Urban Economic Shalom:

Possible Place of Peace and

Economic Growth

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with John H. Quinley, III

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Abstract:

The concept of Urban Economic Shalom is God's idea. Repeatedly scripturally mandated, we’ve tended to continue to hit and miss the goal now as much as in ancient Israel. Urban poverty has been tackled by modern macroeconomic theory and International Development with a rasher of tools devised to address the plight of the poor, some unwieldy and equivalent to sweeping vacuously over nations with international development billions. Other ways include, no more or less, than simply being with the poor – one on one – the hands and heart of Jesus. Between the extremes, comes myriad methods as varied as major microfinance organizations to coffee shops, multi-million dollar consulting firms to antenna manufacturing concerns and small leather or jewelry workshops. In the midst of the fray, groups of “new friars” seek to take a place to bring peace to the city, and deliver God's hope among those the West consider the least of people. How this all fits together is anyone’s guess. I suspect we will need the guidance of God’s spirit to help us work uniquely yet collaboratively to see Urban Economic Shalom become reality.

Authors:

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Urban Economic Shalom: Possible Place of Peace and Economic Growth

The concept of Urban Economic Shalom is God’s idea. Repeatedly scripturally mandated, we’ve tended to continue to hit and miss the goal now as much as in ancient Israel. Urban poverty has been tackled by modern macroeconomic theory and International Development with a rasher of tools devised to address the plight of the poor, some unwieldy and equivalent to sweeping vacuously over nations with international development billions. Other ways include, no more or less, than simply being with the poor – one on one – the hands and heart of Jesus. In between the extremes, comes myriad methods as varied as major microfinance organizations to coffee shops, and multi-million dollar consulting firms to antenna manufacturing concerns and small leather or jewelry workshops. In the midst of the fray, groups of “new friars” seek to take a place to bring peace to the city, and deliver God’s hope among the least of these. How this all fits together is anyone’s guess. I suspect we will need the guidance of God’s spirit to help us work uniquely yet collaboratively to see Urban Economic Shalom become reality.

1. It’s Not God’s Fault: The Biblical Basis of Economic Urban Shalom

Throughout the whole of scripture, God shows without question God’s cares for the plight of the poor and calls for justice delivered to them by the people of God. Economic Shalom is clearly God’s idea with an expectation of action put to His people through the ages. It is certainly no new concept. Some of the earliest biblical challenges concerning poverty are shown by Robert D. Spender in his Theology of Poor and Poverty:

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\text{Beyond direct legislation a number of institutions contained special provisions for the poor. Gleaning laws focused on the widow, fatherless, stranger, and poor (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22). During the Sabbatical year debts were to be canceled (Deut 15:1-9) and Jubilee provided release for Hebrews who had become servants through poverty (Lev 25:39-41, 54). During these festivals the poor could eat freely of the produce of all the fields (Exod 23:11; Lev 25:6-7, 12).}^{1}
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Gleanings laws, debt limitations, as well as, special provisions for the poor, widow, and orphans essentially show that we must make certain specific provision for the poor in our society. Otherwise, we find ourselves actually at odds with God himself as he identifies closely with those who society is often very happy to ignore, dismiss, or exploit.

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So, while God makes special place and provision for the poor, many – who claim His name and care – make a mockery of the poorest of God’s creation.

The book of Amos dramatically frames Israel’s lack of care for the poor, and delivers strong rebuke. Here Spender describes the poor’s lot:

*The poor are bought and sold, trampled, crushed, oppressed, forced, and denied justice by those who are in a position to do otherwise. Their treatment is a striking example of the waywardness of God’s people from the covenant obligations and their unique relationship with the Lord. Amos underscores this situation*  

Amos is quite graphic in his portrayal of the poor’s oppressors: "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed" (Amos 2:6-7).

Yet, God never relents in His calls for intervention among the oppressed.: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24)

Not only biblical literature, but the whole of world literature is actually full of chronicling the perils and protagonists of poverty and oppression.

2. The World’s Greatest Writers Tried to Move Us

World literary history confirms this well with the writings of Dickens in England, Hugo in France, and a veritable parade of pain in Russian writings from Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov often themed amidst squalor, and fully interlaced with physical and spiritual poverty.

So, whether “Let them eat cake.” was actually uttered by Marie Antoinette, or as Jean Jacques Rousseau referenced to a “great princess”, either would display utter disconnectedness and disregard to the common peoples’ plight and affirm Victor Hugo’s take in *Les Miserables*, “There is always more misery among the lower classes than there is humanity in the higher.”

