of Oru Sogui, and it is already having a wonderful impact on the community. Several people have come to faith and a deep credibility is being built with the community. Their prayer is that these schools will serve as a catalyst to a church planting movement in northern Senegal.

### **Africa Example #3 – Zambia (Emerging Church)**

Two single AGWM missionaries working in rural Zambia quickly felt moved to address urgent health needs. They introduced the concept of CHE (Community Health Evangelism) to their national church partners. One local church bought into the vision and they began to do CHE training in a small village.

Since CHE is heavily based in training and re-training, initial investment was made by covering costs of seminars. After the seminar, they choose a community, set up a management committee, and train community educators (many times these educators are or become believing evangelists). These educators teach their neighbors through lessons that promote good health practices and prevention of common illnesses. Through their teaching, they incorporate a clear message of the gospel (evangelism – “reaching”) along with teaching foundational biblical truths (discipleship).

Community Health Educators are chosen by their communities (not by the trainers). Very often they are not believers, especially in community-based programs in rural areas. Typically, one of two things happens: either they get saved during the 6-month training, or they decide CHE isn’t for them and drop out. Believing trainers are key to successful programs, for they evangelize and mentor the CHE’s (Community Health Educators) who in turn begin sharing their new faith (and new knowledge on health topics) with their neighbors. Drunkards have been saved and become strong leaders in CHE ministry. Many nominal believers (even a pastor) have been saved through CHE ministry as they hear a clear presentation of the Gospel for the first time.

CHE brings a visible social impact. After 2 years, in the first village where CHE was introduced, the district hospital officials publicly thanked CHE for a significant decrease in cases of diarrheal disease and cholera in the district, as well as a drop in child mortality. Surveys conducted by the CHE’s showed improvement in health practices such as hand washing protocols, water purification, and construction and use of latrines. In many communities, CHE partners with government clinics in special projects because they have a reputation for integrity and a proven emphasis on health education. They have open doors to present programs at schools and community events, which serve as opportunities for them to also share the Gospel of Jesus.

There are now over 300 active trainers serving in over 100 programs in every province of Zambia. Every month, CHE receives invitations from other communities. They have crossed borders into Malawi, Botswana and Zimbabwe. To date, four churches have been planted through CHE ministry. One of those is in a Muslim village in Zambia’s Eastern Province. They are now active in five Muslim communities, and more doors are continuing to open.

## **ASIA PACIFIC**

### **Asia Pacific Example #1 – Bangkok (Emerging Church)**

In 1997, a missionary called to plant churches among the unreached had a very powerful spiritual experience and heard the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit told him to make disciples and plant churches among the urban poor in an integrated, holistic fashion.

One of the first things that he did was to visit a slum that he had seen but never entered and to start building relationships there. He and his wife looked for creative ways to be helpful to this community. She took opportunities to connect her work with an English speaking international youth group that she had pioneered to do special events in this set of communities along a drainage canal in Bangkok.

The jump start for the first ongoing ministry in the Khlong Beng slum communities came with the help of a group of summer interns from Assemblies of God universities in the United States. That summer they went in and started teaching English in three locations, and when the interns left, AGWM personnel transitioned those groups into children's clubs. From that point on, a wide variety of regular ministry such as English and art classes, adult cell groups and Bible Studies, school scholarships, prayer for the sick, tutoring, child discipleship, assistance for families who have children with disabilities, and evangelistic outreaches has been happening among the people living in this set of communities.

About the time that the ministry in the Khlong Beng communities was starting, a young Thai couple were feeling called to plant a church. Accompanied by the AGWM missionary, they began prayer walking the slum area, and that practice continues to this day.

As the missionaries continued with their work, national believers began to help them in their special events and gatherings. What happened was a gracious work of God's Spirit. This was the believers' first time in an urban poor community, and something began to happen from that connection.

Today, Bangkok City Church operates Kings Kids, a ministry for children in elementary school. Twice each month they pick up children from over 10 slum communities nearby and bring them to church where the gospel is presented and children are encouraged to give their hearts to the Lord and live for Him daily. Sport and art activities are also offered, as well as a meal. The children who come are primarily from Buddhist and Muslim families. The church has developed a relationship of trust among the people in these communities, as the pastors, their staff, and members of their congregation make regular visits to the peoples' homes. Every other weekend the church ministry team holds Life Groups for children in several slum communities.

The church, sometimes together with the missionaries, also regularly helps the schools in the area by teaching English, doing Christmas programs, passing out Christian literature, or helping in other ways the school may need. The church has also developed an accompanying ministry to youth so that those who become disciples in the elementary school ages can have age-appropriate ministry.

Today, all of this ministry is completely run by this local church and its members. What started small as a step of obedience to the call of the Spirit has turned into a holistic ministry – meeting the physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, social, and spiritual needs of the community. This has resulted in thousands of people hearing the Gospel,

hundreds of people engaged with Christians weekly, and a number of new believers committed to Christ and living daily for Him.

