

“GIVING CUPS OF COLD WATER”: A MISSIOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL MINISTRY
IN THE URBAN SETTING

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INTRODUCTION

Social ministry is integral to the missionary nature and task of the urban church. The mandate to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19-20) includes the urban populace.¹ The gospel calls for a practical expression, and social ministry meets that requirement. In fact disciple-making finds its practical application in the giving of *cups of cold water in the name of Jesus Christ*. The urban environment is full of rooms for ministries that require practical means, methods, and resources. While social ministry and missions do not mean the same thing, they interface in a dynamic and creative fashion. Social ministry is one critical strategy in establishing disciple-making environments in the city as the latter is home to a myriad of social needs, crises situations, and problems. Every single day the urban church faces all these challenges in different forms and ways.

Bong-Rin Ro challenges the Asian church to become aware of urbanization and its challenges, to base urban ministry firmly on biblical foundations, to conduct careful research on the complexities of

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¹Raymond Bakke and Jim Hart assert, “We know where all the nations are—in the big cities. God has brought all the nations here—to wherever your big city is” (*The Urban Christian* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], 28).

urbanization in different cultures, and to plan for effective urban missions.² God is the “Chief Missionary” who works in a fast “urbanizing world.”³ Missions in urban societies demand effective strategies, adequate resources, and highly trained workers. Social ministry then is crucial to the fulfillment of the missionary mandate of the church in urban societies.

This essay expounds the missiological framework of social ministry in the urban setting. It defines social ministry in relation to urban missions, identifies missiological challenges in urban social ministries, and reviews the objectives of social ministry. The essay also spells-out basic principles of social ministry applicable to the urban context.

A PRIMER ON SOCIAL MINISTRY

In his book, *Applying the Gospel*, William M. Pinson Jr. defines “social ministry” as an “effort to help persons in special needs and those hurt by adverse social conditions, such as the poor, the neglected child, the sick, or the aging.”⁴ As an “effort,” social ministry may be done individually or corporately although it is not easy to layout nor its goal easy to achieve. In Christian social ministry collective effort is encouraged. This is because the complexities in urban mission take their toll heavily on the local church and individual members that they need to be handled collectively. The concept of “help” and “service” reveals the psycho-social character of social ministry. Here the local body of Christ works together to serve the needy.

In most cases, “personality is more important than skill,” although skills are necessary tools for effective social ministry.⁵ This means that

²Bong-Rin Ro, “Urban Cities and the Gospel in Asia,” *Urban Mission* (May 1989): 20.

³Raymond Bakke stresses that “God is urbanizing His world” (Cited in Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds., *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future* [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984], 32). For a concise survey on how God uses Christian ministry in a constantly urbanizing world, see Winston Crawley, “Urbanization and Christian Ministry in World History,” in *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future*, ed. Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984), 37-50; Clinton E. Stockwell, “The Church and the City: A Five-Stage History,” *Urban Mission* 11, no. 1 (September 1993): 29-36; Frank Allen, “Toward a Biblical Urban Mission,” *Urban Mission* 3, no. 3 (January 1986): 6-13.

⁴William M. Pinson, Jr., *Applying the Gospel: Suggestions for Christian Social Action in a Local Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1974), 13.

⁵Social ministry provides Christians with many opportunities to relate to people,

relationship-building that would consequently restore people's identity in the face of God's redemptive grace and love is a crucial concern in social ministry, an area that could be fulfilled best through helping and serving.⁶ Three levels of relationship may be established in urban social ministry, namely, *healthy relationship*, *wholistic relationship*, and *holy relationship*.⁷

Social ministry calls for a well-identified needy groups or sectors of urban society. It needs to avoid metamorphosing into a mere humanitarian or charitable activity. Those who receive assistance are people with well-defined needs, which could not be met outside the perimeter of practical ministries. The centrality of sin, however, as humanity's foremost problem in society, demands serious attention in urban social ministry.⁸ The immediate focus of urban social ministry is the social condition that contributes to the marginalizing of the city dwellers, but the ultimate focus is the person. Thus the restoration of the person's identity in relation to God's redemptive plan is crucial in social ministry.⁹ Any form of social ministry that leaves out God's redemptive plan for humanity is devoid of any spiritual currency.¹⁰ Pinson asserts that social ministry is an "attempt to help those who are

which makes personality as a higher factor than skill. Skill is a necessary "tool with which one works" to make others help themselves. "Personality," however, asserts Rudolph M. Wittenberg, "is the hand that holds the tool" (*So You Want to Help People* [New York: Association Press, 1949], 3).

⁶For an excellent exposition on service from a biblical perspective, see Charles R. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1981).

⁷For an excellent discussion, see Jon Johnston, *Walls or Bridges: How to Build Relationships that Glorify God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), specifically, 19-213.

⁸Roger S. Greenway concurs, "Social problems, urgent as they are, must not divert attention from the root-problem of sin and the city man's needs for personal reconciliation with God" ("Mission to an Urban World," *Church Growth Bulletin* 11, no. 1 [September 1975]: 478).

⁹Derrell Watkins defines social ministry as "an organized process used by redeemed individuals who are called by God to proclaim the good news, demonstrating Christ's concern for the spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, and relational well-being of persons, families, groups and communities both inside and outside the community of faith" (*Christian Social Ministry: An Introduction* [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994], x).

¹⁰Cf. Gerardo J. De Jesus, "Toward a Theology of the Barrio: Reflections of an Urban Pastor," *Theology, News and Notes* 38, no. 4 (June 1992): 7-10, specifically, 8.

hurt rather than to deal with the social causes of their hurt.”¹¹ This differentiates “social ministry” from “social action” although the two inform each other well and play complementary roles in urban missions.¹² Social ministry, however, is not equivalent to “social action” because the latter “endeavors to correct harmful social conditions, such as war, an unjust and exploitative economic system, or a corrupt political system.”¹³ Social action primarily deals with the “social causes of human hurt,” while social ministry directs primarily to the “persons who are hurt.” The logic, then, of social ministry hinges on “helping persons in the Spirit of Christ.”¹⁴

THE MISSIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MINISTRY IN URBAN CONTEXT

Urban missions remains to be one of the church’s greatest tasks.¹⁵ It appears daunting, but it does not mean that it cannot be done.¹⁶ For social

¹¹Pinson, 13.

