



# The art of accompaniment

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## Abstract

Pope Francis's recent document on evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium*, emphasizes option for the poor and solidarity as key components of our mission outreach. He suggests that this outreach move beyond simply providing “welfare projects” and focus on real relationship and walking with those who are poor and vulnerable. He insists that all people must become the “artisans of their own destiny,” and that we must develop solutions to poverty focusing on education and employment. This theology of mission is consistent with previous Catholic Church teaching. What has been missing is a framework for putting the theology into concrete practice, and as a result mission outreach to the poor still tends to be devoted to “welfare projects.” Catholic Relief Services has developed such a framework, called Integral Human Development (IHD). This article will describe and analyze Pope Francis's teaching on “the inclusion of the poor in society” as mission, and then show how IHD incarnates this teaching. Finally, using examples, including from my own work in Haiti, I will show how IHD can be applied to church-to-church partnerships and other mission programs.

## Keywords

accompaniment, solidarity, option for the poor, integral human development, Haiti, Catholic Relief Services, parish twinning, Haiti mission, Catholic mission, mission and development

*The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious, and laity—into this  
“art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals  
before the sacred ground of the other.*

Pope Francis

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## Introduction

A few months ago I visited several small communities of coffee growers with whom I work in Haiti. These growers own tiny plots of land, far less than one hectare in most cases. They and their families live at subsistence level, growing just enough food to feed themselves, and trying to sell their coffee at a price high enough to provide a little cash to cover school fees, medical care, home repair, and any of the many emergencies that are likely to suddenly materialize in the unstable environment that is Haiti. The mission group I represent, Just Haiti, is dedicated to accompanying these growers from a situation of instability and vulnerability, to one where they have developed the capacity to move themselves forward, providing enough income for their families to live in the dignity promised to them as part of the human family, as created in God's image and likeness.

The first group of growers I visited on this trip was located in Leon, in the southern part of Haiti, near the larger city of Jeremie. This was the first year Leon coffee growers have worked with Just Haiti, and I found them full of hope. One of the women in the cooperative, a leader and elder, as well as a coffee grower, welcomed us by leading the group in a song she had written. Designed as a theme song for their cooperative, it expressed their hope that this coffee project will move the community of Leon forward. This is their dream: to advance out of grinding poverty on their own terms, staying in their communities and living in dignity and self-sufficiency from the sale of a product that their ancestors also produced. It is the mission of Just Haiti to accompany this and other communities of growers so that they may achieve their dreams.

Our goals mirror many of the goals of contemporary Catholic theology of mission. For example, Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* describes Jesus' evangelizing work as proclaiming the kingdom of God, which is the key to salvation and involves liberation "from everything that oppresses" (1975: 9). For Pope Paul, mission means to share in the mission of Jesus, which was to preach, to serve, and to witness to the kingdom of God. Similarly, the 2007 *Aparecida* document, the work of the 5th general conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, concludes that mission involves witness to the transforming power of Life in Christ (2007: 356). This transformation to life in Christ takes place in all aspects of one's life, but in particular involves a movement of those who are poor toward "integral liberation, humanization, reconciliation, and involvement in society" (2007: 359). As missionaries, witnessing to the kingdom of God means to accompany the poor in this movement.

Most recently, Pope Francis issued *Evangelii Gaudium*, a new apostolic exhortation on evangelization. Quoting extensively from previous mission documents, especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Aparecida*, the current pope states unequivocally that "to evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world" (2013: 179). The kingdom of God creates a society of "universal fraternity, justice, and peace" (n. 180). "Each individual Christian," he goes on to say, "is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of

society” (n. 187). However, although he insists on the importance of praxis, Francis does not provide a framework in this document for accomplishing these lofty goals, leaving the missionary to figure it out for herself.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the international relief and development organization of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, with over 70 years of experience addressing global poverty, has endeavored to fill this gap as a way to ensure that their work is in line with current Catholic thinking on projects aimed at poverty alleviation. Called Integral Human Development (IHD), CRS has developed a framework for addressing poverty at its core that is based on both Catholic teaching and best practices in poverty alleviation learned over many years. However, as a large international development NGO, working in 100 countries, CRS has not historically been in conversation with many of the smaller, more concentrated Catholic mission institutions or projects. As a Catholic mission theologian and employee of CRS with years of experience working in other mission contexts, including Just Haiti referenced above, I am in a unique position to bring them together as conversation partners.

