



tearfund

*Thinking Theologically  
Bangladesh*

*5 - 8 October 2015*

CONFERENCE REPORT

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## 1. OVERVIEW

**Thinking Theologically** was organised by Tearfund. Its aim was to envision and equip theologians, church leaders and other Christian leaders working in relief and development for integral mission. The conference gave delegates the chance to deepen their understanding of integral mission and to share ideas about what this really looks like in practice. It was also a wonderful time of building new friendships and networks. The three-day conference brought together 51 delegates from six different countries and from 22 different NGOs, networks and churches. It featured plenary sessions, panel discussions, workshops and group discussions.

### *Countries of origin of conference delegates*

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF DELEGATES	COUNTRY	NUMBER OF DELEGATES
Bangladesh	36	Malaysia	1
India	3	South Africa	1
Nepal	4	United Kingdom	6

Overall, the conference received positive feedback from delegates:

- 17 per cent rated it excellent
- 53 per cent rated it very good
- 27 per cent rated it as good
- 3 per cent rated it as satisfactory
  
- 43 per cent said it fully met their expectations
- 10 per cent said it did not meet their expectations
- 47 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed
  
- 13 per cent reported that their understanding of integral mission increase very significantly as a result
- 50 per cent reported a significant increase
- 37 per cent reported a moderate increase





## Testimonials:

*'After this conference the concept of integral mission is clear to me. Organisationally we have different training modules where we can include God's word/story and help people to think about what integral mission looks like in practice.'*

*'It was very good to be part of this conference, meeting new friends and learning new ideas of integral mission.'*

*'It was wonderful experience for me to come to Bangladesh and attending Thinking Theologically. It was really wonderful.'*



## 2. CONFERENCE CONTENT

Throughout the conference we thought about the nature of mission, what the Bible has to say about issues connected to poverty, and what being disciples of Jesus means for our lives and work. We reflected on the Bible passage: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21). We considered the mission God has given his church, the mission to loosen the chains of injustice, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim good news to those in poverty (Isaiah 58). Delegates were given space to reflect and consider what it means to follow in Jesus' footsteps to declare to the world the fulness of the Father's love in contexts of poverty and the complexity of its causes and effects.

The conference was highly engaging and created space for active participation through the workshops, group discussions and plenary question-and-answer sessions. This ensured that delegates were able to share their own reflections, learning and experiences, providing a rich, cross-cultural learning experience.

### 2.1 Devotions

Each morning a devotional session took place.

### 2.2 Plenary sessions

Five plenary sessions were hosted during the conference.

#### 2.2.1 Rooted in God: why reflect on his word?

##### *Rev Shourabh Pholia of the Bible Society*

Shourabh reminded us of the importance of listening to God and letting the Bible shape our development work as we seek to tackle poverty and injustice. Key learning included:

- **Responding to challenges.** Bangladesh has a large number of challenges. Attempts to respond to these that have failed are due to being rooted in personal greed and self-centredness rather than in God and his word.
- **Involved in God's mission.** Our work is joining in the mission of God (*missio dei*) that he is working out throughout history. Each individual has a different calling but the same goal.
- **The two-fold mission.** As in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) and Jesus sending out his disciples (Matthew 10:7–8), we are called to a two-fold mission of preaching and acting. God's mission demands more of us than just bringing people into the kingdom of God. It is not limited to saving souls but Christ's redemption was salvific in the physical, mental and spiritual. Faith should be action-oriented, as 'faith without deeds is dead' (James 2:26).
- **God's mission for creation.** Christ's mission was for the redemption of all creation, to reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:20; Romans 8:22). We are called to be the stewards or caretakers of creation.

- **Humility.** Part of being in God's mission is humbling ourselves (Micah 6:8). This includes humbling ourselves in prayer and asking that his will be done. This is how Jesus taught us: '...your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10), '...not my will, but yours be done' (Luke 22:42).
- **Roots like the banyan tree.** The banyan tree has extensive roots that strengthen it even in the greatest storms. It even has roots that grow down into the ground from the new branches. This is how we should root ourselves in God. The deeper our roots, the stronger we will be and the better we will do in God's mission. This comes from reading his word daily.
- **Following Christ's example.** Christ always treated people with respect and dignity. In Nazareth, Jesus stood up for the poor and needy. We should also respond to people in this way.
- Key Bible passages include: Matthew 7:24; Psalm 119:11,105; Luke 10:25–37.

