

6 *The stewardship challenge: management and funding:* Since media production and distribution are expensive, how can financial support be obtained, and how can production and distribution be managed in an efficient and business-like manner?

- What is worth it? Factors and formulas for directing limited resources
- International monetary policy and how it affects Gospel outreach
- US support and local support: what proportion is best?
- A business model for supporting media ventures in world missions

Ugis Sildegs wrote:

Counting all costs and serious stewardship planning is necessary before any media undertaking. From a strict business perspective it is hard to imagine how such a media mission can be profitable, unless one is involved in some kind of "theology of glory," where health, wealth and a worldly success enterprise is substituted for the Gospel. Whichever way you wish to look at it, the Gospel mission always is "a holy waste" which, God willing, will bring some good fruits for eternity.

Professional media production for TV, radio and printed media can be quite expensive and, before starting such a demanding project, it is important to think through whether in fact it will be worth the human and all other resources which are necessary to expend.

The Internet, on the other hand, has become a quite cheap medium and web projects can be started now almost by anyone who has Internet available and some basic skills. Even making a simple audio or video message doesn't cost too much. So in that regard it is better to start activities on the Internet and acquire some skills and experience, before spending bigger money on more advanced projects. If anything goes wrong, it is better and cheaper to fail on the Internet.

We were privileged. The support for our newspaper was provided by the mission organization *Thoughts of Faith* and the *Schwan Foundation*. Since our congregations were still young and relatively small, they were able to support only their pastors, and then only partially. Thus, thanks to the overseas support and stipend, our pastors were put in a very

favorable situation, being able to do mission both inside (congregation) and outside (newspaper).

In our newspaper production and distribution we combined both business and mission principles. Our paper sold for about 1 dollar which was a reasonable price. But there were also places like an army base, a prison, homes for the elderly, and hospitals where we gave away free copies (of left over older papers). In many ways we had to learn about the newspaper business from "the children of this world who in their generation are wiser," at the same time keeping our distinct Christian identity and putting our mission objectives first.

We attempted to raise funds for *Latvian Lutheran* also from our own members who for the most part loved the paper but unfortunately didn't help much financially. There were both objective and subjective reasons for that. Objectively, there were still many poor people who struggled to make ends meet. Subjectively, there was also a sort of human prejudice which implied: "You receive support from rich Americans. Why do you ask something from us, poor Latvians?!"

Questions:

Since media outreach most often is not the first priority in Church and such projects can be funded only from some surplus which congregations rarely have, usually it will be up to media enthusiasts to be the driving force. What are the best ways to encourage them? How can we make individual projects into a common mission?

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Terry Schultz wrote:

Good stewardship of scarce funds often means trying to reach a large number of lost souls with each media project. I have suggested picture books and videos that feature real-life situations of the target audience. I have seen our Amazon brothers take great interest in seeing drawings depicting their daily lives and traditional beliefs. Villagers would be captivated seeing for the first time their lives portrayed on a big screen.

One may need to somewhat generalize the real-life stories portrayed in books and videos in order to reach across as large a population as possible. For example, Vodou adherents on the north coast of Haiti believe and practice Vodou differently than adherents in central Haiti. Yet there are many common core beliefs.

Evangelism books and videos for Haiti based on real-life situations would need to be detailed enough to be authentic yet general enough to be applicable throughout the country.

Questions of video production quality need to be analyzed. How sophisticated a product do we insist upon? An amateur magician can dazzle an audience with parlor tricks and sleight of hand, while some people prefer a glitzy Vegas-level stage production. However, if you rarely have access to any performance, even a simple presentation is welcome! A field study of the audience response to a low-budget evangelism film could provide a valid test. Remember, in remote areas especially, an evangelism film will invariably be the “only show in town” that night, perhaps the only special event in weeks or more.

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Paul Hartman and Gonzalo Delgadillo wrote:

We at MLP agree with the need to evaluate the usefulness of publications and related initiatives. We hope to begin a program at Wisconsin Lutheran College that employs business administration students working under the supervision of a professor to give quantified answers to three questions about various publications in various fields: 1) Are publications

sent to (or produced in fields) actually gotten into the hands of the intended readers/users? 2) Are the publications actually used by the intended population? 3) Does the use of the publications show evidence of spiritual growth? A particular publication of MLP (done in association with WELS Prison Ministry), the *Bible Teachings Series*, is well-suited to provide the information needed to answer those questions, since the series asks users to take a final test upon the completion of a book.

