A half-century ago, WELS mission work was still in its infancy. Since then, our home and world mission programs have grown to include multi-million dollar budgets overseen by professional administrators. The Lord has clearly blessed the efforts of the synod to reach out with the Gospel, and the results can now be seen from coast to coast and around the world.

As our mission program developed, the methodology necessarily followed a learning curve. Spurred on by requests from conservative Lutherans, the first wave of home mission growth concentrated on opening churches where there were no conservative congregations to serve local Lutherans. This strategy centered on choosing locations that would be centrally located and had easy access to the growing U.S. freeway system. Not wishing to sow in other men’s gardens, missions were usually planted in the burgeoning suburbs and bedroom communities that typified America’s unique brand of late-20th-century urban development. The hearkening to “Macedonian calls” from conservative Lutherans was supplemented by decisions to unilaterally plant congregations in strategic growth areas and, more recently, in some areas of cross-cultural opportunity.

Our world mission program began growing about mid-century. The two new fields that were started were vastly different from one another—a station in the African bush and another in the industrialized country of Japan. The former experienced good growth among an impoverished people, the latter very slow growth among a social class recovering its prosperity in a post-war environment. In both cases, while the goal of indigenization was clear, the circumstances made it difficult for quick advances in that direction.

Picking up on the concept of indigenous missions as well as our American ideal of self-sufficiency, home mission guidelines evolved that encouraged a quick transition from mission to self-supporting congregation. This became more and more standardized as the synod developed a more sophisticated administration to oversee what had become an annual budget for home missions. In addition, the Church Extension Fund was created to offer low-interest loans to construct facilities for mission congregations. The guidelines for the fund stressed the need for systematic and prompt repayment, geared to the expected growth in congregational membership. Both the decisions for parceling out the annual mission budget and the use of building funds required increasingly complicated financial and business decision-making skills. The synod turned to businessmen among its laity for much-needed guidance in matters of administration, bookkeeping, and financial decision-making. Missions had gradually become “big business.”

Many established and mission congregations had periodical stewardship programs to educate their membership in this important area of Christian life. As the century progressed, synodical leaders, as well as the synod at its biennial convention, took continual steps to ensure that the gifts of its people were being properly and wisely used. Even in the most prosperous of times, we have tried to be the best of stewards. And, in keeping with modern business principles and parlance, this usually meant “getting the biggest bang for our buck.”
As our world program spread, especially in the last quarter century, we at times found ourselves over-extended. Tough decisions had to be made. Do we enter a new field or expand an existing one? Do we expand a blossoming field by pulling manpower from another field that seems stagnant? Synodical boards and administrators had to devise stewardship strategies for just such situations. With half a dozen administrative committees now supervising work in several dozen countries, such decision-making has become more and more complicated.

This brief and highly simplified sketch undoubtedly does much injustice to the development of our synod’s mission program. It is presented here, however, to give some small picture of just how naturally our synod’s mission programs became big business operations governed by sound business practices. There certainly were many detours and growing pains that had to be surmounted. But it was through God’s grace and the hard work of many dedicated and intelligent servants that we have come this far.

However, along the way, has something inadvertently been lost or marginalized? With the implementation of sound, rational business practices, has some of Jesus’ advice on mission outreach and stewardship been overlooked in our current situation and, therefore, not been used in the planning and implementation of mission work? This article will seek to examine some of the assumptions behind business decision-making and their use in truly biblical outreach and stewardship.

**Stewardship in Biblical and Ecclesiastical Contexts**

It is not my purpose to exhaustively expound the biblical teaching about stewardship. Our synodical stewardship materials have consistently given wonderful expression to the teaching. However, there are a few points that often are omitted. There is also an important application that has often been drawn which must be questioned.

Our use of the English words *steward* and *stewardship* in the context of our Christian life goes back to the KJV (neither word appears in the NIV). The KJV used these words to translate the Greek words *oikonomia* and *oikonomos*. The NIV translates them with *manager* and *management* in Luke 12:42 and 16:2-4, with *administering* in 1 Pet. 4:10, and as *those entrusted with* and *those being given a trust* in 1 Cor. 4:1-2 and Titus 1:7.