### **Asia Pacific Example #2 – Philippines (Established Church)**

Childcare Community Ministries Philippines (CCMP) places partnership with the local church at the center of its efforts to fight childhood malnutrition. Local church partnership enhances the ability of the church to improve community life, evangelize the lost, and disciple believers.

The church provides Bible teachers for children and adults, cooks, and other volunteers, and CCMP provides food and curricular materials. This connects participants with Christians from within their own communities, and church members develop relationships with people who are unlikely to visit a regular church service.

Staff nurses teach weekly health lessons to children and parents that cover nutrition and healthy living and speak to local concerns. CCMP hosts a seminar in the feeding stations that addresses domestic abuse, morality, and family relationship dynamics. Pastors and volunteer teachers from the local church teach children daily Bible lessons and weekly Bible lessons to adults.

CCMP's outcomes illustrate the effectiveness of integration. In 2014, 1081 children enrolled in the feeding program. Over 71% of enrolled children's nutritional status significantly improved. Partnering churches reported 608 parents made salvation decisions, 565 parents attended and graduated from the Spiritual Care program, 64 new Bible study groups began, and 7 new church plants.

### **Asia Pacific Example #3 – Laos (No Church)**

Laos is a Communist, Buddhist nation with a strong desire to maintain its culture and traditions. Foreigners are welcome as long as they are not influencing change in the culture.

An AGWM team in a Laos village has integrated evangelism with compassion through holding community celebrations, giving baskets of food and house supplies to the poor, and providing scholarships for needy students. Unbelievers are invited to "come and see" their lives wherein they then prayerfully seek out "people of peace" for intentional gospel conversations. Because the message is so foreign in this UPG context, the missionaries open their homes and lives so that seekers can see and hear how the body of Christ operates together on a daily basis. Currently the team has about 10 different small groups happening throughout the week with about 6-10 people in attendance in each group. The main vision of these groups is to disciple mature believers with the heartbeat to reach the unreached around them and the UPGs in the outer most parts of Laos. Evangelism is emphasized and believers are held accountable to verbally share their faith as they practically share their lives with neighbors and friends.

At the same time, the team is training local believers by modeling generosity. Intentional teaching has encouraged even poverty-stricken new believers to serve others tangibly. For example, after seeing the expatriate team members begin to care for a local elderly

couple who were suddenly left without income, the local church eventually took responsibility to support the needy couple. This ongoing act of compassion led to the salvation of the couple and gained the respect of the surrounding community.

## **EURASIA**

### **Eurasia Example #1 – West Bank (Emerging Church)**

In the West Bank, an AGWM missionary has been discipling the leader of an emerging movement of new believers. These believers all come from a Muslim background and meet in multiple small groups to fellowship, study the word, and pray. These groups are very active in ministry to their neighbors—almost all of whom would be among the Muslim poor. They take up tithes and use them exclusively for compassion ministry. They help families that are unemployed or under-employed or that have sickness in the family by donating food supplies. This distribution includes buying up the previous year's olive oil supplies and giving them to the poor along with rice and beans that are purchased locally. The believers also provide material help such as used clothing and wheelchairs through another partner organization.

The believers have a saying – it rhymes in Arabic – and is simply translated: “A bite with the Word.” This does not mean that they help Muslims in a mean-spirited “We will help you if you listen to our preaching” manner, but rather: “We do this because of Jesus.” Their distribution is very proclamation-centric, and they include distribution of Scripture with their benevolent help.

### **Eurasia Example #2 – Arab World (No Church)**

In the Arab world, educational development and literacy are primary ways AGWM church planting teams reach, plant, train, and serve among unreached people groups. These services are run as non-profit English center businesses, illustrating that compassion/social justice must also address human dignity and not create dependency by every service being given gratis. Fees correspond to the capacity of the social demographic.

A group of refugees from a minority tribe in a war-torn area was displaced to the capital city. Desirous to improve their impoverished state, they approached an English center and asked for specific training. Appropriate fees and arrangements were made, and classes were started, every student being Muslim. The first phase was a basic class which lasted for two months. The second phase class covered C.S. Lewis' “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” with a focus on redemption analogies. Phase three was moved off campus, and the class of men was asked if they would like to meet weekly in a public park to discuss spiritual texts. Food was prepared, soccer was played, and then the group discussed biblical themes. Before phase four, missionaries asked the question: “Who of you would like to meet in our house to study the Bible on a weekly basis?” Nine of the group indicated that they wanted to be intentional about Bible study. After two months of Bible Study, six of these Muslim men gave their hearts to Jesus and became (in phase five) the nucleus of a house church. In phase six, the house church multiplied into several house churches, with the house church leaders being

mentored by missionaries.

### **Eurasia Example #3 – Central Eurasia (Established Church)**

Social justice/Compassion ministries in the context of the local church can be observed in a large metropolis in Central Eurasia. A local church made up primarily of poor immigrants and refugees is active in the sphere of evangelism and discipleship of the many refugees that are coming to faith. The church, though not financially well off, still practices compassion in a contextually-appropriate manner.