This article will look at Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, focusing in particular on chapter 4: “The Social Dimension of Evangelization.” It will then describe the Catholic Relief Services Integral Human Development framework, showing how it correlates with and gives flesh to Pope Francis’s thinking on contemporary Catholic evangelization. Finally, it will illustrate ways that the IHD framework can be adjusted and applied to mission programs, especially church-to-church partnerships, short-term immersion programs, and other contemporary expressions of mission. My hope is that this analysis will prove useful to all mission programs that endeavor to correlate their praxis with their theory.

## The social dimension of evangelization

*Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully part of society.*

*Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis I, 2013: 187)

One cannot separate the work of evangelization from the work of addressing poverty and violence, according to Pope Francis. Evangelization literally means to proclaim Good News. The gospel we proclaim is the kingdom of God and Jesus’ mission was to inaugurate the kingdom of his Father. Our mandate is to go forth and proclaim this good news of the kingdom. In addressing poverty and violence, we must examine the grave social issues of our time and seek effective pastoral responses to the context in which we find ourselves (2013: 184).

For Francis, two issues are fundamental to bringing about the kingdom in today’s world: the inclusion of the poor in society, and peace and social dialogue. This analysis will focus on the first, which Francis believes dramatically impacts the second. Inclusion of the poor in society means “working to eliminate the structural causes of

poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter” (2013: 188). Inclusion of the poor requires solidarity.

We are scandalized by poverty, Francis writes (2013: 191). Thus, by “solidarity” he means more than just a few acts of kindness or generosity. He seeks a change in mindset whereby all seek the good of all. This means that the common good takes precedence over the rights of private property and the purpose of private ownership of goods is not for the enrichment of the owner but in order to use those goods for the common good. This, Francis says, is restoring to those who are poor what is rightfully theirs in the first place (n. 189), because those who are poor have equal dignity in the human family, as each of us is created in the image and likeness of God. Francis is concerned about the “inordinate” defense of individual rights, especially the rights of richer peoples, over the common good of the entire planet. Here he quotes his predecessor Paul VI: “The more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” (n. 190). This, then, is solidarity. And to forget the poor, Francis writes, is “self-centered paganism” (n. 195).

Evangelization as solidarity puts the poor at the center, and solidarity involves more than just activism or assistance programs. The Church’s *option for the poor* is an invitation to find Christ in those who are poor (Matt. 25:5ff.), and to consider the other as “one with ourselves” (Francis I, 2013: 166). An authentic option for the poor is based in love and friendship, and our actions on behalf of liberation for those who are poor flow out of love, relationship, and true esteem. This love and real relationship ensures that “in every Christian community the poor feel at home” (n. 199). If this vision were to be brought about, Francis writes, it would be the true manifestation of the Kingdom. Anything else risks distortion of the true meaning of the Gospel (n. 199).

Putting the poor at the center means moving beyond just charitable aid to ensure subsistence living. Francis seeks the full participation and self-fulfillment of those who are poor so that they may become “artisans of their own destiny” (2013: 190). In addition to real relationship, “this means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives” (n. 192). Francis refers to this process of inclusion for those who are poor, which involves both solidarity (the wealthy renouncing some of their rights so that the poor may have more) and the option for the poor (the poor and the rich become as one), as “accompanying the poor on their path to liberation” (n. 199).

Francis spends some time emphasizing that he is not promoting “welfare projects,” those that meet urgent and immediate needs, and which should be temporary responses and not permanent solutions (2013: 202). The only solution, he writes, is to address the structural causes of poverty, and this requires rejection of the “absolute autonomy of markets” (n. 202). This aspect of Francis’s writing has been much-commented on in the international press, both secular and religious. Francis describes the global economic system as one which promotes the economic well-being of a few individuals and countries, excluding the rest of the world. “Such an economy kills,” he writes (n. 53).