¹²See Ronald Sider, *One-Sided Christianity: Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 159-86.

¹³Pinson, 13. For an excellent essay on social action in the Philippine context, see Edicio de la Torre, “Social Action: Its Relation to Socio-Political Change,” *International Review of Mission* 76, no. 303 (July 1987): 322-47. Lawrence Hall (*Biblical Bases of Socio-Political Action*) offers the following eight key doctrines for socio-political action: the nature of God, the created nature of human beings, the fall, God’s justice in the Law and the Prophets, the kingdom of God, incarnation, atonement and resurrection, and holy living and making the Word flesh ([London: Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission, 1986], 4-6).

¹⁴Watkins, x.

¹⁵Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk forcefully write, “Christians’ preconception of missions needs to shift from a 19th Century rural, tribal image to a modern, urban one. The Church, and its sending structures in particular, must be advocates for urban missions more than ever. Pioneer work in concrete jungles and vast squatter settlements must be shown to be just as valid as pioneering in rural areas” (*Operation World: 21st Century Edition* [Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001], 711).

¹⁶R. Keith Parks concurs, “The changes we see all around us do not imply that all of the past is worthless—the future is still built in the past. Nor do the changes we observe determine the ultimate shape of the future. Many things are possible. As we consider new directions for mission, let us cling to the best of what Christians have always held: a compelling set of basic beliefs. At the same time we should be willing to adjust our methods to changing circumstances and not accept the present overwhelming mission challenge as impossible” (Preface to Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds.,

ministry to succeed in urban contexts, effective and adequate programs and methods are necessary as the city church struggles with reaching urban dwellers with the good news using outmoded and irrelevant strategies. Today's church needs to find strategic and creative ways in coping with the current demands of the urban society. Patrick Johnstone laments that "Christians are not advancing in the major cities in the same way as elsewhere."¹⁷ Urban mission, despite its apparent difficulties, is highly possible and that social ministry could serve as its indispensable strategy as the following challenges would show.

The Challenge of Prioritizing Urban Mission

One of the most significant trends in mission today is to reach out to the poor, the marginalized, and the disadvantaged, particularly in depressed and underdeveloped areas. It is not surprising then to see many mission organizations and church-funded relief programs to focus their attention on war-ravaged countries like Afghanistan and East Timor, whose economies depend heavily on rural agriculture. Missions in rural areas is part of the biblical mandate of the Great Commission. But while many mission agencies pour out plenty of resources into economically depressed areas, there seems to be a significant neglect on reaching out to the marginalized people in urban areas. In some cases, social ministry, as a form of mission, seems to be a monopoly of the rural poor at the expense of the urban poor and the marginalized in the big cities around the world.¹⁸ It is thus easy for the contemporary church to concentrate resources on rural areas at the expense of urban ministries. In most cases, the tenor of Christian mission seems to be progress and development, that is, helping rural communities achieve economic prosperity and technological capability rather than the evangelization and transformation of persons.

The mandate, therefore, to consider seriously urban centers for mission by means of social ministry is loaded with practical reasons.¹⁹

An Urban World: Churches Face the Future [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984], 9).

¹⁷Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 618.

¹⁸For an excellent theology of evangelizing urban areas, see Emilio Nuñez, "Theology of Evangelizing the City" (A Paper Presented to the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities, Chicago, Illinois, March 14-17, 1986), 1-20.

¹⁹Ervin E. Hastey observes, "The city has the most important role to play in God's

This is because a city speaks of a “social system, a cultural center, and a religious center.”²⁰ Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway concur, “Cities are strategic. People are concentrated there, so are power and wealth. Communication networks flow from cities. Often what happens in a single city so dominates a nation that what occurs elsewhere in the country is almost insignificant.”²¹ Capital cities, then, across the Asian region need primary consideration for missions because smaller cities normally follow the success model of their metropolitan counterparts. In such case, social ministry as a strategy for reaching the cities needs to intensify so that smaller cities could follow suit. It is not guaranteed, however, that what applies in capital cities also applies in other cities. Local churches would have to make necessary adjustments in their social ministry program-designs in order to serve their respective constituencies better.

dealing with persons in both the Old and New Testaments. The extension of the church of Jesus Christ as presented in the New Testament largely centers in the cities of that time. They were the centers of proclamation, witnessing, church planting, and missionary activities. Political leaders established great cities and religious leaders made them the focal point of their activities” (“Reaching the Cities First: A Biblical Model of World Evangelization,” in *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future*, ed. Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984], 147). For an extensive study on the theology and practice of urban mission, see Roy Joslin, *Urban Harvest: Biblical Perspectives on Christian Mission in the Inner Cities* (England: Evangelical Press, 1982); Craig Ellison, ed., *The Urban Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974); John Kyle, ed., *Urban Mission: God’s Concern for the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988); Floyd McClung, *Seeing the City with the Eyes of God* (TarryTown, NY: Chosen Books, 1991); Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: Mission’s New Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989); Bakke and Hart, *The Urban Christian*; Harvie M. Conn, *A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987); David Claerbaut, *Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

²⁰For an extensive discussion, see David S. Lim, “The City in the Bible,” in *Urban Ministry in Asia*, ed. Bong-Rin Ro (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1989), 20-22. Francis M. Dubose sees two symbols of a city from a biblical perspective, namely, “good” and “evil” (*How Churches Grow in an Urban World* [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978], specifically, cha. 6).

