

1-1-2012

Interdependent Church Planting Among the Urban Poor: A Case Study with Living Bread Ministries in Southern Brazil

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Recommended Citation

Hubbard, G. P. (2012). Interdependent Church Planting Among the Urban Poor: A Case Study with Living Bread Ministries in Southern Brazil. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 3(2), 252-266. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol3/iss2/8>

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VOL. 3 • NO. 2 • WINTER 2012

**INTERDEPENDENT CHURCH PLANTING AMONG THE URBAN
POOR: A CASE STUDY WITH LIVING BREAD MINISTRIES
IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL**

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G. Patrick Hubbard II

abstract

This case study will highlight the work of Living Bread Ministries. I will detail our seven-year journey of beginning LBM, building interdependent partnerships with indigenous leaders, and planting eight churches in the *favelas*¹ within the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, Brazil. In addition, I will discuss how these partnerships have led to planting churches and to establishing a Brazilian-led church planting ministry which shares the vision and focus of LBM. Through this organization, Brazilian individuals and churches are joining us to plant churches among the urban poor in Brazil and beyond. Finally, I will share some theological principles that are guiding the work of LBM.

After a year of seeking God's will, Bárbara and I surrendered to His call in early 2004. We were both young Christians, having received Christ on the same day in March 1999. Even prior to that day we had always had a heart for the urban poor (*favelados*) in Bárbara's native Brazil. That burden grew when we came to know the Lord. Over a few years, the vision for a ministry among the poor began to take root, and the Lord worked in our lives to bring us to a place of total surrender.

¹ Portuguese word for slum or shanty.

We had no formal training in missions, yet God had already given us many gifts that we needed. Of course just allowing a young Brazilian exchange student and me to meet and ultimately get married was a wonderful act of God's providence. Culture and language would not be an issue for Bárbara, and after eleven years of marriage, I had gained some insight in these areas as well. Further, Bárbara had studied at North Carolina State University and "settled" for a major in Spanish Language and Literature, honestly for lack of interest in anything else. We began to understand that this, too, was an act of Providence and would help when we looked to expand in Latin America. Finally, having married right out of high school, it was necessary for me to work full time while Bárbara studied. Again by Providence, I worked my way up from maintenance person to regional manager with a hospitality management company. All along the way I was acquiring numerous skills that would become great assets in our new endeavor. With the gifts and talents given to us, we set out to legally establish Living Bread Ministries in order that we might fulfill the mission God had given—to plant churches among the poor and needy.

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The first year and a half of our Christian lives had been spent in a United Methodist church, during which time the Lord cultivated in us a greater love for the hurting, the poor, and the marginalized. However, we had moved to a Baptist church, and there the Lord fueled the passion we had always had for evangelism. As we set out to begin LBM, we had never heard the term "missional" or "integral mission." We simply believed that these two burdens in our hearts were not at odds with one another but should be brought together in the local church. These were the types of churches we wanted to plant.

By mid April 2004, we were incorporated, and we had our 501 (C)(3) status from the IRS. We began some efforts to raise money but felt that before anyone would get behind a brand new organization led by two people with no formal training, we would have to bear fruit. We sent letters to approximately thirty churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil, sharing our vision to plant churches among the *favelas*. Our choice of Porto Alegre was one of practicality since Bárbara was from there, and we had a place to stay. It was only later that we came to realize that the city is possibly the least evangelized major city in Brazil with an evangelical population of only 0.8%.² Surprisingly, we only received replies from two churches in the city who were targeting the over 300,000 desperately poor.³ This was our first sign of the need for ministry in the *favelas* of Southern Brazil.

² See Allan Myatt and Nolen Pridemore, "The Status of Evangelicals in the Mega-Cities of Brazil: A Preliminary Survey" (International Mission Board, South America Region, Brazil, December 14, 2007), 5.

³ See IBGE, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. <http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat/topwindow.htm?1> (accessed 20 February 2010).

By the end of April, I resigned from my job, and a few weeks later our family headed to Brazil to share our vision with and learn from the two churches that had responded to our initial letter. Over the next few months, we built a relationship with Pastor Daniel and some lay leaders at First Baptist Church of Porto Alegre. We worked with them as they did their weekly feeding ministry and worship service for about 400 people from various *favelas* around the city. We also worked with Pastor João who preached at this weekly service.

