

Executive Director: Rev Dr David Parker, 17 Disraeli St, Indooroopilly, Qld, Australia 4068
Phone (+61 7) 3878 3178 Mobile (+61) 0404083108 E-mail: tc@worldevangelicalalliance.com

Holistic Ministry: Reflections from the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance

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Vision

Holistic Ministry: The whole gospel working through the whole person and the whole church to the whole world.

Rationale

In line with the evangelical tradition, which was reaffirmed at Lausanne 1974, we understand holistic mission to incorporate the proclamation and visible demonstration of the good news which is ours in Jesus Christ. Being disciples, the point of the call of the Great Commission means loving God and your neighbour in concrete ways.

“I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the Great Commission, but the actual Commission itself, must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.”
John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*

Biblical & Theological Principles for Holistic Ministry

Holistic concerns permeate the whole biblical narrative: creation, exodus, the law, OT prophets, incarnation, Jesus' practices, resurrection, letters to the churches, eschatology.

- In the incarnation, the eternal Son as the Second Adam assumed human nature: hallowing and reaffirming the image of God in every human being.
- Jesus consciously engaged the marginalised as an illustration of the holistic nature of his ministry.
- Jesus' acts and teaching were holistic, addressing the whole person and the whole community.
- The NT concept of salvation encompasses every aspect of the human condition, though this is not yet fully realised.
- In fulfilment of some OT promises, the NT hope in Christ of a new creation is holistic.
- The church is called to be a sign, agent and foretaste of the new creation.
- The church is called to be the church in word and action such that our proclamation and demonstration of the gospel are integrally related.
- Some individuals may be gifted in either evangelism or helps, but all are called to both love their neighbor and witness to Christ.

Opportunities associated with Holistic Ministry

- The gospel holds out a vision to all people of reconciliation with God and fulfilment in Christ.
- The obvious material needs of various groups provide an opportunity for holistic ministry e.g. widows, orphans, strangers.
- All cultures are addressed by the gospel and therefore require transformation in their social norms e.g. consumerism in the West, sex trade in SE Asia.

- The pervasive presence of the theme of holistic mission in the Bible (see above) and examples in church history provide vast resources for teaching and equipping the church.
- A variety of contemporary trends are sympathetic towards aspects of holistic ministry e.g. emphasis on community and relationality, openness to social activism, integrity between words and deeds.
- The ability to network, mobilise and move resources permits us to respond quickly to human tragedy in our world.
- Joint activity with non-Christians concerning social needs provides an opportunity for holistic witness to them.

Challenges associated with Holistic Ministries

- Ministries in which either evangelism or social action dominate to the exclusion of the other either in their own ministry, or in respect of other's ministries.
 - Isolating social activism from its theological grounding e.g. aid agencies that lose their evangelical roots
 - Separating social and economic analysis from theological reflection and critique e.g. ignoring the theological dimension of social problems
- Uncritical assumption of social and cultural norms damaging how we do evangelism and social action e.g. Western pragmatism and utilitarianism, caste system in India.
- Adopting models of either social action and / or evangelism that are culturally inappropriate.
- Knowing where to begin in the context of limited resources.
- An exaggerated sense of the need to do everything leading to paralysis.

Practical Steps to encourage Holistic Ministry

- Churches being led to new areas of ministry networking with those who have experience in that area as an encouragement to get started.
- Sound teaching on integral / holistic ministry drawing on appropriate theological resources (see resources below).
- Highlight and disseminate good examples of holistic ministry.
- Encourage theological reflection on all aspects of our ministry – tools may be needed to help with this.
- Agencies and churches to use a checklist in making funding decisions.
- Ministry practitioners to use a diagnostic tool for continual improvement in their holistic ministry.

Recommended Resources

- Chrysostom, John, *On Wealth and Poverty*
- Lausanne Covenant
- Miller, Darrow, *Discipling the Nations*
- Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*
- Padilla, C. Rene & Sine, Tom & Storkey, Elaine (Eds), *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor*
- Ramachandra, Vinoth, *What is Integral Mission?*
- Samuel, Vinay & Sugden, Christopher (Eds), *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*
- Stott, John, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*
- Wright, Christopher, *The Mission of God*