²¹Rose and Hadaway, 32-33. Frank Allen summarizes the priority of city mission because “the city is the country.” “The message radiates,” Allen writes, “outward from the city to the rest of the country. What happens in the large urban centers of a country eventually is felt in the village” (“Toward a Biblical Urban Mission,” *Urban Mission* 3, no. 3 [January 1986]: 10).

The Challenge of Rapid Urbanization

The rapid character of urbanization poses a great challenge to the 21st Century church. Some cities in Asia grow at twice the rate of their respective nations.²² So, there is a need to understand the exploding cities across the region rather than become bias against them.²³ The urban church, in its commitment to social ministry, faces at least six types of social organizations as follows: cosmopolites, ethnic villagers, singles, socially disadvantaged or economically oppressed, the disaffiliated, and the migrants and immigrants.²⁴ Economic growth, which is guaranteed by emerging democratic governments and political stability, results in rapid urbanization. Consequently, across the Asian region, strategic cities have been developed, expanded, and converted into metropolitans, with big towns aspiring to become cities. This results in the affluence of today's urban societies. As cities grow, so does the growing challenge posed by the problems of overpopulation, pollution, environmental problems, unemployment, moral and social breakdowns, injustice, abuse of human rights, and housing, among others.²⁵

Cities, both old and new, continue to attract people from all walks of life. Many people from rural areas know the hardships and costs involved in dwelling in a city, but they still take the risk. Rural based people tend to perceive the city as a place of boundless socio-economic, political, and

²²As early as the 1980's, it was projected that at the dawn of AD 2000 16 of the 24 biggest cities in the world would rise in Asia. India alone accounts three mega-cities at the turn of the century. See Thomas Wong, "Urgent Task of Evangelizing Cities in Asia," *Urban Ministry in Asia*, ed. Bong-Rin Ro (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1989), 125-28.

²³Jun Vencer laments, "In Scriptures we tend to be biased against cities—Babel, Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah. Cities dehumanize men. They are built by man as a sign of rebellion against God. Yet at the same time, the salvific work of God moves from the primal garden to the apex of the ultimate city that is to come" ("The Nature and Mission of the Urban Church," *Asia Theological News* 14, no. 1 [January-March 1988]: 16-17).

²⁴The first five are taken from Allen Swanson, "The Challenge of Urban Mission," *Chinese Around the World* (August 1991): 4-5.

²⁵Noting the problem of housing in urban areas, Hadaway and Rose write, "All over the world the lack of suitable low-cost housing forces city residents to live in slums and squatter settlements. . . . It has been estimated that over one third of the urban population in developing countries now lives in such conditions, and in some cities the level actually reaches 70 and even 80 percent" (27).

educational opportunities, without knowing the plethora of problems and difficulties involved in dwelling therein.

The Challenge of Reaching the Urban Residents

The urban society, of course, even with its aura of opportunities, remains to be the matrix of social ills and problems of humanity. As urban residents increase in wealth and status, they tend to become more private, individualistic, and less involved in local community life.²⁶ It is thus typical for an urban family to isolate itself from the rest of the community although members live in a high-rise apartment with hundreds of other families residing in one building. In most cases, city dwellers do not even know the names of their neighbors, nor do they possess the enthusiasm to engage in community activities.²⁷ Urban social isolationism is high among city dwellers, which results in the breakdown of interpersonal relationship and the collapse of core values that are vital to the survival of any society. This makes social ministry crucial as the city church endeavors to prevent the breakdown of social cohesion by way of designing effective ministries relative to interpersonal relations.²⁸

Urban dwellers face the increasing introduction of violence, rapes, and other forms of social ills, corruption, and base morality. The “Hollywood-type-lifestyle” of some city dwellers has damaged the morale and sense of justice of other urban residents for a long time.

²⁶For a person to dwell in the city, however, does not necessarily mean becoming “individualistic.” The Bible does not say that it is sin for people to live in a city. Deut. 6:10-12 shows that living in an urban place could be a blessing from God as the city, in the words of Walter C. Kaiser Jr., is “an inheritance from the Lord.” “The problem did not reside in the cities,” explains Kaiser, “their walls, towers or their fortifications; the problem instead was in the trust that the urbanites placed in these things rather than in the Lord” (“A Biblical Theology of the City” [A Paper Presented to the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities, Chicago, Illinois, March 14-17, 1986], 10, 9).

²⁷“It may well be,” observes Harvie M. Conn, “that the urbanite has moved to the city to find a cure for his or her loneliness. People in apartments, high rises and condominiums may not know their neighbors. And they may move into such buildings to maintain their personal privacy. But this does not mean they do not have personal relationships. They just find them in other channels” (“The Depersonalization Misunderstanding,” *Urban Mission* 2, no. 5 [May 1985]: 9).

²⁸The ministries of an urban church, notes Vencer, include presence, prayer, participation, and proclamation (17).

Movies reinforce these deviations as they depict crimes, abuse, and violence. It is not surprising then to hear that many urbanites form their notion of justice and morality from the movie screen, thereby making the actors and actresses as models of morality in society.²⁹ It is in this type of environment that the urban church could reach out to urban residents and assist them in their struggle against spiritually oppressive structures and conditions.³⁰ Moreover there is a high rate of youth delinquency, teen-age pregnancy and single parenthood, drug and alcohol abuse, school drop-outs, to mention but a few.³¹ The problem of youth delinquency, of course, shows only the root of the dilemma, that is, the breakdown of relationships in the family that results in broken homes. The urban youth are highly vulnerable to abuse and deception, so the church needs to design relevant ministries for them.