Jesus uses *oikonomia* three times in his parable of the clever manager. Faced with losing his job, the steward or manager unilaterally reduces the amounts owed to his master by various clients. In so doing he wins favor with the clients, ensuring some friends and support after being sacked by his current master. In his application Jesus makes two points. First, he encourages use of our worldly wealth to gain lasting friends for ourselves, “so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9). Second, he reminds us that “whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (v. 10).1

Paul also talked about the Christian as an *oikonomos* of God who must prove faithful to his master (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Therefore, “he must be blameless— not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain” (Titus 1:7). Peter adds that every Christian is to be an *oikonomos* of “God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10).

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1 In Luke 12:36-42 Jesus again talks about a “good oikonomos” but simply defines this person as the one who cares for his master’s possessions by constantly being on watch.
While all of these passages stress the fact that God expects us to be faithful managers and stewards of the physical and spiritual gifts he has given us, the question remains: “What is meant by “faithfulness”?

Current Definition of Stewardship in the Context of Mission Expenditures

What does “good stewardship” mean in the context of WELS missions today? In both home and world mission situations, it might be a synonym for “wise investment of resources.” I would argue, however, that as soon as the word investment is used, we have added a more precise meaning than is warranted. Resources of money and manpower are not just to be wisely and efficiently used (i.e., possibly “used up”) but are to be invested (i.e., used in a way that will give the best “dividends”). A good investment will conserve the “principal” that is invested. But is conserving principal implied in biblical mission stewardship?

In world mission situations, there is little expectation of an eventual monetary return of the principal. The good investment is judged primarily by the blessings that become evident from the work—converted sinners, the founding of congregations and church bodies, and the training of indigenous workers. While the indigenous Christians are expected to grow in their own giving and stewardship, this is usually expected to be very gradual. If a field does not meet any of these general expectations, however, the supervisory bodies will consider it to be “good stewardship” to reconsider future investments of manpower and money in that work. It is now normal for mission boards to be faced with many more opportunities to enter new fields than we are able to meet. This may lead us to favor work among populations that can more quickly become self-supporting and self-propagating. Others may suggest that we build up indigenous churches in more affluent communities, thinking that such churches will have the resources to then reach the poorer classes of their own people.

In home missions, the situation has traditionally been viewed quite differently. Since America is more economically blessed than most foreign fields, and since faster growth is expected in the Judeo-Christian environment of North America, the corresponding expectations are also considerably higher. New missions are judged not to have a proper “field” for work if there is little evidence of numerical growth. If there is insufficient growth toward economic self-support, the nucleus might be judged to be less than fully committed to the mission enterprise. Both of these are grounds for a district mission board to question the “stewardship” of additional investment in that work. Self-support within five or ten years is often specifically enunciated as a reasonable goal. Fledgling congregations are often loaned money for building projects with contractual agreements for repayment. Less strict standards of stewardship accountability might be suggested and applied only if the field is out of the ordinary, e.g., is in a central city or rural area, involves outreach to ethnic or social minorities, or is seen as some other sort of specialized ministry (ministry to collegians, prison inmates, the disabled or elderly).

There are three conclusions to note from this brief summary. First of all, there are fundamental differences in expectations of numerical growth and progress toward self-support between our home and world mission programs. Second, despite these differences, both programs would lay claim to being good stewards of the resources entrusted to them. Third, both can provide rational defenses of their stewardship. They are eminently “reasonable” to the average pastor or layperson.

Mission Stewardship, Modern Business Models, and the Selection of Mission Fields

As stated above, as our mission programs grew in size, those responsible for overseeing the work repeatedly reassessed the mechanisms by which they supervised the work and made decisions.
Mission Stewardship

affecting the work. Lessons in efficiency and management have been learned from the business world. And, by osmosis, we have also absorbed a rational secular view of stewardship. Reference has already been made to the word investment and how it can add a new dimension to the idea of how resources are used faithfully. It is still continually and rightfully emphasized that the goal of missions should be the sowing (preaching) of the Word, and that we must wait on the Spirit to provide the increase. However, the fruit that is sought is not simply the saving of souls but the establishment of viable congregations. Where this does not take place, it is seen as proof of “rocky soil” or simple rejection of the message. When this happens, we may “shake the dust from our feet” and go elsewhere. Doing so in such a case will be “good stewardship.”

