

LOVE IN ACTION: BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO THOSE WE SERVE

Aimee Nott

A community tends to their crops in Manhokwe, Malawi

ALL WE CAN'S COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, AIMEE NOTT, EXPLORES HOW SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL GO HAND IN HAND.

Love. Collaboration. Integrity.

These three values are at the heart of All We Can - guiding principles which underpin all that we do, and imbue all aspects of our work. It might seem odd for a charity to list 'love' as one of its core values. After all, in modern culture the word can conjure up images which feel characterless and banal at best - love hearts, stuffed teddy bears, Valentine's Day cards. To some, the word 'love' can seem so closely linked to romantic notions that it may be perceived as an inappropriate value for a charity.

But all this misses the core of what 'love' truly is. It misses the unflinching, unwavering, unshakeable love that God, in Jesus Christ, first showed to each and every one of us. It misses the relentlessness of love: its grit, its determination and its resilience. The kind of love which compels us into a meaningful relationship with one another - which drives our actions - and is the very oxygen of the All We Can movement. We seek to express this love in all that we do - from our relationships with local partners across the globe, to our interactions with each other as staff members.

The love which All We Can seeks to embody is born out of the Good News of the gospel. We exist to serve those living in some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised communities - and as a charity rooted in the Methodist Church, we are called to bear witness to this love. The place where these two intersect is how All We Can seeks to bring the Good News of the gospel to those we serve.

This thinking takes many of its cues from 'integral mission'. The Lausanne Movement defines integral mission as "the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ" and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility in bringing Christ's peace to the poor and oppressed. It recognises both evangelism and social responsibility as essential, central aspects of the Good News, wholly indivisible from one another. The term originated in revolutionary 1970s Latin America, but simply names a much older understanding of the gospel rooted in scripture and the life of Jesus.

The Ecuadorian theologian René Padilla, often considered the 'father' of integral mission, compared evangelism and social responsibility to the two wings of a plane - both equally important, and both essential if passengers are to arrive at their destination. When we bear practical witness to the gospel, by embodying the call of Micah 6:8 - doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly - our work can have profound evangelistic

consequences, by demonstrating the love of Christ in action.

This isn't about forcing people to convert to Christianity - it is about meeting people where they are, and seeking to see their potential fulfilled. We embody the love and teachings of Jesus by putting the marginalised at the centre of our work, just as he did. We take seriously the command to love our neighbours - wherever they might live. The communities through which All We Can works are without a doubt some of the most under-served in the world. From disabled children in Ethiopia, to farmers reckoning with the climate crisis in Zimbabwe, to teenage mothers without education in Malawi - we work in challenging contexts, where physical needs are often unmet, and communities grapple regularly with hunger and extreme poverty.

In the face of these challenges, All We Can works with talented local partners from across the globe. Our calling is to see a world where every person's God-given potential is fulfilled; where each and every one of us can know life in all its fullness, and make the most of the gifts and opportunities with which they are blessed. We work with local partners who share this passion. Each of these local partners are deeply embedded within their communities. They know intimately the issues with which those they serve are faced, and are committed to walking alongside the most vulnerable in order to reach community driven solutions to these issues. All We Can is committed

to doing what Jesus did: to working with and serving people regardless of their race, religion and gender, and to meeting them and their need in a kind and servant-hearted way. Our local partners share this vision, and are from a variety of different backgrounds. In many contexts this work is driven by church based Christian partners.

EAGLES, a local partner with which All We Can works in Malawi, are one such partner. They are the outworking of the evangelical faith of the Living Waters Church denomination, Malawi. EAGLES serve communities through hundreds of local Living Waters churches, with work spanning a range of critical issues - including food security, livelihood development, caring for elderly community members, and working to protect the environment. Founded by Living Waters Church in Malawi, following a devastating food crisis in 2002, their work is driven by an understanding that sharing the Good News, without taking into account the needs of a community, is a fruitless endeavor. To put it simply - their work is faith in practice.

During a recent conversation, Victor, EAGLES' Director, explained: 'what does faith mean, if it is not relevant to people in need? If we turn a blind eye, what is the meaning of our faith?' There are several key passages of scripture which guide EAGLES' work - none more so than Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners

The Good News referenced in Isaiah is not just the promise of salvation; it is the meeting of physical needs, here on this earth. It is life-giving freedom. It is social justice. It brings with it the hope of joy, opportunity, and potential fulfilled.

But how does this inform the day to day work of our local partners on the ground? Guided by love, and their vision for the local church in every district of Malawi to work with their communities to bring change for those most in need, EAGLES train and support churches so that they in turn can help hundreds of communities. Through their 'church envisioning' process, churches of all denominations



Thilizi and her grandmother sift beans in Mchacha, Malawi

are taught about their important and influential position within communities. With a keen focus on scripture, churches grapple with their own identity, and examine the gifts, talents and skills they have at their disposal. They are asked the all-important question - what do you have to share with your community? Just as Jesus fed the 5000 by sharing what the crowd already possessed, so too can churches bring about remarkable transformation, by utilising the assets they already have.

The resulting impact is remarkable. For example, in each of the communities where EAGLES is working in Malawi, churches are sharing the Good News with the most vulnerable not only within their walls - but by bearing practical witness to it, and developing community driven solutions to local issues. The breadth of solutions devised is quite incredible. After EAGLES' intervention, churches have been known to set up HIV/Aids support groups in their region; organise savings and loans schemes for vulnerable villagers; provide school fees for children whose families are unable to afford their education; organise community based childcare; work together with local authorities to construct roads to otherwise impassable areas; provide support to those in prison and hospitals... the list goes on. All We Can supports EAGLES in their community and church mobilisation work, enabling them to train church leaders as community change agents. All We Can also helps EAGLES to strengthen and develop themselves as an organisation, so that the life-changing work they do with local churches can continue to transform the lives of those most in need.

EAGLES are just one example of how All We Can's local partners embody integral mission in order to share the Good News. Our commitment to sharing the Good News in this way permeates all aspects of our work - from our long term

development work with local partners like EAGLES, to our 'Church CAN' initiative with the Global Relationships team of the Methodist Church (which strengthens the capacity of churches across the globe to improve their effectiveness as agents of change in their own contexts) - to our work with churches and organisations in the UK who share our commitment to seeing every person's potential fulfilled.

We see God moving in phenomenal ways throughout our work at All We Can. From the outpouring of generosity for our Emergency Coronavirus Appeal, which has impacted the lives of more than 194,000 people (and counting!), to the incredible number of people drawn together in joy and worship through online events such as The Big Church Sing, there are myriad ways in which we can see the Holy Spirit moving. When we allow ourselves to be used by God in service of the most vulnerable, evangelism and social justice join hands to achieve astonishing ends.

At the core of the Good News is Christ's unshakeable, steadfast love for each and every one of us. With service to the most vulnerable and marginalised at the heart of All We Can's work, integral mission offers a framework through which to put this into action. It goes without saying that the gospel is good news for us all. But if practical love for our neighbours and care for their physical needs is removed from our understanding of the gospel - then as Jimmy Likagwa, EAGLES' Church Mobilisation Coordinator said: 'that is no longer Good News. That is something else.'

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