The Challenge of Strategic Missions in Urban Centers

David S. Lim stresses that urbanization is “the apparent consequence of obedience to God’s cultural mandate.”³² As more rural-based people move to the cities, relevant missions strategies become necessary. To maintain relevance, the church in the city has to find creative ways and

²⁹Cf. Anthony de la Fuente, who argues that “film can become an important source for doing theology as people continue to search for fresher perception and articulation of their understanding of God as processed through the text of filmic expression” (“The Relationship of Film and Theology,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 1 [February 2004]: 34).

³⁰Greenway summarizes the nature of urban people as follows: people of many tensions, people of many hopes and disappointments, some people who suffer worse poverty than their rural counterparts, and people with special moral and spiritual problems (“Mission to an Urban World,” 476-77).

³¹Teen-age pregnancies and single parenthood are in an alarming rate in highly developed countries. See for instance, Ian Crichton, “Out-of-Wedlock Teenage Pregnancies in the Black Community,” *Urban Mission* 4, no. 2 (November 1986): 14-27. For an insightful discussion on single-parenthood, see Alice B. Tolbert, “The Crisis of Single Parent Families,” *Urban Mission* 7, no. 2 (November 1989): 9-14.

³²Lim, 22. With obedience to God’s cultural mandate as a backdrop, Lim holds a positive view of human effort in urbanization arguing that “the Bible reveals that God takes human efforts focused on [sic] urbanization seriously, and He will judge all peoples (and individuals) on what they have done in the light of the cultural mandate. In the end He will not abolish or destroy the works of humankind; instead He will gather up their achievements, so that nothing that has been made by human creativity (except sin) will be discarded” (Ibid., 23).

means to meet urban needs. When a city church fails to respond to the needs of the urbanites, it risks losing its reason to exist. Of course, social ministry does not serve as the ultimate indicator of the church's existence in urban centers, but the way it responds to pressing social needs is critical to its survival, relevance, and growth. Thus in the face of rapid urbanization, the power of the gospel needs to reach every nook and corner of the city through the social ministries of the church.³³ Evidently the gospel travels as the church's social ministries penetrate urban centers.³⁴

THE OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL MINISTRY IN THE URBAN SETTING

A "mission field" as big as the city offers a complex environment. Allen Swanson claims that "there is no typical city in the world," and any notion about a "typical method for doing urban mission" does not exist.³⁵ Social ministry in the urban center may be take different forms, but its objectives remain the same. One major objective of urban social ministry is to reach city dwellers with the gospel of Jesus Christ through practical programs that cater to specific needs. This translates social ministry into a "practical application" of the gospel of Jesus Christ in urban areas.³⁶ Social ministry seeks to minister to the "total person" with the "whole gospel" by the "whole church" to the "whole city."³⁷ This means that any person in need shall be reached holistically

³³Lamenting over the failure of churches during the famous 1992 looting and violence in California following the Rodney King beating, Young Lee Hertig writes, "The reconciling power of the gospel has been denied in a city where there are thousands of Christian churches. In Southern California alone, there are more than one thousand Korean American churches and three thousand pastors" ("The Melting Pot Myth: A Korean Christian Perspective," *Theology, News and Notes* 38, no. 4 [June 1992]: 19).

³⁴Raymond Bakke points out that the Apostle Paul went to Ephesus, "the cultural and economic hub of West Asia and third largest city in the world (only Rome and Xian, China were larger)." Accordingly, "Paul penetrated the city and the 'gospel was heard all over Asia' (Acts 19:-10). The principle remains: penetrate the city and the gospel will travel" ("The Significance of Cities for World Evangelization," *International Urban Associates* [Summer 1992]: 1).

³⁵Swanson, 2.

³⁶See Pinson, 12.

³⁷See J. D. Douglas, ed., *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes: Calling the Whole*

with the love, encouragement, and support of the whole congregation in the city.

Social ministry also aims to evangelize urban people through a practical demonstration of Christ's love and offer of forgiveness.³⁸ The use of social ministry in urban mission may result ideally in the organizing of new communities for worship, fellowship, and discipleship.³⁹ In this sense, social ministry serves as a "critical strategy" in creating evangelistic and mission environments whereby urbanites could respond to the gospel without being manipulated.⁴⁰

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING URBAN SOCIAL MINISTRY

Social ministry is imperative to urban missions. Ideally, a city church

Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1990).

³⁸Paul Mooney assents, "The calling and sending of Christian disciples under the power of the Holy Spirit to evangelize people in urban areas using urban social networks and methods of communication to form Christian communities compatible with urban social structures as well as working for the strengthening and empowering of existing urban Christian communities, in order that all the members of Christ's church in the cities of the world become God's agents and witnesses of salvation to those among whom they live and work" ("Theological Foundations for Urban Mission," Th.M. thesis, Asian Center for Theological Studies and Mission, Korea, 1992, 25).

³⁹This seems to be a missing element in many of the current social ministries across the Asian region and beyond, especially those activities that deal primarily with helping the urban poor and the economically indigents. One reason behind this failure could be the lack of theological basis for many of those who are engaged in social ministry. Bong-Rin Ro laments, "Many of Christian relief agencies have had little emphasis on establishing churches among the poor and have spent most of their energy just providing food and shelter" ("Preface," *Sharing the Good News with the Poor: WEF-TC Consultation on the Evangelization of the Poor* [Seoul: World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, 1993], 5).

⁴⁰In his thought-provoking essay, "Strategies for Evangelizing World Class Cities," Ralph Neighbor calls for the need to layout strategies for urban mission viewed "not from the buildings and the streets, but from the special attitudes toward religion which exist there." Neighbor argues that one of the attitudes that need to be seriously studied is "the sensitivity of government and industrial officials to the city's religious activity." This is because these officials "often monitor the impact this could have upon the community from other areas of the globe." Neighbor notes that the church should also look at the "distinctly pluralistic attitude toward religion on the part of the citizenry" (A Paper Presented to the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities, Chicago, Illinois, March 14-17, 1986, 1-23, specifically, 3-4).

that takes the task of evangelizing the city seriously grows and multiplies, thereby making the church healthy and dynamic.⁴¹ There are, however, guidelines that need to be spelled-out as city churches utilize social ministry as a *creative strategy* for urban missions.