Francis envisions a world of inclusion rather than exclusion. The included are those who fully participate in civil society and who have the power to make the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families. The excluded are those who are living on the margins, so poor that they cannot make even basic choices about where they live and work. Most people from the United States have never observed what Francis refers to as the “excluded.” They are the people in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood I recently visited in Haiti, where there is a massive trash dump in the middle of a block of homes, populated by angry pigs, and located on the side of a ravine used for cleaning and for relieving oneself. If people could leave that neighborhood, or change it, they would.

Francis says that our current theories of economic growth are not working for everybody. Having worked in some of the poorest parts of the world, to me this conclusion is self-evident. Furthermore, “while the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few” (2013: 56). Francis observes that it is an unfettered free market which feeds this exclusion and inequality, and that it is a mistake to assume that we can trust those who wield economic power, and the workings of the market by itself, to bring about “greater justice and inclusiveness in the world” (n. 54). He does not, however, propose an alternative economic model. He proposes a change in mindset, leading to a financial reform open to ethical considerations which “favor human beings” (n. 58). The ethics he proposes are a “non-ideological” ethics which would bring about a more humane social order (n. 57).

The current system, which creates extraordinary wealth and extraordinary poverty, has given rise to what Francis calls “welfare projects.” The wealthy give of their excess to respond to emergencies, preventing famine and starvation and meeting many urgent and immediate needs. Many mission projects are also organized in this way. Parish-twinning programs, for example, most frequently pay for school feeding programs, medical missions, and teacher salaries, often without thinking to work with communities so that they can pay for their own teachers, their own school lunches, and their own health care. These projects, while well-meaning, do not address the cause of peoples’ misery, and therefore will not end it.

Growth in justice requires more than economic growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms, and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment, and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality (2013: 204).

## **Seeking an effective praxis: Catholic Relief Services and Integral Human Development**

Francis is asking those of us who minister in the church to practice solidarity and the option for the poor. This means seeking to include those who are poor in our friendships and in our communities. It means valuing those who are poor as equal and contributing members of the human family. And it means promoting economic decisions and programs which lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth and

improved livelihoods, and therefore self-sufficiency, for those who are living in poverty. An improved livelihood assumes that the wages received are enough to sustain a family in dignity. When taking all of these actions, the church accompanies the poor on their path to liberation.

It is a beautiful theory, and it brings to mind Isaiah 11:1–10, the Peaceable Kingdom: all God’s creatures living together in harmony, each having what they need to sustain life in dignity. However, as with many papal proclamations, the path toward enacting the vision is not clear. As missionaries, what concretely must we do to bring this about?

Catholic Relief Services has been working to alleviate poverty for more than 70 years, moving from a strictly relief agency in its early years, to one that promotes improved livelihoods and “integral human development” as a long-term solution to poverty. I believe that CRS’s approach to poverty alleviation can be helpful in thinking about how to construct mission projects that are true to the teaching of our faith.

CRS has adopted “Integral Human Development” (IHD) as a central component of its strategy and as a framework for designing projects. Integral Development was first introduced as an element of Catholic Social Teaching by Pope Paul VI in his 1967 document *Populorum Progressio*, and as we have seen, is repeated in later papal documents, including *Evangelii Gaudium*. Drawing from *Populorum Progressio*, CRS defines IHD as development that “promotes the good of every person and the whole person; it is cultural, economic, political, social and spiritual” (Heinrich, Leege, and Miller, 2008: 2). For CRS the concept is a means to articulate the goal of their work, as well as a process for moving toward the goal. The goal is

a state of personal well-being in the context of just and peaceful relationships and a thriving environment. It is the sustained growth that everyone has the right to enjoy and represents an individual’s cultural, economic, political, social and spiritual wholeness—a wholeness that we all want to experience and that, in concern for the common good, we want others to experience as well. (2008: 2)

CRS’s theory of change posits that integral human development occurs when actors work collaboratively from across civil society and the public and private sectors, operating at different levels (individual, family, community, regional, national, international) to:

- Protect, human life and dignity by caring for poor and vulnerable people;
- Increase resiliency by protecting, building and maximizing family and community assets (human, social, political, physical, financial, natural, and spiritual);
- Promote right relationships between all people, and within and across families, communities and nations; and
- Increase inclusive access to and influence on structures and systems at all levels.