David Herman clearly asserts in his, *Poverty of the Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature about the Poor*, that essentially urban poverty is the primary lens for viewing most of the western world in the nineteenth century:

*The primal scene of all nineteenth-century western thought might involve an observer gazing at someone poor, most commonly on the streets of a great metropolis, and wondering what the spectacle meant*

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2 Spender, “Poor and Poverty”.
in human, moral, political, and metaphysical terms. For Russia, most of whose people hovered near the poverty line throughout history."  

So, if these postulates are true for the historical developing western civilizations, the projection of the utter pain in the development of Asian, African, and all the majority world stories must be many multiples and are all but yet untold to the world at large. For example, obviously the highly awarded 2008 film, *Slum Dog Millionaire*, is certainly as close as most of the Western world may ever come to a Mumbai slum, and became something of modern wakeup call for the world at large in reference to majority world urban slums.

### 3. But, How Can We Help?

This question has loomed continually over the centuries and, until the beginning of the 19th century, there was no sense that there could ever be any significant help for the poorest of the world. Bryant Myers points to this in his *Walking with the Poor*:

> With a radical change in the trajectory of economic history around 1800, a wide range of new ideas emerged – creating wealth, markets as systems, ordinary people as creative contributors, and the idea that God’s world could be improved by human creativity. Science and technology emerged as ways to create wealth and increase human well-being. In the West, material improvements in the human condition were rapid. More recently, China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia have assumed this same trajectory. Sadly, this is less the case for Africa and Central Asia. While this process was wildly uneven and some benefited a great deal more than others, the fundamental historical shift that took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century is a historical fact that resulted in the creation of the idea that we now call development or poverty eradication.

Working within the larger world of International Development and poverty eradication, for better or worse, is the playing field we all come to today in the wake of the first global ISUM Summit. So, how will we move forward now? Let’s look at Shane Claiborne’s ISUM challenge.

### 4. Just Do It?

In the first ISUM Summit keynote address, moments after explaining that his “dreds” had had to go for a recent trip back to Afghanistan (he had also been in Iraq on a peace team during the Shock and Awe campaign on Bagdad) this prophetic activist, “Ordinary Radical”, Shane Claiborne put us on the edge of our seats, and on his inside committed view concerning the possibilities for peace in

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5 Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 12.
the urban slums of the world. Throwing out his punchline-like, tongue-in-cheek, slam you in the gut challenge – but all the while smiling: “We throw up our hands, asking God why won’t God do something. And God responds, “I did do something – I made you. Now get out and do something!"

The International Society of Urban Mission (ISUM) Summit held in Bangkok the last week of January 2013, did not happen in a vacuum or without a long history leading together the some 200 participants who gathered. They came from around the globe, for various reasons, but one overriding agreement seemed to rule the hearts of all those hearing Shane’s clarion call: God cares greatly for the urban poor and their plight, and expects us to act accordingly, indeed, on His behalf.

In some ways, these are very clear marching orders. Just do it! Sounds like we just got dropped in the middle of shooting a NIKE commercial. Too bad solving urban poverty isn’t as straightforward as producing an award winning NIKE commercial: for that, you simply take the requisite budget to secure the best creative and technical talent the ad world can muster and there it is: ready to garner more creative accolades. Ready to “Take It to the Next Level”, “Write the Future”- and “Just Do It”- bolstering market share and global sales figures.

“Do something!” That is not very specific is it? It reminds me a bit of my father, who I remember used to posit regularly enough: “Do something, even if it’s wrong.” He didn’t really expect that we should make some foolish or inappropriate move, rather he was cheering for my sister and I to consider the options, make a good decision, and act with significant commitment.

So, coming off the ISUM Summit, it is pretty clear to all, it is incumbent on us all: to act. Perhaps, even to launch forward in new endeavors, or maybe carry on as we have started with more certainty and redoubled resolve than ever before. Yet, far less certain, however, would be the manner and methods that seem most appropriate to all. To each of us, however, as we consider the “What to do?” question, Micah 6:8 seems to ring out in our hearts.

To act justly, and
to love mercy,
and to walk humbly
with
your God.

But, one might say, that is not so much instruction on, “What to do?” as it is “How do we do?” Micah outlines a framework for Urban Economic Shalom rather than specifies practices of how to implement it. That might be a fair summary, but the popular passage certainly moves us all forward in a clear direction.