Another way in which students might help MLP evaluate its work is to determine what portion of its budget is used for production.

WELS World Missions puts strong emphasis on national churches becoming self-propagating, self-administrating, self-supporting and self-disciplining. The world mission effort has increasingly put its support for national churches in the areas of worker-training and publications, while it encourages national churches to conduct its own outreach and discipling ministries, administer its own affairs and support its national ministries.

Publishing has been an expensive proposition, even though publishing does generally increase the number of people evangelized and discipled. The sales of many items does not seem consistent with outreach and discipling at the beginning level; and the capturing of sales income in foreign countries in any case is frequently more expensive than the funds received. Nevertheless, placing a value on publications is as important in foreign cultures as it is in the United States; items that are actually purchased tend to receive greater respect than items that are received free of charge. Our solution has been to encourage national churches to sell materials when they consider sales helpful and to use the proceeds to support their outreach efforts.

Here is a comparison presented to the national convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mexico that to some degree represents a business model:

Comparison between Distributing Printed Booklets of *Bible Stories in Pictures* And Using Digital Equipment during a Period of Five Years

Printing and shipping of 1,000 sets of 64-page booklets to Mexico from Bogotá, Colombia

	Printing	Shipping	Cost per student (15 books + shipment to Mexico)
Cost / book	\$2.05	\$1.30	\$3.35
Books / set	15	15	15
Cost / set	\$30.75	\$19.50	\$50.25

iPad + Projector + Printer

	Cost of digital equipment per group
Cost per set of equipment	\$2,000
Number of students needed per set	44
Cost per student (the basis for calculating minimum number of students needed per set of equipment)	\$50.25

- 50,250 -- The total cost for 1,000 sets of booklets (at 15 booklets per set)
- 25 -- The number of sets of digital equipment that could be purchased for \$50,250
- 26 – Number of congregations and preaching stations in Mexico

Benefits of distributing printed books

- Book given to every student
- Books can be taken home
- Teaching can be reviewed at home
- Less misuse of materials
- Materials are easier to use
- No equipment repairs

Benefits of using digital equipment

- Stories presented to the entire congregation
- Audio-visual presentation is more dynamic
- Films like *Road to Emmaus* can be shown
- A large theological library can be placed on the tablet – *the real cost savings*
- Communication via the Internet facilitated
- Higher level distance learning encouraged

Cost of equipment (in USA/in Mexico):

\$500 / \$1,000	iPad (tablet)
\$300 / \$600	Projector
\$100 / \$200	Printer
\$100/200	Speakers
\$1,000 / \$2,000	Total

Another, related business model is to publish resources like the Spanish People's Bible on Logos. The company has offered to enter the entire Spanish People's Bible into the logos without charge to MLP/WELS. This would save us more than \$32,000. Logos would pay a 10% royalty fee on the sales of the Spanish People's Bible in logos. At the republications 40% discount, each license of the Spanish People's

Bible could be purchased at \$132. After Logos has had time to sell the Spanish People's Bible, MLP would be able to make the same volumes available in PDF or e-pub format.

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Jas Lonnquist and Mike Klebig wrote:

My mom was not reared in a Christian home. At age 13, she heard a radio broadcast offering a Bible study course. Listeners were asked to send \$1 to cover the cost of the course but if they didn't have a dollar, send for it anyway. Mom didn't have a dollar but, as promised, received the materials. From them, she learned the truths of the Bible. She became a Christian and, later, reared six children in a Christian home. Her oldest son and grandson became Lutheran pastors. Another son, an executive at a radio network, has put more than 50 Christian radio and TV stations on the air. Several more kids and grandkids volunteer in medical missions, video streaming, church music, and other gospel outreach and humanitarian aid.

Someone used their time and talent to record that broadcast and write the Bible study course. Someone used technical skill to put the broadcast on the air. Someone covered the dollar when my mom could not. They did this not knowing if anyone would ever listen to what they had to say or if the dollar would bring a return on investment. I wonder if they'll be amazed at the crowd of people who thank them in the kingdom of heaven!