A women's Bible study led by a local believer established something similar to a small revolving loan fund. The members of the women's study all contribute a small amount of money to the collective purse. As women in the group have various needs, they are able to borrow from the purse and return it when their need had passed. In this way the women help each other during times of financial crisis. Such a system requires trust in order for it not be abused, but due to the dynamics of the local shame-based culture, the fact that all had contributed to the purse serves to prevent abuse.

The church also constantly has an influx of new refugees who often lack places to live or sources of income. Instead of offering a feeding program or something institutional, the church is compassionate in that it offers prayer and ministry for such needy people. The help does not end in this spiritual component, but is continued in that the members of the church are themselves hospitable, often taking in new refugees to live with them at no cost. Additionally, the members will help these new refugees find local work. The process is completely organic and not organized through an official program or designated person, yet, for years many refugees, both Christian and non-Christian, have been helped merely by the believers in the church expressing the love of Christ in practical ways.

## **EUROPE**

### **Europe Example #1 – Calais (No Church)**

In 1994 the small town of Calais, France made history as the geographical point of the opening of the Channel Tunnel connecting the continent with Britain. In 2014 this community again became international news as refugees and migrants, after walking across Europe, were stopped in Calais. As host to those unable to move forward or to go back, Calais found itself home to an unofficial tent community of almost 6,000. Locals named this area, "The Jungle."

Convoy of Hope Europe (COHEU) in the summer of 2015 began to investigate how best to be involved among migrants and refugees in Calais. Their first step was to identify the facts of the camp. There were a few humanitarian organizations active, (none of them evangelical) though various tents were being used as mosques. COHEU recognized immediately that they would need a local partner and connected with the local French Assemblies of God church.

With the help of COHEU, this church was able to accelerate efforts in humanitarian need and offer some training opportunities. At the same time, they had met a few Christians

in the camp. COHEU stepped in and helped build and establish a local church in this transit camp. The church in the camp continued to grow through 2015 and at Christmas held a united event where 1,000 people were fed and many came to Christ including Muslims.

In the winter of 2016, the French government began to crack down on The Jungle, bulldozing the church and many mosques. At the same time, people began moving to Dunkirk where a second Jungle was being established. Currently, Christians in the camp have been persecuted and one has been killed. The local French Assemblies of God church has reached out to persecuted Christians living there by offering them housing with local church members.

### **Europe Example #2 – Athens (Established Church)**

The International Christian Fellowship (ICF) church in Athens, Greece has been working with refugees for over 5 years. Before the refugee wave began in 2015, many were already coming through Athens and some from the Greek islands. AGWM missionaries began compassion ministry in 2011 among those in the streets of Athens. It became apparent that many refugees were coming into Athens from Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. There were many on the streets with no food, water or any resources. They began to bring food to them and then through one of their congregants, an outreach began to help find a place of refuge along with basic supplies. This grew into 50, then 70 and now more, as they began to feed them not just in the streets but also in the local church. ICF established a meeting every Saturday to have the refugees come for food and fellowship with discussions about “faith in God” to help them in their journey. Several refugees were converted and baptized.

### **Europe Example #3 – Roma (Emerging Church)**

The Roma are a traditionally itinerant ethnic group living mostly in Europe and in the Americas.

Sabinov, as with all Roma communities across Slovakia and Europe, has traditionally been haunted by many problems. About 95 percent of Roma are unemployed. Alcoholism, incest, theft and violence are all too common. Roma often resist education, integration or cooperation. Distrust and resentment between Roma and majority Europeans create a vicious cycle of unrest. (Oct 2015 Pentecostal Evangel)

However, today in the midst of these cultural and existential challenges, a church is emerging that is having wide-ranging social impact.

In 2004, the Roma church in Sabinov, Slovakia started in a small storefront in the center of town and now number 400 in attendance at their new location. They host multiple outreaches into the city and surrounding areas. God is changing the lives of Roma, and the difference is measurable. Recent figures show that crime has dropped 20% in the city of Sabinov. The government has noticed what is happening and why. A recent study by the research faculty at Bratislava University noted that the government can help



improve the lives of the Roma by permitting the church to build community and change people's lives.

The impact of the Sabinov church is not only felt locally, but across Europe since the Roma are a collective culture with strong family ties. New churches have started across the region via these family connections, and a network of churches is quickly becoming a reality throughout the region. This principle of redemption and lift has been repeated as these new churches continue to have social impact within their communities.

## **INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES**

### **International Ministries Example #1 – HealthCare Ministries (No Church)**

HealthCare Ministries (HCM) provides unique opportunities for health professionals to partner with AG missionaries to impact people's lives physically and spiritually. HCM recently conducted an outreach in partnership with AGWM missionaries in Romania. The problem identified was that there was neither a church in the village where the missionaries work and live nor virtually any other evangelical Christians in the area. The mutually-agreed on plan was to hold a clinic and health teaching in the village as an open door to share the gospel.