Pastor João took us into many of the *favelas* in the city, which was the first time either of us had ever been in one. He and the people from First Baptist were a blessing and helped us fine tune our vision and to better understand the needs of the people. We saw how much they loved the poor and needy, yet despite years of caring for them, only a couple had actually transitioned into church membership. The others would only come to the feeding ministry on Mondays when, except for the few volunteers, everyone was just like them.

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We also visited and learned from the pastor of a small charismatic church in the city. He took us through several *favelas* and introduced us to many people. This pastor had a tremendous burden for the poor and needy. He faithfully dedicated two to three days a week to visiting the slums surrounding his community. Despite doing this for over two years, no one had ever visited his small, working-class church. God was confirming our desire to church plant among the *favelas*. It wasn't enough to invite them to existing churches; they needed their own churches in their own communities.

At the end of our time in Brazil, we sat down with the elders of First Baptist and once again shared our vision and what we had been learning. The leadership offered their insights and wisdom to continue to help us solidify our vision. Ultimately they voted to help LBM in any way possible. This was our first strategic partnership, and while they could not invest financially, they would be essential in establishing the work. With this new partnership in place, along with all that we had learned, we headed back to the U.S. to begin casting the vision for church planting among the urban poor.

planting churches

A year later, in 2005, we were back in Brazil. Pastor Daniel, who had become a dear friend since our trip the summer before, had found a candidate to pastor our first church plant. He introduced us to Pastor Magioli, a missionary with thirty

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years experience planting churches. He was beginning a work in a slum
community.

We spent the summer working alongside Pastor Magioli and getting to know his family. After weeks of working together, long discussions of our mutual visions and doctrine, and much prayer, we agreed to become partners. This was a departure from our initial vision, because we had not considered partnering with existing missionaries. However, lack of money and a desire to get to work facilitated this approach. His personal support was already taken care of, but he had no resources for working in the slums. After jointly developing a budget, LBM began to help plant the church in Vila Nova, a barrio in Porto Alegre.

During our trip in 2005, we also began working on establishing a Brazilian Religious Organization. Once again our initial motivation was one of practicality. Since the church plant could not be legally established for some time, we needed a way to get funds from the U.S. to Brazil legally and in a fashion that would not be taxed as income for the future pastors. While we were thinking practically, the Lord was moving to open the door for what would become a cornerstone of our vision—Ministerio Pão Vivo (MPV).

We worked closely with Pastor Magioli and openly discussed the process of establishing MPV. As we did, the vision for something more began to grow jointly between us. It would not just be a way to facilitate the movement of funds from the U.S. to Brazil, but MPV would become a church planting ministry led and funded by Brazilians to plant churches in the midst of the poor and needy among them. MPV was finally established in 2006, and it is presently led by a Board of Directors that is entirely Brazilian. Eventually, Pastor Magioli became the Executive Director.

Today MPV is overseeing the work of planting churches among the poor and needy in Brazil. This provides distance between the American organization of LBM and the various church plants. It has resulted in the empowerment of the local churches and their leaders as well as the body of Christ in Brazil. However, to be clear, MPV is not a shell to hide behind; it is a legitimate organization that shares our passion for church planting among the poor and needy. In fact, in 2010, MPV began building partnerships in Brazil. Currently over 15% of the monthly operating budget in Brazil is met by these partnerships. In addition, multiple properties have been purchased with funds raised in Brazil by MPV.

In 2006, MPV and LBM began two more partnerships with existing missionaries. We were introduced to these pastors and their families by Pastor Magioli. As before, we spent time working with and getting to know them but also relied on his recommendation. In His providence, God had brought us together

Hubbard: Interdependent Church Planting Among the Urban Poor: A Case Study and knitted our hearts together in the Gospel. We were not only ministry partners, but we also had become dear friends. In a strange way, Pastor Magioli and I both see one another as mentors.

We were now planting three churches through partnerships. Things were going well, but this was not our original vision. As with all partnerships, there was a certain give and take, which in this case prevented us from fully implementing our vision. We longed for the time when we would have the financial resources to call our own pastors. It would be two years before this would happen.

