



Habitat for Humanity's Christian Foundation



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1.1 Introduction

We stand in awe when we consider not only the houses that have been built, but also the individuals and families who have been touched, and the neighborhoods that have been transformed through the work of Habitat for Humanity. God has indeed blessed this service.

Early leaders in this housing ministry prayerfully hoped for such blessings when they built their plans on Christian principles that have become the foundation for Habitat. Clarence Jordan, Millard Fuller and others who had a vision for building homes with their neighbors in need saw their work as a means of practical Christian discipleship. Thousands who followed have seen God at work in concrete ways as they faithfully loved and served as followers of Jesus Christ.

In the first section of this document, you can examine some of the basic Biblical concepts upon which Habitat for Humanity was founded and faithfully functions. By being faithful to our Christian foundation, we remain focused on the call to follow Jesus Christ and his example of care and compassion for the poor. In Part 2, you will examine some practical ways that Habitat groups can be consistent in operating and communicating as a Christian ministry while engaging the broadly and global community through inclusive leadership and diverse partnerships.

Scripture quotations in this publication, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

1.2. The Biblical Witness to Selfless Service

When we trace the founding vision for the ministry of Habitat for Humanity, we find that our principles are rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Our foundation is the Bible, which teaches us that through the grace of God, unconditionally offered to all in Christ, generates new life. As people created new life in Christ, our response to God's amazing love is to share it with others. We come to realize that all persons have value because all are created by God. We understand that God intended that we live in relationship with one another and that we care for one another, particularly the poor. For in Christ Jesus, we were reconciled to God, and with one another (2 Corinthians 5:18). Over and over, the Bible emphasizes God's solidarity with people who are poor, oppressed and marginalized.

The Gospels report that when Jesus began his public ministry, he deliberately recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah about bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

The life and ministry of Jesus show us genuine love, concern and compassion. Jesus lovingly touched the untouchable, ministered to those rejected by society and lifted up the sick and oppressed. In Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus proclaims his empathy with those in need and identifies with the vulnerable. He is disguised among the hungry and thirsty; the stranger; the sick and the prisoner. It is precisely there and then, here and now, among these whom Jesus described as the "least of these," that Christ is present and at work in the world.

It is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that we understand how God wishes to be known to us. What is revealed in Jesus is the clearest and perfect representation of God and God's will. God's will and the way of Jesus Christ is generously offering a helping hand and consistently showing mercy. Jesus showed us how to extend hospitality to the stranger as he lived a life that demonstrated compassion for all.

God calls us to live like Jesus lived. Regardless of our means, we are to serve as Jesus served. If we are to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are to reach out to "the least of these" and to love one another.

1.3. Part 1: What Guides Habitat's Work

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian ministry that is organized and operated by local groups in communities around the world. Each of these groups signs a covenant agreement acknowledging that one of Habitat's purposes is to build modest but adequate houses in order to demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus Christ. The first part of this document examines four basic concepts that help shape Habitat as a Christian ministry:

- Faith in action
- Kingdom building
- The economics of Jesus
- A Spirit of Unity

Faith in Action

Habitat for Humanity builds homes with people in need - in response to God's love. Filled with God's love and mercy, we seek ways to share God's love with others in practical and concrete ways. We intentionally serve—to model the life and teachings of Jesus by partnering with local and global communities and empowering people to love and serve as neighbors, and hence help in the transformation of individuals, families, neighborhoods and communities. The Bible teaches us that love must be sincere and practical. *“We know love by this that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action”* (1 John 3:16-18).

We find the same message in another Biblical passage in James 2:14-26 which mandates that we live out our faith. Our loving service is our response to God's love and compassion for the world. This call to action—to care for every person created in the image of God—cannot be ignored. We are to become partners with one another, treating each other with dignity and empowering one another. Clarence Jordan, founder of the Christian community of Koinonia Farm, where the housing ministry of what would later become Habitat for Humanity had its beginnings, was adamant about this fact. Jordan believed that we cannot have any dealings with God unless we care for one another.

Kingdom Building

Jesus spoke many times about the kingdom of God to describe God's will. Following the example of Jesus by selflessly and lovingly serving one another, we further the kingdom of God by obeying and fulfilling God's will on earth. By caring and serving all people, especially people who are poor, we actively participate in fulfilling God's will and building up the kingdom and influence of God in the world.

Many people feel called to the work of Habitat for Humanity as a response of faith. Habitat provides numerous opportunities and partnerships with diverse people, communities, and agencies all over the world to take action when God has stirred within them a desire to respond to their brothers and sisters in need. Together, we determined that it is unacceptable for families to struggle amid the hardships that poverty imposes, and that it just won't do for people to live in dignity under leaky roofs or amid rodent infestation or with no water or sanitary facilities.

While Habitat for Humanity alone is not the manifestation of the kingdom of God, by serving those in need as Jesus commanded, we further the kingdom and are enriched by it. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit and by scripture as we follow Christ in his revolutionary practices of love.

The Economics of Jesus

Habitat for Humanity uses the term "the economics of Jesus" to describe attitudes about money and resources that Jesus initiated. The economics of Jesus teaches us to incorporate scriptural wisdom to guide our work.

1. God blesses what we offer and turns it into the miraculous.

Just as Jesus fed thousands with the loaves and fish packed for a little boy's meal (John 6:1-14), hence, God blesses our limited resources and meets the enormous need when we step out in faith and serve with love and compassion.