The team arrived in Baneasa, Romania and began the clinic; however, it wasn't long before they realized that the local priest was not happy with the fact that they were there and were praying with and for people. At one point, the priest reported to the police a few team members teaching in the local school. While remaining respectful, the team kept praying with individuals and began to see people coming to know Christ. By the end of the week, 26 had dedicated their lives to the Lord.

This example illustrates how International Ministries and local missionaries can work together to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the community, laying a foundation for a church plant.

### **International Ministries Example #2 – Vanuatu (Established Church)**

As a part of AGWM's CompassionLink Ministry, Sustain Hope is one of five Teams whose purpose is to provide a Christ-centered, best-practice approach to improving people's lives through community-initiated, sustainable solutions that utilize local resources in agriculture, alternative fuels, water and sanitation.

Recently, a Sustain Hope (SH) team was invited to Vanuatu by an in-country missionary to partner with the national church (AG pastors from surrounding villages) and to work alongside a HealthCare Ministries (HCM) team for an initial community outreach and medical clinic on the island of Tanna. The plan was then to continue with sustainable water well training for the following 2 months on a neighboring island, Santo. The SH team talked with villagers and leaders to determine which technologies they wanted and needed and then prepared to train.

The plan included the criteria that each community that requested a water well also provide the funding for the materials and team labor. These wells and subsequent wells

have been successful in finding good water sources. Several ongoing benefits of the training were realized:

- A reliable source of clean drinking water was provided to families in these drought-ridden areas
- The training provided a vocational skill to the local team which produces a secure source of income
- Doors have been opened to the Gospel and to establish churches in communities that have previously been resistant to the Gospel
- This partnership with the in-country missionary and the national church is helping them attain their strategic goals of getting the Gospel of Christ to these unreached people groups and plant churches in the villages

### **International Ministries Example #3 - Iceland**

Stykkishólmur is a fishing village of 1100 inhabitants on the western shores of Iceland. A national church planter struggled to launch an evangelical-Pentecostal work until the Lord impressed on him the importance of reaching kids and youth first.

Upon learning of Royal Rangers, the church planter determined it was an answer to the Lord's prompting to reach the next generation and launched it as a Christian scouting alternative to the whole community. Kids and youth were instantly attracted to their weekly events, and it wasn't long before they started seeing a decrease in alcohol and drug abuse as well as declining participation in superstitious occult activities. Hope returned to families and many who were closed to the idea of a new church in their little community became more receptive.

The church finally launched and today has 10-14 adult members and ministers to 90 kids and youth each week. The pastor's social outreach to the community is having a significant impact on families and continues to garner favor in the community which gives them influence in the local schools and a significant presence at municipal functions and celebrations. Where there was no Pentecostal church, today there is!

## **LATIN AMERICA and the CARIBBEAN**

### **Latin America and the Caribbean Example #1 – Mexico (Established Church)**

Ten years ago it was decided that an LACC school should be started in a small village in Mexico, Teotitlan. The vision and mission of LACC has always been, and continues to be, to meet a physical need out of a heart of compassion, utilize the tool of education to provide the teaching and training they need to be successful adults and members of their society as well as transform their lives spiritually through the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so they have a personal relationship with God.

LACC schools are always tied to a local church congregation in the community where our school is located. LACC believes that in order to truly be a successful member of society, a quality education is not enough. They strive for "*whole life transformation*" that can only come about with having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and living

their life according to the principles set forth in God's Word. This life transformation not only takes place in the lives of the children who attend the schools, but in the families of the children as well as the local church reaches out to the family unit.

The following story illustrates this whole life transformation.

Sara, a third-grade student in one of our schools was getting sicker by the week. X-rays brought horrible news. Sara's liver, infected by a parasite, had abscessed. The doctor knew that medically there was not much more he could do. After a few weeks, it became obvious that Sara was going to die. Sara was sent home to die in the familiar surroundings of her family.

At school, Sara learned that God was powerful and had the ability to heal people, even children. Sara decided that she wanted a miracle for herself. "I am not going to die," she announced to her mother, "because God is going to heal me." Her classmates began to pray with Sara for a miracle.

Within days she improved. New X-rays clearly indicated that Sara's liver was completely normal. Because of the healing, Sara's mother was converted and became a member of the Assemblies of God church located next to the school.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean Example #2 – Costa Rica (Established Church)**

*Chicas de Promesa (Girls of Promise)* is a ministry developed in response to a felt need among vulnerable girls in the community of Linda Vista in San José, Costa Rica. The Director of the LACC school and the local LACC missionary noted the high index of abuse (mostly sexual) among girls attending the LACC school. Although the girls were safe while they were at school, before and after classes they were exposed to abuse and other risks factors. Linda Vista is a poor community with a high percentage of single mother households, drug and alcohol abuse permeates the community, and there is a prevalence of sex workers, which places the girls at high risk of being trafficked.

Through intentional evangelism and discipleship over 3 years, the cases of abuse had dropped 90%. The girls feel empowered to resist abuse, talk about it in the community, and understand the value that they have in Christ.