From the beginning we determined to live by faith. We did not set out to raise ways and means for our family or for the church plants before beginning the work. When starting LBM, we slashed our cost of living to the extreme. By moving into a small, thirty-plus-year-old doublewide trailer and having essentially no disposable income, we survived on as little as possible. These lifestyle choices allowed us to bear fruit via the above mentioned partnerships, but beginning a new ministry from scratch was proving to be a greater sacrifice than we had ever dreamed.

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In 2004, we took no support from the ministry and survived by working multiple jobs. I was going to school full time, working when I could, and building LBM. In year two, we began taking some personal support, but it was very little. From 2004 through 2009, our family of four (eventually five) lived in the U.S. on less than \$22,000 per year. In the early years, our income was well below this level. Times were difficult, but the Lord always saw us through. We often questioned our decision to begin ministering right away, but we thought if it was this challenging to raise money for actual church plants, how much more difficult would it be to raise money for an idea? In the end, we have come to realize that this was all part of the providence of God. Among many lessons during that time, He taught us to understand and relate to the desperately poor more than we ever thought possible. Though we lived in the U.S., we had learned to identify with the poor and needy in a very real way—by embracing personal economic hardship.

a new era

By March of 2009, we were finally able to begin the first MPV church plant. Together with Pastor Magioli and the Board of Directors for MPV, we called Pastor Jocelito to begin a work in the community of Vila Safira, another barrio of Porto Alegre. At the same time, we began our last partnership with an existing missionary to plant a church in the neighborhood of Bom Jesus.

Vila Safira is considered to be one of the most dangerous communities in greater Porto Alegre. Jocelito had grown up there and lived on the streets for many

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years as a drug addict. He had a home with his mother, but drugs kept him on the streets. Having come to know the Lord several years earlier at an evangelical drug rehab center, he had a desire to plant a church in this community.

He was a seminary student with a part time job to pay for school, yet he and his wife Luciana were already working in Safira. They had no resources apart from the Holy Spirit but were faithfully meeting in homes for Bible studies. They didn't know how, but they knew the Lord would make a way for His church to be planted in this most difficult of fields. The Lord did just that through MPV.

In early 2010, Pastor Magioli and I met with Lindomar, a young man from a *favela* in the city of Capão da Canoa. He had been discipled by another church planter for over two years. Having grown in grace and knowledge, he developed an overwhelming burden to plant a church in his community of over 10,000 people. He and his family had been praying for such an opportunity when MPV approached him. After hearing his vision for the church and seeing his heart for his neighbors, we agreed to call him. In June, he became the second church planter on staff with MPV, and in July, he began the work of planting a church among his poor and needy neighbors.

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Since 2005, LBM and MPV have helped to plant six churches in Southern Brazil. In April 2011, we began two new works, bringing our total to eight. All of these churches are boldly proclaiming the Gospel while incarnationally living it out in their communities. Each church is operating feeding ministries and providing medicine. They are making available school supplies and caring for orphans and widows. They are fulfilling the mission of the local church.

We have seen great fruit during this time. Many have come to know the Lord. Numerous couples, having been discipled, have gotten married and are raising their children in godly homes. This is of great significance since cohabitation is very common, especially among the poor. In addition, young people are beating the odds and not becoming pregnant or getting involved with drugs, neither selling nor using. They are finishing school or getting a technical education. People who have never worked are finding jobs; they are providing for their families and the churches. Individuals, families, and entire communities are being transformed by the power of the Gospel through the mission of the church.

practical lessons

It is important to give some detail regarding our motives and fears as we built the partnerships that have resulted in the work we just discussed. As previously stated, we did not launch out on this journey even knowing the term “interdependent

Hubbard: Interdependent Church Planting Among the Urban Poor: A Case Study partnerships.” I honestly admit that we were inexperienced and naive from the beginning, and therefore were forced to lean heavily upon the Lord.

