

Executive Summary 2016

SOCIAL JUSTICE, ISSUE-BASED MISSION AND AGWM MISSIOLOGY

Writing Teams

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Introduction

This year's topic explores the theology and practice of social justice and issue-based approaches to mission in relationship to AGWM missiology. The topic arose due to the increasing number of people applying to our missions agency with a "call" to a specific social issue, and who construe their mission's ministry *as* social justice independent of conversionary evangelism, discipleship and the planting of the church.

This trend raises two fundamental questions for our organization that our two papers seek to address:

1. How should AGWM, with its broad biblical agenda of planting the church and showing compassion, relate to issues of social justice in general and to the practice of issue-based mission in particular?
2. How should AGWM respond to those who come to our organization with an issue-based view of missionary service?

In the theology/missiology paper we identified four arenas that needed to be focused on in order to answer the primary questions that drive this study: (1) the historical and sociocultural context, (2) biblical and theological reflection, (3) missiological reflection and (4) the necessity of integration within a four-fold missions strategy of reaching, planting, training and serving (RPTS). The following questions emerged from these four arenas and they form the structure of the body of the paper:

1. How do the socio-cultural context, the historical background and the current uses of social justice effect the perceptions of our sending churches and the missionary candidates that come to AGWM for appointment?
2. What practices are required of God's people according to sound biblical theology in relation to compassion and social justice?
3. How does our specific AGWM missiology inform the response of cross-cultural workers to social issues?
4. Why is the integrated practice of AGWM's four-fold strategy of reaching, planting, training and serving the best way to achieve true social change?

A second paper gathers case studies that serve as practical examples of effective and integrated compassion ministry with the goal of identifying best practices within our movement.

The material we generated in answering these four queries along with four common priorities that emerged from the case studies provide the foundation for our final conclusions that seek to answer the primary questions of this study and to suggest a trajectory of action that could provide direction for existing and future missions endeavors.

Summary of Findings

Arena 1: historical and socio-cultural context. Our Assemblies of God USA movement is embedded in a context in which the activist trends of the Millennial generation combined with the cultural value of tolerance leads to a bifurcation of truth proclamation and good deeds. At the same time, in the church historically, a tug of war for primacy between compassion ministries and proclamation of the Gospel has been a thorny issue causing uncertainty both in our missions organization and in our churches, as to how the two should be integrated in practice.

Due to a wide variety of definitions of social justice and compassion ministry we chose to use JoAnn Butrin's distinction between these two terms: compassion ministers to those effected by injustice, and social justice engages the institutional and societal causes of injustice.

Arena 2: biblical and theological study. In scripture the idea of justice expressed horizontally in human relations flows from the character of God himself. The Bible, both OT and NT, expects compassion from the people of God; they are to reflect His character in their relations with one another. The church is the community of righteousness that serves as a sign of God's rule and through the Spirit loves and cares for the poor and marginalized in the household of faith and beyond.

The pursuit of social justice as it is currently conceived in its various forms for the broader society is not mandated for God's people; final justice is something God brings forth himself in the *eschaton*. However, it is the preaching of the gospel and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit that makes individuals fit for the future Kingdom and establishes the righteous (just) community in advance before its final perfect form. The church then both proclaims the message of the Kingdom and is a prophetic embodiment of the Kingdom. However, the fact that the Kingdom is experienced proleptically through the power of the Spirit in the Church in the present requires that the internal life of the Church should be a prophetic exhibit to the world of social justice in its internal relations.

Arena 3: Missiological priorities. Two missiological priorities become important for understanding the cross-cultural worker's role in compassion ministries. The first is the distinction between the modality (the local indigenous church) and the sodality (the missionary band). The narrow work of the Pauline apostolic band was to plant churches that would then be able to participate in the mission of God in its broader sense. The second concerns the implications of our commitment to indigeneity on how cross-cultural workers address social need. Those who conceive of mission as the pursuit of social justice on a particular issue tend to

see the primary work being done by the cross-cultural worker. However, when we value and encourage the primacy and instrumentality of local engagement by the church to respond to social needs, it requires the cross-cultural worker to see one's role as catalytic in nature to encourage, promote, and equip local believers to engage in sustainable solutions to social injustice.

Arena 4: Indigeneity. Indigeneity is best accomplished when there is integration of reaching, planting, training and serving. The primary task of cross-cultural missionaries is not to grapple with social issues as stand-alone ministries, but to plant churches and then work with these churches to strategize, equip, and empower local members to do ministry that will address issues of injustice. There is increasing evidence around the world that this kind of practice has produced indigenous church movements that have brought about true social transformation.

The compassion case studies collected from our colleagues in all the regions of the world demonstrate how our missionary community practices integration. The four common priorities that emerged from their vignettes include (1) listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit, (2) proclamation in conjunction with loving deeds, (3) the development of indigeneity by expressing compassion ministry through the local church, and (4) the integration of word, deeds, and signs and wonders when working where the church does not exist.

Framing an AGWM Response to Issue-Based Mission

In the final section we share our answers to the two primary questions and conclude with a suggested course of action for helping AGWM missionaries to respond to human need with best practices that are in keeping with our missiological commitments.

How should AGWM relate to issues of social justice in general and to issue-based practice of mission in particular?

From our contextual, historical, theological and missiological work along with an examination of the case studies from our missionary colleagues, we propose the following statement which captures our recommendation to AGWM concerning issues of social justice and human need brought about by injustice.

AGWM as a mission agency relates to the brokenness and injustices of our world as an apostolic band whose priority work is:

- to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom in word and deed
- in order to plant reproducing indigenous churches where there are no viable church-planting movements
- resulting in local communities of faith
- that are transformed by the Spirit and are sign of the kingdom to come
- that extend a hand of compassion to the broken and oppressed,
- and proclaim a prophetic message through word and deed,
- challenging social injustices.

We believe that AGWM should hold fast to its theological and missiological commitments and not be driven by popular trends among the AG USA movement. Our

commitments to world evangelization by the power of the Spirit to plant and partner with fully indigenous church movements have produced hundreds of thousands of churches and millions of Christians who are a powerful force of social change around the world.

How should AGWM respond to those who come to our organization with an issue-based view of missionary service?

We can affirm their longing for justice in a world that is filled with injustices and human brokenness, but we have to move beyond that. It is incumbent upon us that we demonstrate that, as a missions agency, our historic AGWM commitment to world evangelization through planting and partnering with indigenous church movements has produced massive expressions of social concern and true social change through hundreds of thousands of churches and millions of Christians.

As the case studies clearly reveal, AG Pentecostal missionaries sent by AGWM are indeed deeply concerned about human need and injustice and are involved in ministries of compassion. We must make it clearly understood to applicants interested in social issues that our response is uniquely driven by our identity as a mission agency that sends Gospel-proclaiming, church-planting apostolic workers. Joining our mission means seeking to further the integration of proclamation and compassion ministry with a strong commitment to indigeneity. For candidates who truly feel called to an issue only, we should not be at all reticent to give them our blessing and recommend to them other organizations that work on their issue of concern.

The Need for Training on Missiology and Best Practices in Ministries of Compassion

As we have reflected deeply on this subject we have repeatedly returned to the conclusion that the major implication of this work for AGWM is the need for training in the arena of social concern and integrated practice within our mission community and US partners.

We suggest the following three areas to consider for developing further training: to develop a process for examining compassion ministry plans in light of RPTS, to develop training in RPTS and integration for all workers, and providing missiological training and education for our AG USA churches and other sending sources.