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## Editor's note

In this issue of SHARE, we once again share CEDAR's core belief: helping the poor 'From Church, Through Church'. This issue's 'Focus' section delves into the historical development of Christian perspectives on social involvement and shares how CEDAR promotes church participation in social issues. 'Back to the Bible' reflects on community-oriented missions through the scriptures in 2 Samuel. 'Taking Action' shares a testimony of a church partnering with CEDAR to care for the poor community.

## FOCUS

### The Transformation of Church Social Involvement

Written by Tony Chan (Senior Communications Officer)

The distinct feature that sets CEDAR apart from other poverty alleviation and development organisations is our operating principle of helping the poor, 'From Church, Through Church'.

Here, 'Church' refers not to a specific congregation but to the Christian community. In Hong Kong, we encourage the Christian community to participate through donations, prayers, or volunteer services to help transform the lives of the poor. On the frontlines, we implement projects through local churches and Christian organisations in impoverished areas to fulfil the Lord's will—believers united in social involvement.

### The Historical Development of Social Involvement in Hong Kong's Churches

Promoting social involvement in Hong Kong's churches is not easy. One factor is the development and theological perspectives of liberal and evangelical branches, which have profoundly impacted Hong Kong's churches. The rise of liberal theology in the 19th century led liberals to critique the authority of the Bible, leaning more towards philosophical and scientific explanations of religion rather than believing in supernatural phenomena. As a result, they de-emphasised concerns for the afterlife, focusing instead on the present world and social reforms, actively engaging in social affairs.

In contrast, evangelicals emphasised personal spiritual redemption, believing Christians should focus on evangelism and saving souls. Many evangelical churches in

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Over the years, CEDAR colleagues have continuously mobilised believers to care for the poor through preaching, Bible studies, workshops, and simulation activities.

the 19th century were deeply dissatisfied with the liberals' critique of the Bible and their downplaying of spiritual matters. To counter liberalism, evangelicals increasingly stressed spiritual salvation. They held more conservative views on social issues, with some churches even abandoning social involvement work to avoid any impression that they endorsed liberalism.

Since the mid-20th century, liberal influence has waned while evangelicalism has flourished. Although some churches still engage in social involvement work, many have lost balance in their priorities or only dare to link social involvement with the significance of saving souls before promoting it within the church. For example, some Hong Kong churches call social involvement work 'pre-evangelistic work', suggesting that while the church's mission is not social involvement, it creates a favourable impression of the church, leading to the acceptance of the gospel.

In Luke 4, Jesus declares His mission with a passage of scripture: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Believers should not only interpret descriptions of poverty and captivity as the effects of sin, understanding that Jesus frees people from sin, but also recognise that He helped many in various circumstances. Jesus' mission was not only spiritual; He also cared for people's physical needs. The children of the Lord should also comprehensively participate in this mission, sincerely undertaking both the soul-saving focus of the evangelicals and the social action emphasis of the liberals.

After the 19th-century divergence between liberals and evangelicals, there was significant reflection within the international evangelical community regarding social involvement. The Lausanne Conference in 1974 and the Cape Town Conference in 2010 profoundly impacted evangelical attitudes towards social involvement. The 'Lausanne Covenant' stressed that the wholeness of the gospel requires Christians to care for both soul salvation and social justice and human welfare. The 'Cape Town Commitment' stated that social involvement is a Christian response to the love and justice of God. However, these reflections did not quickly bring widespread influence. Some churches continued to follow past teachings, focusing solely on evangelistic work.

Even though many local believers are unfamiliar with Integral Mission, CEDAR has never given up advocating for Integral

Mission over the past thirty years, promoting churches to manifest the goodness of the gospel through social involvement, as this is part of the integral gospel. Besides sharing with different local churches, schools, and organisations over the years, CEDAR has also launched Integral Mission courses in recent years to equip churches with the knowledge and skills needed for community work, hoping that everyone in poverty alleviation work can be 'loyal in heart and skilful in hands'.

## Transformation in Ethiopian Churches

Ethiopia is one of the world's earliest Christian countries with a long church history, yet poverty alleviation work faces many challenges. Firstly, since the 4th century, the main Christian denomination in Ethiopia has been the Orthodox Church, which focuses more on liturgy and spiritual life. Secondly, since the mid-20th century, Ethiopia has undergone complex political changes, including a period of socialism, which somewhat restricted the church's role in social affairs. After the mid-20th century, the rapid growth of evangelical churches in Ethiopia also brought new challenges. Hannes Knoetze, a practical theology professor at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, points out that some evangelical churches in Ethiopia have a narrow view of ministry, primarily focusing on congregational matters rather than community involvement, resulting in minimal influence in the community.