Initially, we had a vision for ministry but had no idea how to implement it. Those months in 2004, when we served alongside and learned from the Brazilians, were of great worth. We were eager to learn and greatly valued their insights into the implementation of our vision. Like sponges, we soaked up everything they taught us. Beyond equipping us for the work, this posture led to them coming to trust and love us. By their own account, they had never experienced this before. Outsiders, specifically Americans, always came with their own plans and agendas. We came and said, “Teach us.” This was not simply a strategy. We sincerely wanted to learn all that we could from them because we knew that they had much wisdom to share. This humble approach became the foundation of our partnership.

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We carried that mindset over into the partnerships with Pastor Magioli and the others. We never mandated our views or used financial resources to manipulate them. We simply sat down with them and asked, “What is your vision for the church, and how can we help you reach it?” Further, we explained that in no way did we want any credit for the work, that when someone received food or any other assistance, the Lord and the church should receive the glory. If any further information needed to be given, they could honestly share that MPV was helping. They had never experienced this type of mindset, and it endeared us to them. Again, this was not a strategy to win them over. We firmly believe that the local church should be the place people turn to in need, and we see no reason to receive glory for ourselves.

With this type of approach to partnership, there was struggle every step of the way. Our flesh wanted to keep control. After all, God had called us, and we were accountable to Him and our donors. At times, we feared that we could be making a mistake or that the nationals could be dishonest and be putting on a show. We had to pray through these feelings and ultimately realize that God was sovereign, that He had opened these doors, and by faith we would walk through them. In true partnership there is always an aspect of risk because to truly be partners, we have to be vulnerable.

That being said, we are called to be good stewards of the resources God entrusts to us. From the beginning, we established checks and balances. Each church has their general ledger reviewed monthly by an independent accountant. Further, receipts for all expenditures paid by MPV/LBM are submitted to the accountant for review. Finally, the accountant prepares a monthly report that is then submitted to the leadership of MPV for review and is reviewed by the leadership of LBM. These procedures are a necessary part of partnership. It is not

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lordship over the nationals, but rather a joint realization that there is a need for accountability. This plan was developed jointly, and the leadership of MPV is responsible for overseeing the execution of it. In a spirit of humility, as partners, we navigate this potentially touchy issue of money.

Another aspect of concern from the beginning was the problem of dependency. We were reminded repeatedly of the potential dangers of our approach, and how dependency is a real issue. We have always wanted the churches to be able to fund themselves financially. Our thoughts on this issue have changed somewhat over the years, and more will be shared about that when I discuss some of our guiding theological principles. For now, let me share some practical ways in which we have worked to guard against a mentality of dependency.

First, our original approach to partnership has proven to be essential. From the first trip to Brazil, we yielded ourselves to the wisdom of the nationals. We shared our vision but sincerely asked for their input. We not only listened to their opinions and ideas, but together we also implemented many of them. We have continued this practice as the work has grown. When we have matters of disagreement, unless it is an issue of primary doctrine or the core values we have jointly agreed to, we routinely yield to their expertise. We do have differences on a few secondary doctrines. By the power of the Spirit, we maintain unity around primary issues and are gracious toward one another regarding others. In this way, we have built a relationship of mutual respect where the nationals feel free to voice dissent without fear of repercussion.

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Sacrifice comes with this type of approach. We do not always get to do things the way we would like. Quite often it takes much longer to accomplish tasks, but we resist the temptation to do things for our partners. We show respect for them by working through issues and only moving ahead when we are all ready. By the same token, the nationals respectfully consider our viewpoints and quite often change their positions on issues to align with ours. This humble give and take is essential to partnership, and it leads to a joint empowerment where both sides are valued equally.

Second, we have always sought to move slowly and never overdo it. When we have jointly determined budgets for the various works, we have always been modest. We began each church in homes and have only moved to other locations when necessary. When moves were made, they were made to modest facilities that met the basic needs.

We have never set out to meet every need or solve every problem. Each church has dealt with the difficulty of having outgrown their meeting place. Our pastors all began as bi-vocational. We understand that there is a cost to planting a church,

Hubbard: Interdependent Church Planting Among the Urban Poor: A Case Study especially among the poor, and we have no desire to work against the Lord's timing. This has required discipline on the part of the leadership of MPV/LBM and patience on the part of the church. Frankly, it has been the topic of much debate, but we have only moved ahead when we could do it together.

