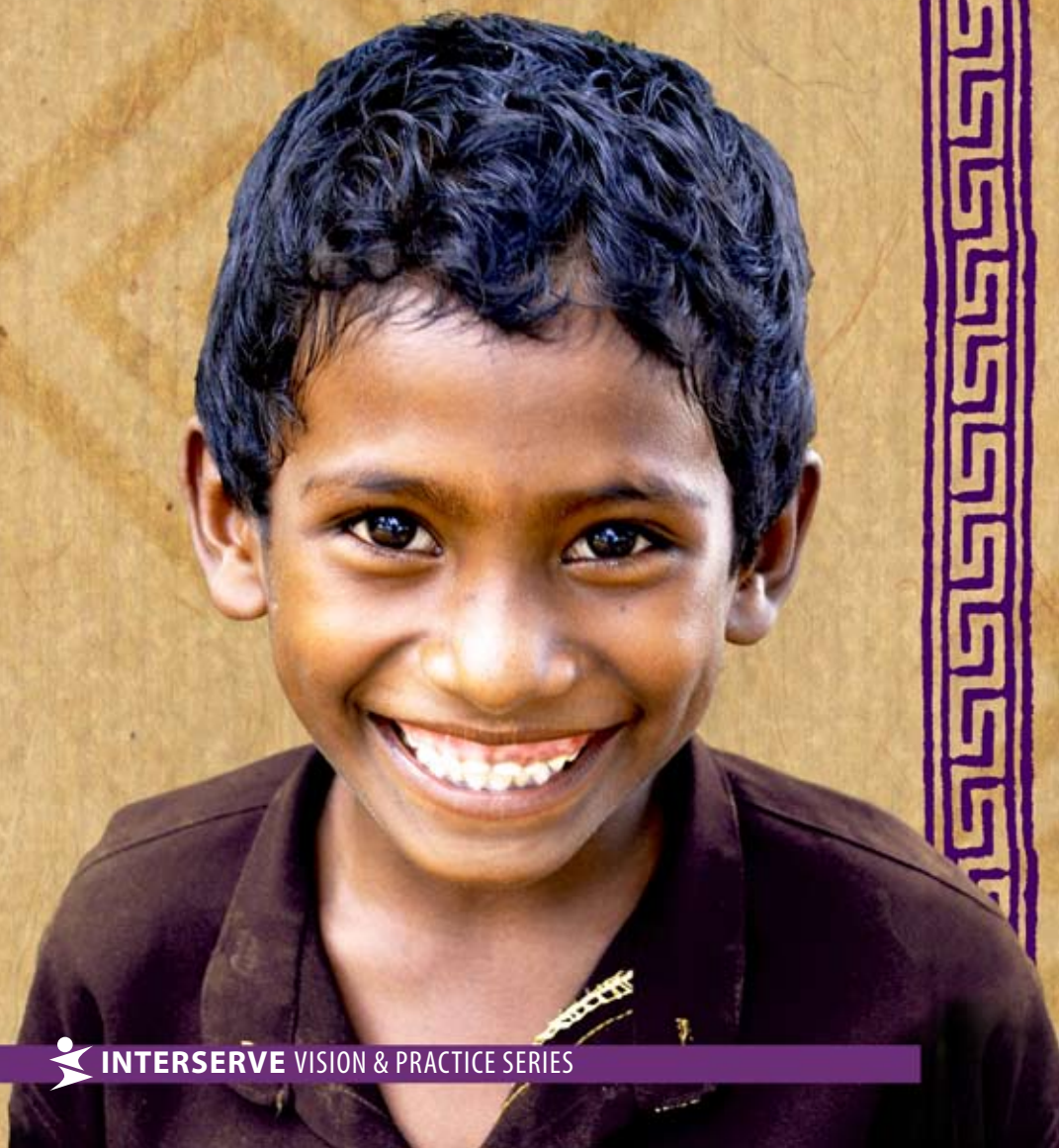


# GOD'S BIG IDEA

*wholistic mission*



INTERSERVE VISION & PRACTICE SERIES

Interserve is an interdenominational and truly international community of Christians, bringing God's love to the peoples of Asia and the Arab World through word and action. Wherever we work, we do so in partnership, serving the global church and encouraging newer mission movements. We serve in some of the hardest places in the world in obedience to Jesus' commission to "go and make disciples of all nations".