The late Tom Hall, a former associate director of HFHI, reflected on God's miraculous acts. "Rather than complaining about the meagerness of the resources, Jesus took what was at hand, thanked God for it and put it to work. Wonder of wonders, there was more than enough! I do not know just what happened on that Galilean hillside. I do know that when we take what is given and go to work with it to do God's will, the job can be accomplished."¹

Skepticism and the human desire to be in control often stand in the way of our expecting great things, but Habitat for Humanity supporters can tell countless stories of times when God has blessed them in ways far greater than they ever could have imagined.

2. God expects us to share our resources.

Acts 20:35 reminds us of Jesus' words that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The early Christian community modeled this lifestyle when members sold their possessions and used the proceeds to care for one another. Though it might be difficult to think about giving up our possessions, Tom Hall challenged us that to live by the economics of Jesus, we must become a sharing people. The result of living this way is amazing, he said.

The key is to create a balance. God does not mean for us to go hungry or to do without adequate clothing and shelter. John the Baptist clearly explained how we bridge the gap between poverty and affluence: *"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise"* (Luke 3:11).

We have to examine our needs and our wants and rethink what we do with our treasure. In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus offered a specific explanation: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Habitat for Humanity continues this cycle of sharing through the concept of the tithe. Around the world, when people make a gift to a Habitat project, they begin a process that keeps on giving. In accordance with the Old Testament model of tithing, each Habitat project is asked to give a 10-percent tithe on the money raised locally to help build homes in another location.

3. Our work is a response to God's love.

Habitat for Humanity homes are built on the concept of partnership. Just as Jesus told Peter to "feed my sheep" as a way for Peter to show his love for Jesus, we build houses as a response to Christ's love with no expectation of financial gain. Habitat's mission is to provide simple, decent, affordable homes through non-profit loans with affordable payments that do not burden the poor.

4. Grace and love abound for all, equally.

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells the parable of the landowner who paid laborers in his field the same wage no matter how many hours they worked during the day. The metaphor of wages teaches us about something that has nothing to do with money. Jesus used this opportunity to proclaim that no person is of greater value than another. God's grace is a gift that is not deserved but is given freely to all.

A Spirit of Unity

Many places in the book of Ephesians, the writer speaks of oneness and unity. Referring to Jesus as the cornerstone in Ephesians 2:20, the writer says, *“In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God”* (Ephesians 2:21-22).

This ability to bring together a wide diversity of people, churches and other organizations to build houses and establish viable communities is one of the great benefits of Habitat for Humanity. Supporters acknowledge that differences of opinion exist on numerous subjects—political, philosophical and theological—but that we can find common ground in the physical act of building a house to manifest God’s love.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah also describes this spirit of cooperation: *“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them”* (Isaiah 11:6).

When we respond to God’s call to help our neighbors, it is amazing how easily we forget our differences. As we focus on working together to build a house, we realize that the things that make us the same become more important than the things that keep us apart. Emphasizing a spirit of unity builds community and glorifies God.

The kingdom concepts outlined in this section are the reasons that Habitat for Humanity works. The world tells us these ideas are foolish, but we know differently. We continue to reap God’s blessings through obedience to the Lord’s call for acceptance, selflessness and service.

¹Tom Hall, “The Economics of Jesus,” *Kingdom Building: Essays from the Grassroots of Habitat*, edited by David Johnson Rowe and Robert William Stevens (Copyright ©1984 by Habitat for Humanity, Inc.), p. 49.

1.4. Part 2: Being Clear about Our Christian Identity

The first section of this document outlines four Christian principles upon which Habitat was built and thrives. Being aware of the foundational concepts is not enough, however. Part 2 of this document discusses how we can maintain our Christian identity both outwardly, while we are at work among people of many faiths and no faith, and inwardly, as we seek communion with Almighty God.

Celebrate the Blessings

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian ministry committed to the alleviation of poverty and community transformation mainly through building affordable and decent houses in partnerships with local communities and related ministries and organizations as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church therefore is a natural and significant partner in these efforts. Many people—homeowners and other partners—have been blessed by their participation in Habitat for Humanity projects. Together with our many partners we celebrate, communicate and give thanks to God for these blessings.

Transparency

Habitat is certainly committed to developing and sustaining partnerships outside the church as well, including relevant secular and interfaith organizations and entities. This we do in transparency and sincerity, especially regarding our Christian identity. Many Habitat entities face issues relating to our Christian identity at some point. This matter usually is prompted by the perceived conflict between the Christian origins and identity of Habitat for Humanity and cooperation with secular or non-Christian entities and the indispensable need to partner with related organizations in order to better serve local and global communities. It is crucial to the success of any Habitat group that leaders and partners understand clearly who we are and what our mission and purposes are, and when and why we must cooperate and share resources faithfully and without compromising our Christian identity.

Being a faithful Christian ministry and a vital partner in the business community do not have to be mutually exclusive. Jesus calls us to be good stewards of that which we have been given. We can find benefits in both worlds that will help us serve increasing numbers of families. What we must concentrate upon is that fact that our strength comes from our commitment to our vision and mission and to various accountability mechanisms.

We make every effort to articulate and communicate our Christian identity and inform potential donors and other supporters.

Habitat is also honest and forthcoming when recruiting, training and sending volunteers to serve, as well as when hiring staff and enlisting board members in various capacities and tasks. Everyone involved with Habitat for Humanity, at whatever level, is fully aware and informed that Habitat is and will remain a Christian ministry.

Consistency in Messaging

Habitat for Humanity constantly monitors its communications and reviews related publications including Web pages, brochures, mailings, recent newsletters, etc. Navigate through your Web site. We are committed to faithfully serve our mission and sincerely communicating our identity, vision, and mission.

Habitat Welcomes All People

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating substandard housing and homelessness worldwide and to making adequate affordable shelter a matter of conscience and action.