Third, we have endeavored to keep LBM behind the scenes as much as possible. We have always pointed to the local church as the instrument of God in ministering to the community. Eventually, the word gets out. By then, the church leadership is firmly in place, and the people have taken ownership of the church.

When LBM leadership is on site, we always yield to the authority of the local pastor and the church leaders. This is especially true of our short term missions program. The trip agendas are developed jointly with the churches, and the group philosophy is that we are there to assist them in ministering to their community. We try very hard not to usurp their authority. For example, the mission team may bring winter clothes to distribute, but we leave them with the church leaders who distribute them after the team has gone. We do not want the glory; we want Christ to be exalted by the local body ministering incarnationally. As a testimony to their ownership, the clothes I mentioned are typically voluntarily given back to the church when no longer needed and distributed to others in need.

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These approaches have worked well over the years. Of the four churches planted via partnerships, one no longer needs our financial assistance. The remaining three only receive funds for outreach ministries such as feeding ministries or working with children and widows. The average for these is about U.S. \$350.00 per month for each church. Beyond this, each of these churches is meeting its own budgetary needs. While we are working to get to the point that even these amounts are funded by the church, we do not necessarily view this as dependency. If it is acceptable for Western organizations to operate child sponsorship programs in order to fund various feeding and orphan care ministries in the majority world, our view is that it is okay to assist the local body of Christ so that it can carry out the same work from the local church. In fact, we believe this is to be preferred since the local church is the community charged with the mission of God and is vastly better equipped to minister in a given community.

The two churches that have been started by MPV/LBM church planters are younger and still require help from the ministry. However, the members are giving, and they meet as much of their basic needs as possible. Furthermore, every church gives from its tithes and offerings to missions in general and to MPV. The people give sacrificially of their time and resources, and we have every reason to believe that they will, in due season, be able to better fund the ongoing operation of their church.

addition to the problems inherent in working trans-culturally, pride is an issue. Our flesh does not like being behind the scenes or seeing others receive credit for the fruit of “our” labors. We do not like to routinely yield to others or find joy in seeing them minister when we really want to be the one caring for the poor and needy. Pride is an ugly beast that, if allowed, will destroy any attempt at building the types of partnerships we have discussed.

Some of our partners recently shared their thoughts on the relationship between MPV and LBM as well as the individual church plants. Pastor Bira, who leads one of the church plants with which we have partnered, said:

We believe that the vision is in sync with God’s vision, seeking to help the less fortunate through the planting of new churches in the slum communities, especially because it is risky in nature and few are willing to go. We believe that the model used by LBM and MPV teaches the church plants the vision of autonomy and independence. We believe that there is great sync between the two ministries, a deep communion, and an alignment of vision.⁴

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About the relationship between MPV and LBM, Pastor Magioli, the Executive Director of MPV, said:

Aside from having the same philosophy and vision, we make up a team that is like family. In a brief amount of time we have developed an excellent relationship and work with agility and transparency seeking to reach the same objectives.⁵

About the relationship between the Hubbard family and his family, Pastor Magioli also said:

I have difficulty writing about this, because in all my 32 years in ministry the most beautiful thing that has happened to me, in terms of relationship and partnership, was to meet missionaries Pr. Patrick and Bárbara Hubbard and their children. God brought them to complete our ministry.⁶

Certainly, improvements can always be made, and nurturing partnerships is an ongoing process. These statements reveal the nature of the partnerships that the Lord has allowed us to develop.

theological principles

Let us now turn to some theological principles that undergird our work. As previously stated, Bárbara and I did not study mission theory and then set out to

⁴ Pastor Bira Alves, interview with author, November 3, 2010.

⁵ Pastor Joacyr Magioli, interview with author, September 30, 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

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implement those principles into a ministry. With no formal mission training, we surrendered to the will of God in early 2004 to begin a work among the poor and needy in South America. We had a God-given vision and the God-given faith to trust the Lord to accomplish all that He was calling us to. I do not say this to boast but simply to make the point that the work did not evolve out of an academic understanding of the principles I will share. Instead, the Holy Spirit cultivated these principles as He led us on this journey. Our continued education has served to corroborate them.