### 2.2.2 How do I reflect? Ways of learning and using what we have learnt.

#### *Hannah Swithinbank*

This session looked at the ways in which different types of people absorb, process and use information and ideas. Understanding how we learn and how other people learn can be helpful for improving how we work together. This was to prepare the delegates for the large amount of information that they would need to process throughout the conference.

**Discussion in small groups:** Delegates were encouraged to think about a learning experience that was enjoyed and a learning experience that was not enjoyed. And the reasons why.

#### **Feedback:**

- Some enjoyed interactive learning
- Others needed enthusiastic teachers
- Learning from past experiences sticks with you

Hannah proceeded to explain the **Honey and Mumford learning styles tool** that includes four types of learners: **Activists, Theorists, Pragmatists and Reflectors.**

Delegates took part in a questionnaire exercise to determine their learning style and to feed back as to whether they felt the tool accurately portrayed the way they work. Most delegates thought they fit into several of the suggested categories rather than just one.

The session recognised that an individual is very unlikely to find a learning style that completely suits them and was therefore aimed at allowing delegates to understand why they learn better in some environments than others, so that they can seek out training that works for them. It also sought to allow them to manage learning experiences that they find uncomfortable.

**Discussion:** In small groups delegates thought about a time when something was learnt and then put into practice and how this transition took place.

Hannah then introduced the **learning cycle**. This includes four stages of learning: concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

**Challenge:** Hannah concluded the session by challenging the delegates to test out their learning style by trying something new and seeing how they work best in that situation.

### 2.2.3 What is integral mission?

*David Westlake, Integral Mission Director, Tearfund*

This plenary session explored what it means to be sent as Jesus was sent and how this helps us to understand 'mission'.

*'The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.'* (John 1:9–14)

#### The 'thin' gospel

- There are things in each context that God really cares about that we do not talk about.
- David challenged the delegates to think about what it is in their contexts that they forget to talk about but that God cares passionately about.
- There are two types of thin gospel:
  - 1) **Forgetting about justice and about serving people in their need.** Our gospel is thin when we neglect justice and neglect bringing the good news of the gospel. What is good news for a hungry person? Food. What is good news for a homeless person? Shelter.
  - 2) **Forgetting about introducing people to Jesus.** Our gospel is also thin when we perform projects but miss out the person at the heart of the project, Jesus.

**Discussion in small groups:** A discussion took place in small groups focusing on the two types of thin gospel. Have they been manifest in the development work being done in Bangladesh?

Feedback included:

- It is easy not to introduce Christ as a person in development work.
- Sometimes the spiritual aspect of healing is not addressed and consequently needs are not fully tackled.

#### The 'full' gospel

- David unpacked the picture of salvation in the Old Testament. This covered the exodus in which the Israelites were set free from captivity, changing their social, economic, political and spiritual situations. God's covenant with Israel set out a blueprint for a new way of living, setting them apart from other nations. This is a picture of discipleship. Finally, the concept of **jubilee** allows for restoration in our failure.
- As development workers, to express the full gospel in our work we need to be walking with Jesus before we can work for him.

**Reflection time:** David encouraged the delegates to think about their relationship with God. He challenged them to make a commitment to thoroughly seek God.

**Concluding ideas:**

- Salvation is the mission and relationship is integral.
- Discernment of what the Holy Spirit is doing and the need in the community is of utmost importance in our work.
- We need to make pathways between the different aspects of salvation. There should be no divide between people's physical, mental, social, political, economic and spiritual needs.

**Reflection time:** Delegates were asked to consider two questions.

1. What is God saying to me personally?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for a full gospel in my context?

#### **2.2.4 Urbanisation: what does it mean for the mission of the church? (Integral mission in practice)**

*Michael Roy, Anglican Alliance*

The majority of the world's population now lives in urban areas. This session looked at what urbanisation means for the mission of the church and possible biblical responses.

##### **Overview of urbanisation**

- Urbanisation is a consequence of industrialisation, modernisation and growth-based economy. It changes human settlement, relationships, socioeconomic bonds and livelihoods.
- The growth of urbanisation leaves a vast number of people in poverty and affected by a range of issues, including poor water and sanitation, poor nutrition, under employment, violence and drug- and alcohol-related crime.
- One in seven people worldwide live in urban areas. Urban poor have little voice and few means to influence policies and issues which affect them.
- Urbanisation is an increasing creator of climate change and inequality, and is increasing illegal migration.