Habitat welcomes people and organizations of all faiths and no faith to be a part of this indispensable service. Explicit in our invitation to all interested persons is the understanding that we neither seek nor require conversion to the Christian faith as conditions to benefit, partner, or become involved in this ministry. Also explicit is the fact that we will neither deny nor compromise our Christian beliefs in order to recruit or accept support. Habitat will remain faithful to our Christian identity fostering an inclusive and invitational partnership model open to secular and interfaith approach with sincere likeminded organizations and entities.

As faithful people of God, we are called to love, serve, and accept all people as God loves, serves, and accept all in Jesus Christ. Habitat recognizes that most of the world's religions emphasize caring for people who are poor, making the world a better place and serving others. We can build on these common faith understandings and social commitments and create partnerships that are mutually beneficial and rewarding for all.

Being welcoming includes being sensitive to the religious practices of other faiths. For example, the food coordinator of a project in Redmond, Wash., noted that cooking for 1,200 Muslims, Jews and Catholics takes not only careful planning but an appreciation for religious customs. The food was cooked in accordance with Jewish and Muslim traditions. Workers also took breaks during the project while Muslims observed prayer times.

Another thing to consider for some faith groups is construction schedules. Jewish congregations, for example, that observe the Sabbath from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, might be invited to do their house building on Sunday.

Focus on God's Blessings for All

Too often people think of Habitat as a ministry to the poor; however, many people who set out to do something good for someone else have realized that they received much more than they gave. Habitat provides a place and a purpose for people of diverse backgrounds and opinions to come together for a common good.

Strengthening Our Christian Identity Within

Each affiliate is encouraged to create opportunities for spiritual growth. Habitat for Humanity stresses education, prayer and worship to help strengthen this ministry and its Christian foundations.

Orientation and Education

Habitat's Christian roots are discussed with each new volunteer and board member. To encourage growth and understanding, Habitat organizations can provide volunteers, staff and board members with reading and study materials. (See the list of resources available at Section 4.)

Time may be set aside during board meetings, annual retreats or planning sessions to review Habitat's Christian focuses, and to allow board members to recommit themselves to those emphases.

Prayer

Though we pray in various ways and use different words and rituals, prayer is simply means connecting with God. When we begin each day, each task, each meeting, each construction project in prayer, we are empowered to do God's work. When we see ourselves in the presence of God, rather than in the crippling grip of stress and worry, we can experience the joy that God intended for us.

We sometimes worry that the money will not come in. We fret that the materials will not be delivered on time and we moan over why it had to rain, today of all days. But the donations exceed the expenses. The least likely volunteer shows up with a truck and the sun peeks through the clouds. God blesses us beyond our expectations.

Prayer also enables us to make difficult decisions. In prayer, we trust that God will supply us with courage to do those things that at first may seem too difficult. We also trust that God will give us the strength to be faithful and obedient servants.

Worship

Worship empowers our work and service. It is important not only to individuals, but also to Habitat as an organization. Often when we come together as the Habitat community, whether it is locally or in a larger context, we gather for worship. In addition, for each new home that is built, we offer praise and thanksgiving to God during groundbreaking and dedication services. (The

“Celebrations” resource listed at the end of this material includes sample groundbreaking and dedication services, plus devotions and other worship materials.)

Habitat organizations also are encouraged to set aside special times for the entire community to rejoice in the work God has given us. While Habitat for Humanity is not a church, we eagerly take advantage of the opportunity to gather for worship. A great time to plan such services is in connection with the International Day of Prayer and Action for Human Habitat, the third weekend in September. Many individual congregations offer their support on the Day of Prayer by shaping their worship services around the themes of decent shelter and helping their neighbors.

These worship services, combined with the simultaneous prayers for shelter lifted up around the world, radically empower us. In the Book of Acts we read about this power experienced by members of the early Christian church. “When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). As a result of this empowerment, “the whole group of those who believed was of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:32-33). May it also be with us.

Section 2 - HFHI Mission Principles

2.1. Mission Principle #1: “Demonstrate the Love of Jesus Christ”

Official description from the Core Documents:

“We undertake our work to demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus, acting in all ways in accord with the belief that God’s love and grace abound for all, and that we must be “hands and feet” of the love and grace in our world. We believe that, through faith, the miniscule can be multiplied to accomplish the magnificent, and that, in faith respectful relationships can grow among all people.”

Some key teachings of Jesus which form the basis of Habitat for Humanity mission and principles:

1. Humility

- Jesus did not cling to his privileged heavenly position, but humbled himself and became a servant (Philippians 2: 5-8).
- Jesus washed the feet of his trainees (disciples). This was normally the job of the lowest level servant and beneath the dignity of any man, let alone a religious teacher. John 13:1-17;

Application to Habitat: it means that all of us, especially leaders, are to practice humility and to serve – no task is beneath our dignity. Managers and supervisors are to lead by example. i.e. to practice servant leadership.

2. Inclusiveness

- All human beings are created in God’s image, therefore every person is equally precious to God (Genesis 1:27; 2:7)
- Jesus, who was a Jewish Rabbi (teacher), treated women and non-Jews, ethnic minorities, people of different religions with equal respect as anyone else. This was in a culture where men considered women to be inferior and where Jewish Rabbis would not speak to women or non-Jews. All are welcome – e.g. parable of Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24). Other scriptures: John 4:4-26 (a poor marginalized woman); Luke 19:1-10 (a rich tax collector); Matthew 9:10-11.

