

Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission

Preamble

The Micah Network is a coalition of evangelical churches and agencies from around the world committed to integral mission. Convened by this network, 140 leaders of Christian organisations involved with the poor from 50 countries met in Oxford in September 2001 to listen to God and each other for mutual learning, encouragement and strengthening as we serve the cause of the kingdom of God among the poor.

Our meeting coincided with the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. We express our abhorrence at this atrocity. God grieves for the more than 7,000 people who died and the many thousands who have been sadly affected. At the same time we recognise that many more thousands die unnecessarily each day, especially in the poor countries of the world, because of the evil alliance of injustice and apathy. God also grieves over these deaths. We want to call the attention of the church and the world to this daily outrage against human beings made in the image of the Creator.

We recognise too the symbolic meaning of this act of terrorism. In his day Jesus interpreted the butchery of Pilate against the Galileans as an opportunity to repent. Could it be that this act against the symbols of Western economic and military power is a call to repentance?

As we gathered, we heard of the devastating effects that globalisation is having on poor communities around the world. We recognise the importance of the market for a healthy economy, but we reject giving the market ultimate status, allowing consumer goods to define personal identity and leaving the plight of the poor to market forces. We name this as idolatry. Although globalisation is contributing to the creation of more open societies, on the whole it means the massive exclusion of the poor. Perhaps the most critical social task for the church in our generation is to offer a compelling alternative to the unjust imbalances in the world economic order and the values of its consumer culture. God is calling us to build global twin towers of justice and peace. We need to create a coalition of compassion.

During our time together, we have been deeply moved by the heart cry of those who suffer as well as by the astounding possibilities of change through Jesus' compassion. We have heard of the pain and blessing of accompanying people dying of AIDS in a town in Zimbabwe in which a third of the population have HIV. We heard of the life changing experience of touching a limbless child in a Bosnian cellar and the story of a community kneeling together to confess their complicity in a culture of violence in Mexico. We were inspired by the transforming power of the gospel in the lives of drug addicts in Central Asia and advocacy on behalf of children forced into prostitution and bonded slavery.

Integral Mission

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.

We call one another back to the centrality of Jesus Christ. His life of sacrificial service is the pattern for Christian discipleship. In his life and through his death Jesus modelled identification with the poor and inclusion of the other. On the cross God shows us how seriously he takes justice, reconciling both rich and poor to himself as he meets the demands of his justice. We serve by the power of the risen Lord through the Spirit as we journey with the poor, finding our hope in the subjection of all things under Christ and the final defeat of evil. We confess that all too often we have failed to live a life worthy of this gospel.

The grace of God is the heartbeat of integral mission. As recipients of undeserved love we are to show grace, generosity and inclusiveness. Grace redefines justice as not merely honouring a contract, but helping the disadvantaged.

Integral Mission with the Poor and Marginalized

The poor like everyone else bear the image of the Creator. They have knowledge, abilities and resources. Treating the poor with respect means enabling the poor to be the architects of change in their communities rather than imposing solutions upon them. Working with the poor involves building relationships that lead to mutual change.

We welcome welfare activities as important in serving with the poor. Welfare activities, however, must be extended to include movement towards values transformation, the empowerment of communities and co-operation in wider issues of justice. Because of its presence among the poor, the church is in a unique position to restore their God-given dignity by enabling them to produce their own resources and to create solidarity networks.

We object to any use of the word "development" that implies some countries are civilised and developed while others are uncivilised and underdeveloped. This imposes a narrow and linear economic model of development and fails to recognise the need for transformation in so-called "developed" countries. While we recognise the value of planning, organization, evaluation and other such tools, we believe they must be subservient to the process of building relationships, changing values and empowering the poor.

Work with the poor involves setbacks, opposition and suffering. But we have also been inspired and encouraged by stories of change. In the midst of hopelessness we have hope.

Integral Mission and the Church

God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission. The future of integral mission is in planting and enabling local churches to transform the communities of which they are part. Churches as caring and inclusive communities are at the heart of what it means to do integral mission. People are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message.

Our experience of walking with poor communities challenges our concept of what it means to be church. The church is not merely an institution or organisation, but communities of Jesus that embody the values of the kingdom. The involvement of the poor in the life of the church is forcing us to find new ways of being church within the context of our cultures instead of being mere reflections of the values of one dominant culture or sub-culture. Our message has credibility to the extent that we adopt an incarnational approach. We confess that too often the church has pursued wealth, success, status and influence. But the kingdom of God has been given to the community that Jesus Christ called his little flock.

We do not want our church traditions to hinder working together for the sake of the kingdom. We need one another. The church can best address poverty by working with the poor and other stakeholders like civil society, government and the private sector with mutual respect and a recognition of the distinctive role of each partner. We offer the Micah Network as one opportunity for collaboration for the sake of the poor and the gospel.

Integral Mission and Advocacy

We confess that in a world of conflict and ethnic tension we have often failed to build bridges. We are called to work for reconciliation between ethnically divided communities, between rich and poor, between the oppressors and the oppressed. We acknowledge the command to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute in a world that has given "money rights" greater priority than human rights. We recognise the need for advocacy both to address structural injustice and to rescue needy neighbours.

Globalisation is often in reality the dominance of cultures that have the power to project their goods, technologies and images far beyond their borders. In the face of this, the church in its rich diversity has a unique role as a truly global community. We exhort Christians to network and co-operate to face together the challenges of globalisation. The church needs a unified global voice to respond to the damage caused by it to both human beings and the environment. Our hope for the Micah Network is that it will foster a movement of resistance to a global system of exploitation.

We affirm that the struggle against injustice is spiritual. We commit ourselves to prayer, advocating on behalf of the poor not only before the rulers of this world, but also before the Judge of all nations.

Integral Mission and Lifestyle

Integral mission is the concern of every Christian. We want to see the poor through the eyes of Jesus who, as he looked on the crowds, had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

There is a need for integral discipleship involving the responsible and sustainable use of the resources of God's creation and the transformation of the moral, intellectual, economic, cultural and political dimensions of our lives. For many of us this includes recovering a biblical sense of stewardship. The concept of Sabbath reminds us that there should be limits to our consumption. Wealthy Christians - both in the West and in the Two-Thirds World - must use their wealth in the service of

others. We are committed to the liberation of the rich from slavery to money and power. The hope of treasure in heaven releases us from the tyranny of mammon.

Our prayer is that in our day and in our different contexts we may be able to do what the Lord requires of us: to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

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