A modern business approach has also been used in evaluating potential mission fields. Our resources are limited, and our goal is to reach as many souls as possible with the Gospel. Therefore, the decision on where to invest our limited manpower and money is an important one. It is only logical to invest in areas where the growth will be most rapid and where self-support will occur quickly. This will allow us to take our “principal” and reinvest it elsewhere in the near future, expanding and repeating the effect it will have. This makes good business sense and formulas can be devised so that mathematically accurate decisions can be made. Maps can be scanned and demographic data compiled to determine in which areas and with which target groups there is greatest chance of success.

Again, this all seems eminently logical— but is it scriptural? This writer is convinced that those who have in the past and are presently overseeing our synod’s mission efforts at home and abroad have done so to the best of their abilities and in an effort to be faithful stewards. But self-examination is always a worthwhile exercise for Christians. And the church’s foe is clever enough to routinely get a foot in the door.

Christ’s Definition of Mission Stewardship

Christ was clear in his mission instructions to his followers: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” And yet we cannot go everywhere simultaneously. We must make tough decisions on where to go now. God clearly directed Paul to bypass certain areas on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-7). Paul was given and recognized as divine the “Macedonian call” to preach still farther afield. Later Paul was confronted with an “Open door” at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12); although we are not told specifically how Paul recognized this. It would appear that it was evident from the enthusiastic reception that he received when preaching there (the energies of 1 Cor. 16:9).

Many people have discerned certain missionary principles and strategies from Paul’s life as a missionary: He concentrated on cities, increasingly on major population centers and provincial capitals; he always preached first to the Jews in the local synagogue, then turned to the proselytes, God-fearers, and other Gentiles; he seldom did “street preaching”; and only once in his three missionary journeys do we hear of a situation where his own linguistic abilities were not sufficient to carry out his work (Acts 14:8-20).

However, while many of these principles may be valid yet today, Scripture nowhere commands us to emulate them. While the accounts of Paul’s mission endeavors were “written for our learning” like the rest of Scripture, his mission practices are not hermeneutically normative for all times and places.

2 In 1 Cor. 16:9 Paul speaks of a “great and effective door” being open for work at Ephesus. This same imagery is used in Acts 14:2; Col. 4:3; and Rev. 3:8. The door metaphor used to describe openness to hear God’s Word may well build on Jesus’ own frequent use of doors to indicate accessibility in spiritual matters (cf. Matt. 25:10-11; Luke 11:7-10 and 13:24-25, among others).
Does the Master, Christ himself, however, give us advice on mission stewardship? I believe he does. First of all, he tells us clearly that mission work is a top priority for the church. We are to work while it is day before the night comes that will be our opportunity to bring others to Christ (John 9:4). We are told clearly to “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them…” (Matt. 28:20).

Key to Jesus’ concept of stewardship is Luke chapter 14. We are told that Jesus had accepted an invitation to a Sabbath banquet at the house of a prominent Pharisee. While he was there, he observed the guests vying for places of honor. This gave Jesus the opportunity for telling a parable about humility (Luke 14:7-11). Afterwards, he turns to his host and teaches him a greater lesson about stewardship. Jesus implies that this Pharisee followed the local custom of the day by inviting other “rich people” to come to his feast. This would have been seen as a good “investment” of his funds, because he in turn would be invited to their banquets, thus getting a “return” on his investment. However lavish one’s hospitality in the community is, however, it is not a “good investment” in God’s sight if the guest lists are drawn up in this sort of “reasonable” way. The people who are most in need of an invitation to a free meal are those who are in need, those who will never be able to throw a party in return. Invite, rather, “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (v. 13). If you do that, says Jesus, “you will be blessed.”

But how can that be? How can such an investment be blessed if it is never repaid? Jesus’ answer was simple and reasonable, but in a very un-businesslike way. “Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (v. 14). The real reward will be in the next life—a divine reward that will include seeing those you reached on earth sharing in the heavenly banquet.

Jesus then changes the subject to God’s heavenly banquet and invitations to it. He tells a parable of a master sending out his representatives to invite large numbers to a great banquet. But most potential guests are caught up with the affairs of their own lives, and so they have no time to respond or no interest in the invitation. The heralds come back with little to show for their efforts. So the master sends them out again. This time they are to concentrate their efforts on “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.” After bringing in everyone from the back alleys and lanes, there is still room for the rural poor in the country lanes. These are the people who gladly respond and become guests at the feast.³

If this parable had appeared in isolation one might question its application to the concrete situation of making mission decisions. But since it is conspicuously linked to the advice Jesus gives directly to his host, it is hard to avoid seeing a connection. Just as an earthly host might be misled into thinking that investment decisions that produce an earthly payback are good stewardship, so the same is true in the spiritual realm. Invitations to eat at earthly banquets or God’s heavenly banquet would be extended to all, not just the well-to-do. And that is good biblical stewardship, no matter whether it seems to be smart business practice or not.