The purpose of the Vision & Practice series is to promote and build a greater understanding of Interserve's ethos and direction.

Vision & Practice Series:  
God's Big Idea: Wholistic Mission  
© Interserve International 2010

PUBLISHED BY  
Interserve International  
[www.interserve.org](http://www.interserve.org)

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## WHOLISTIC MISSION AND INTERSERVE

**There was a time when Interserve was unusual amongst mission communities in promoting a “wholistic” vision of mission. This is not so today.**

All strands of mission are now using the buzzwords of “transformation”, “integral mission” and “wholistic mission.”<sup>1</sup> Missions and churches have moved from terms like “reaching unreached people groups” to working towards “transformation.” Now is a good time to re-examine our understanding of the term “wholistic mission,” and to foster a consistent approach to its use. In Interserve we have defined the practice of wholistic mission as:

*...intentionally bearing witness to the whole character of God and his mighty acts of redemption, through proclamation, service, and fellowship.*

We seek to demonstrate these key tenets to all. Wholistic mission is ministry from the fullness of God to all humanity, in every kind of society and culture. Wholistic mission responds to total human need, and brings complete salvation. It is therefore defined by the extent to which we bear witness to God’s love, through service, fellowship and proclamation. ☩

**“ WHOLISTIC MISSION MAY NOT BE ‘FULL-TIME’ MINISTRY BUT IT IS A ‘FULL-LIFE’ MINISTRY. ”**

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
CENTRAL ASIA

**“ WHOLISTIC MISSION ENCOMPASSES MY WHOLE LIFESTYLE OF SERVING AND SHARING GOD’S LOVE IN MANY LITTLE WAYS EACH DAY. ”**

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
CENTRAL ASIA

## THE JOURNEY TAKEN

**There has been a growing disquiet amongst mission communities, due to the failure to hold together a message of good news and its practical demonstration.**

Further, the rapid expansion of churches in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America without an accompanying transformation of society has led some to reflect critically on the nature of the gospel and its dissemination. Various attempts have been made to relate proclamation and presence,<sup>2</sup> from the Lausanne Covenant in 1974, to the Micah Declaration of 2001, which states the goals in this way:

*Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.<sup>3</sup> ☩*

## WHOSE MISSION IS IT ANYWAY?

**Mission is “God’s Big Idea!” The Bible is all about God’s mission. If we want to understand God’s mission, we need to understand the whole concept of mission as it is presented in the Bible.**

Our understanding of wholistic mission must begin in the garden and end in the city. We must be wary of an overly simplistic approach to the task, since it can be said that “too often our theology and missiology begins with Genesis 3 and ends with Revelation 20.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, a missiology that is framed by mankind’s fall and God’s final judgment,

with personal salvation “filling the sandwich,” is a defective missiology.

An effective wholistic missiology encompasses the following key concepts: the beginning; the all-pervasive impact of sin; the all-inclusive scope of the cross and resurrection; and the hope of the glorious reign of God over all. ☩

**“ WHOLISTIC MISSION HAS UNTANGLED ME FROM THE TROUBLESOME, COMPARTMENTALIZED AND FRAGMENTED VIEW OF LIFE THAT MY WESTERN EDUCATION LEFT ME WITH. I NOW FEEL MUCH MORE HUMAN, MORE WHOLE. ”**

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
CENTRAL ASIA



# A FRAMEWORK FOR WHOLISTIC MISSIOLOGY

## THE BEGINNING: GENESIS 1 & 2

Creation unfolds as the natural dynamic creative activity of the Trinity, revealing a God who is distinct from creation, yet involved in it. Human beings alone are made in the image of God and stationed as God's vice-regents over his creation. This mandate to care has not been rescinded, and continues to be part of God's mission today. Further, we see that God pronounced all creation to be "good." All of creation matters, and poses no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, between work and worship.