CRS has developed a conceptual framework to help guide their programs along this path. The basic approach is one that seeks improved livelihoods, so that people are able to lead full and productive lives. If the people in that neighborhood in

Port-au-Prince with the trash dump and angry pigs were making more money, either they would improve the situation or they would leave. But improved livelihoods depend on more than just money, although income is a big part of it. Improved livelihoods depend on the strategies people use to improve them, and strategies depend on the resources, or assets, people have at their disposal. Assets include not only material things, but also spiritual, human, and social assets. These would include the network of relationships that an individual, family, or community is able to sustain, as well as education, religious belonging, life experiences, individual health, and technical skills. How people are able use their assets is also dependent on some external factors, such as the institutions, systems, laws, and structures that people work within, as well as the risks, such as natural disasters or conflict. Households develop strategies based on all these factors. The key to effectiveness, then, is to analyze these factors, and capitalize on assets while minimizing risk in a given context.

Each of us is vulnerable to outside risk factors, whether a bad storm, a death in the family, a medical emergency, or financial collapse. Our ability to cope and then recover depends on the myriad of assets we have at our disposal. As already noted, assets are more than just financial, and, in addition to employment, include: our internal spiritual and intellectual resources, social resources, such as networks of family and friends, institutional belonging, political power, and the ability to claim one's rights and influence decisions in one's own community; tangible assets, such as a car or house, and available natural resources. In short, if we want to address poverty, we have to address it through assets, as well as the underlying structures and systems where the root causes of injustice are often found. This mirrors Pope Francis's comment that growth in justice requires an integral promotion of the poor, which includes creation of sources of employment but also addresses the systems and structures that prevent an equitable distribution of income. A chart developed by CRS (Fig. 1) illustrates the interrelated components that affect livelihood strategies.

In my experience, when people from the United States are inserted into a situation of extreme poverty, they frequently feel overwhelmed by the need. What they see first is the need, and they feel a strong desire to somehow fix what they see. While admirable and well-intentioned, this desire to fix can lead to what Pope Francis calls "welfare projects" that do not actually address poverty. We have to train ourselves to see gift. Each person is created in God's image; each person is a gift from the Creator. Every person has gifts; every community has resources. The key is to understand what those gifts and resources are, and how to capitalize on them in any given context.

It is not possible to implement this type of intervention without deep understanding of the community and context, and a long-term commitment. It also requires developing relationships and working together with local partners, so that local partners share responsibility for identifying assets and opportunities, and make decisions about program priorities. In fostering such partnerships, through dialogue and a planning process with mutually identified goals and outcomes, CRS builds a spirit of mutuality, transparency, and accountability into the relationship, fostering trust and equality. This process, of developing relationships, understanding the context, designing appropriate responses to improve livelihoods, and long-term commitment, CRS calls *accompaniment*.



**Figure 1.** Interrelated components that affect livelihood strategies (Source: Catholic Relief Services, used with permission).

Accompaniment leads to sustainability, and sustainability is the goal. The classic definition of sustainability is: the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2007: 1). CRS manuals say the same thing in a different way: 'A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base' (Heinrich, Leege, and Miller, 2008: 55). Sustainability means that people and communities are able to meet their own needs, capitalizing on their resources but not depleting them, and are not dependent on outside assistance to do so.

CRS is a large agency, and for them the IHD process involves a complex set of activities and assessments. For smaller, more focused mission programs, I think we can summarize the wisdom of IHD into three main points, or ideas:

- Relationships are primary and precede projects;
- Focus on assets, not problems;
- Through dialogue and planning, develop a long-term strategy that aims at improved, sustainable livelihoods.



### ***Relationships***

Focusing on relationships means that we value the person as a person first. People or communities are not objects of our mission projects. They are human beings, children of God, with their own hopes and dreams, and their own ideas for developing their communities. When missionaries focus on projects first, before relationships, we risk imposing our own agenda, our own ideas about what is right or wrong in a given context. This turns people into objects of our mission, and the missionary into an object from which to receive funding, denying both their dignity. Furthermore, real relationships lead to trust, and to partnerships with local institutions and associations and committees—the ones that ultimately must be the primary implementer of whatever projects are developed. Strengthening the capacity of local organizations to lead development projects should be part of the relationship, so that the community can truly become the “artisan of their own destiny.”