Seeking the peace of the city, indeed, seeking economic development that empowers the urban poor is not an easy task. Delivering Economic Urban Shalom is now a major remaining task for the church today. Today’s problems include a single mom ordering the dollar specials for her children in an urban food desert. Yet, fixing problems like this will require more than ranting against
massive multinational corporations, indeed it could take challenging corporate leadership to turn around to help serve up solutions and build the communities they serve. It will take planting “urban gardens” by the thousands, and mentoring youth by the hundreds of thousands to work in them. Meanwhile, add to that teaching them English and computer literacy, keys for global youth discovering new opportunities and growing up in a way that is not bounded by their birthplace.

Seeking “Urban Economic Shalom” is going to take work and require painful persistence. But no matter what we do – it will need to be a labor of love. We will foster shalom as we display God’s love working in and through us. In the ISUM working group presentation for Urban Economic Shalom, a short paragraph erupted full of desires that we hoped could lead us all forward, and which led us to this paper. More than anything, however, it did clarify just how we all desired to serve.

5. Serving Like Jesus

*WE DESIRE:* to see Economic Urban Shalom: Christ centered mustard seed initiatives and groups serving alongside the poor, learning and loving together, making priorities to be people and families, always over money. So we commit to serving one’s neighbors, like Jesus, but also ready to challenge vile systems of injustice at the macro level and bring about growing impact in communities — no matter what, not matter where – serving like Jesus.

We felt this was not just some cliche, rather a helpful focusing strategy. In the ISUM Summit second keynote address, Ruth Callanta, spoke on “Serving Like Jesus”. Some would have to be forgiven for thinking she was just sharing on how she launched, built, and now continues to run CCT – Center for Community Transformation – a massive microfinance ministry in Manila and across the Philippines, and for thinking further: “What has this got to do with my own work in the slum I awake in every morning?” It actually has everything to do with it, for certainly more than anything, Ruth told us no matter what we do – we must “Serve Like Jesus”. This priority can remain equally true whether we lead organizations with thousands of staff, and multi-million dollar budgets, or if we lead a “kids club” in a slum community.

The how to “serve like Jesus” for Step Ahead Integrated Community Development, includes finding microfinance economic solutions for great-grandmothers and grandchildren in Klong Toey slum community, the largest of its kind in Bangkok with over 100,000 inhabitants. Indeed, having CCT as a mother program and Ruth Callanta and David Bussau as mentors, since 2002, Step Ahead has sought to serve among the urban poor with economic development, mentoring, and training among mostly women and children. Sometimes the work can span a family of four generations like in this example of a very committed Great Grandmother.

This is an incredibly arduous story that began over twenty years ago. “Feung” had a daughter who left home, leaving her own baby daughter, “Naen”, in the
care of her Grandmother Feung. The father, for better or worse, never figured prominently in this story. He was, as the term is used, as though missing days from school, “absent”. The mother, facing the increasing pressures of her life, followed suit. Grandmother Feung over the next two decades heard very little, and received no help from her daughter. Feung fought hard for her granddaughter doing the best she could. Sadly, before Naen turned ten, misfortune multiplied and Feung’s husband died. So, all the care of her granddaughter fell to her alone. Selling her food to order in the markets of Klong Toey slum community was the most certain opportunity she could find. This was all complicated by the local money lender, who would threaten her if she could not pay on time the onerous interest payments (usually over 20% month) for her small working capital loans (less than $50).

After a few more years, Feung's situation came full circle: her grand-daughter gave birth to her own baby girl – “Sofa”. Feung had become a great-grandmother. Clearly, Naen, not yet twenty years old, needed help to raise her daughter, as the help of the father was not to be found. Today, a great-grandmother, and mother look after baby “Sofa” together. Feung, now nearly 70, today continues to sell delicious curries, standing in the gap for the futures of her granddaughter and great granddaughter. Step Ahead’s place was to help with microfinance, prayer, mentoring, and encouragement in the love of God.

Across the community, Urban Neighbors of Hope (UNOH) staff began to grow close to a woman working in Klong Toey selling her delicious fresh food to order. UNOH worker Anji Barker was impressed enough to start cheering for her to start a cooking school, and not just any cooking school: a cooking school for expats and tourist to Thailand. Initially, Poo demurred saying, “I can cook, OK, but I could never teach cooking for tourist and foreigners.” Against all odds, and perhaps against best consultation practice, Anji pressed her that she believed she could do it. She believed in her. The story of Poo’s Helping Hand’s Cooking School that finally became just the brand “Cooking with Poo” is a runaway success story. In Thailand’s tourist industry at one point recently “Cooking with Poo” pulled more interest online for bookings than the Grand Palace tour.