Urban Social Ministry as Holistic

The solution to the complex needs of urban people does not lie in isolated or compartmentalized ministries, but in holistic missions. Holistic social ministries possess the following components: being, worshipping, proclaiming, fellowshiping, teaching, and serving.⁴² This means carrying a total ministry to a total humanity with a total gospel.⁴³ One component of holistic urban social ministry is its focus on the total person (*being*).⁴⁴ This includes the one who ministers (“social minister”) and the one ministered to (“social ministry recipient”). Those who minister to urban people need to be aware of their giftedness as God’s people in that their ministry among the urbanites could result in spiritual growth.⁴⁵ Likewise recipients of the church’s practical demonstration of Christ’s love would

⁴¹See Crawley, 37-50; Roger S. Greenway, “History of Evangelizing World Class Cities” (A Paper Presented at the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities, Chicago, Illinois, March 14-17, 1986), 1-24. Greenway’s study focuses on urban evangelization in the United States between 1870 and 1910. He discovers how the church responded to America’s first urban explosion, its dealing with the slum society, mass suffering, poverty, the labor class, migration, among others. The genius of Greenway’s paper lies in his ability to point out the missiological necessity of social ministry in urban areas.

⁴²For this particular section, see A. Clark Scanlon, “Planning a Holistic Strategy for Urban Witness,” in *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future*, ed. Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984), 177-80; Bruce Bradshaw, *Bridging the Gaps: Evangelism, Development and Shalom* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1993), 5-48; 151-62.

⁴³Bakke rightly laments, “Sometimes today we see evangelism moving into the city with half the gospel, often in response to modernists or liberals who went in earlier with the other half” (“A Theology as Big as the City,” 65).

⁴⁴Claerbaut writes, “Just as theologically we cannot divide people into component parts, so also in ministry we must not dissect but rather serve the whole persons” (17).

⁴⁵John M. Perkins puts it succinctly, “When God calls people to the inner city, he often takes them through a growth process where he accepts their service as well-intended-do-gooders, and shapes them into mature, effective urban servants” (*Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993], 157).

have the opportunity to realize their worth and potential to become members of God's family.

Another basic component of holistic social ministry is *worship*.⁴⁶ This includes ministering to urban dwellers by tapping the "power of celebration" along with the "joy of united expressive worship."⁴⁷ Then there is the evangelistic component, i.e., the proclamation of good news, which tops all priorities in the process of holistic social ministry. A. Clark Scanlon aptly writes, "A holistic strategy in the city will include the announcement of the good news with its message of hope, forgiveness, the cross, the resurrection, and meaning for life."⁴⁸ Next is the *fellowship* component that is vital to a sustainable holistic social ministry. This is more than socializing or getting-to-know who the needy are and who are not. It means drawing together both social ministers and the social ministry recipients to establish a sense of belonging. Fellowship is a time to share needs and possessions as well as pooling of resources together to help those who have specific needs.⁴⁹

Teaching is also an important component in holistic social ministry. This includes training the social ministers to share effectively God's love and offer of forgiveness through practical services and helps. "Unless Christians are taught about the social implications of the Gospel," argues Ronald Sider, "they will have no positive impact on society."⁵⁰ But holistic social ministry does not simply help people to acquire information or knowledge, but to guide them to "grow in the knowledge of Christ."

⁴⁶Social ministry requires a connection between worship and ordinary feeling so that people can have a sense of ownership and appreciation of their active participation in worship. See Nicholas Bradbury, *City of God: Pastoral Care in the Inner City* (London: SPCK, 1989), 60-61.

⁴⁷In this regard, the transformation of the community becomes the aim of worship. Linthicum observes, "Community transformation requires deep reflection, centered around an act of worship that celebrates the people's heritage, and a recognition that they have helped create their discontent" (*Empowering the Poor: Community Organizing Among the City's "Rag, Tag, and Bobtail"*) ([Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1991], 102).

⁴⁸Scanlon, 178.

⁴⁹"Urban people," notes Bakke, "want, and hunger for, fellowship which is high quality and lasting. . . . To the Christian, the answer to the need is obvious. Jesus Christ offers love and acceptance, the ultimate personal relationship, freely to all. The Christian community, working and worshipping together, offers fellowship and support" (*The Urban Christian*, 43).

⁵⁰Sider, 177.

An important component of holistic social ministry is *servicing* others with the expressed purpose of glorifying Christ.⁵¹ This calls for believers to maximize their spiritual gifts, share their God-given resources, and take their role as “ministers” of God (Eph. 4:11-13) seriously, both inside and outside the community of faith.⁵²

Urban Social Ministry Amidst Religious Plurality

Religious background is not a criterion for helping urban dwellers in need. Oftentimes religious colors eclipse the biblical intent of ministering to the marginalized and the disadvantaged in the city. There is a tendency to minister to those who belong only to the denomination of the funding agency. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and Christians of the First Century, did not discriminate non-Christians in their ministry.⁵³ They taught and helped those who were in need. When Peter and John were confronted with the need of a crippled beggar in front of the gate called “Beautiful” (Acts 3:1-12), they did not ask for the man’s religious background. What they cared most about was the man in need, so they

⁵¹Hall insightfully writes, “We would expect Christ to lead costly involvement in evangelism and pastoral ministry, and in the struggles against injustice in housing, racism and employment. We would expect Christ to bring us alongside people of other faiths and none, in alliances on particular issues and community projects. We would expect him to bring us into conflict, even with fellow Christians who see things differently. But we would expect him to be with us as we walk with him through the fire, and share in both the fellowship of his sufferings, and the power of his resurrection” (5).