### ***Focus on assets, not problems***

Those who are poor are not defined by their poverty; those who are rich are not defined by their wealth. God views each of us as Gift, and we are asked to do the same for one another. Part of our giftedness is that each of us—each person, each family, each community—has resources, or assets, that can be developed and utilized. When the relationship turns to project development, assess the assets first. Here are some sample questions to ask:

- What do the people already produce or sell? What would they like to produce? What did their ancestors produce?
- What are the barriers to increased income from what they produce or sell?
- What community development plans already exist? What are the priorities of different groups in the community, such as women, the elderly, and different socioeconomic groups?
- What are the hopes and dreams of the people, and do they have a long-term vision?
- What assets/resources does the community already have to achieve their goals? How can these assets be developed (such as additional training or formation programs)?
- What outside assets are needed for success?

### ***Dialogue that leads to a long-term strategy for improved, sustainable livelihoods***

From the beginning the missionary must think about how to end the project. Not the relationship, but the project. Relief and development projects can end when the community no longer needs outside assistance to take care of itself or to weather any storms. Therefore, the ultimate goal must be improved, sustainable livelihoods. I suggest

a joint planning process with community leadership that names goals and objectives and has a clearly articulated exit strategy. Here are a few points to consider:

- Develop plans focusing on skill-building and enhancing technical capacity for local groups.
- Emphasize community participation in all decisions.
- Identify what assets will be needed for the long-term continuation of the project and where these assets can be found locally. If they cannot be found locally, how can they be developed?
- Articulate how you will know when it is time to end outside assistance.

If our mission projects are not going to become “welfare projects,” then they must come to an end. I think that the difficulty many mission groups have is that the relationship is defined by the project. When the project ends, the relationship ends. Our relationships must transcend our projects, and it is the relationships that will endure.

## **The art of accompaniment**

Holy Trinity Church in Washington, D.C., is working to put into practice a relational approach to mission through its sister parish connection with St. Jean Baptiste in Anse-D’Hainault, Haiti. Last summer they worked with local leaders in Haiti to sponsor a soccer camp for over 100 children of all ages. Holy Trinity collected the equipment and provided funding for coaching and meals. St. Jean Baptiste organized the camp. Parishioners from Holy Trinity attended the camp, cheered the students, and surely developed lasting relationships with the children and their families.

The assumption behind the soccer camp idea is that our mission interventions need to recognize the needs of the whole person, to see beyond poverty. The children participating feel celebrated for who they are as children, thus validating their identities, as well as their hopes and dreams. This validation is empowering all by itself, without any other action taken. In a context of extreme poverty or violence, the survivors can feel forgotten, cut off from the benefits that the global economy confers on the few. When they are recognized, and their own hopes and dreams validated, this alone can help them to transcend their situation and plan for the future. This kind of intervention cannot be easily measured, but I am convinced the effects go deep. And it is the particular genius of parish or congregational twinning to be able to offer what CRS might refer to as “soft” development projects.

Another “soft” development project is an art program for local youth organized by the Felician Sisters of North America, located in Jacmel, Haiti. The Felician Sisters are in the early stages of setting up a long-term mission presence in Jacmel. One of the sisters, an artist, visited Haiti and, in despair over what she saw, wondered what she had to offer in an environment of such intense and obvious need. Through prayer, this sister recognized her own giftedness (or assets), and she began to do art projects with the neighborhood children. In recognizing her own gifts and sharing them, neither the sister nor the children became objects. Together they painted a giant mural on the walls of the convent. Soon the children organized their own art club and elected officers.

The Felicians hope to continue to support the efforts of the children through instruction and materials. Like the soccer camp, art classes and clubs are relational, and thus empowering, recognizing the desires and the dignity of the whole person.