God blesses his people in many ways. Often this includes material well-being. However, the possession of wealth can be a spiritual temptation. It is no accident that the Bible warns repeatedly about the dangers of wealth while saying little about the spiritual dangers connected with poverty. Having money can easily lead to “loving money” and to feeling a security that minimizes a person’s perceived need for divine help. In addition, the obvious advantage of having wealthy members in the church can lead to spiritual problems there as well. It was precisely to such a situation where the rich

³ While it is not the point of this article to discuss specific audiences, it is noteworthy that Scripture repeatedly pictures the wealthier classes as too busy with their possessions and affluent lifestyles to hear the Gospel, while the poor are repeatedly pictured as responding favorably to the same message. At the same time there are notable exceptions, e.g., Abraham, Job, Zacchaeus, Lydia, Barnabas, and Erastus.
church members were being feted to the detriment of poor Christians that James wrote: “But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”

In numerous other contexts Scripture warns God’s people against favoritism based on people’s socio-economic position (Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; Job 34:19; Eph. 6:9) or on ethnic background (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11). Christ also illustrates the importance of impartiality in his own ministry—making a point of eating with “publicans and sinners,” talking with Samaritans and Romans, holding up a widow’s two-penny gift for emulation, and the like. Even Jesus’ enemies had to admit that his ministry was characterized by its impartiality (Luke 20:21). There are two obvious conclusions to be drawn: 1) There will be an ongoing temptation not to be impartial but to play favorites in various areas of ministry, and 2) there is a special temptation to show favoritism toward those who are more well-to-do.

One hardly needs to spell out the implications for our ministry. As a whole, God has blessed the people of the WELS to such a degree that few of our members ever need worry about where their next meal will come from. The majority of us are members of America’s middle class, the world’s upper class. Although family size continues to drop, square footage in our houses continues to rise, solely to provide space for storing all our possessions. Should we not be warning our people lest they fall into the rich man’s trap (Luke 12:16-20)?

Scripture makes it clear that wealth can be a blessing of God for which we should feel thankfulness, not guilt. However, we must also be extra cautious to guard against the temptations wealth brings with it. And one of those temptations is partiality in all areas of our Christian life— including mission work.

**Five Implications for Mission Decision-Making**

To illustrate how easy it is to fall into partiality, let us look at five areas in which some otherwise sound mission strategies can, when they are made normative, distort our mission decision-making.

1. **Friendship/FRAN Evangelism**
   
   Studies have shown that most people come to faith after being introduced to Christ or the church through a friend, relative, acquaintance, or neighbor. While this should be remembered and capitalized on wherever possible, our evangelism must never be restricted to such contacts. We tend to live in neighborhoods with people who are socio-economically, educationally, and racially similar to us, and we normally work and associate most with other such people. Therefore, Jesus leaves us the example of his own ministry to the Samaritan woman, the ten lepers, and others to remind us that we are also to reach out and share the Gospel with all those people who live outside our comfort zones, those on the other side of the economic, educational, and racial barriers that surround us. At the mission board level, this kind of intentional effort should be regular and planned. In fact, in an era of decreased funding for mission starts at the national and international level, it is even more important for our synodical mission efforts to both model this type of outreach, and to do so in areas beyond the range where daughter congregations can effectively be established by local congregations through friendship evangelism.

2. **The Use of a Nucleus**
   
   Many, if not most, new home missions have begun with a committee WELS nucleus. This was done with the best of intentions, concentrating on the creation of an active lay participation in ministry from the very beginning. However, WELS people who move to new areas usually end up living in other middle-class white suburban communities. Thus almost all such nuclei are found in rather new suburban communities. Again, while this approach can be useful and sound, we must not limit our
efforts to these areas, or even let them predominate. If we do, we are showing unbiblical “partiality” to one particular type of neighborhood and one narrow section of the population.