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The first principle I would like to discuss is Holistic Mission, or *Missão Integral* as it is called in Latin America. Holistic Mission is the understanding that the mission of God is bigger than simply the salvation of souls. While this aspect of the Gospel is essential, it fails to encompass the full scope of God's mission. In reality, through Christ, God is reconciling all things to Himself (Col 1:20). Rene Padilla says, "The salvation that the gospel proclaims is not limited to man's reconciliation to God. It involves the remaking of man in all the dimensions of his existence. It has to do with the recovery of the whole man according to God's original purpose for his creation."⁷ In reference to the holistic nature of God's mission, Esteban Voth says, "God's mission is not limited to establishing a spiritual relationship with people, though this is extremely important. God's mission also concerns itself with concrete aspects of human existence."⁸

These descriptions communicate the desire of our hearts in founding LBM. We wanted to reconcile a heart concerned for all of the needs of the poor with an understanding that apart from repentance of sin and faith in Christ, everyone will perish. This is accomplished with an understanding of the wholeness of the mission of God and was demonstrated clearly in the early church (Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–37). As Padilla states,

Acts 2:41–47 clearly shows that the result of the Pentecost experience is no ghetto-church, devoted to cultivating individualistic religion and an exclusive, separatist church. On the contrary, it is a community of the Spirit, a community that becomes a centre of attraction, '*having the good will of all the people*' (v. 47), because it incarnates the values of the Kingdom of God and affirms, by what it is, by what it does and by what it says, that Jesus Christ has been exalted as Lord over every aspect of life. It is a missionary community

⁷ See René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), XX.

⁸ See Tetsunao Yamamori and Carlos René Padilla, eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission*, Brian Cordingly, trans. (Buenos Aires: Kairós Ediciones, 2004), 65.

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that preaches reconciliation with God and the restoration of all creation by the
power of the Spirit.⁹

This is the type of church that we have committed to planting among the urban
poor in the majority world.

The second principle that has influenced our work is a desire to minister
incarnationally. The vision to minister as Jesus ministered flows from an
understanding of holistic mission. In the Johannine Great Commission (John
20:21–23), the post-resurrection Jesus tells His disciples that He is sending them
into the world in the same way the Father sent Him. Samuel Escobar says that in
this passage we have “not only a mandate for mission but also a model of mission
style in obedience to the loving design of the Father, patterned by the example of
Jesus Christ and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ If we desire to minister
like Jesus we must be familiar with His ministry.

A look at Luke 4:16–21 will shed light on the way Christ viewed His own
ministry. Luke purposefully places this passage at the beginning of his account of
the ministry of Christ. Voth refers to this passage as “The Great Omission”
because in large part the evangelical church has neglected this aspect of Christ’s
mission. He states that this passage is “. . . the essence of mission for Jesus. This is
what he came to do.”¹¹ The church has tended to spiritualize the words of Christ
here. However, according to Bosch, the fact that Luke inserted “to let the
oppressed go free” from Isaiah 58:6 into the quote from Isaiah 61:1–2 illustrates
the “social-ethical thrust” of the passage.¹² Furthermore, the ministry of Jesus
demonstrates that the passage must also be seen as literal. The Lord literally
proclaimed good news to and cared for the poor and marginalized, freed those
oppressed by demonic powers, and healed the blind.

It is clear that Jesus saw the physical fulfillment of these verses (Luke 4:18–19)
as being a characteristic of His ministry. The way He fulfilled this mission was to
do so incarnationally; thus this becomes our model. Just like Christ, we must
proclaim good news to the poor and needy. We must lovingly and with compassion
enter into people’s lives in order to heal, deliver, and free them. By entering their
lives, we do not become hopeless ourselves; instead we “become involved in the
poor man’s sufferings and lifestyle to show that in Jesus alone is hope.”¹³

⁹ See Dr. Evvy Hay Campbell, ed., *Holistic Mission* (Lausanne Occasional Papers 33. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2004), http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP33_IG4.pdf (accessed January 18, 2011).

¹⁰ See Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 25.

¹¹ See Yamamori, *The Local Church*, 75.

¹² See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 100–101.

¹³ See Viv Grigg, *Companion to the Poor: Christ in the Urban Slums* (Waynesboro: Authentic Media, 2004), 61.