I recently visited an example of a CRS soft development project in Haiti. Although as a large and complex international agency, CRS cannot offer the kind of deep relationship that parish twinning can provide, it can and does promote and implement “soft” development as an intervention that fosters the growth of the whole person. In one Port-au-Prince slum severely affected by the 2010 earthquake, CRS set aside some land to build a soccer field. When I was walking through the neighborhood, a young man (who had taken me under his wing) proudly led me straight to the field and told me that this was what CRS had done for their neighborhood. In his mind, the soccer field was far more important than the “hard” CRS development projects; I believe because the soccer field acknowledges the humanity and dignity of people living in the subhuman conditions of extreme poverty.

The mission project I am best-qualified to describe is my own: Just Haiti. Just Haiti evolved out of a sister parish relationship between St. John the Baptist in Silver Spring, MD, and St. Pierre in Baraderes, Haiti. From 1996 to 2004 I was the Silver Spring director. Like most sister parishes, we implemented “welfare projects.” In 2006 I had the idea to work with the community to develop their coffee, and joined with some others in the United States to form Just Haiti.

Baraderes was and is part of a traditional coffee-producing region in Haiti. In the 1980s the coffee industry collapsed in Haiti, and with the exception of a few very strong cooperatives, most growers cut down their coffee trees and planted beans. Elimination of coffee as a viable cash crop has contributed to Haiti’s deforestation woes, because without the coffee trees, which thrive under shade, the need to keep the shade trees was diminished. They are cut down for charcoal—in essence, a different cash crop. Today, Haiti is 98% deforested, leading to soil erosion down to the rock in some places.

Just Haiti’s first step, before our own incorporation, was to meet with a representative sample of coffee growers who were still producing, albeit small amounts. We presented the idea to them:

- Just Haiti would provide the seed money for them to organize their own association and provide training for them to relearn how to produce export-quality coffee.
- They would need to create an association with democratic structures and elected leadership, and with legal standing.
- Just Haiti would organize the first training, and pay for an agronomist to work with them for at least the first year, visiting all their fields and helping them with things like pruning and composting.
- Just Haiti would purchase their coffee green, import the coffee into the United States, sell it roasted and packaged, and after covering expenses, return all profits to the grower association for distribution to the growers and to cover their costs of doing business.

Coffee is a valuable commodity on the international market, and based on what I pay for a cup of coffee in Starbucks, the profit margin is very high. Most producers are getting no more than \$1.40 or \$1.50 per pound for their coffee, which requires hard labor to produce and harvest. The exporters, the coffee-bean brokers, the roasters, and the retailers all make money on coffee. The growers do not fare so well. Even when the coffee business was thriving in Baraderes, the growers tell me that they did not reap much benefit. The exporter made money; the producers barely survived. Returning the profits to the producers is returning to the poor what is rightfully theirs, because the wealth is generated by the work of their hands. This basic philosophy of Just Haiti is one shared by Pope Francis: “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our goods which we hold, but theirs” (2013: 57).<sup>1</sup>

The growers enthusiastically accepted our offer, based on a trust that existed as a result of the long-term prior relationship. Later the growers told me that they experienced our project as “God’s grace raining down on them.” They also told me that we were helping them to regenerate an important industry for the area, one which had sustained them for generations, but doing it in a way that benefitted them, and not only someone else. They said that previously they had always sold their coffee for a price that barely provided subsistence, and then never heard anything about what happened to it. The wealth it generated was never shared. This is typical for the coffee industry as a whole, and is the reality of inequality and exclusion that Francis is warning us about in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Today that original coffee association, called KDB, is thriving. The original group of 24 growers has grown to 102. It is a diverse group of men and women, young and old. There is new construction in town, their children are going to school, and KDB is planting new trees. The coordinator of the association is now running for political office, wanting to represent his community on the local municipal council. They are truly starting to become full participants in their own lives, “artisans of their own destiny.”

Just Haiti is also thriving. Our model of doing business has expanded so that we now work with five communities, and we expect to keep growing. KDB conducts the training for new grower associations, for which it is paid. Coffee sales are robust, and we have a diverse customer base. Part of our mission is to educate the consumer, and especially churches, about our way of doing mission, and so about 40% of our customers are churches or church-based. We have also instituted a scholarship program for members of the associations working with us, and their families. These are scholarships for higher education, and in return the recipients will work as interns for the grower associations. In this way, we invest in the future of Haiti through higher education, and strengthen the technical skills of the associations. Pope Francis has asked mission projects to move away from welfare projects to support education and employment, and that is precisely the Just Haiti approach.