To promote Integral Mission among local churches, CEDAR collaborated with the local organisation TDA (Terepeza Development Association) to initiate a 'Church and Community Mobilisation' project, urging local churches to extend their outreach beyond their premises and assist impoverished communities. Since the project's launch in September 2022, we have conducted various vision-sharing and training sessions for over 70 church leaders. Last year, nine local churches, inspired by the project to wholeheartedly embrace community responsibility, embarked on poverty alleviation efforts using their own resources. Through these small-scale pilot projects, they supported 48 impoverished farmers by supplying seeds, school supplies for children, and covering medical expenses for their families. We are grateful to see that their assistance extended beyond their congregations; out of the 48 beneficiaries, 20 were not affiliated with the churches. This demonstrates the transformative impact of Integral Mission in responding compassionately to the needs of their neighbours.

One of these nine churches is called Chare Zamine Kale Hiwot Church (CZKHC). Before participating in our project,

### The Communal Aspect of Integral Mission

Written by Tsang, Ho-Yin Kenneth (President, Lutheran Theological Seminary)

Scriptures reading: 2 Samuel 8:15-18

<sup>15</sup> 'David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people. <sup>16</sup> Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; <sup>17</sup> Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelek son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; <sup>18</sup> Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were priests.'

When Christians discuss Integral Mission, they often reflect on it from an individual perspective. This means that 'I' not only preach the gospel to people, leading them to repentance and faith in the Lord, joining the church, and receiving eternal life; but it also encompasses a much broader scope. Christians, besides caring for others' spiritual needs, should also seek the well-being of others in all aspects, including their physical, mental, social, and vocational needs, and even extend to the stewardship of God's creation (such as environmental protection). Indeed, we must understand the richness of Integral Mission.

However, we must acknowledge that an individual's abilities are very limited, making it difficult to participate in every task. In fact, the Integral Mission entrusted to us by God has a communal aspect. This means 'we' must work together according to God's will, collaborating to fulfil this broad Integral Mission.

As the scripture in this article shows, what seems to be a plain account of people and their positions is actually a team effort. It is a concise version of the teamwork that the Israelites took pride in during the Davidic dynasty. Towards the end of 2 Samuel, we will read a series of names of warriors who contributed to this dynasty (2 Samuel 23:8-38). No matter how capable David was, without the cooperation of Joab, Abishai, Ithai, Ahimaaz, Jonathan, Hushai, Nathan, and others, how could he have overcome various difficulties and challenges to achieve the beautiful picture of the Davidic dynasty?

Today, in the Integral Mission entrusted to us by God, He does not want us to fight alone but to work together with collective wisdom and proper division of labour. If several congregations distribute meals to the homeless in one area, there will be an excess of meal boxes, and resources will not reach those in need in other areas, resulting in waste. I like to use a jigsaw puzzle as an analogy: each of us Christians is like a small piece of the puzzle, responsible for different tasks and areas. When each puzzle piece fulfils its role under God's design, it forms a beautiful picture!



Through the project promoted by CEDAR and its partner, several Ethiopian churches have been encouraged to fulfil their mission by taking action to assist local impoverished farmers.

CZKHC believed that community construction and repair work were the government's and relevant institutions' responsibilities. Hence, even if it were a simple task, the church would not participate; they would rather wait for the government and institutions to solve the problems slowly despite the inconvenience caused. However, through our project, they understood that the church's mission also includes working with neighbours to build a better environment.

Earlier, a group of CZKHC members noticed that many villagers often had to wade across a stream to reach nearby areas for work, small business, or school, frequently getting injured. During the rainy season, schoolchildren could not cross the stream to attend school due to rising water levels. To avoid crossing the stream, some villagers chose not to leave the village, isolating themselves from other communities. CZKHC members initiated a bridge-building project, mobilising other villagers to participate. Some did carpentry work, while others brought wood to the stream. Together, they built the bridge. In addition to building the bridge, they also took on the responsibility of regular maintenance to ensure villagers could cross the stream safely in the long term.



The bridge built by CZKHC with villagers highlights the strength of the church and the community.

Although not a large project, this wooden bridge testified to the church's transformation. The spirit of CEDAR's 'Church and Community Mobilisation' work is not about seeing the needs of poor communities and acting quickly, nor about leaving the local partners to do everything alone. Instead, it is about patiently transmitting the vision and skills, encouraging local believers and communities to participate together. We firmly believe this is the direction and pace of work that pleases the Lord.