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The third, and final, principle that I would like to share is our understanding of global ecclesiology. The global church makes up the body of Christ. Individual parts of the body are neither independent nor dependent, but are interdependent upon one another in order to fulfill their God-ordained function (1 Cor 12:12–31). In the same way, the church is called to be interdependent upon one another. As John Rowell states, “Healthy interdependency is a mandate for all members of the body of Christ.”¹⁴

Paul says that the weaker members of the body are indispensable (vs. 22), and that there should be no division in the body, but all should receive the same care (vs. 25). Jonathan Edwards states, “He (the Father) hath made us all one body. Therefore we ought to be united, and subserve one another’s good, and bear one another’s burdens, as is the case with the members of the same natural body.”¹⁵ In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul called the church to use their abundance to take part in the relief of the saints, specifically the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:1–15). Paul’s understanding that the church is the body of Christ led him to call for interdependence and not independence. As Padilla notes, “Interdependence comes with a deeper understanding of the nature of unity in Christ and of the situation in which other members of the body of Christ live.”¹⁶ Therefore, like the churches in Macedonia and Corinth, we should be willing to share based on our resources and others’ need.

This understanding of the body of Christ has altered our views on the question of dependency. While this issue is a concern for us, it does not justify holding back the financial resources God has so graciously blessed us with in order that we might advance His kingdom. Laying down our lives for our poor brethren requires that we invest financially in them (1 John 3:16–18). We agree with John Rowell that “the problem of dependency is rooted more in *Western practices that express our sense of superiority* than in *indigenous propensities for seeking subsidy as a way of life*.”¹⁷

conclusion

In closing, I would like to share a testimony from our work in southern Brazil that illustrates each of these principles. In the summer of 2006, Pastor Magioli, Bárbara, and I visited Dona Tereza after her shanty had burned to the ground. She

¹⁴ See John Rowell, *To Give or Not To Give?* (Atlanta: Authentic, 2006), 24.

¹⁵ See Johnathan Edwards, “Christian Charity or The Duty of Charity to the Poor, Explained and Enforced,” sermon preached in 1732. <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/charity.htm> (accessed January 19, 2011).

¹⁶ See Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, 137.

¹⁷ See Rowell, *To Give*, 25.

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was an elderly Mae da Santos, a priestess in an animistic religion, who had developed a reputation in the community for being very powerful. She lost everything, even her altar, in the fire.

Pastor Magioli visited with her and shared about Jesus Christ. He told her about the church and how they believed that they had a responsibility to care for widows and orphans. He explained that the church wanted to add her to the role of people they helped with a small food kit each month. That night, Tereza visited the church for the first time. She seemed to enjoy the worship service and was happy to head home with her bag of food.

Over several months, she began to visit the church periodically, even when there was no food being distributed. Eventually, her eyes were opened, and she was gloriously saved. Immediately, she turned away from her previous animistic religion and primary source of income and began serving the Lord. When people in the community would come to pay her to cast spells, she would refuse and tell them about Jesus, often bringing them to church to visit. She brought her children and grandchildren to church as well. She became a faithful follower of Christ.

A couple of years ago Tereza had a stroke. She is currently paralyzed on one side of her body and cannot speak clearly. This is a very precarious situation in a majority world slum. Fortunately for her, she is part of the body of Christ. The church has come to her aide by beginning a small group that helps care for her. They feed her through her feeding tube, clean her, and care for her bedsores. They visit her regularly and listen to an audio version of the New Testament with her. They pray for and encourage her and her family.

The local church has been practicing holistic mission. They reached out to a widow that had suffered a tragedy and ministered to her spiritually and physically out of a heart of love. They ministered incarnationally by entering into her life and providing her with the hope found only in Christ. Finally, as a member of the global church, Tereza is being cared for. Her food, medicine, and diapers are provided with resources that come from LBM and MPV, but the members of her local church are the ones who purchase the items and physically care for Tereza. One could scarcely say that their level of commitment to the least among them is the result of unhealthy dependence. To the contrary, it is the result of individual members of the body of Christ working together interdependently to advance the kingdom of God among the poor and needy.

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