

Guideposts for Giving

Principles that help the giver avoid unwanted dependency as a result of giving.

—Glenn Schwartz

For the past several decades I have been concentrating on issues of dependency and self-reliance among mission-established institutions. Without a doubt, the most-often-asked question has been, “But what should Westerners do with all the money they have?” In this article I shall try to point to principles of giving to avoid or overcome the problem of dependency. Some readers will be disappointed, because a simple list of do’s and don’ts is easier to follow. The problem with being specific is the numerous cultural (and other) factors involved create an environment where a suggestion that fits in one place may not fit in another. Hence, the need for learning principles.

1. Don’t confuse our need to give with someone else’s need to receive.

The first principle is to recognize that there are two different factors related to giving and receiving. One relates to the person who is in need. The other is the need for the giver to give. Mission-established churches frequently have problems rooted in insufficient giving in their local congregation. Many are very capable of paying local operating expenses and funding their own missionary outreach, but remain dependent on outsiders. They could easily support themselves if they decided to do so.

Secondly, wealth has left many in the West with more than they need to live on—and they are searching for meaningful ways to do their giving. This problem is a very different problem from the first. The excess of the wealthy church is not *necessarily* the solution to the needs of the dependent church. In fact, it may be that the problems of the dependent church were caused by well-meaning people from the wealthy church in the first place. If a church is dependent on outsiders when it could support itself, then no amount of outside funding will correct that problem. This is a hard message for many in wealthy churches, because, particularly in the Western world, we use money to solve problems. We need to recognize that sometimes the way we use money creates problems rather than solving them.

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2. Recognize two kinds of need.

A second principle is to acknowledge that not all dependent people or churches are in need of outside assistance. One could have assumed that the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8 were needy people. The Apostle Paul described them as being in “severe trial and extreme poverty.” I would call that needy. But the Apostle Paul said that they begged for the privilege of giving. If he had collected funds elsewhere and taken them to the Macedonians, he would have deprived them of the privilege of giving—something for which they were pleading (v.4).

This is not to say that there are not legitimate needs in our world. There are the poor, the hungry, prisoners, widows and orphans. Jesus commanded us to help them. However, we must use discernment so that the help that is given—often from afar—does not replace what could be given by those close by (see “Geographical Proximity,” p. 22).

3. Examine the attitude behind the need to give.

We will never overcome the dependency syndrome if we do not deal with the issue of paternalism in the Christian movement. Many people in Western cultures are geared to dividing people into the *haves* and the *have-nots*. People are often considered to be needy if they do not have as much as we do. Some time ago I learned about a place in Northern Mexico where well-meaning Americans were building a house for a woman and her children who lived in a shanty nearby. She was asked how she felt about the new house she was getting. Her response was that the idea for the new house came from the people who were building it. “After they are gone, I will most likely sell it and return to the place I lived before,” she said.

Westerners need to learn to appropriately evaluate the needs of those they are trying to help as they give of their discretionary money. Otherwise, we might unwittingly promote the same materialism we ought to fight against in our own society, promoting an interest in goods at the expense of the Gospel. It is the Gospel that changes the way people live and their quality of life more than the goods or funding they receive.

4. Choose to invest in things which avoid or resolve dependency.

Westerners who want to help others rise above poverty should consider investing to improve two particular areas: *infrastructures* which are inadequate, and *mentalties* which enslave. Admittedly, investing in this way is a tall order. However, unless these two are dealt with, those in need could be left worse off than before the outside help arrived.

Many countries with, for example, a natural disaster or a food shortage find that only parts of the country are in need. When Hurricane Mitch hit Central America, one part of Nicaragua was affected, but the other was not. It was the privilege of one part of the country to assist those in need in the other. When a food shortage hit in Zambia in 1984, it was during a year when the country as a whole grew more food than it needed. However, the Southern Province was in great need. Well-meaning people from the outside helped the Zambian government to import overseas grain for the Southern Province. At the same time, people in the Northern and Eastern Provinces had grain they could not sell. Anyone who wanted to help appropriately would have helped with storage and transport, not importation. That would have been paying attention to infrastructure.

A second component of this principle is to address the mentality of those in need. If this is done, real needs, not just felt needs or needs perceived by first-time visitors, will be met. Any Westerner who wants to help a country like Haiti will recognize that outside money does not change the mentality of dependency. If outside money was the key, Haiti would be a shining example of prosperity. Good reports are coming out of Haiti in some circles today because the root causes of dependency are being dealt with. Anyone who truly wants to help will invest in changing the dependency mentality, not continuing to perpetuate it.