## The Triune God – Creator, Redeemer

God continues to reveal himself, from Creator-God, to a Covenant-making-and-keeping, holy and just God. The pages of the Bible unfold a trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are three and different, yet one in a deep, profound and perfect relationship and interchange. Only a trinitarian concept of God makes possible the incarnation, justification and forgiveness.

Accordingly, this triune God, and the dynamic creative relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, becomes our model for mission, community, church and in fact for any and all relationships between humans.

*Because mission is God's mission and it is about God, Interserve Partners take mission seriously and intentionally. Partners seek to see their place in God's big picture and fulfill their role in mission.*

*The creation mandate calls us to have a concern for the whole created order. Interserve Partners seek to use the dynamic creative abilities invested in them in a variety of avenues to reach all of creation to fulfill this mandate.*

*In the same way, just as the Trinity models equality in relationships, as reflected in the creation of Adam and Eve, so we are called to be involved in the restoration of the equality and the dignity of all men, women and children everywhere.*

“ WHOLISTIC MISSION MEANS TO REFLECT JESUS CHRIST THROUGH MY WHOLE SELF SO THAT OTHERS MAY KNOW HIS RELEVANCE IN EVERY AREA OF THEIR LIVES. ”

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
EAST ASIA

“ WHOLISTIC MISSION - THE GRACE AND MERCY OF JESUS EMBRACING AND ILLUMINATING THE LIVES OF COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIVIDUALS. ”

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
ARAB WORLD

## THE ALL-PERVASIVE IMPACT OF SIN: GENESIS 3

All human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Humans are thus capable of partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and of being co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9) and yoke-fellows with God (Matthew 11:28-30).<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, all humanity is fallen. The effects of the fall are profound and far-reaching. It affected Adam and Eve's relationship with God, with each other, with themselves, and all of creation's order. The fall renders all humankind guilty before God and in shame before him and each other.

At their best human beings are fallen creatures and the image of God is

marred in all. The scars appear in all creation. But this image is not completely obliterated, therefore at our worst the image of God is still present in all human beings. So we work toward reconciliation between human beings and a restoration of creation. A whole view of the fall and the multi-level impact of sin, and the need for forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation shapes a biblical understanding of wholistic mission.

*Interserve Partners recognise that all cultures are fallen and in need of redemption and appropriate affirmation, and that no culture*

*is superior to another. In the communication of the message of the King and his kingdom, Interserve Partners seek to be culturally appropriate and sensitive. Bridges are built where the culture reflects the image of God. Proclamation and demonstration of the values of the kingdom open the way for redemption, in those areas where sin has corrupted culture.*

*Partners seek to be instruments of reconciliation, restoration and healing for individuals and communities, in the knowledge that only a restored relationship with God will produce sustainable and complete transformation.*

## THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SCOPE OF THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

God is “in the business of” reconciling to himself individuals, society and indeed the whole of creation.<sup>6</sup> God loved ‘the world’ (the cosmos) so much that he gave his one and only son. Wholistic mission refuses to reduce God’s cosmic act of reconciliation to a single dimension, to individual human beings, however central that dimension may be in his mission plan. A cosmic view of salvation shapes a biblical understanding of wholistic mission. The cross and resurrection provide the solution for all of creation:

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:19-20).*

Jesus is the bridge-builder and reconciler:

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).*


He is our peace:

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).*

As the world pushes towards greater division and disintegration, Christ comes as the one bringing together all the parts of our lives, and our relationships with each other. The cross brings complete salvation, redeeming every part of us and the world that we live in. Ministry and mission arise out of what God has already done for us.

*The good news of the possibility of reconciliation with God, that guilt has been paid for; of shame removed; of joy for today and hope for tomorrow, is the message which takes Interserve Partners to the hard places.*





**THE HOPE OF THE GLORIOUS  
REIGN OF GOD OVER ALL:  
REVELATION 21 & 22**

Christians know that there is a goal to history. The end (*telos*) is not the *end* of the story, but the *completion* of 'His story'. God is still the creator God, creating a new heaven and new earth. A New Jerusalem descends from heaven. The redeemed do not go up 'to heaven' to live but inhabit the new earth where God once more dwells with man. As John's vision draws to a close, the One seated on the throne speaks for

the first time in the revelation, saying, "I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Here is the fulfillment of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 6:10: "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Yes, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ! (Rev. 11:15). Eschatology too shapes a biblical understanding of wholistic mission.