⁵²Scanlon writes, “The church follows both the example and the teaching of Christ as it ministers. In very innovative ways, churches in the Third World have ministered by buying coffins for deceased, rehabilitating drunks, seeking release of prisoners, and aiding victims of violence. There also will be occasions in which the church enters into social action. While most often social action will come about by the involvement of individual members, there will also be occasions in which the church speaks as a body” (Ibid., 179).

⁵³In Korea Won Buddhists and Catholics work together in helping lepers and the underprivileged. Their joint-effort is “being lauded in the religious world as a philanthropic outreach that is breaking down religious barrier” (Sang-Hee Cha, “Won Buddhist Nun’s Inter-Religious Crusade Blossoms at Lazarus Village,” *The Korea Times* 8 February 1995, sec. 1, 10). Of course, evangelicals need to be wary about multi-faith efforts for the sake of simply doing “philanthropic outreach,” considering differences in theology and missiological intent. Urban holistic social ministry, however, needs to be conducted regardless of the recipients’ religious affiliations.

helped him in Jesus' name. The practical assistance that Peter and John extended to the lame man did not predicate along religious lines. Edward R. Dayton aptly writes, "The very act of being a Christian assumes 'doing good' for all humanity."⁵⁴

Urban Social Ministry by the Local Body of Christ

The church remains to be the central agent in applying the gospel through practical means. Robert C. Linthicum observes, "To believe that urban ministry can be carried on by denominations or mission organizations based halfway around the world is ludicrous. The key question is what would happen to such a ministry if for some reason the denomination or mission organization was forced to leave the country? The answer to that question reveals both the vulnerability of an outside organization and the inherent weakness of having a ministry centered in anyone other than the local people."⁵⁵ Thus, the local community of faith, under the empowering presence and leadership of the Spirit of God, remains to be the most formidable team to develop, conduct, and sustain social ministries that would eventually transform the spiritual landscape of urban centers until the second coming of Christ.⁵⁶

Urban Social Ministry in Terms of Partnership and Networking

Urban needs are staggering in that no local church or single

⁵⁴ Edward R. Dayton, "Social Transformation: The Mission of God," in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 59.

⁵⁵ Linthicum, *Empowering the Poor*, 39.

⁵⁶ Lim observes, "The challenge of biblical revelation that the eschatological reality of the New Jerusalem is not just to be fulfilled in the future, but is also to be the basis for God's construction of 'new cities' on earth today. God is calling out a people called the Church to be His primary agent of transformation in the cities since Pentecost until the New Jerusalem is finally unveiled" (28). See also, Maurice Sinclair, "Development and Eschatology," in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 161-74. Eldin Villafañe calls for a "theology of the Spirit" that would eventually lead to what he calls as "social spirituality" relative to urban ministry (*Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, with a foreword by Harvey Cox [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995], 27).

denomination can meet all of them. Urban mission is intricate and highly complex; it requires adequate resources and highly trained personnel. Thus, partnership and networking are indispensable to effective urban social ministry.⁵⁷ “If the churches are to seek seriously to meet needs in local areas,” argues Roy Carroll, “they must be open to ideas that go beyond immediately available options and familiar strategies and tactics. No congregation, and indeed no denomination, can address all the needs. Local Christians must cut across denominational barriers to work together to identify needs and to set priorities and then, both in joint endeavors and by sensible divisions of labor, use their energy and their money to address those needs.”⁵⁸ Evidently, it is of great necessity that relationships between rich and poor churches in the city be established to achieve successful partnership and networking.⁵⁹ No local church in the city, regardless of its rich resources, would be able to meet all the needs of the community; it needs partners in social ministry. Likewise a poor city church could not escape the responsibility to share the good news simply because of its economic status.⁶⁰ In urban social ministry, partnership is a theological necessity and demands that urban churches share resources together.

⁵⁷Robert C. Linthicum explains, “Networking means the creation or maintenance of a ‘net’ of contacts through which one effectively carries out an enterprise. That net can be a human net or a corporate net or even an electronic net (such as in telecommunication or computer system). But whatever sort of net it might be, it is effective only as the net’s contacts are used to carry out a given capacity Networking is simply a strategy by which people get in touch and maintain contact with each other” (“Networking: Hope for the Church in the City,” *Urban Mission* 4, no. 3 [January 1987]: 32-33). See also, Timothy Monsma, “Homogenous Networks—A Label that Promotes Good Urban Strategy,” *Urban Mission* 5, no. 3 (January 1988): 11-17.

⁵⁸Roy Carroll, “Shifting Strategies: Rural Culture to Urban Influence,” in *God-Called Ministry: Essays on the Christian Ministry*, ed. Morris Aschraft (Carey, NC: The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1983), 185.

⁵⁹On the partnership between the rich and poor churches, see the provocative but insightful essay by Mark R. Gornik, “The Rich and the Poor in Pauline Theology,” *Urban Mission* 9, no. 1 (September 1991): 15-26.

⁶⁰James E. Westgate insightfully writes, “The superchurch can provide many things that a small church cannot because of its financial resources and the multiplicity of leadership, and it can influence a city in powerful ways” (“Emerging Church Planting Strategies for World Class Cities,” *Urban Mission* 4, no. 2, [November 1986]: 13).