Order Poo’s book online http://www.cookingwithpoo.com/
After the success of the cooking school, Poo published the cookbook *Cooking with Poo* through UNOH Publications which now drives the demand for the school and creates a potentially much greater income stream than is possible in the cooking classes.\(^6\) *Cooking with Poo* is now a Business as Mission (BAM) that is changing more than her families’ life but also employing a handful of helpers who are learning how to do the business as well.

With the success of *Cooking with Poo* behind them, and with Poo’s consultancy, UNOH also last year launched a Cafe/Catering business on the edge of Klong Toey community with a view of training young, inexperienced youth from Klong Toey to run a Thai/Aussie Cafe called: Manjai Cafe. Manjai means confidence in Thai language and that is exactly what this BAM is building with Thai youth, along with steady sales, and a dedicated clientele.

Last year because of growing relationship between Step Ahead and UNOH, it was discovered the two organizations had unwittingly collaborated in supporting an amazing micro-entrepreneur. Living in Klong Toey community for 35 years, Mrs. Vimon Romphum joined as a respected community member client since the beginning of Step Ahead nearly ten years ago. Her first loan, for just under $100 was to sell second hand merchandise and noodles in the community. Later, her son had an idea for a niche market as he had studied Japanese food preparation. He convinced her she could do it, and now she makes and sells a delicious kind of Sushi in several weekly market fairs. Her market is mainly local youth coming out from school and home delivery. Japanese Sushi is actually a new strongly developing cuisine in Thailand today, and the savvy recognition of this market opportunity opened bigger economic doors than she had ever seen before. After nearly ten successful loans mostly for working capital, she generally accessed just over $200 to keep her business moving forward until she no longer found the loans necessary.

![Image of Mrs. Vimon Romphum](image)

### The Taste of Tokyo Comes to Bangkok’s Largest Slum. Mrs. Vimon Romphum, Bangkok Sushi Micro-Entrepreneur

On one visit, the Step Ahead program assistant noted that there was a lot of nice new Sushi menus and marketing around. After asking about the nice advertising, it was found that the good folks at UNOH had essentially become her ad agency and translation service. This kind of unintentional collaboration challenges Step Ahead and UNOH to look for more good ways to serve in Klong Toey together.

6. More BAMs and Organizations Seeking to Serve Like Jesus

A major network that strengthens BAM and grassroots business initiatives is Ten Thousand Villages. Started by an innovative business woman of faith Edna Ruth Byler in 1946. Then in 1962, her business initiative was fully embraced by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MCC works for peace and development around the world and has helped lead the BAM model because they believe its an integral tool for peace building. Ten Thousand Villages is apart of the fair trade movement where artisans receive a fair income. If people receive a living wage they will be less likely to go to war, if needs are met people are at peace. Ten Thousand Villages has today grown to a global network of social entrepreneurs working to empower and provide economic opportunities to artisans in developing countries around the globe with sales in excess of 20 million dollars.

Sari Bari founded by Sarah Lance, opened in 2006 after four years of steady presence and friendships with women in the red light areas of Kolkata, India. The love, solidarity, and desire for freedom born out of these friendships became the foundation of Sari Bari’s work for hope, justice, and freedom.

Sari Bari functions as both a for-profit business a well as a non-profit trust. This kind of hybrid model works very well in social business and is very innovative. The Sari Bari women learn an artisanal trade by recycling old saris into bags, scarves, blankets, and other accessories and profitably selling them. The story of Sari Bari is not just about profit, but about coming into a narrative of how they help build this story of the women who work for them. Therefore, each Sari Bari product is marked with the name of the woman who made it.

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Founded by Annie Dieselberg in 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand, NightLight’s mission is to do “whatever it takes” to affect change within the global sex industry. The local offices build relationships with victims of commercial sexual exploitation and those who are at-risk and provide hope, intervention, rescue, and assistance by offering alternative vocational opportunities, life-skills training, and physical, emotional, and spiritual development to those seeking freedom. NightLight builds support networks internationally to intervene and assist women, men, and children whose lives are negatively impacted by the sex industry.

Nightlight Designs are now sold around the globe.

In Bangkok, Nightlight operates as a business (NightLight Design, Co. Ltd) and a non-profit (NightLight Foundation). In the United States, NightLight operates as a 501c3 with branches in Atlanta, Branson, and Los Angeles.