Jesus is presented as God's antidote to the fall. In Romans 5:12-14 we read of "death through Adam, life through Christ". Christ is a second Adam, who was "the pattern of the one to come" (Romans 5:14). He came to inaugurate a new kingdom, where people were subject to God himself as the King: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

*Interserve Partners live and serve in the hope of the reality of the coming kingdom. This reality, inaugurated in the Christ event, and enabled by life in the Spirit, gives the power to serve, and the promise of life, healing and fullness. We announce and demonstrate God's kingdom, and invite everyone to enter in. ☸*

## HOW DO WE 'DO' WHOLISTIC MISSION?

**Wholistic mission derives from God's mission, *Missio Dei*. In wholistic mission we are called to join God in his purpose. What does this look like in practice? The principal exegete, and our model for mission, is Jesus.**

The breadth and the wholeness of God's mission is demonstrated for us in Jesus. Our own 'commission for mission,' then, comes from Jesus who says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).

The incarnation reveals a God who sees life as a whole, via Jesus, who takes the sacred into the market place. Jesus turns every situation, be it sitting at a well to talk to a woman, writing in the sand, a wedding feast or a journey from one town to another, into opportunities to bring glory to God and to reveal him to humankind.

If we wish to understand our mission we must immerse ourselves in the will and work of the Father, as expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. To illustrate some central aspects let's look at John 9: "Jesus heals a man born blind."

Here was a hopeless case if ever there was. The disciples knew it, and preferred a theological discussion to any attempt to deal with the problem. Jesus heals the man in a remarkable way, forming clay with his spit and daubing the man's blank eye sockets with it. The allusion to the Father's creative work in Genesis 2 is compelling. Jesus is

re-creating the brokenness of a fallen world. The man is healed, even though he does not know who Jesus is. The response of the community is varied, from amazement to total rejection. The healed man suffers the same rejection given to Jesus by the authorities, even though he still does not know Jesus. Finally, Jesus finds the man and reveals himself, resulting in the healed man believing and worshipping Jesus as Lord. Jesus models for us many elements of God's mission through this story.

Firstly, the kingdom rule of God is here in the person of Jesus. As he says in Luke 11: 20: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, the kingdom of God has come to you." No situation is beyond the power of Jesus: he steps into the brokenness and suffering and offers healing and life.

### *Key message:*

*As participants in God's mission, we are now carriers of the kingdom (Luke 10: 9). Our task is to bring life, extending the rule and authority of the kingdom of God into every sphere of human existence. To do this, Interserve Partners are committed to sharing deeply in the lives of those we serve, living incarnationally.*

Secondly, whether the kingdom is welcomed or even recognised does not change the reality that the kingdom is present. Furthermore, the benefits of the kingdom can be experienced by people even when they do not recognise the King. The blind man did not know who

**" WHOLISTIC MINISTRY INTEGRATES THE GOSPEL INTO OUR WHOLE LIFE WITNESS AS JESUS FOLLOWERS. "**

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
EAST ASIA





Jesus was, yet his life was transformed by the kingdom. Jesus never demands personal allegiance as a condition before one can benefit from the kingdom. This is the nature of love and grace.

*Key message:*

*God's grace is not restricted to those who recognise and welcome Jesus. The love of God, which we are to reflect equally towards God and our neighbour, is an unconditional love, available for all: "Loving God and loving our neighbour is a single, not a sequential act."<sup>8</sup>*

Thirdly, it is hard to imagine a greater transformation than to gain one's sight, having been born blind. Yet Jesus was not content to leave it there. Jesus pursued the man to give him the opportunity to make a personal response to Jesus as Lord. This mission is modeled in the gospels again and again, as Jesus draws faith from the individuals touched by him. The blessings of the kingdom are incomplete without the experience of relationship with Jesus as Lord.