CZKHC is just one example. For many years, CEDAR has tirelessly called on believers worldwide to practice Integral Mission. Their work serves as a cloud of witnesses, participating in social involvement to let the world experience the power of the gospel, which is not limited to spiritual abundance but is also manifested in community transformation.

### Let's Think:

1. What specific service has God sent you to undertake (which piece of the puzzle are you)?
2. Have you communicated well with others, divided the work, and collaborated to make things better?

### Put into Practice:

1. Focus on the specific service that God wants you to perform, and be attentive and open-hearted in communicating and collaborating with others.
2. Prayer: Almighty God, whose thoughts are higher than ours, You are the creator of the whole blueprint. Please guide each of us to understand our roles and tasks in Your plan and help us to focus on them, working together with others to be pieced together by You into a beautiful picture. In the holy name of Jesus, Amen.

## Taking Action

### The Lord's 'Matchmaking'

Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)

At the end of 2022, our colleagues visited our partner, Samari Utthan Sewa (SUS), in Nepal and met with those assisted by SUS's anti-human trafficking project. The region faces a severe human trafficking issue, with traffickers making use of the open border between Nepal and India to smuggle Nepali women and children into India. They lure impoverished women with promises of job opportunities, exploiting them in adult entertainment sectors. Our partner proposed an initiative to further combat human trafficking, so they wanted to secure additional resources to launch the new project, which aims to provide education to impoverished children and adolescents, reducing their chances of dropping out of school and enhancing their livelihood skills to lower the risk of being lured by traffickers. Additionally, the project would raise their awareness about human trafficking, helping them avoid falling into traffickers' traps.

Unfortunately, CEDAR lacks sufficient resources to allocate additional funds for the new project. Our partner understood our limitations and requested that we seek church support upon returning to Hong Kong. We prayed, asking the Lord to lead us to churches with a heart for ministry in Nepal. Despite keeping our partner's situation at the forefront of our minds, we had yet to find any leads on locating supportive churches. Around April 2023, we received a call from Pastor Lam Yin of Lock Tao Christian Association Shamshuipo Church. Pastor Lam had not known us before, but he had come across CEDAR's work online and proactively reached out to inquire about our ministries and explore opportunities for collaboration.

We shared the situation in Nepal with the church's pastors and leaders. After prayer, they agreed to support the education project and were united in the compassionate desire to serve the local impoverished community. They arranged for Pastors Monica Wong and Lam Yin to visit Nepal with CEDAR staff in November 2023 to meet our partner and beneficiaries and understand the local context firsthand. We are grateful to the Lord for hearing our prayers and bringing together our Nepali partner, Lock Tao Christian Association Shamshuipo Church, and CEDAR to work together in helping the poor.

Pastors Monica Wong and Lam Yin witnessed the lives of the local impoverished people. They heard their life stories, gaining a profound understanding of the importance of

CEDAR's mission, 'Beyond Feeding the Poor.' They realised that while education and living assistance are crucial, only the mighty gospel of Jesus and His everlasting love can bring acceptance and hope to the neglected, saving them both spiritually and physically. To encourage the brothers and sisters in their church to extend this love to the vulnerable, the pastors actively shared their experiences with the congregation upon returning to Hong Kong. They hoped that the church members would support the ministry not only through donations but also by visiting Nepal to care for the beneficiaries personally.

CEDAR has always adhered to the principle of helping the poor 'From Church, Through Church' in its operations. We believe that our strength is limited, but by uniting with like-minded believers, we can collectively bear powerful witness to Christ's love. If you feel called to serve alongside CEDAR, we welcome you to contact us and join in witnessing the Lord's work in different corners of the world.



Pastors Monica Wong (back row, right) and Lam Yin (back row, left) visited the marginalised and impoverished communities in Nepal.

## 2023/2024 Operating Statements

In the period of Jul 2023 - Jun 2024

<b>Income</b>	<b>HK\$</b>	<b>20,020,081</b>
Donations		18,175,616
Appeal for Relief		1,309,230
Other Income		535,235

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>HK\$</b>	<b>19,707,610</b>
Development Projects - Asia		7,612,244
- Middle East		914,996
- China & HK		1,719,613
- Africa		2,328,828
Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects		1,029,418
Partnership Development		3,537,887
Administration		1,588,791
Annual Depreciation		975,833

**Account profit and loss / (Deficit) HK\$ (312,471)**

Note: CEDAR's fiscal year is from 1st July to 30th June of the following year. The total budgeted expenditure for the fiscal year 2024 to 2025 is HK\$21,943,000. Please pray for and support CEDAR and its partners in their ministry. The financial report is not yet audited.

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