Urban Social Ministry as a “Ministry” Rather than as a “Program”

There is a marked difference between practical services as a “program” and a “ministry.” On the one hand, a *program* makes social ministry a necessary activity for the sake of filling up an annual church calendar. It simply keeps the church going the whole year round. On the other hand, *ministry* aims to meet specific needs based on the biblical nature of the body of Christ, in general, and the mission-statement of the local church, in particular. In this sense, one of the concerns of social ministry is to build up relationships, rather than create stereo-typed programming. This makes personal presence primary over program as the former focuses on the person, while the latter deals with needs.⁶¹ This also makes social ministry a strategic tool for urban mission, emphasizing the basics of giving rather than receiving. In other words, it is in giving—not receiving—that the city church demonstrates its practical experience of the gospel. The act of serving others in Jesus’ name provides the city church creative opportunities to meet people’s felt needs, including spiritual, material, psychological, social, and physical needs.⁶² “Authentic servanthood,” notes Charles R. Swindoll, “calls for people with a passion for giving *whatever* without recognition, without reservation, without reluctance, and without restriction.”⁶³

Urban Social Ministry as a Task of the Laity

The “era of the laity” has finally arrived in the modern church.⁶⁴ For centuries laypeople have been on the sideline of ministry. The past

⁶¹Mark R. Gornik notes, “Ministry programs are important to the life of the church. They provide structure for the exercise of callings, gifts and abilities. But they work best when flowing out of relationships” (“Evangelical Lessons for the City from the Base Ecclesial Communities,” *Urban Mission* 11, no. 3 [March 1994]: 11).

⁶²See Craig W. Ellison, “Addressing Felt Needs of Urban Dwellers,” in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 94-110.

⁶³Swindoll, 48. In his study of 2 Corinthians 8, Swindoll observes how believers give anonymously, generously, voluntarily, and personally (Ibid., 43-48).

⁶⁴Orrin D. Morris, “Future Trends: Emerging Issues in Ministry,” in *God-Called Ministry: Essays on the Christian Ministry*, ed. Morris Ashcraft (Carey, NC: The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1983), 197.

century saw the potential, power, and effectiveness of laity ministry. Urban mission, using social ministry as a strategy, will find it difficult to succeed without the commitment, talents, spiritual gifts, and resources of the laity. Raymond Bakke explains, “The only way we will evangelize within the structures of the city is to recruit, equip, and encourage lay men, women and youth to identify and penetrate their respective worlds with the gospel. It will never happen by professional evangelism and ‘come-structured’ strategies.”⁶⁵ Laypersons, then, need to be recruited, trained, and involved in urban mission. It is important for all believers to discover their role in fulfilling the Great Commission and overcome their reluctance to serve as *social ministers* in urban areas.⁶⁶ Bakke identifies four distinct worlds of primary relationships whereby laypeople could penetrate the cities as follows: biological (family), geographical (neighbors), vocational (work), recreational (play).⁶⁷ In this context, laypeople “will become the bridge which will carry the gospel.”⁶⁸ Ralph Neighbor concurs, “The millions and millions of dollars of residences owned by these Christians will become evangelism centers for touching lives in the area—and their maintenance will not be included in any church budget. People in homes, in district after district, will penetrate far deeper into unchurched families than will all the church properties.”⁶⁹

In a word, as laypeople take on diverse social ministry tasks, they would discover more opportunities to penetrate the city, using their own

⁶⁵ Raymond Bakke, “Sociology and Demographics of World Class Cities” (A Paper Presented at The Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities, Chicago, Illinois, March 14-17, 1986), 13.

⁶⁶ In a survey conducted by Seok-Hwan Kim among the Bible Study leaders (*Soonjangs*) of Korea Campus Crusade for Christ (KCCC), respondents shared the following reasons behind their reluctance to serve as lay ministers: theological, training, economic, calling, social, occupational, physical and psychological, and family relational reasons, among others (“The Motivation of Group Bible Study Leaders to Become Lay Ministers of Korea Campus Crusade for Christ,” Th.M. thesis, Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, Philippines, 1991, 54-86). Harvie M. Conn rightly observes that the “office” of deacon as spelled-out in Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:8-13 is a “forgotten tool in urban missions” (“Deacons: A Forgotten Tool for Urban Mission,” *Urban Mission* 9, no. 1 [September 1991]: 3-4). For a short but insightful discussion on staffing an urban ministry, see George Reitz, “Three Types of Urban Practitioners,” *Urban Mission* 11, no. 1 (September 1993): 22-28.

⁶⁷ Bakke, “Sociology and Demographics,” 13.

⁶⁸ Neighbor, “Strategies,” 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

resources and property. This includes opening their homes up to urbanites who aspire to know more about God's love and care. The practice of demonstrating God's love right at the believer's own homes will be of great service because, a house, as compared with a church building, offers a family atmosphere and involves the laypersons themselves.⁷⁰

Urban Social Ministry as Sociologically Inclusive

Viv Grigg reports that the least evangelized cities are also cities of the poor. Accordingly, in the evangelized mega-cities, "the migrant poor are generally the most responsive."⁷¹ So, the poor in the city still make up the primary thrust of urban mission.⁷² Extreme caution needs to be taken here to avoid exaggerating its significance. The high degree of receptivity by the poor, however, does not mean that the city church ignores the felt needs of the rich and those belonging to the higher strata of urban societies.⁷³ The rich equally deserve to hear and respond to God's love, either by direct proclamation of the gospel or a simple display of Christian love through social ministries. The mandate of compassion for the poor

⁷⁰See Donald Jones, "The House Church as a Tool for Urban Evangelism," *Urban Mission* 6, no. 4 (March 1989): 27-32; Met Castillo, *The Church in Thy House* (Makati City, Philippines: Alliance Publishers, Inc., 1982).

⁷¹See Viv Grigg, "AD 2000 Adopt a City Network," *Adopt a City* (June 1994): 1. Reflecting on the social strata of the early Christians, Nuñez writes, "It seems that the poor have always been more receptive than the rich when the gospel is announced" ("Theology of Evangelizing the City," 11).

⁷²See Viv Grigg's provocative essays, "Sorry! The Frontier Moved," *Urban Mission* 4, no. 4 (March 1987): 12-25; "The Urban Poor: Prime Missionary Target," in *Urban Ministry in Asia*, ed. Bong-Rin Ro (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1989), 185-97. Grigg notes, "People are being thrust out to the last frontier, but the last frontier has moved. . . . We may find that the largest grouping of truly 'unmissionaried' people would be the urban poor" ("Sorry!" 22).