5. Invest in development, not only relief.

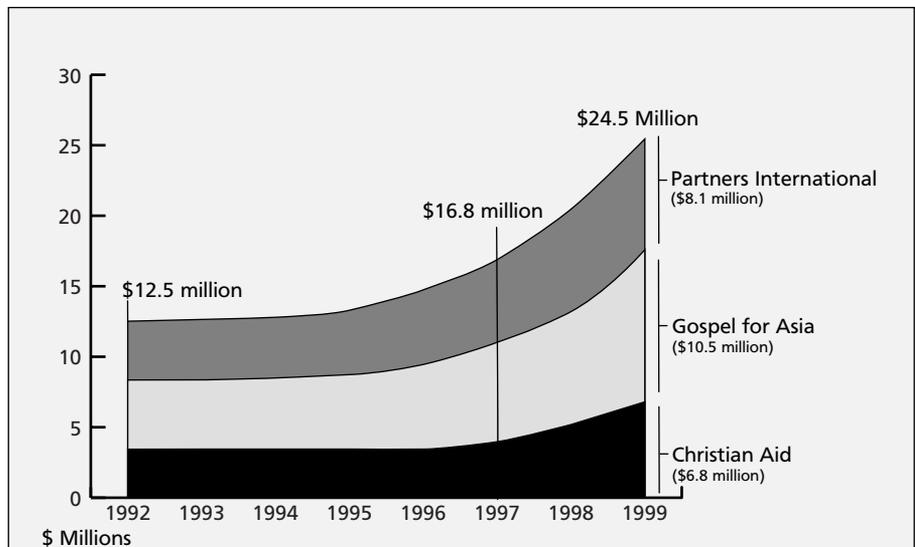
It has often been said that teaching someone to fish is more effective than giving them a fish. (One problem I have with that statement is that it continues to perpetuate the image of outsiders as teachers when sometimes it would

be good if outsiders could become good listeners or learners.) The challenge is to get those who need help to see that they often have what they need to improve their standard of living in arm's reach, including health care and education. Westerners who truly want to help will become removers of roadblocks, rather than only providers of goods and services.

6. Learn what kind of help hinders the process.

It is important for all who want to help to look at the long-term consequences of how we try to help. We should ask ourselves whether the thing we are doing is the best kind of help in the long run. Think of a wealthy person who is asked to advise a struggling congregation in North America. He might conclude that the congregation is poor and that he could solve all their problems if he simply set up an endowment from his own resources for that congregation. The rest of the congregation may then sense they're "off the hook" for giving tithes and offerings. Many who try to help mission-established churches

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Funding the Nationals

Ministry income of the leading North American organizations that focus on funding nationals.

Figures adjusted to year 2000 dollars.

Since 1992, funding of nationals in just three organizations has more than doubled, with the most aggressive growth in the last four years.

Source: *Mission Handbook*, U.S. and Canadian Christian Ministries Overseas, Monrovia, MARC, 1993; Monrovia, MARC, 1997; Wheaton, EMIS, 2000.

represent the long-term endowment which does not lead to the healthy development of local income sources.

7. Quick and easy answers may do more harm than good.

Many people who ask what to do with the excess in Western churches are looking for a quick reference list of things to support and things not to support. They resent the time it would take to learn the principles of appropriate giving. What is the alternative? I suggest that those interested in giving learn about what causes dependency. An understanding of the positive and negative effects of how to give assistance will mean dealing with thousands of challenges which arise. Any list of approved things will soon run out—and new things will arise for which there are no fast-and-easy answers.

8. Widows, orphans, prisoners, refugees, and those who suffer natural disasters deserve help.

As pointed out in the “Geographical Proximity” article below, I am suggesting that the best help in cases such as these is the nearest help so that the blessing goes to those nearby. It may take more effort, creativity, time and energy to locate and mobilize local resources, but it could well be the most effective and long-lasting help. Even widows, orphans and refugees have dignity which ought to be preserved. Mobilizing resources near to them, however sparse they appear to outsiders, is one way to help preserve dignity.

9. Never do for others what they can and should do for themselves.

Dependency results when people are given the impression that they are too needy to help themselves. This happens when an individual feels what they have is too small a gift to offer to God. Large outside gifts for their church building, Bible institute or a vehicle may make them feel too poor to give to God from their own resources. A good example is not to build a church building for those who already live in adequate houses. Remember that people can have a church equal to the houses they live in. Those who build a church for such local people are taking away a privilege that belongs to them.

10. Don't settle for giving money when God is asking for people.

We live in a day when it is easier to give money than to give ourselves, our children or other relatives into Christian service. If God wants us, then no amount of money will be a substitute.

11. Evaluate where the money comes from that you feel compelled to give away.

Be sure that the excess spendable income that you are giving away was earned legitimately. If someone else was not given a fair price for their goods and services and you end up with more than you need, you should not feel justified by simply giving it away. For example, laborers

The Principle of Geographical Proximity

—Glenn Schwartz

Recently I was pleased to hear that a church in Zambia collected a planeload of relief supplies to send to southern Sudan. When the Rwandan refugee crisis occurred several years ago, churches in South Africa collected goods to be sent to Rwandan refugees.

These were regional resources being mobilized for other regions of the continent of Africa. Using this principle, the ideal is for local needs to be met with local resources (see the graph on the following page). Needs and resources range from individuals, to

nuclear families, to extended families all the way up to global resources. First of all, individuals in a family should help themselves and other individuals in their own family.

Beyond that, extended families are a God-given resource for their own members. Communities can help members of their own community or other communities. If there is a problem in one province of a nation, another province within the nation can help. In that way one part of the nation helps another.