3. **Targeting Growing Communities**

Another common mission strategy is to target new and growing communities. These are populated by newly arrived families who, in theory, are therefore more open to the Gospel and who have not yet joined other churches. These areas are especially prime if we are successful in being the first church to come into the area. However, this again leads us to only one type of community—the growing upper-middle class suburbs and subdivisions. Here again we are tempted to show “partiality” on the basis of logic. In addition, it seems historically that even in these areas we are outwardly successful in establishing new independent congregations only if the timing is right. If we don’t get there early enough, other churches (with the same philosophy) will beat us to the punch. Such communities are not areas that will have no Gospel presence unless we are there. While we should not callously turn our backs on such communities, there is no biblical reason why we should let this strategy predominate or have undue influence in our mission decisions.

4. **Local Decision-Making**

In recent years attempts have been made to increasingly allow a more bottom-up approach to mission decision-making. This strategy argues that those in the trenches, those “in-the-know” (district mission boards for home missions, regional administrative committees for world missions) can best determine where outreach monies can best be spent and where new efforts should best be located. However, district mission boards are manned by dedicated men who, while holding down full-time occupations, must fit their mission efforts into their free time. Without time to study the bigger mission needs throughout the geographical area for which they have responsibility, it is only to be expected that these pastors and laymen will usually be far more knowledgeable of needs in growing middle-class suburban areas than elsewhere. While aware of large ethnic or poorer populations within the area, only within the last decade have the district mission boards begun to more regularly seek trained assistance in evaluating these situations. So opportunities that were uncovered often remained near the bottom of the list, not because these areas had fewer heathen, more churches, or less spiritual need, but simply because we were uncomfortable going there to investigate, had trouble communicating with the people there, or just felt that our dollars would be better spend in the suburbs. Recent synodical attempts to stress cross-cultural outreach have fortunately bucked this trend to some extent.

World mission decisions concerning manpower placement and new starts have historically been made by a complicated series of interactions between regional administrative committees, a priority committee, and votes of the general or executive board. The past decade has also seen increasing attempts to allow regional committees to make decisions within their own areas. The makeup of these committees, like that of district mission boards on the home front (i.e., elected pastors and laymen, most with little if any foreign experience, and all serving on a part-time basis), is again, problematic. Since representatives of each regional committee come together to form the general board, the temptation to “protect” one’s own fields has always been an issue. These are just some of the reasons that have led to a recent call for reorganizations with larger decisions being put into the hands of a more independent board of overseers, and local decisions into the hands of full-time regional missionary administrators. While our democratic heritage favors grass roots decision-making, wisdom seems to dictate the need for people who have the time and training to see the big picture. It would seem that this would help us lead to mission decisions that evince good stewardship rather than partiality based on an incomplete picture.
5. Targeting the More Affluent First

As mentioned above, some mission decision-makers have argued that in both home and foreign situations it is better stewardship to start cross-cultural work with the middle or upper classes. The new Christians of the target population can then reach out to the poorer classes in their own midst. This again sounds eminently reasonable. But does it work? It has not worked in our own synod! Nor are there many examples from church history to support such claims. Instead, missiologists speak of “lift,” a historical trend for church memberships to become more and more prosperous over time and, in doing so, lose contact with the economic levels below them. This illustrates the fact that socio-economic barriers also separate people into different cultures, and often those barriers are as hard or harder to cross than ethnic or linguistic barriers. The lower classes have little reason to trust the wealthy. And the middle classes tend to view the poor stereotypically as lazy and dirty. As a result, few congregations or church bodies have a successful blend of widely diverging economic classes. Thus the “reasonable” argument of going to the wealthier first normally results in mission work among middle class people and little beyond that. In the process, it seeks to shift any feelings of guilt for not serving the poor with the Gospel from ourselves to the target population.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line for Christian mission decision-makers is therefore not the same bottom line as it is for Christian businessmen. Our job is not to find a “niche market.” It is to do as much as we can to bring God’s message to all people. It may be good business practice to look for target areas that will quickly become self-sufficient or will be able to speedily repay building loans. It may be good for us to locate new churches in areas that will make worship and fellowship more convenient to existing WELS members, but such expansion fits more naturally under inreach than outreach. Planting a church where there is no Lutheran presence, or no confessional Lutheran presence, may also serve the kingdom, but such efforts are also not mission work in its strictest sense of reaching the lost.