Hagar was first started in 1994 in Cambodia and in 2009 started branches in Afghanistan and Vietnam. The U.S. state department has named Hagar founder Pierre Tami as “one of the its six international heroes in the struggle against the modern-day slave trade”.

Hagar Catering & Facilities Management Ltd. (HCFM) is a social enterprise with a partnership between Hagar Social Enterprise Group (HSEG) and private investors from international catering businesses. HCFM provides employment opportunities for men and women from Hagar NGO’s shelters and social programs.

Hagar’s mission is to provide high-quality, professional food catering services to companies and organizations operating in Phnom Penh at affordable prices.

HCFM is Cambodia’s largest and most professional food services and facilities management company. They currently produce over 4500 meals daily for the employees of over 13 different companies, hotels and factories. Hagar annual turnover is in excess of $1 million and they currently employ over 135 highly-trained staff.

Hagar currently provide catering services to a number of major international companies and organizations, including Raffles Le Royal, Intercontinental Hotel, and the US Embassy. No other food services company in Cambodia can match their experience, quality, and level or professionalism.9

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ITSERA PURSES are a community economic development that Step Ahead began after the South East Tsunami and developed further in 2009 with training of an at-risk woman’s group making woven leather purses in Pattaya, Thailand. Today, ITSERA (meaning Freedom in Thai language) purses are in development across three provinces in the North East of Thailand, bringing Freedom with Every Bag. (http://stepahead.myshopify.com/products/itsera-hobo)

“Economic Urban Shalom” is not limited to one program, and need not carry any specific branding. It must simply change lives for the better. It does not necessarily mean we are all to take on running microfinance programs, small economic initiatives, or even sizable economic engines of Social Business or Business as Mission. But it will mean that we consider carefully the options available for us, and our teams. Further, it will mean we need to discover who among us is prepared and meant to do serious economic engagement, so that those in our communities have the best opportunities. Or at a minimum, it urges that our teams see how to best network and possibly partner with those around us with a proven track record to serve our networks among the “least of these”.

We who seek “Economic Urban Shalom” look with hope and confidence that while none of us will do everything, and many will certainly not do all a Ruth Callanta has done, all of us are able to network, learn, facilitate, and be a part of discovering the economic solutions that God has for our neighbors to experience growing “Economic Shalom” in their own communities. Before we consider further our own particular place in all this, it is instructive to look back at the last few decades to see what vehicles of service were developed and to consider how they may yet work for us and the urban poor.

7. Davids, Muhammads, and Goliaths

When speaking of solutions to poverty and urban slums, it is all but impossible to do so without looking back to the passionate, visionary, and breakthrough work
in the 1970s of leaders and organizations like Muhammad Yunus and the genesis of The Grameen Bank, David Bussau and the launch of Opportunity International, Accion in Brazil, or John Hatch and his conception of the Village Bank and FINCA.

These unlikely disparate players, while unaware of their similar work, or the cumulative impacts their innovations would bring, had paradigm rocking ideas which surged around the globe: from Bangladesh, to Indonesia, and reaching right across South America to essentially birth the much touted and hoped-in modern microfinance movement. This movement has become a focus of poverty eradication/reduction/alleviation over the last half a century, delivering us to the current shores of “Financial Inclusion”. Over those decades, most informed observers until today, continually evaluated that while microfinance was certainly never a panacea for poverty, urban or rural, it has offered monumental opportunities for massive programs with unparalleled reach and impact in opening economic possibilities to the poor.

Even with significant problems or achievements, depending on one's point of view, of IPOs and mass commercialization, certainly these small loans disbursed by the millions delivered possibilities that no macroeconomic development program with its dams and roads ever hoped to deliver – and without bringing with it inevitable crippling national debt, and the enabling of despots, autocrats, and creation of aid traps. So, even with its most recent problems (some perceived and some real), micro-finance can not be dismissed as inconsequential or finally unneeded. The reality is that the only alternative that shows no sign of disappearance is the local money-lender, one whose only motivation from time immemorial is exorbitant profit.

8. The Macro-Movement of Micro-Finance

According to the Microcredit Summit Campaign, as of December 31, 2011, 3,703 microfinance institutions reported reaching 195,014,970 clients, 124,293,727 of whom were among the poorest when they took their first loan. Of these poorest clients, 82.7%, or 102,749,643, are women. That is massive reach and impact, that only the most jaded can easily dismiss. Meanwhile, another very important fact is not reported in the statistics, yet it is a reality that those working and motivated by God himself can never diminish: that all of these microfinance clients are greatly loved by God himself.