Ideas to consider:

(a) **Inspire.** People want to be partners, not donors – active participants, not just a checkbook. Financial partnership should be rewarded with feedback. A Christian radio station helped fund a medical mission trip to Tanzania and sent a satellite phone with the nurses. Each morning a nurse called the radio station to provide updates: Parents who carried a child with a crushed arm five miles to the church where they were set up. Hundreds of people lined up by dawn for treatment. A man, blind from cataracts, who could now see. Listeners heard the effectiveness of their donations and responded with even more. The cost of these phone calls? \$1.90 per minute.

(b) **Use funds wisely.** Transparency, accountability, and a system of checks and balances help.

(c) **Share successes regularly.** A thank you note from a person who benefitted from an outreach is powerful.

(d) **Talk about money.** Wrong attitudes toward money hurt stewardship. Money is a tool, nothing more or less - not “filthy” or “stinking” rich and not the “root of all evil” as often misquoted. Money should be discussed like time - something to be used wisely for the most part, invested, shared, and not squandered.

(e) **Specific gifts:** Some people prefer giving specific gifts. Gospel for Asia offers opportunities to make specific purchases for missions from \$1 tracts to vehicles. Galcom offers \$25 radios or entire radio stations. ChildFund International's catalog has everything from a chicken for a family to water treatment plants.

(f) **Overcome evil with good:** Scripture says “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Giving a gift can be a very healing response to pain or disappointment with life. One day, preoccupied with a problem, I decided to respond to “evil with good” and made three donations to worthy charities. It did make me feel immediately better. A week later, to my amazement, I received three thank you notes, including a hand-written note from a teen in drug rehab and a cheerful letter to update me on resident's activities at Bethesda Lutheran home. I had to shed a few tears. I never anticipated that the people I hoped to help would turn and minister to me. Since then I've encouraged many hurting people to try this.

(g) **Fifty on the First:** Ask 50 people from 50 congregations to give \$50 on the first of every month. To donors, it's less than the cost of sushi for two. To missions, it's \$1.5 million a year.

SAMPLES OF WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING (*For information only – not an endorsement of services or content*)

- **Crown Financial Ministries**
www.crown.org

Money management tools for Christians.
Affiliation: Statement of faith on website

- **Gifts for Asia** www.gfa.org/donation
“Tools for missionaries” allows donors to provide specific gifts. Affiliation: Statement on website
- **Barnabas Ministries**
www.barnabasministries.org
Scriptural principles of stewardship. Seminars, teaching materials. Affiliation: Non-Denominational

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John Lawrenz wrote:

The greatest challenge that faces mission work in the world is not something entirely new, but one that has been developing over time. Researchers tell us that economic and generational factors are moving the general membership of denominations like the ELS and WELS toward “investment at home.” What that means is that a larger share of personal offerings will be, more and more, kept close to the local congregation or be given to ministries that people can easily see and influence. This is true even if total dollars given to the Lord’s work has increased overall in the last fifty years.

The economic downturn of 2008 worked itself out in dollar outlay for world missions in WELS that had the net effect of reducing the number of workers in world fields significantly. The next largest Lutheran denomination in the USA after the ELS and WELS no longer has a mission program directed and funded by the synodical center. Missionaries from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are now expected to raise a significant percentage of their own support. This is done through direct appeals. In the early 1990’s grant money from Schwan underwrote mission expansion in both ELS and WELS. The extent of that support could not be sustained. Yet, individual donors and grass roots mission movements among confessional Lutherans continue to spring up.

In East Asia we count the cost going forward and the investment is neither static nor diminishing. It will take continued new investment of financial support to bring the unconditional

Gospel to the millions who have never been fed or are being fed “another gospel.”

Raising money is improving stewardship on the part of both givers and spenders. The biblical teaching on giving turns away from high pressure tactics. It is not against presenting need, but the motivation must be love for God who loved us first. Direct appeals are not wrong, but with them comes the temptation to fragment cohesive planning, to pit one need against another, and even to create circumstances that will generate waste and duplication of effort and investment. If direction from a synodical central office fades and even comes to an end in the foreseeable future, there must be a heightened spiritual awareness on the part of missionaries to take its place.