*Chicas de Promesa* works closely with the local church. The local pastor recommends potential leaders from the girls in the church who are then mentored by the missionary. In addition the girls who have gone through the program are given the opportunity to become part of the leadership.

A parallel boys project is being developed. This program deals with issues that are important for the boys such as conflict resolution, dealing with anger, and the biblical role of men.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean Example #3 – Ecuador (No Church)**

The situation was particularly dire in a slum area of Guayaquil, Ecuador called *Monte Sinai*. The area of *Monte Sinai* has a high level of poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse with high percentages of women and children. As with most slums,

there is no running water, electricity is stolen, there is rampant crime and drugs, extreme poverty, and the majority are single parent homes. Most homes are fatherless due to abandonment and domestic violence. Over half of the population is 18 years old or younger.

Drug usage in this slum fosters violence which takes more lives than the drugs themselves. This leads to organized gangs who fight over territory and recruit youth. These areas of great economic disparity created vulnerability to the influence of the sex trade.

AGWM personnel decided to plant a church in the slums of Guayaquil, Ecuador in April of 2010. In an effort to offset this hopelessness, they decided to call their church “A Place of Hope”.

The church has a small food bank with some basics, rice, oil, and beans. The food bank tutoring, and job placement provide natural bridges of trust, gratitude and openness. Holistic evangelism, combining listening, proclamation, church planting and community development has birthed a church in the slums of Guayaquil, Ecuador.

## **NORTHERN ASIA**

### **Northern Asia Example #1 – Village Clinic (No Church)**

AGWM personnel rode out on Speed-the-Light bicycles to a seven-village area – home to an unreached people group – and began a prayerful investigation. There was no Christian witness, church or believers. Investigation revealed that the greatest felt need was medical care. People were dying for lack of simple things like medicine or care for injuries.

Though the AGWM personnel had no medical experience or expertise, they stood on the Scripture “nothing is impossible with God” (Lk. 1:37). They prayerfully proceeded and discovered a Chinese doctor in the village area. After some discussion, they decided to assist with a one-time medicine supply to be sold at low cost among the villagers. The profits would be turned over to buy a new supply, thus becoming indigenous immediately, but still offering opportunity for our continued presence among the villagers. By God’s hand and orchestration in the life of a Chinese man (who nearly died from illness but in the process became a believer), the AGWM team was able to open a small one-room clinic in one of the villages.

The aim for the clinic was that it would not just be an indigenous source of medical care and income for the people, but that it would also become a place of eternal healing and opportunity for the saving message and love of Christ. God answered by bringing a wonderful Asian worker trained in dentistry, who had a gift for evangelism and a heart to train villagers in dentistry. He also supplied another Chinese doctor as well as funds for medical supplies, medicine, and equipment.

Meanwhile, the team scholarshipped two young men from the village to train in medical school. They tested very well and gained entrance to a top medical university program. A Christian Chinese friend agreed to oversee their financial and personal lives as they

had to move to a large city. In return for their education expenses, they agreed to return to their village and serve their people for eight years. During their time of study they became believers.

In the meantime, people in the village came to know Christ, God sent a Western worker to assist the dentist, and discipleship and training began. In time, the team discovered that the clinic was not going to be big enough for the growing need and future. So they began prayerful plans to expand the facility and its capabilities. God supplied a substantial amount of funds, and the village supplied the land and personnel to construct a 40-room village hospital.

After about one year of the hospital's completion it became completely indigenous, with its staff including the two (now Christian) scholarship doctors, some young ladies trained in dentistry and won to the Lord by the two expatriate workers, and two experienced local doctors whom God supplied. Soon a believing doctor and dental worker married, and eventually this Christian couple came to direct all the operations of the hospital.

Out of a simple medical outreach that began from a ride on Speed-the-Light bicycles to unreached people group villages, and the process of years of God's presence, protection, provision and miraculous supply -- two churches were birthed. Today, not only is there an indigenous Christian medical work, but an indigenous church as well in the midst of an unreached people group. Reaching, serving, training and planting unfolded through God's beautiful orchestration of Western and Global South expatriate workers with local believers.

### **Northern Asia EXAMPLE #2 – Baimeen (No Church)**

The Baimeen are an unreached people group scattered across a vast mountain area. They are mostly farmers and raise small black goats as well as other farm animals, so have a good understanding of animal husbandry. The Lipo are another ethnic minority, but a people group well known as devoted Christians with the Bible in their own language. Their wider impact has been limited by the facts that they are relatively few in number, mostly poor farmers, and live in a remote area with few connections to other people groups.

Although the Baimeen and Lipo live a distance apart and speak different languages, the lands they inhabit are not very different, they have many cultural similarities, and most can all speak and understand Mandarin. Their shared identity as ethnic minorities as well as common life experience living in poor rural China makes it easy for them to relate and communicate with each other.