Larry Reed, Chairman of the Microcredit Summit Campaign, would quite agree and hope for our global and local, wise and inspired, and humble and love-motivated inputs with all these micro-entrepreneurs. Larry was once the President of Opportunity International the largest Christian microfinance organization in the world. Perhaps standing with millions of micro-finance clients across the globe is actually a huge opportunity to work together with the working poor: making hundreds of millions of non-financial, mentoring and training inputs humbly in the love of God.

Also during the 1970s and 1980s, another important group of leaders and organizations keenly focused on solutions to poverty, but didn’t fit into a tight economic development solution matrix. Dr. Ron Sider of Eastern University, quietly shook the church in 1978 with Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. This book was a challenge to responsibility that had never really been articulated so clearly before. For example, he argued that while some urban missionaries, such as Vinay and Colleen Samuel and David and Carol Bussau felt called to live and minister among the poor, almost all of us can afford to fund a $500 microloan. Essentially, Dr. Sider challenged that all Christians should take an important part in fighting global poverty and displaying a witness in the process.10

In 1982, John Perkins challenged the church again in his book With Justice For All looking at church planting among the poor in the USA.11 A few years later in 1984, Viv Grigg’s Companion to the Poor would next look at the crushing needs in the slums around the globe and deliver a radical and strategic call for communities to live among the poor as servants delivering God’s love to their neighbors.12

These works set the stage for Bryant Myers, now Professor of Transformational Development at Fuller Theological Seminary and bringing over 30 years of senior leadership with World Vision International to write Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practice of Transformational Development published in 1999.13 Today, it remains a seminal work for all those who care deeply about the solutions to poverty, not least of which over 40,000 World Vision staff.

Further, as an important side issue, World Vision and other mega-sized Christian non-profit organizations can simply not be ignored when the questions continue to arise: how should we work with such massively large organizations that have annual budgets in excess of a billion dollars. Perhaps, there is no clear answer but we would be amiss not to acknowledge the importance of this new phenomenon. Certainly, engagement within these organizations as holding tanks of vast amounts of goodwill, wisdom, understanding, (not to mention funds) must register as a significant opportunity for collaboration. Again, Bryant Myers as one of the builders and makers of World Vision today, is an example of a good friend in the world of people caring deeply about Urban Shalom. Furthermore Jayakumar Christian, a global leading voice in terms of serving in the urban slums of the world, is National Director at World Vision India.14 Therefore, we

must choose to all stand together, whether we come from the world’s largest organizations or some of the smallest.

All these people and organizations have tilled the soil where today’s new innovative thinkers, activists, and ministers such as Ash Barker and Urban Neighbors of Hope (UNOH) from Bangkok and Shane Claiborne of The Simple Way in Philadelphia now pave the way. Perhaps hundreds of groups like them and hundreds of thousands of workers will continue to serve in global fields of fruitful ministry, writing, praying, loving and calling forward more radicals to follow Christ’s call into the largest and most congested slums the world has ever seen.

10. If We Are One, What’s this Wall About?

It seems many of us who are united and committed to being the hands and feet of Jesus are somehow falling on two sides of a dividing wall. On the one side, there are those who hope for God to fill economic development engines with the fuel of promise and thereby open opportunities among the poor that can remain so elusive. Be it by micro-enterprise development or other economic development programs, or Business as Mission (BAM), and Social Business that generally demand significant funding and management inputs from outside players would make up and fall on one side as they seek to bring significantly large economic impacts with and among the poor.

On the other side, camped deep in urban slums there are neighbors, or pilgrims, whose call brings them into the closest relationship possible with the poor. Some essentially follow St. Francis’ call and example today, whether or not they actually take his vows and don his robe under the auspices of the Franciscan order in Roman Catholic church, they are simple friars with various orders and vows of their own. It is this kind of simple life and “with-ness” that defines the work and commitment to Christ and the “least of these” that these servants demonstrate daily. Sometimes, unfortunately, this call and commitment can seemingly bring disdain for the possible economic tools and infrastructure that could actually really help.