Application to Habitat: it means that we are to be inclusive: welcome everyone regardless of social status, ethnic minority, religion, nationality, political party, etc

3. Special bias to the poor and marginalized

- The core of Jesus mission was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah and bring good news to the poor – through words and actions (Luke 4:16-21)
- Jesus made time for, and gave special attention to, the outcasts, disabled, those who suffered discrimination. Examples – Accepting anointing from a sex worker, commending her and

forgiving her sins (Luke 7:36-50); welcoming people with disabilities (lepers, blind, mobility-impaired)

- Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- Jesus teaching about the final judgment based in how we treat people who need shelter, clothing, food and health care (Matt. 25:31-46)
- He treated the poor as equal persons with dignity, as people who have abilities and capacities
- Justice and Advocacy with and for the poor (Proverbs 31:8-9)
- Jesus chases the traders and money changers out of the temple. He challenges economic systems that oppress the poor and squeeze out spiritual values (Mark 11:15-18; Matt.21:12-15)

Application to Habitat: Link to Mission Principles 2,3 and 4; Means we work with the economically poor and marginalized as equal partners, treating them with dignity and expect them to work and help themselves; we are “co-workers, not case-workers” working together in partnership. It also means we speak up on behalf of the poor (advocacy)

4. Reconciliation and Transformation

- Jesus breaks down barriers and prejudices between people
- He reaches out across sectarian, social and ethnic divide to bring people together, such as his 12 disciples including a tax collector, Matthew – all Jews looked down on tax collectors (Luke 5:27-32). Jesus accepted the hospitality of another unpopular tax collector, Zacchaeus, and was criticized for it by the religious leaders (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus explicitly commands us to “love our enemies” and demonstrates this in his life (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-30).
- Transformation begins with the individual (2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Romans 12:2) – but spreads to community (e.g. the first Christians in Acts chapter 2:44-47; 4:32-35; Ephesians 2:14-18)

Application to Habitat: our Mission statement “.....Habitat for Humanity brings people together.....” Domestic and Global Village Volunteer program; regular HFH new house builds bringing people together. Link with Mission Principle 5 – “Transformational Development”.

5. Resources

- Everyone, however poor or rich, has something to give. Jesus commended the poor widow who gave a much smaller amount of money than the rich people at the temple, but it was a high proportion of her income (Luke 21:1-4)
- It is more blessed to give than to receive – i.e. there is promise of happiness for those who give (Acts 20:35)
- Small physical or financial resources can go a long way when mixed with prayer and dependence on God. Example of Jesus with the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

- He expanded the biblical teaching on tithing (Malachi 3:10) and reminds us that all our resources are given by God who expects us to be good stewards of them
- Jesus teaches us to ask God for resources needed – prayer, plus the implication of challenging the rich to give (Matthew 7:7 – “Ask and it will be given to you”) which I think has double meaning of asking people and asking God.

Application to Habitat:

- Applies to Strategic Plan Foundational goal (page 4) “Build a Sustainable Organization”)
- Our Resource development work – claiming Jesus promise: “Ask and it will be given to you” – by prayer and by going out seeking donors.
- The tithe program. Originally, all Habitat affiliates were encouraged to tithe regardless of how economically poor their country was – e.g. there were occasions where affiliates in poorer African and Latin American countries designated their tithe to an affiliate in the US after a disaster affecting the latter.
- HFH seeks to enable the poor to enjoy equally with the rich the blessing (happiness) that Jesus promised when he said “it is more blessed to give than to receive”. Equally, HFH provides an opportunity for the economically rich to divest themselves of what they don’t need and thus come to experience God’s special blessing.
- Sweat equity – everyone can contribute their labour.

6. Salt and Light

- Jesus teaching that his staff are to be salt and light (Matthew 5: 13-16)
- Salt: a preservative against rotting (corruption); Light shows everything up – nothing hidden

Application to Habitat:

- Transparency; no corruption
- Honesty, accountability and respect in advertising, fund-raising and reporting.
- Professionalism, high quality in construction, housing finance, accounting, etc: “Whatever Jesus did, he did it right”

Further Reading:

- Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in modern translations, including “Cotton Patch Gospels” by Clarence Jordan.
- Article by John Stack: ”How do we demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus Christ in a global context?” in “Kingdom Building – Voices from the Soul of Habitat for Humanity” published 2006 by HFHI
- “Creating a Habitat for Humanity: no Hands but yours” by Jonathan Reckford
- “Theology of the Hammer” by Millard Fuller

Questions for General Reflection

MP #1 Demonstrate the Love of Jesus

1. What would your leadership look like if you followed Jesus' example? What are the challenges in adopting your interpretation of his style?
2. Identify a place in your life where a desire to control has overtaken the call to love.
3. How can we practice Jesus teaching on "inclusiveness" in board and staff recruitment as we strive to maintain our Christian identity?
4. Who is our neighbour in today's world?
5. Think of times you've seen people in need but you were too busy to stop and talk or respond; discuss how we can change our attitude from one of clutter, complexity and busy-ness to one of applying the power of love more effectively and naturally?
6. What would it look like for the light of the world to be known to you, through you, in your life, to your household, in your community in your actions?
7. How and where do you find opportunities to let your light shine for the glory of God?
8. Have you ever thought of Jesus as a fugitive and as a refugee? If so, how can this help in your attitude to our clients?
9. In what ways do you see HFH distinguishing itself as a Christian movement? In what ways do we struggle or fail?
10. What does it mean to you in your work life to keep God at the centre?
11. How can we strengthen one another as faith-based worldwide community to find God's guidance to build impact?
12. How can we leave room in our strategic planning for the strategy of the Spirit?
13. What do you do to maintain faith and trust in God when you faced a great difficulty or disappointment or uncertainty?
14. In these days of 24/7 connectivity, how can we ensure proper time to rest and regenerate our spiritual and physical lives? How can we improve in our obedience to the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) to use God's gift of the Sabbath correctly?