An AGWM NGO has a "Goat Project" that gives goats to villagers in poor rural areas. The breed of goat we use has more offspring more often and grow faster and bigger than the little black goats traditionally raised in the area. But, the new goats must be reared in a very different way, thus requiring training before the goats are given, oversight of the distribution, and follow up.

The breeding stock and training are provided by the NGO free of charge to the Baimeen, but recipients agree to receive several days of training and then ongoing oversight from the Lipo men who manage the project. The training and occasional visits give a lot of opportunity for relationship building.

The recipient villagers sign an agreement that 10% of all profits from their future goat sales will go to help others in need. This fund is overseen by a respected elder chosen by the villagers. It does not take long before the donated goats begin to multiply, and some of the goats can be sold off for much-needed cash. It has been thrilling to see how Baimeen villagers cheerfully embrace the concept of sharing a tenth of their profits with others in need—a Bible precept taking root in their hearts.

In addition, the project makes the Lipo active and front-line participants in touching an unreached people group with whom they would never have had interaction otherwise. The Lipo easily and naturally share their faith with people so much like them yet who have never heard of Jesus Christ. The Baimeen are being reached and served, with the goal of churches planted among them.

### **Northern Asia Example #3 – Foster Care (Established Church)**

After several years of AGWM personnel helping to train and staff state-run orphanages, the director of one of these orphanages asked them to help find a village that could provide home-based foster care for some of special needs orphans our NGO had been caring for. Missionaries had been advocating fostering for years, so this was progress. When we presented this possibility to our Chinese staff, one of our workers offered her home village, Wangjia—which is almost entirely Christian. When the orphanage director heard that the village was Christian, she had reservations—religious matters can be “complicated” in China, she said, and delayed a decision. But since no other village offered to host special needs orphans, she finally she agreed to give it a try.

After preparing for the children and training the prospective parents, ten of the children with milder special needs were sent to the village. Within a month, they showed far more contentment, progress intellectually, and development physically than they had in many years in the clean, efficient, and well-staffed orphanage. Ten more were sent, with the same remarkable results. Soon more and more children were placed.

Today over 250 special needs children are cared for in Wangjia Village, with many of the Christian families caring for two or three special needs children. The children have developed physically, emotionally, and socially in ways far surpassing all expectations. The village has been visited by government officials, sociologists, and other researchers eager to find the “secrets” of this amazing transformation. TV and newspaper reports have told the story of Wangjia Village across the country.

Officials are thrilled with the progress the children make in the village; it is a true “win” for the social welfare system. Each family receives a government stipend based on the number of children they are caring for, enabling many of the villagers to remain at home rather than going for work in distant cities. The pastor of the church is happy; increased local income has brought increased tithes to the church so that it is able to do more to

reach out to its community. But the biggest winners are the children, who now are a part of loving families where they grow and learn about God.

## **CONCLUSION**

Upon reflection of the 21 examples given, it is quite clear that AGWM is having social impact across the world. As mentioned, these examples reflect best practice of AGWM holism without being exhaustive. This is only a small sampling of the heart of Christ that draws us to “love our neighbor” as we make disciples and plant churches.

Within these examples, four priorities were agreed upon that best shape our current expression in social justice and compassion ministry.

### **PRIORITY ON LISTENING TO AND OBEYING THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Woven through the above examples is the repeated praxis of compassionate Christ followers listening to the Holy Spirit. AGWM social concern always begins with and includes listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us as a community and as individuals. As the Spirit is speaking to AGWM leadership in giving guidelines and parameters for our involvement in compassion ministry, the Spirit is also calling individuals to be engaged in these ministries. At times individuals may stretch our collective call, and our collective call may give Spirit-guided parameters to passionate individuals. However, this tension becomes an invitation for leadership and individuals to seek the Lord in unity for the appropriate response to compassion ministry. The Biblical pattern in Acts 15:28, “It seems good to the Holy Spirit and us,” is reflected well in this healthy spiritual dialogue.

### **PRIORITY ON PROCLAMATION AND NECESSITY OF LOVING DEEDS**

Scripture reveals a God who is compassionately concerned with the union of body and spirit both in this temporal world and the post-resurrection restoration of all things. At the same time, Scripture does not value body and soul in the temporal realm<sup>1</sup> equally as it repeatedly affirms that soul damage (i.e. sin, rebellion, estrangement from God) is more dire than body damage (i.e. sickness, poverty, loss of limb). In biblical perspective, to lose physical health or a piece of your body – while serious and important to God – is never as serious as spiritual decline and/or losing a piece of your soul. In the eternal realm, body and soul will both be complete and whole. In the temporal realm, the goal of wholeness is still fervently desired and pursued, but if the body must suffer that the soul be safe then the difficulty – even injury – to the body is of unquestioned worth. Not all humans have a physical need that missionary compassion or capacity is qualified to heal or help, but all humans have a spiritual need that missionaries have not only been equipped to address, but commissioned to prioritize. Physical (body) needs in these cases varied according to context and tragedy, but the spiritual need for salvation was ever and everywhere present.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:28