Scripture also admonishes the worker to serve God rather than the nice things money can buy. There is a statement from the flush times of the early 90s that has been etched in my memory. A missionary had been extraordinarily blessed with a gift many times larger than what he expected. Exiting from the donor’s presence, he remarked to an aide who later shared the anecdote with me. The newly endowed missionary exclaimed, “Now we will have to come up with things to do with all this money!” Spenders must plan, be wisely frugal, and never take support for granted. Visions become concrete when costs are carefully counted. “Bang for the buck” is simple prudence, but it must never be short-sighted. A quick investment in media that chintzes on quality is bad stewardship. Take translation, for an example. Employing a cheap translator with limited gifts may render the whole enterprise fit only for gathering dust on the shelf. If there is a rollout of any kind, media included, watch out if it garners a burst of initial attention, only to sputter and go out like a spent Roman candle. For such penny-pinching a high spiritual price will likely be paid, if not immediately, eventually. It’s like casting good seed among the rocks, or on the path, or in shallow ground.

I believe God’s judicious use of miracles in his recorded plan of mission expansion offers us some guidance. Miracles did not create faith.

Nor do they sustain faith. God used them to bring proclaimer and lost soul into juxtaposition in order that the power of the Holy Spirit in the Word could go to work. Miracles also authenticated the extraordinary love of God in a world fast in the grip of godlessness. In similar fashion, a media blitz can have a special, authenticating place on the mission frontier. Our God is great and he can motivate his messengers to do great things. But then MUST come the sure, steady sustaining power of Word and sacrament ministry in order to kindle and nurture faith. That's good mission field stewardship.

Mission endeavors defy the rather static budget processes of established church bodies. Our experience with planning in East Asia is that mission expansion is dynamic to the extreme. Nobody knows for sure what doors will open or when. Nor do we know what doors must be closed and when. Prudent planning, developed over many years in the States in my synod works on a two-year cycle, with input for those two years to be laid on the table as much as a year and a half before the budget is presented in convention for approval. The approval process is multi-layered and loses clarity and focus as it is handled "up the line" by well-meaning people who have only a vague grasp of the dynamic issues which drive the mission frontier. Fast changing circumstances can rarely look 3-1/2 years in advance with a high degree of accuracy. Good stewardship therefore requires effort to build trust. This means budgets that somehow always finish in the black. And it most often means gathering additional funding from sources outside the budget because they rarely can. Such planning and spending must be carried out transparently. There must be no hiding and no misrepresentation. Both destroy trust.

Our work in East Asia, and more specifically, our work to build and expand a confessional Lutheran seminary in East Asia, has turned to mission advancement. In this we are far from alone. Our confessional schools in America all employ mission advancement. Here a brotherly concern for others is always in place. We must believe in our own pitch to donors, but must be

informed and gracious in regard to the appeals of others, all in the interest of kingdom balance.

Finally, it must be mentioned that both of our confessional American church bodies have experience with para-church organizations, also in world missions. I have had personal experience with Thoughts of Faith and served a decade on their board of directors when it was still an entity largely independent of the ELS. Since my move to East Asia, Thoughts of Faith has been brought directly under the ELS Board of Missions. In East Asia we were not alone when we came to East Asia with the "Now Is the Time" charter of WELS adopted in November 2003. WELS members in the Twin Cities area, led by departed brother Loren Steele, had opened a window to East Asia. They organized outside WELS structures. They raised funds and sent people. They did what needed to be done and we still remain the beneficiaries of that early zeal.

Our strategy out of Hong Kong is to work with and alongside anyone that promotes the spread of the unconditional Gospel in the Chinese-speaking world. We ask only that all entities be informed fully and accurately, and that all entities care enough about each other to share information and avoid costly duplication of effort. While in Thoughts of Faith the board agreed that our appeal to donors would openly and clearly state: congregation first, synod second, Thoughts of Faith third. This, I believe, is still common sense. Granted, it is not as easy as the uncluttered appeal. Teamwork requires communication, patience, and advancing those strategies that are compelling—not just to the donor, but to all who are brothers and sisters in the same work.

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