2.2. Mission Principle #2: “Focus on Shelter”

Official description from the Core Documents:

“We have chosen, as our means of manifesting God’s love, to create opportunities for all people to live in decent, durable shelter. We put faith into action by helping to build, renovate or preserve homes and by partnering with others to accelerate and broaden access to affordable housing as a foundation for breaking the cycle of poverty.”

Comments on selected phrases from this statement:

“Means of manifesting God’s love”:

- Our mission statement opens with the phrase: **“seeking to put God’s love into action.....”**
One of Jesus’ first disciples subsequently wrote:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18)

- The scriptures also teach us to **demonstrate our faith** by helping the economically poor.

“What good is it if a person claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him: “go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” but does not do anything about his physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:14-16)

- Jesus’ teaches that **key criteria in the performance evaluation of our lives** concerns how much our faith has been demonstrated in practical action to help the poor - see examples of the criteria given in Matthew 25:31-46.

“Create Opportunities for all people”

- This phrase implies the empowerment of people and systems to create such opportunities; the emphasis on “all people” implies **scale**.
- Jesus’ miracle of feeding the 5000 could be considered as an illustration of some aspects of this: the opportunity for all those people to be fed was provided by the use of limited resources (five loaves and two fish), careful organization of the crowd and prayer for God to multiply the limited resources on hand (Mark 6:37-44)
- Some of the ways Habitat for Humanity creates opportunities for greater numbers of people include: the **development of markets** for affordable and environmentally sustainable building materials; the provision of **training and technical assistance** for home partners and the community; work with microfinance institutions to unlock financial resources for **small loans**

for housing; **advocacy** for changes in policies and practices that enable more low-income households to obtain secure land tenure and housing.

“Decent durable shelter”:

- Our vision is a world where everyone has a “decent place to live”
- Our Founder, Millard Fuller, often referred to the need for everyone to have a “simple decent place to live” – emphasizing both the “simple” (i.e. affordable and not too fancy) and “decent” (i.e. durable, resilient)
- A decent house means it must be strong, disaster-resilient and healthy - including secure access to a toilet and to clean water.
- Therefore the specific sectorial focus of Habitat for Humanity is shelter, water and sanitation

“Partnering with others”

- A “decent place to live” also means a need for a safe, mutually-supportive and healthy community where people can earn a living, pursue livelihoods and develop, socially and spiritually as well as physically.
- Habitat for Humanity handles this aspect by collaborating or partnering with other people or organizations which have relevant expertise in education, health, food security, livelihood development etc. Also to partner with those who have expertise in organizing savings groups and administering micro-loans for housing
- Just as the apostle Paul uses the human body as an illustration of how individuals should work together in harmony and collaboration, so this metaphor can be applied to groups and organizations working together in collaboration or partnership (see Romans 12: 3-8).
- Habitat for Humanity’s calling and expertise is to focus on shelter, clean water and sanitation – so we strive to be excellent at that. We don’t try to do what others are called and gifted to do, but rather to complement their work with our contribution.
- In addition, Habitat for Humanity methodology has an emphasis on partnership; the mission statement speaks of us “bringing people together” – which includes our home partner beneficiaries, local community members, other organizations and people from near and far.
- We seek to follow Jesus’ example in the way he respected the economically poor and marginalized by building **with partner families** and not just “for” them; i.e. we recognize them as equal partners with dignity and skills. Then we invite them to join the Habitat for Humanity movement helping to create opportunities for others also to have a home.

“Foundation for breaking the cycle of poverty”

- We research information about the impact of housing on other aspects of human and community development.
- We advocate that secure access to disaster-resilient housing is **foundational** for good health, psycho-social well-being, for children’s education, and for income-generation/secure livelihoods.

Questions for General Reflection

MP #2 Focus on Shelter

1. As we scale up our work serving tens of thousands of people, especially through housing market development and advocacy, how can we maintain the personal touch of demonstrating the love of God for individuals? Or can we?
2. Consider/discuss the challenges of keeping HFH homes simple and affordable at the same time as ensuring disaster resilience, as well as contextualizing to local communities?
3. How can we maintain a focus on shelter, water and sanitation and resist donor or community pressure to take on other issues? Is this important? Why? Or why not?
4. Consider/discuss the application of Romans 12:3-8 (the Body metaphor) to organizations collaborating with each other.
5. How can we improve our awareness-raising and advocacy efforts to demonstrate that secure access to decent shelter is foundational for health, education, poverty alleviation, etc.?

2.3. Mission Principle #3: “Advocate for Affordable Housing”

Official description from the Core Documents:

“In response to the prophet Micah’s call to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God, we promote decent affordable housing for all, and we support the global community’s commitment to housing as a basic human right. We will advocate for just and fair housing policies to eliminate the constraints that contribute to poverty housing. And, in all of our work, we will seek to put shelter on hearts and minds in such powerful ways that poverty housing becomes socially, politically and religiously unacceptable.”

Definition and goal of HFHI Advocacy:

- “Changing systems, policies and attitudes to achieve decent housing for all” (*HFHI global advocacy guide - GAG*)
- “The word “advocacy” comes from the Latin word for “someone called to one’s aid”; it refers to someone who argues for a cause or course of action. Such advocates support and argue for the rights of those in need or who suffer from injustice. Advocates work for justice by raising awareness of, and working to change situations and policies that are unjust” (*GAG*)

Bible Definition of advocacy in action:

- *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute; speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy”* (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Biblical call to advocacy:

- *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8). This is “Micah’s Call” referenced above in description of this mission principle.
- It comes straight out of the commandment to *“love your neighbour as yourself”* (Matthew 19:19). Micah’s Call firstly emphasizes justice which has been defined as “the form love takes when dealing with groups”
- Therefore the focus of biblical advocacy is justice – with and for people who are poor, oppressed, marginalized, enslaved, wrongly convicted, homeless, or discriminated against.
- But “doing justice” alone can be hard and unfeeling, so Micah balances this with his second phrase – to “love mercy” which includes being willing to forgive the sins of others, just as God has forgiven us. And of course this includes being willing to not only confront the oppressors who cause the injustice, but also to forgive them.
- The final phrase of Micah’s Call (to “walk humbly with your God”) challenges us to act with humility, recognizing that we may need to repent for our part in supporting systems that oppress people, as we advocate for justice for people who lack a simple decent place to live, and to recognize that we need to keep God at the centre and seek his wisdom and strength if we are to be effective.