I want to underscore several points of correlation between the teaching of Pope Francis, the IHD framework, and the work of Just Haiti:

- All emphasize a relationship of accompaniment that respects and protects the dignity of those who are poor.
- All highlight the need to capitalize on the gifts, or assets, or what they already know how to do, of those who are poor in order to improve their livelihoods.
- All emphasize sustainability, so that future generations are empowered and equipped to lead their own development.

Just Haiti started small and emerged from a sister parish relationship. Coffee is not right for every community or context. But any sister parish relationship or other mission project can consider pursuing a kind of livelihood intervention that does make sense for their context.

Microfinance programs are another possibility and also put the IHD framework into action. CRS promotes a model of microfinance, called savings and internal lending communities, or SILC, which embodies these same principles. The program involves forming small groups of savers/lenders who agree to pool small amounts of money into a general fund each month. Over a period of time they have a little saved, and they can begin to give out tiny loans among themselves. They determine the interest rates themselves, and then at the end of every year there is an accounting and each receives a small amount of interest on what they have saved. The loans are generally used to expand whatever small business the person is already engaged in, increasing their household income. Local service providers are trained first, and then they go on to organize the groups, for which they are paid. The groups receive training in financial management, in many cases learning how to save and account for their money for the first time. The repayment rate is very high, because the groups know each other, and sometimes form community among themselves for other things, such as gardening or cooking.

In my view, this type of program is ideal for sister parishes to support. Although none that I know of are yet working with CRS, several have implemented similar programs with different partners. St. Nicholas Church in Evanston, IL, works with a Haitian organization called KOFIP developing a SILC-like program for their sister parish in Limonade, Haiti. As a result, to date, the Limonade area has 133 savings and lending groups with 3950 total members and 10,550,300 Haitian Gourdes in savings (about \$245,000 USD). A total of 307 loans of around \$100 each have been made, with a 98% repayment rate. This program is relational in a different way: it focuses on members of the groups developing relationships with each other for mutual empowerment. It also capitalizes on the assets people already have to expand the work they already do, teaches a valuable skill-set, and trains local leaders to continue the model so that the groups are not dependent on outside assistance.

## Conclusion

*Jesus did not proselytize; he accompanied his people.*

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, SJ<sup>2</sup>

So, too, are we called to accompany. Accompaniment means that those who are wealthy recognize that the wealth they have does not belong only to them; it also belongs to the farmer, factory worker, or miner who produces the object that generates wealth. This is solidarity. Accompaniment also means that those who are wealthy develop true friendships with those who are poor, entering into their world, accepting some of their risk, developing equal relationships, and programs which lead to improved livelihoods for those who are poor. In this way, those who are poor are included in civil society, becoming protagonists in their own life stories, artisans of their own destinies. This is the option for the poor. Accompaniment is solidarity and option for the poor together, and in action.

This vision, the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom, is one that all Christians share and is the hope of our faith. It is a hard vision to implement, but surely not impossible. This article has described an approach to implementation developed by Catholic Relief Services and based on their many years of experience addressing global poverty and violence. Their approach is comprised of three main elements relevant to all mission programs:

- Relationship is primary;
- Focus on assets, not problems;
- Develop programs that improve sustainable livelihoods.

None of us has all the answers, but my hope is that this article will assist mission programs in thinking further about their role in ushering in the Kingdom of God in a world that desperately needs it. Inequality and exclusion spawn violence; inclusion and integral development are a pathway to peace.

Another word for accompaniment is love. Love brings us closer to the other, and being closer to the other brings us closer to God. The path of accompaniment is a path of action, but it is grounded in a spirituality and a life orientation that leads to action. Jesus loved his people, in the same way that God loved him. Jesus' mission flowed out of that love.

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7 (NRSV)*

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## **Notes**

1. Francis is quoting St. John Chrysostom.
2. Homily of September 12, 2012, prior to his being named pope.

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Kim Lamberty works at Catholic Relief Services to strengthen the mission programs of Catholic institutions. She is also cofounder and president of Just Haiti, a coffee development program working in partnership with associations of subsistence coffee growers in Haiti.