The most biblical stewardship of our mission dollars would be to follow Christ’s command to go into the highways and byways not thinking of earthly repayment of our dollars. This would mean planting churches:
1) where there are no churches preaching the Gospel now and where it is likely there will be no churches in the future,
2) where there are the largest number of people who have not yet come to know Jesus as their Savior,
3) where there are the fewest Christian missionaries preaching the message of salvation to the lost, and
4) where there are segments of the population— modern equivalents to Jesus’ tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers— who are not being preached Law and Gospel in a sympathetic yet biblical way.

The growth of the kingdom of God, not necessarily the growth of the Wisconsin Synod, must be our clear goal. Any criteria that take social class, economic viability, or outward expansion of our earthly organization into account immediately run the risk of ending in partiality. Good stewardship of our mission resources will result in balanced decision-making that reaches out to people from the uppermost economic and educated classes to the poorest illiterates, leaving out no ethnic or other social groups, and not over-emphasizing “our kind of people.”

Balanced Decision-Making

Most people will agree that we should have “balanced decision-making” in our mission program. However, what does that mean? Here a serious and godly debate is needed to come to a consensus. While this article has highlighted the need to reach out to groups that are less like us, it does not
imply that we ignore those with that affliction either! Balance and lack of partiality should be the goal.

For example, do we need a sort of “affirmative action” program to get ourselves in balance? If all the home mission openings in the last 25 years were tabulated, the results would show a great imbalance toward middle class suburban white communities. If a case can be made, and I think it can, that diverse urban communities rank high as potential fields using the four criteria mentioned above, what do we need to do? Will a balanced mission program seek massive new openings in cross-culturally diverse central city neighborhoods to get us back on track? Will it seek to start three out of every ten new missions in diverse communities, reflecting the current population balance? Or will it judge each new field on its own merits and not be held hostage to quotas? If the last is chosen, as seems to be current policy, can we still call our program balanced? And who will determine the master list of “merits” to be used?

An equally difficult problem has to do with other fields that would receive a high ranking when judged on the four criteria cited above. What about the fields that are the hardest to reach—politically, ideologically, and practically? In North America these are the urban centers where crime and racial segregation present major problems. Overseas we have the Islamic nations where mission work is forbidden, and countries like China and India, vast in populations, having only small percentages of Christians, and yet with significant political and cultural barriers that hinder open preaching of the Word. We have also done little work among the geographically hard to reach—natives of the Amazon, New Guinea, and other areas where physical hardships present major problems in outreach. Will we avoid these fields as poor stewardship risks for our human and financial resources because the harvest is slow and difficult or because of the potential dangers to our limited human resources? And in some areas we would not even be able to talk openly about the work we are doing because such notices could have repercussions on the work itself. How will we make stewardship decisions in such cases?

Finally, even if our criteria would support the claim that two fields were equally needy, at times resources will only allow the entering or continuation of one. How should such a decision be made if not on the basis of some outward results? Obviously, some system of evaluation will be needed. However, the question remains whether that system will be based on rational principles or biblical principles. The New Testament does state that there is a time for a missionary to shake the dust from his feet and go elsewhere. It also states that there are times when God gives an open door. However, nowhere to my knowledge does the Bible indicate that economic, class, or ethnic considerations should be part of such decision-making. Jesus did not say, “You will always have the poor among you” because he felt they were a bad mission investment, but because someone claiming to be his disciple “was a thief” who used to help himself to what was put into “Christ’s treasury” (John 12:5,8). Christ and the poor were not meant to compete for our attention and resources. James says, “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (2:5). The poor who come to faith will make significant contributions to Christ and his church, even though their contributions may not be monetary.

Epilogue

The purpose of this article is not to point fingers nor to upbraid current or past decision makers. It simply hopes to cause a reexamination of the biblical principles of mission stewardship. With increased talk about unifying our home and world programs administratively, it is a good time to also study again the basis on which we make our missions decisions, and how we define good stewardship. With increasingly tight budgets and a more unified structure, the questions of kingdom balance will become even more pressing, and what kind of balance we are striving for needs to be clearly enunciated after prayerful study. May our future mission decisions stand up to the searching
light of Scripture! May we truly be part of Christ’s invitation to all people to take part in the Lamb’s great heavenly feast!

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