Jesus Christ's Teaching and Example

- **Jesus is our advocate with God**, the Judge of the entire world. *“If anyone does sin we have an advocate who speaks with the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2: 1-2). The picture here is like a court of law with Jesus as the barrister or lawyer pleading the cause of the sinner, based on the justice of the fact that the sin penalty has already been paid (by Jesus death in our place). Background study on this: see Romans 3:21-26, which talks about how God demonstrated his justice and his love and mercy to human beings
- **Jesus Ministry Manifesto:** *“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”* (Luke 4:18-19)

Biblical Principles for effective advocacy:

1. **Intercessory prayer** is the principle form of action for Christian advocacy; we advocate directly to God for people. Therefore we need to spend time individually and communally working in prayer advocating with God for people we know, as well as those we don’t know, who lack a simple decent place to live
2. **It must be relational.** The effective advocate identifies with the people who are suffering and need someone to advocate for them. It’s not “top down” but “coming alongside”. Example of Jesus, who being himself God, identified with humankind and came alongside us (his incarnation celebrated at Christmas). See Philippians 2:5-8: *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”* See also Jesus’ examples of how he related to individual poor and marginalized people as recorded in the four gospels.
3. **It can mean taking risks, and being sacrificial.** For example for Jesus to be our advocate he risked and gave his life. The young Jewish Queen Esther risked her life to advocate for the oppressed Jewish minority (see the Old Testament book of Esther)
4. **It is based on verifiable facts.** It is essential to obtain accurate information about the causes of the problem in order to advocate accurately and effectively. For example, before she acted Esther obtained detailed information about the situation of the Jewish minority, the danger they were in and the specific causes of that danger so that she could advocate accurately on their behalf (Esther 4: 5-9)

5. **It is humble**, rather than arrogant – using weapons of peace. Examples: Nelson Mandela, Gandhi. Also, for example, Jesus quietly came alongside the “woman taken in adultery” (see John 8: 1-11) – i.e. quiet non-confrontational, yet powerful approach.
6. But there may be some rare situations when a **robust confrontational approach** is necessary – for example – Jesus in dealing with religious leaders in Matthew 23 v. 23, where he said *“woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel”* and later in the same chapter Jesus referred to them as *“you snakes; you brood of vipers....”* This language may be a bit too strong for us to use (!) but it is a reminder that part of our Christian calling is to boldly challenge religious or secular leaders that cause oppression. The almost impossible challenge for us sinful humans is to be bold like this without becoming proud and arrogant – to be outspoken while at the same time being humble, prayerful and dependent on God
7. It is usually **collaborative** rather than individualistic. An important aspect of humility is to recognize our need for others. Several biblical examples involve calling people together to clarify the issue, learn from each other, pray together and agree the advocacy action. For us it is important to collaborate with the wider Habitat for Humanity family to ensure consistent messaging in the name of Habitat for Humanity.
8. **It is prayerful**. For example, before acting, Queen Esther called for 3 days of fasting and prayer (Esther 4:15-16). We need to pray and practice the Habitat for Humanity strategic plan global prayer:

“God, teach us humility so that we may....listen, confess and forgive, serve in relationship with the poor, persevere in our mission, unify as one body with many diverse parts, and act with courage and boldness.”

Further information:

1. The bible, especially Esther, Micah and other Old Testament prophets, as well as the New Testament four Gospels in traditional translations, or for a modern version applied to a specific 20th Century cultural context – try “the Cotton Patch Gospels” by Clarence Jordan.
2. The Micah Challenge – see www.micahchallenge.org for some biblical advocacy resources
3. Tearfund – see www.tearfund.org – search “advocacy”
4. World Vision – see www.worldvision.org – search “advocacy publications”
5. “Justice, Mercy and Humility ...integral mission and the poor” by Tim Chester, Paternoster Press 2001
6. “Theological Reflection on Strategic Objective 2.2 – Advocacy” by Grant Wadley, HFH!
7. “Esther the Advocate” power-point presentation used in devotions, by Robin Shell, HFHI

Questions for General Reflection

MP #3 Advocate for Affordable Housing

1. The Bible has numerous references to God's judgment (e.g. holding us accountable for injustice) and love. In what ways is it true to say that justice is an expression of love?
2. How do we balance justice with mercy?
3. Do you agree with the eight principles listed as important biblical principles for effective advocacy? If so, how do we balance them as an organization?
4. How can we balance the statement that advocacy should be "relational" (or should it?) with carrying out global campaigns to reach large numbers of people?
5. Should HFH ever engage in a "robust confrontational approach" like Jesus sometimes did?
6. How do we maintain humility at the same time as fighting injustice in regard to land tenure security and affordable housing access?

2.4. Mission Principle #4: “Promote Dignity and Hope”

Official description from the Core Documents:

“We believe that no one lives in dignity until everyone can live in dignity. We believe that every person has something to contribute and something to gain from creating communities in which all people have decent, affordable places to live. We believe that dignity and hope are best achieved through equitable, accountable partnerships.”