The question begged is: can each side be fully performing the commands and work of Christ with the poor, or has one somehow actually got it right, while the other is essentially missing something. Or even, could it be that each one working diligently on their side of the wall is unaware of the strength available if we worked together and tore down the walls. Perhaps, the hearts of Shane Claiborne, founder of The Simple Way in inner city Philadelphia, and Peter Greer, CEO of Hope International who has Ruth Callanta’s Center for Community Transformation – CCT (a ISUM Summit keynote speaker) as a partner are, indeed, of one heart. Look at how CNN recently posed them as Capitalist and Communist and queried them as to which of them could properly claim Jesus for it’s leader.15

Obviously, Shane and Peter do care for each other as brothers in Christ, indeed, knowing that the other shares the highest commitments to serving “the least of these” and Jesus. But, what of the broad gulf that seems clearly to divide them? Can one discover how to get a “strategic screen shot” of all the strengths that the other possesses, while also holding to their own personal priorities, callings and strategies?

Can the players like David Bussau, Peter Greer, and Ruth Callanta, and their organizations mobilize and serve with hoards of “New Friars” or “Neighbors” moving in to live and love like Jesus in the poorest slum communities of the world and even serve as their partners in economic good?

Can the grassroots movements of committed incarnational workers understand and accept the possible role of microfinance friendly advocates who stand for the clients of MF organizations - along with the employed MF loan officers?

Can they cheer for one another, pray for one another, help one another serve with the poor in the special way they have been called? Then, they can conceivably pray together for but working against the local moneylender with their loan interest that “stings like a scorpion”.16

If they could, then perhaps the troops in each camp can see we are all really on the same side in this war against poverty, and against Satan himself, who desires only to kill and destroy. If they can, then there is opportunity to dramatically display John 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” and pursue “Urban Economic Shalom” together.

11. The Three Ps of Micro-finance Could Help: Provision, Promotion, or Partnership.

This can happen, if those who provide, or promote microfinance, or partner with major Microfinance players (a concept first put forward by Dr. Russ Mask and David Bussau in Christian Microenterprise Development17) can see each other as members of the same team with roles as different as Strikers and Goalies on the football pitch, or Guards and Centers on a basketball court. Certainly, urban poverty is no game, but God has plans that can use the various strategic gifts of MBAs and the writing of major programs requiring funding proposals, as well as and informed by time spent one on one just being with neighbors in the most daunting of circumstances in their slum communities.

Paul recognized the contributions of different team members: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function” (Rom 12:4). In a liberal rewrite on this passage, we might say,

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“Just as not every member is meant to start an inner city MF program in Philly or the Phillipines, not all are called to live and work in an urban slum.” We might agree to disagree on some of this, but we can certainly stand together as one family. With wildly varying roles, we commit to love one another, and those who are different to us, whether rich or poor. Finally, we might look together to help those who are our poor neighbors in the majority world connect to financial possibilities that they might not have discovered otherwise.

12. International Development Economics: Development or Devastation?

The Christian world has struggled to address the call and priority of over a billion people now living in urban slums. The development sphere has also wrestled with the same realities from a wide continuum of views ranging from Jeffrey Sachs to William Easterly. Sachs is a major force in promoting the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and writer of The End of Poverty in which he recommends “clinical economics” and “differential diagnosis” with a top down approach to heal the ailing patient. Easterly comes from the other end of the spectrum, in The White Man’s Burden which focuses on his views of how foreign aid has through the decades often actually brought more problems than solutions.

Dambisa Moyo who penned, Dead Aid “describes the state of postwar development policy in Africa today and unflinchingly confronts one of the greatest myths of our time: that billions of dollars in aid sent from wealthy countries to developing African nations has helped to reduce poverty and increase growth.” Finally, Paul Collier from Oxford, weighs in rather squarely in the middle between the two extremes with The Bottom Billion where he looks at a rasher of “development traps” that tend to cause an ongoing downward spiral for the world’s poorest. Who is right, who is wrong, and just how they add or actually confuse the whole discussion is up to your study and decision. In International Development and Politics, we don’t get a vote, except for our reasoned commitments and informed actions.

13. Muhammad Yunus – Equation Changer Extraordinaire

During the mid-seventies, entered an academician turned activist, microbanker, and finally turned global tour de force. Muhammad Yunus: founder of the Grameen Bank and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, presses on to

18 Jeffrey Sachs, _The End of Poverty: How Can We Make it in our Lifetime_ (New York: Penguin Press, 2005)
19 William Easterly, _The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
20 Moyo, Dambisa. _Dead Aid_ (New York: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010).
21 Paul Collier, _The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It_ (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2007)
the cheers and undaunted through the jeers. The Bangladesh government put Yunus out of leadership of Grameen Bank in moves that are mostly understood to be in the machinations of politics, power struggles, and national jealousies.