The findings of the above examples reflect in praxis what the Bible teaches about soul and body. “The explicit statements of the Great Commission, the examples of the apostles, and the logic of the gospel make proclamation fundamental.”<sup>2</sup> It is pleasing to God to minister to both body and soul, yet the nuance of priority remains for as Samuel H. Moffett said, “Without the accompanying deeds, the good news is scarcely credible; without the word, the news is not even comprehensible.”<sup>3</sup> As faith comes by hearing<sup>4</sup>, there is a logical priority to the verbal proclamation of the gospel, which by no means reduces the importance of loving kind deeds. The gospel must be verbally articulated in order to be correctly understood. In the examples, our compassion was distinguished from other humanitarian efforts not by of the excellence of the physical component – though excellence was pursued – but, because AGWM compassion included and prioritized the spiritual component of care for the eternal soul.

The findings do not suggest that proclamation has to be the opening act of ministry. Often it is the kind, loving act that opens the door to verbal witness. The insertion point is arbitrary. In some cases, the spoken word comes first and strikes right at the soul, verified by a loving act or miraculous deed. In other cases, compassionate ministry to the body opens the door of the heart to the gospel message. In all cases, mission is only complete when the soul has received attention through the verbal proclamation of the gospel. Caring for others is not the gospel, nor is it evangelism, without the spoken message of the Jesus. Caring for others represents the gospel, upholds the gospel, and is an implication of the gospel, but it is not the gospel nor equal to the gospel.<sup>5</sup> It is vital, it is necessary, that mission includes loving, compassionate care, yet the Bible is clear, there is a priority on the soul and the soul is saved by hearing and responding to articulated news: bad news that all men are sinners, good news that there is a Savior. Every example above shows the unity of ministry to body and soul, and the priority of gospel proclamation.

### **PRIORITY ON INTENTIONALLY DELIVERING COMPASSION MINISTRY THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH**

The Assemblies of God’s global footprint is made up of thousands of local churches. It is here at the grassroots where we do our best work, and this is certainly true when it comes to acts of compassion.

New Testament precedent seems to support this idea as it frequently makes appeals for local action, not cross-regional action, in the arena of compassion. Local action brings credibility to the local body of Christ, which in turn lifts up the name of Christ in the community. The one exception to this in the New Testament is Paul’s frequent appeals

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<sup>2</sup> Craig Ott, Stephen Strauss, with Timothy Tennent. (page 113) *Encountering the Theology of Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Moffet, Samuel H. Winter, (page 576). *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Ed. Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>5</sup> Stiles, J. Mack *Marks of the Messenger*. Downers Grove, IL. Intervarsity Press, 2010.



to help the poor in Jerusalem. It is based on the conviction by Paul that the Gentiles owe the Jews because they have shared in their spiritual blessings (Romans 15:27). Beyond that example, there does not appear to be any explicit instruction toward cross-regional relief or compassion ministry.

Apparent lack of resources at the local church level need not limit it from expressing generosity; the Philippian church, though seemingly very poor materially, was commended by Paul for not only sending offerings to help the poor in Jerusalem, but also for supporting his missionary efforts (2 Corinthians 8; Philippians 4). We dare to believe that like the Philippian church, those who find themselves in “severe poverty” today can also be used to minister in the area of compassion.

There are a number of reasons why the Spirit-empowered local church is the best mechanism to holistically minister to the spiritual, physical, and social needs of people in its community. Such a church delivers a paradoxical blend of social stability on one hand and social transformation on the other:

- **Accountability:** Local church leaders and members know the people in their community best. Large-scale responses from the outside lack local knowledge and are less capable of monitoring the ongoing spiritual needs, much less the changing physical and social needs.
- **Local solutions employ local ingenuity:** When local assets are used to solve local problems, capacity to confront future problems increases, local talent is identified and improved, local technologies are deployed, communities are empowered, and they learn they don’t have to wait for someone from the outside to confront their challenges. When external assets are indiscriminately and exclusively used to solve local problems, then dependence is created, and local initiative reduces or ceases.
- **Encounters with the sacred in everyday life:** Spirit-empowered congregations don’t create a dual worldview, separating the sacred and secular, body and soul. Rather, they teach members that spirit and flesh are interrelated, so showing God’s love in their acts of kindness, whether spontaneous or planned, in their everyday lives is ministering to the whole person. This extends the sacred into the community, and makes every believer a distribution point of God’s love. The local church in this way has a far greater impact on the community than an outside organization ever would.
- **Local church can address both spiritual and physical needs:** Some theological pursuits have sought to address the physical needs of the poor without the local church, but only the local church can address the needs of man holistically.
- **The indirect power of local church ministry:** By seeking to meet the spiritual, physical, and social needs of its members and those within its sphere of influence, the local church can remain nonpolitical while altering the social reality all around itself; and in effect indirectly challenge oppressive social power systems.
- **The family nature of local church ministry:** We should encourage and train local churches to initiate innovative social programs that introduce God’s Kingdom into

people's everyday lives. Local churches can bring order, stability, and hope to people who live precarious lives. The church serves a social function of that of an extended family surrounding its members with people who care for one another, giving people a place to serve and live in a story greater than self. This lifts people in need and brings dignity and meaning into their lives, which in turn has a far-reaching social impact.