History

Promoting dignity and hope through partnership has been a core principle since Habitat’s founding.

Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm on the purpose of the Fund for Humanity (the precursor to Habitat for Humanity) said, “Its purpose will be two-fold; a) to provide an inheritance for the disinherited, and b) to provide a means through which the possessed may share with and invest in the dispossessed. What the poor need is not charity but capital, not case-workers, but co-workers. And what the rich need is a wise, honorable and just way of divesting themselves of their over-abundance. The Fund for Humanity will meet both of these needs.”

Habitat for Humanity founder, Millard Fuller, said “What Habitat does is much more than just sheltering people. It’s what it does for people on the inside. It’s that intangible quality of hope. Many people without decent housing consider themselves life’s losers. This is the first victory they may have ever had. And it changes them” He also said, “Everyone – all of us, every last person on God’s earth – deserves decent shelter. It speaks to the most basic of human needs – our home – the soil from which all of us, every last person, either blossom or wither.”

Jonathan Reckford, CEO of Habitat for Humanity International has said, “Our ministry is a simple concept of providing a hand up versus a hand out to families in need, and we are deeply grateful to volunteers, donors and other supporters around the world who help us with this life-changing work.”

Biblical Basis for Promoting Dignity and Hope

- Human dignity comes from God because we are made in God’s own image and likeness (Gen 1:26, 27)
- All people are equal in God’s eyes. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Gal. 3:28)
- God is the author of hope. *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and hope.”* (Jer. 29:11)
- We are commanded to love each other, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...”* (John 15:12)
- We are to care for others, *“Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but to the interests of others.”* (Phil. 2:4)

How We Promote Dignity and Hope

In our work and partnerships,

1. We respect and incorporate household and community preferences, by
 - a. Practicing dialogue, consultation, transparency, and participatory methods with all stakeholders
 - b. Seeking project partners that reflect the diversity of the community of housing need and of the broader community
2. We seek to promote individual and collective self-respect and self-confidence, by
 - a. Designing our interventions in ways that promote individual and group interdependence and self-reliance
3. We incorporate contributions by households and the broader community by asking each for an appropriate combination of
 - a. Financial equity (savings/loan); sweat equity (labor); gifts in kind; organizational/collective equity (community capacity to manage aspects of our programs) and/or intellectual equity (individual and collective knowledge and wisdom)
 - b. Balancing the goals of home partners, communities, donors and volunteers
4. We promote gender equity, by
 - a. Actively promoting participation by women in project design and implementation
 - b. Promoting ownership or inheritance rights for women in our housing solutions

(HFHI Mission Alignment Assessment Tool)

“Is my heart so clean that I can see the face of God in my brother, my sister who is that black one, that white one, that naked one, that one suffering from leprosy, that dying one?”

And this is what we must pray for. Because God lives in us and makes us godly, we are one another’s brothers and sisters – one big family of God’s children.”

Mother Teresa

Questions for General Reflection

MP #4 Promote Dignity and Hope

1. What does it mean to build hope? Think of HFH staff and volunteer colleagues as well as clients and partners; is there someone you sense could benefit from an encouraging word of hope from you today?
2. What would be different in your life if you focus on living with hope?
3. What steps can you take to make God a source of hope and strength?
4. Have you ever experienced hope when circumstances around you seem bleak? If so, how?
5. What is God calling you to do individually and as part of HFH to bring hope to the world?
6. In what ways can we be guilty of not treating our clients/home-partners with dignity?
7. How do we maintain treating our clients with dignity as we scale up to serve much larger numbers of people and diversify our methods?
8. How do we put into practice Millard Fuller's comments about the importance of "what (HFH ministry) does for people on the inside: it's that intangible quality of hope"?

2.5. Mission Principle # 5: “Support Sustainable and Transformational Development”

Official description from the Core Documents:

“We view our work as successful when it transforms lives and promotes positive and lasting social change within a community; when it is based on mutual trust and fully shared accomplishments; and when it demonstrates responsible stewardship of all resources entrusted to us”.

Definitions of Transformation:

- “change the shape or character of” (Collins dictionary)
- “the process of changing a person or a thing to something better or more attractive” (English dictionary)
- “Change or renewal from a life that no longer conforms to the ways of the world to one that pleases God” (Bible)
- Bible: From Romans chapter 12 verse 2 – the Greek word translated as “transformed” is metamorphosis (meta = change; morph = form), meaning a change in form. This word is also used to describe the change of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

The need for personal transformation

An essential component for sustainable transformational development is for those involved to experience individual personal transformation or positive change in character and behaviour

From Mission Principle #1 – “Demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus Christ”, some of his teachings with regard to the need for transformation include:

- Jesus said that the personal change needed was so radical that he likened it to new birth (John 3:3). He taught that although all human beings are made in the image of God and are thus capable of great good, they have replaced worship of God with worship of self or things such as money, prestige, power, etc; he also said, *“out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander..”* (Matt 15:19)
- *“What causes wars and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”* (James 4:1-3)
- Calvin’s summary of the entire Christian life is “self-denial” He said that the key to the soul’s restoration is “death to self”. The bible says that greed is idolatry (Col 3:5) as it idolizes self and makes my desires paramount.
- Jesus said: *“whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”*

(Matt. 16:25-26). i.e. we must not treat ourselves as “god”; if the prime focus of every person is only to please themselves with no thought of God or others, then they “lose their life” – i.e. lose meaning and purpose. But if a person’s main focus is to please God and serve others in humility then they find their true selves – purpose, meaning, fulfillment, life.