⁷³In Korea, for instance, the Onnuri Community Church is known to have more than 200 ministries that cater to the specific needs of the residents in urban Seoul. All of these different ministries are customized and address specific needs of people from all walks of life. Under the visionary and dynamic leadership of Rev. Dr. Yong-Jo Ha, Onnuri envisions effective and relevant urban ministries. In the Philippines, there are those who consider ministering to the elite, the rich, and the famous in society as an urgent task. Steve Cadd, for instance, reaches out to the celebrities in Manila and trains Filipino youth in music, drama, and film-making. Churches like Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF) and Cathedral of Praise, two of the mega churches in the Philippines, are known for their ministry to the elite without neglecting the lower strata of society.

serves as a basis for urban ministry and finds support in the Old Testament, the life and ministry of Christ, the diverse ministries of the Apostles, and the witness of the Early Church.⁷⁴ Any attempt to overemphasize the ministry among the poor alone at the expense of the economically affluent and wealthy will find no support from the Scripture. The Great Commission offers the urban church a framework to overcome any bent to “socio-cultural shortsightedness.”⁷⁵ To use up resources for the poor alone, or the rich alone, violates the biblical mandate to *make disciples of all the nations*, which covers both the poor and the rich, the powerful and the powerless, the oppressor and the oppressed, not to mention the weak and the strong.

Urban Social Ministry as a Missions Strategy Rather than a Goal

Social ministry, as a creative strategy in urban missions, could result in local church growth.⁷⁶ As additional church members get involved in various social ministry tasks, they will have opportunities to grow, both numerically and spiritually. In terms of training and equipping God’s people, social ministry could encourage church members to undergo training for specific tasks. They can train practically within the confines of the local church. The idea of using social ministry as a strategy for urban mission is that of bridge building, empowering, equipping, and

⁷⁴In his study of “Poorology,” Harold Oostoyk claims that ten percent of the Scriptures, covering about 400 passages, with over 1,000 verses, deal with helping the poor (Cited by Howard L. Oliver, *A Biblical Basis for Urban Ministry* [Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Men International, 1977], 3). See also Vinay Samuel and Chris Suggden, *Evangelism and the Poor* (Bangalore: Partnership in Mission Asia, 1982), 15.

⁷⁵Cf. Conn, *A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission*, 198. Conn strongly rules out an exclusivist approach to urban mission (Ibid., 191-220).

⁷⁶For a list of samples of urban social ministries, see William Pinson, *The Local Church in Ministry*, 90-131; Ok-Bae Han, “A Holistic Gospel for Urban Poor,” *Urban Mission* 11, no. 3 (March 1994): 18-23; Paul G. Hiebert, “Window Shopping the Gospel,” *Urban Mission* 4, no. 5 (May 1987): 5-12; G. Willis Bennett, *Effective Urban Church Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 81-106; Bob Mitchell, *Rebuilding Our Communities* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, Inc., 1992), 13-239; Edgar J. Elliston, ed., *Christian Relief and Development: Developing Workers for Effective Ministry* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989).

evangelizing.⁷⁷ Thus social ministry bridges the gap between a hostile environment and the redeeming message of the gospel. It is a tool to empower urban people to identify and solve their deep-seated social, economic, political, and spiritual problems, as well as confront real needs underneath artificial social norms and bankrupt spirituality.⁷⁸ The motive behind all attempts to demonstrate God's love and forgiveness in a practical manner is evangelism, which, as Ro rightly argues, "should be the foundation upon which Christians build their social and urban concern."⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

Social ministry is critical to effective missions in urban centers. It is not a goal in urban missions, but it serves as strategic tool for fulfilling the intent of the Great Commission in the cities. Social ministry is not missions *per se*, yet it provides the city church creative opportunities to

⁷⁷In the Philippines, one of the most successful bridge-building strategies is the one adopted by the financing group, "Tulay sa Pag-Unlad" (TSPI) or "Bridge for Progress." TSPI is a Christian organization and partners with the Illinois-based, Opportunity International, headed by Eric Thurman. TSPI provides loans to small business owners unable to get credit through the formal banking system. It works primarily with the "entrepreneurial poor" *vis-a-vis* the literally economically poor. TSPI shows that the church has a vital ministry, too, to other forms of "urban poor. Benjamin Montemayor, president of TSPI, emphasizes that his organization offers a life of "dignity, responsibility and sufficiency." He adds: "We have found the methodology that combines credit with communicating God's Word." Montemayor explains that "when we provide credit we establish a relationship and touch lives. We build people up as small business owners and family members, then we talk about the goodness of the Lord." Accordingly, "credit can open the way to evangelism. We train people in Christian values and using credit at the same time. When we go into a community, we start with prayer. If our loan recipients are comfortable, we move on to Scripture study and the people open up" (Eric Thurman, "New Wineskins in the Philippines," *International Urban Associates* (Summer 1993): 7. The World Vision International has three mission objectives, namely, empowering, equipping, and evangelizing (Linthicum, *Empowering the Poor*, 1-14).

⁷⁸Vencer writes, "The urban church starts its involvement with an environmental analysis of the complex problems of the city. She must deal with the problems of urban poverty, loneliness of uprooted migrants, broken marriages and single parenthood, fear due to rising criminality, drug addiction, unemployment and economic justice, prisoners and ex-convicts, and freedom and political instability" (17).

⁷⁹Ro, 25.

create evangelistic situations and discipleship environments for urban dwellers. The immediate objective of urban social ministry is the meeting of people's specific spiritual, psychosocial, physical, emotional, mental, relational well-being needs, both inside and outside the body of Christ. Its ultimate aim is to minister to the total person, especially the redemptive aspect of God's love for humanity through practical ways and means.

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