*Key message:*

*Wholistic mission has at its heart the goal to see men, women and children respond to the Lordship of Christ and become his disciples. Indeed, the unfolding story of the church in the New Testament makes it clear that the primary vehicle for God's mission are disciples-in-transformation who, as part of a community-in-transformation (the church), bring the kingdom rule of God to all nations.*

Finally, this example reminds us that

mission and suffering are inevitably wedded together. The healed man suffers before he even knows who Jesus is. Jesus' model of mission makes it clear that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed" (John 12: 24). Although uniquely fulfilled by Jesus in his death, the call to suffer in the fulfillment of God's mission is a call to all disciples involved in wholistic mission. As Jesus goes on to say, "Whoever serves me must follow me" (John 12: 26).

*Key message:*

*There is no trouble-free and easy route to the fulfillment of God's mission. Suffering and mission are two sides of the same coin.*

Wholistic mission is founded on recognition that God's mission is the hermeneutical key that unlocks our understanding of the Bible. It also recognises that Jesus is the visible model of God's mission. How then does Jesus' commission of his disciples shape our understanding of wholistic mission? The commission has a number of resources to call on, as promised by Jesus himself. ☼

## RESOURCES FOR THE COMMISSION

**Jesus promises us resources for the fulfilling of the commission. In Matthew, it is the constant presence of Jesus: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). In John, Jesus symbolically acted out his promise when he breathed on them and said, "receive the Holy Spirit."**

This giving of the Spirit is also in keeping with the manner of the sending of the Son, who at the outset of his ministry is anointed with the Spirit in the form of a dove (John 1: 32-34).

In Luke 24 and Acts 1, Jesus assures his disciples that they will receive power to fulfill the commission, and this power is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Mark promises signs that will accompany those who respond to the good news. The signs he mentions testify both to the power of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Jesus (Mark 16:20). In wholistic mission, therefore, we neither go alone nor in our own strength. We do not rely on human systems, logic or authority to witness to the kingdom of God. Jesus, present with us in the power of the Holy Spirit, is our great resource. ☼

## CONCLUSION

**Since the beginning of time, God has been going about his mission and one day he will complete it. Wholistic mission requires that we never lose sight of that end, nor settle for a reduced view of what God has in store for his creation.**

We live in communities filled with sadness, injustice, corruption, violence and greed. By faith we affirm that the One who sits on the throne is making all things new.

Jesus models the reality of a new world order, God's kingdom come. He demonstrates the kingdom of God by offering the love and goodness of the Father, unconditionally. This offer of life can only be made through incarnation and vulnerability. Jesus gave his life for the fulfillment of this promise.

We, his disciples, are called to bear witness to the suffering and victory of God in Christ. We now bring the kingdom to others in the same way that

Jesus brought it to us: unconditionally, incarnationally and vulnerably. Through our speaking, doing and being, we invite all peoples to become part of this new world order. As peoples and cultures are discipled, and as all that Jesus commanded is put into practice, so individuals and communities are transformed. It is a slow process. One day that process will be complete, for we shall see him and be like him. God invites us to join him in mission, and it is in fulfillment of this end that we at Interserve embrace wholistic mission. ☩

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We will use these terms interchangeably. Interserve has adopted the unusual spelling of wholistic with a 'w', since the term holism is now applied to so many contexts that it has virtually lost meaning. We emphasize the nature of mission being from the whole of God, to the whole world, with the whole gospel.
- <sup>2</sup> See Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*. Regnum. Oxford. 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.micahchallenge.org/english/think/aim1/declaration/>
- <sup>4</sup> LT Jayachandran, in a message to the Interserve International Council 24 November 2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Scripture quotations taken from 'The Holy Bible, Today's New International Version'. Copyright © 2004 by permission of Hodder & Stoughton publishers.
- <sup>6</sup> See also Ephesians 1:9,10; Romans 8:19-22.
- <sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:15 refers to the Fall; Romans 5:12-14 to redemption through Christ.
- <sup>8</sup> Melba Maggay, "Integral Mission: what's it all about?" ISACC Bible Study Series, Volume 1. Philippines, p19.

In wholistic mission we are called to join God in his purpose, his mission. In this booklet we re-examine our understanding of the term "wholistic mission," the theology behind it, and how we can become a part of "God's big idea".

*Lives and communities transformed through encounter with Jesus Christ.*