Biblical understanding of transformation

- It starts with the individual experiencing personal regeneration or “new birth” / spiritual birth into a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ in such a way that their whole thinking and life-style is re-oriented away from a focus on pleasing oneself to a focus on pleasing God. (see John 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)
- The apostle Paul writes:

*“I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will”* (Romans 12:1-2)

The proof of whether genuine individual transformation takes place is seen to the extent that a person practices the qualities listed in the subsequent verses (Romans 12 v 3-21)

- If we all practiced these qualities, community transformation would automatically occur. Individual and personal transformation is foundational to sustainable community transformation.

Personal transformation leads to systemic change and community transformation.

(The following comments are mostly taken from Habitat for Humanity’s “Theory of Change” Core document and from its “Development Approach” document which forms part of the current global strategic plan package)

A vision and example of a transformed community is given by the prophet Isaiah as a place restored to wholeness, a place where people live in peace and harmony with one another and where they reap the rewards of their own labour, where people build homes and live in them, where there will be no more child mortality due to poverty, where people live to an old age; it will be a place of equal dignity and opportunity... (Isaiah 65). This kind of community cannot be imposed by outsiders such as social workers, NGO staff, government officials, but only by “transformed” individuals practicing the personal transformational values outlined above, living and working in the community.

Transformational development means positive change in the whole of human life – materially, socially and spiritually. Habitat for Humanity views its work as successful when lives are transformed and when positive and lasting social, economic and spiritual change is promoted within a

community. Authentic transformation changes the lives of all who participate, including those who need housing, as well as Habitat for Humanity volunteers and staff, donors, advocates, community leaders and local government officials. HFH believes that housing, both as a process and as a product, is necessary to create lasting family and community impact. Housing as a product improves household health and well-being leading to increased time on the job or in school; this contributes to family income and education – both essential to breaking the cycle of poverty. Housing as a process focuses on building community cohesion that in turn can lead to systemic change, more broadly reducing vulnerability to the cycle of poverty. The process of housing can be used as an opportunity to bring peace and reconciliation between different ethnic or religious groups in community conflict.

Arguably the most important aspect of the way Habitat for Humanity works is its promotion and practice of volunteerism as a key strategy for achieving transformational development. Barriers and stereotypes are broken down when people from different socio-economic groups work side by side. Sustained systemic change is possible only when those with influence and affluence are moved to holy discontent when confronted by poverty housing conditions in their community. This becomes more real when statistics become faces with names and personal interactions, and when tough neighbourhoods are made up of families with whom we have worked – not just seen as reports in the news.

Another way of describing the biblical vision of community is a community where shalom (a holistic peace) is experienced; this means a community where justice is practiced and available for everyone. Tim Dearborn has written, “The poor don’t simply need charity; they need justice, expressed in structural change, protection from exploitation and access to opportunity.” (“Reflections on Advocacy and Justice”, World Vision)

Justice is rooted in the character and nature of God, since the bible reveals God as both a God of love and a God of justice. The prophet Micah speaks of this when he exhorts us to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). Justice is making life right for the homeless, for orphans, ethnic minorities, the disabled, for everyone in the community. Mercy is to create human societies where life – especially that of the poor and marginalized – can be protected and nourished.

Robin Shell

Questions for General Reflection

MP #5 Support Sustainable and Transformational Development

1. What is your understanding and experience of the meaning of transformation as quoted from Romans 12:2?
2. As individuals in HFH, how can we encourage one another in the process of personal transformation?
3. Discuss the most important evidences of personal transformation as outlined in Romans 12?
4. Do you agree with the statement that if we all practiced these qualities community transformation would occur naturally?
5. Reflect on and discuss what Jesus means when he says “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” How can this apply to us in our personal life? And in our work life?
6. Modern psychology emphasizes the importance of self-affirmation and self-love; in what ways does this conflict with Jesus’ emphasis on self-denial
7. In what ways does “housing as a process” contribute towards peace and reconciliation?

Section 3

Conclusion

Habitat for Humanity is driven by the teachings of our Christian faith. Habitat’s Christian identity motivates and enables its mission. An undertaking as great as eliminating poverty housing from the earth is but foolish rhetoric in the absence of divine direction, and God continues to bless this dynamic ministry. We witness to the power and love of Jesus Christ as we build simple, decent houses in partnership with all people.

Section 4 - Resources

4.1. Resources Available from Habitat for Humanity

Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours—Habitat for Humanity International CEO Jonathan Reckford explains how ending poverty housing is a matter of justice, mercy and humility.

Item # 7127 \$3.50

Kingdom Building for the 21st Century: Voices from the Soul of Habitat—Key figures, past and present, tell how God continues to touch the lives of people and communities around the world.

Item #7063 \$3.50

4.2. WORSHIP RESOURCES

***Day of Prayer bulletin inserts** can be used in worship services at any time of year.

Item #7130 \$2/pack of 100

***Celebrations**—Worship resource that includes groundbreaking, dedications, devotions and more

Item #3347 \$5

4.3. STUDY TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Kindergarten Sunday School Lesson—This teacher's guide for a single lesson is also appropriate for other age groups. Includes Bible lessons and activities.

Item #3382 50 cents per pack of 5

For any of these resources, call the Help Line, (800) HABITAT (422-4828), Ext. 2552. Shipping and handling charges are added to all orders, including free publications.

4.4. Resources Available from Koinonia Farms

The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons—These sermons demonstrate the depth of spirit of Clarence Jordan, who saw fresh meaning in the most familiar passages of scripture.

Code: 124B \$16.99

Cotton Patch Gospels—Clarence Jordan brought the scriptures to life with his modern-day Southern translations of the New Testament.

Code: 110SB \$43.99

To order, call Koinonia toll-free at (877) 738-1741 or e-mail products@koinoniapartners.org.

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