If a nation in one region

of a continent needs help, perhaps another nation in the same region can be called upon. Regions of a continent can help other regions in need, as in my illustrations above. When all other sources close at hand have been tapped, then global resources can be called upon to help meet the needs.

The problem occurs when global resources are used first to help meet local needs. This sometimes occurs even when there are local, national or regional resources available that could be used. When we do that, we run the risk of

destroying local initiative and setting the stage for long-term dependency.

When local resources are used to meet local needs, the blessing derived from helping stays in the local area. When one part of the nation helps other parts of the nation, the blessing stays within the nation.

Likewise, when one region helps another, the blessing stays within the region. But consider what happens when *global* resources are used to meet *local* needs. The blessing goes to the people on the global scene who get a good feeling from

in many other countries would rather have a fair price for their goods and services than a charitable handout from people with whom they do business.

12. Don't become afraid to help those in need.

Be careful not to become so cautious about doing the wrong thing that you end up paralyzed and afraid to help anyone. I often fear that people will listen to what we are saying about the dangers of dependency and end up doing nothing—thereby keeping for themselves what should be given for God's Kingdom. Jesus commanded us to help the poor. The question is how to help in a way that does not leave people less able to help themselves than before outside help arrived. If we destroy the initiative to give, that is just what happens.

Conclusion

Perhaps the above-listed principles provide shed some light on why it's difficult to provide a list of approved or disapproved projects. Without sound principles of giving, it is very easy to go wrong. Once the principles are in place, it could well be that in one place outside assistance is essential, while in another the same kind of help could have negative long-term consequences. How does one know the difference? Only by learning how to analyze the difference between felt needs and real needs as well as the long-term effects of outside assistance.

I learned recently about a rock singer, Bono of the band U2, who has been spearheading a drive for debt relief on behalf of non-Western nations. He has become so conversant with the issues that he is warmly welcomed by both sides of the aisle in Congress every time he goes to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Without approving or disapproving what he is saying about debt relief, if such a person can spend enough time learning about the issues that he gains the respect of politicians at the highest levels of government, why can't those of us seeking to do missions and development not also become thoroughly conversant with the issues? Well-meaning people who are ignorant of the issues are often behind the creation of dependency.

There are many reasons to be encouraged about overcoming dependency. Many mission-established churches are discovering the joy of standing on their own two feet. Hopefully, those from wealthy churches in North America, Europe, Korea and elsewhere will learn how to help without creating or perpetuating long-term dependency. 🌐

1. "The New Guinea Bible Church," presented at the Philadelphia Consultation, November 1999. Available on the WMA web site: <www.wmausa.org>
2. World Mission Associates, 825 Darby Lane, Lancaster, PA 17601-2009 USA
3. The WMA video series entitled "Dependency Among Mission Established Institutions: Exploring the Issues" is available in video format as well as audio cassette and audio CD-ROM.

giving. Unfortunately that good feeling just may be at the expense of those on the local scene who might have been able to give if they were asked.

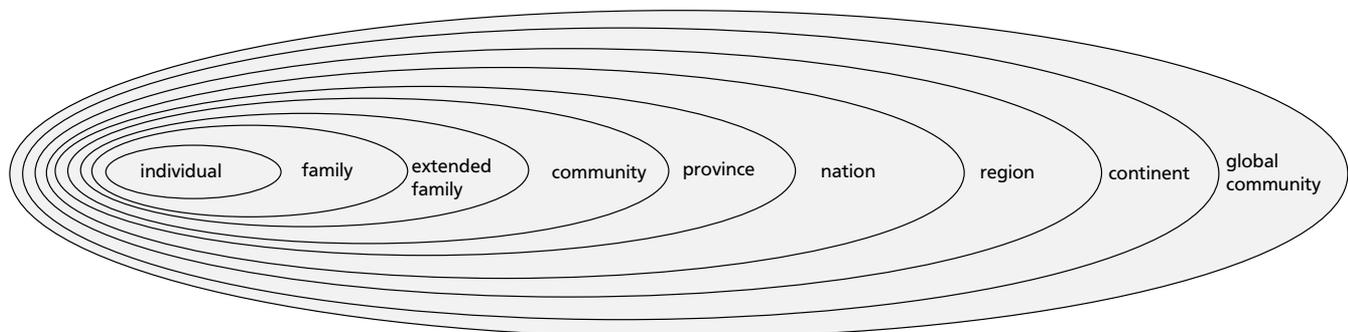
There are clearly cases when global resources will need to be given. But care should be taken so that such giving does not replace resources closer at hand—

and that any help does not create long-term dependency. Knowing when global resources should be given is one more important reason to become familiar with sound

principles that avoid dependency. These principles of giving to avoid dependency are as important at the lower levels of this chart as at the higher levels. 🌐

Whose Need to Meet?

Giving deference to regional structures in our aid



The ideal is for local needs to be met with local resources. Beyond that, special care should be given, lest the global community over-step and thus weaken the intermediate societal structures. Those people, often, yearn for the opportunity to help.