Meanwhile, Grameen has launched cell phone companies to deliver impact among the working poor of Bangladesh, as well as forging a collaboration with Dannon – the yogurt giant – to bring better nutrition and hugely increased opportunities too. In 1997, Grameen launched Grameenphone as a joint venture with Telenor (55.8%), the largest telecommunications provider in Norway boasting mobile phone operations in 12 other countries, and Grameen Telecom Corporation (34.2%), a non-profit organization of Bangladesh. The remainder of 10% of the shares belong to general retail and institutional investors.22

As of March 31, 2012, Grameenphone had a market share in Bangladesh of 42%. Further, more than simply delivery of massive telecom service they have constantly shown innovative prowess that has served markets across Bangladeshi society. Primary among this lineup of social enterprise success is Healthline, a 24 hour medical call center with licensed physicians. Moreover Studyline is a call center-based service that provides education related consultation. Added to the lineup is Mobicash, for electronic purchase of train and lottery tickets, plus Billpay for paying utility bills through mobile phones, and some 500 local centers across Bangladesh that deliver affordable Internet access and other information based services to people in remote rural villages.23

Turning out more books than anyone on the burgeoning subject, Creating a World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism in 2009, and then Building Social Business: The New Kind of Capitalism that Serves Humanity’s Most Pressing Needs in 2011 Yunus now stands not only as the most well known innovator in the world of microfinance, and author of Banker to the Poor, but also as the leading Social Business Guru. No other globally respected figure wields the requisite clout to see the major corporate and non-profit organization collaborations required to bring massive impact, employment, and profits that can hope to recharge and restore severely ailing economies.

Actually, Professor Yunus in Building Social Business envisions a whole new economic reality dawning as he posits:

“The wonderful promise of social business makes it all the more important that we redefine and broaden our present economic framework. We need a new way of thinking that is not prone to creating a series of crises; instead it should be able to end the crises once and for


The first piece of this new framework must be to accommodate social business as an integral part of the economic structure."24

These breakthrough developments should encourage the entire Christian development world, including New Friar types, BAM operators, and MF players. The major question really is how can we engage this movement in the most efficient and effective way that will help us in our work in urban slum communities?

14. What Next? Try the Lord’s Prayer, and the 23rd Psalm

The Christian development worker is wise to be aware of all these factors and issues, understanding that while all the learnings amassed from research and study are important for us to be able to use and have in our toolkits, and to help inform our actions, yet knowing the bedrock reality that personal relationship with the poor motivated by the love of Christ himself will always remain the core strength to any of our work. But, could it be that working in a urban community serving alongside a BAM company in China, Turkey, or Northern Africa, or in a slum community collaborating with a major microfinance provider network like Opportunity International or Hope International might not be one way to see His kingdom come on earth.

This is not to say the Christian development worker has no place in study, research, writing, and business, but simply that we do all knowing that the answers and ultimately hope do not lie in our excellence of thought, research, analysis, or marketing, but in God’s love.

Finally, “God is our peace”, as well as the hope for Shalom among the urban poor. God is the only one who can lead us into all truth, as we seek to make personal, organizational, and business decisions in regard to our own work in discovering the “how” for us in doing the Lord’s Prayer: in action, in love, and obedience for our part in building not our kingdoms, but His and Urban Economic Shalom.

Shall we pray?

Lord may your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Lord, we know there is no poverty or exploitation in heaven. Help us then discover fulfilling, creative work that will bring provision, joy, and increase of daily bread.

Lord, make us ready to serve one another, forgiving one another as you have forgiven us. May we be delivered from the temptation to exploit our sisters and brothers, rather to love one another as you have loved us, displaying the glory of your character and the power of your love. Amen.

And may we walk in the way of Psalms 23 through the alleys of the world’s largest slums:

If the Lord is our shepherd, God can lead us into the lush green pastures that will bring rich rewards and blessing to all that are found there. God can establish and show us how to build supply chains that will mean green pastures of provision can be made for multiplied millions with profits that will bestow blessings and restoration to all engaged. We will not fear drug dealers, moneylenders, or gang leaders— for you are with us. May you be with each family, widow, and orphaned child. We commit Lord to walk in your ways, so that your mercy and goodness will follow us into every corner of the poorest urban slums of the world. Making all those places your dwelling place: places of shalom. Amen.