- Local church offers social stability. The Spirit-empowered local church seeking to meet the spiritual, physical, and social needs of its people provides stability to society. When people have hope, they do not turn to political revolt for their answer. Instead, they turn to one another and to God. God's hand and community serve as a safety net.

Many of the examples cited in this paper illustrate missionaries encouraging local believers in compassion ministry. Where ministry is not yet indigenous, the goal can still be to move toward that model. The following principles can help guide AGWM toward best practice:

1. Be very intentional to follow best practice principles of allowing the local community, in this case the church, to assess and recognize the compassion needs of its local community. An example of this is the Athens international church, which is intentional in getting the local believers to see and meet the need of refugees coming into the city.
2. Be very careful to only invest in projects that will be sustainable by the local (community) church. In the West Bank, discipleship has led the local believers to be actively involved with their own resources in ministry to the poor and hurting. Their tithes are being used to meet the compassion needs of their community.
3. Be proactive in encouraging the local church to think about the needs of the poor and suffering around them. In Bangkok, modeling by the missionaries has led to local leaders becoming involved in the needs of the urban poor.

In order to fulfill its mission, "So all can hear" through RPTS, AGWM must empower the local body of believers (where one already exists) to increase its viability in witness. We must look at ways of involving them in the vision and the strategy for ministries of compassion right from the beginning. This may require us to balance the energy which we put toward presenting physical and social needs directly to our Western donor base with the efforts we make to pray and seed the vision for compassion ministries to the local church.

### **PRIORITY ON UNDERSTANDING THAT SOCIAL IMPACT IS NOT AN ISOLATED END AMONG UNREACHED PEOPLES**

An increasing number of AGWM missionaries are being called to work among unreached peoples and in contexts where there is no church. Many of those contexts either restrict or forbid any public ministry from an organized church; some of those contexts forbid verbal Christian proclamation and/or conversion to the Christian faith. The cases presented in this paper reflect that a way can always be found to verbally proclaim the gospel – even if that proclamation is illegal – and that missionaries and national believers

do not settle for social concern as an isolated end. Those working among unreached or in places that forbid witness (but allow social concern) find a way to proclaim despite the prohibitions. Social concern is viewed as vital to establishing the opportunity to verbally proclaim Christ, it is never the end goal in isolation. The end goal is to view and respond to people as Jesus sees them – possessors of both body and spirit with both needing attention. Missionaries and national workers are not satisfied or even obedient to Jesus if they do not ultimately find some way, some time to proclaim the gospel verbally. The goal remains to make disciples and plant churches by ministering in word, deed and sign to body, soul and spirit - never to only have a program or a social ministry.

Verbal proclamation does not have to happen concurrently with the compassionate outreach, nor does it need to happen at or through the physical location of the compassionate ministry. Often the proclamation, evangelism, and discipleship (the end goal) happens after the compassionate service and in a separate location – but it happens all the same by intentionality and missionary initiation, not by accident or passivity. Social concern in restricted access contexts provides impetus for verbal proclamation. Because verbal proclamation, evangelism, and discipleship is the end goal, if the social concern does not empower proclamation (even if off campus and after the fact) then that social concern is ineffective, not strategic, and ought to be closed down. Negative examples outside the study of this paper show that often proclamation is self-censored in order to maintain the social concern platform – this is counter to AGWM missiology as it has made social concern the end goal rather than the tool/medium to empower ministry to the soul. This model was notably absent from all case studies.

God is glorified when things in His name are done well. Nothing should be done poorly by the people of God. When we go into all the world in the name of Jesus, we therefore must represent His interests well, and the impulse of care extended to those already in the household of faith pulses out to those still being invited. AGWM missionaries understand that the more professional and loving they are in social concern, the better and longer their opportunity for verbal proclamation. Requiring social concern to be integrated with proclamation does not devalue its vital importance, nor do these case studies indicate that missionaries and national workers approach social concern cavalierly or with a lack of professional quality. To the contrary, social concern by AGWM and local partners is done with intentional quality because God cares deeply about physical needs. AGWM social concern merely reflects the integrated care God holds for body and soul.

J. Hudson Taylor summarized the philosophy of holism as revealed in these cases among the unreached and un-churched:

Let us feel that everything that is human, everything outside the sufficiency of Christ, is only helpful in the measure in which it brings the soul to him. If our medical missions draw people to us, and we can present them to the Christ of God, medical missions are a blessing; but to substitute medicine for the preaching of the gospel would be a profound mistake... Let us exalt the glorious

gospel in our hearts, and believe that it is the power of God unto salvation. Let everything else sit at its feet.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Dr. and Mrs. Howard. *Hudson Taylor & The China Inland Mission*. Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1955.