##### **How should we respond to urbanisation through integral mission?**

Doing integral mission means that we have a responsibility to address the negative impacts of urbanisation and it takes some repositioning to ensure we are meeting the needs of different contexts. Integral mission is ultimately focused on the 'Bible in action' and on transforming wisdom to education and education to action.

Integral mission has two elements which are both intellectual and practical:

1. Service to demonstrate love.
2. Institutional intervention to ensure justice.



For effective outcomes in both of the above areas, we must scale up church ministry to meet the specific needs of a given area.

### **Integral mission as drawn from the Bible**

‘Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.’ (Amos 5:24)

→ The Lord seeks justice for the poor and for the needy.

**Following Michael’s talk, there was a series of questions and comments. These were as follows:**

*Q1: What do churches want support with so that they can effectively address urbanisation?*

→ Churches are seeking support on issues of globalisation and how this is affecting climate change. The Bible states that it is our responsibility to restore and preserve creation and that we are equipped to do so due to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

*Q2: How are churches being engaged in issues of urbanisation and how should they be encouraged to respond?*

- Churches must be united to advocate for issues, to serve and to show love. Organisations such as Tearfund can bring churches together to work on these two tenets of integral mission.
- A number of stories was brought forward by audience members on how the church is responding to urbanisation. The stories included:
  - A Bangladesh college that opened its doors to provide evening school for street children.
  - A Bangladesh cathedral that opened its doors for street children to receive education.
  - The Anglican church that provided a place for sex workers to rest during the day after working during the nights.

*Q3: Do you believe that urbanisation is manageable?*

- Fifty per cent of people live in urban areas and there is a constant flow of people moving to urban areas. We cannot stop urbanisation but we need to meet the problems which it creates.
- It was noted by an audience member that urbanisation is not always negative, as urban areas are used by people affected by floods in their local villages.

*Q4: How can we design a strategy for both urban and rural approaches for people who are affected by both?*

- Both pull and push factors have to be addressed.
- The sense of community in urban areas is very weak compared to rural areas and relationships are key to church work. Relationships could also be key for serving people affected by urbanisation. Peacebuilding is also an important aspect of building relationships within urban areas.

Final comments included questions around how much is the church educating attendees about assisting their neighbour and enquiries about the church’s strategic plan to reach urban people in

Dhaka, as it will be one of the largest cities in the world in a few years. It was noted that the more urbanisation work we enter into, the more self-reflection and learning will be needed.

#### **2.2.5 ‘As the Father sent me, so I am sending you...’: leading like Christ.**

*Deepak and Celia Mahtani*

This session challenged how we view the world and considered thinking about theology as about thinking ‘the right side up’ and as differently to how the world thinks.

##### **What do you think about leadership?**

Scripture and Christ teach us about leadership models and there are many books about leadership and types of leadership.

##### **What is true biblical leadership?**

Asking the question, ‘Why leadership?’ provides purpose for the leadership and the ‘What?’, ‘When?’ and ‘How?’ flow from this.

A biblical view of leadership (Ephesians 4:11–16):

‘**11** So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. **14** Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.’

To gain key learning from this passage and to make truth relevant, we need to look at it through these three lenses:

1. Exposition – Explaining what the passage is about and its meaning.
2. So what? – What does it mean for me today?
3. Application – What am I going to do with it?

Using this framework, we learn the following about leadership from the above passage:

1. God gave a variety of different kinds of leaders to the church community.
2. They exist to progress ministry and equip the saints for ministry to build up the body of Christ. (This is the only purpose for a Christian and biblical leader.) The job is never complete and we must remain focused on this task until ‘we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’. This means until we die or until Christ returns.
3. Grow up and mature.

This demonstrates how Jesus led, which is how we should aspire to lead; we should not lead as the world leads.

## **How does the world currently lead?**

Christians are guilty of leading in a similar way to how the world leads. That is, by means of power, control and transactions.

Jesus, however, outlines the ART style of leadership (Authority; Relationship; Trust) in John 13. This passage calls us to change our leadership style from the world's style to a Christian style.

### *1. Authority:*

- Do we lead by exerting power or by exerting authority? Power is self-obsessed while authority is a receiving of power and using it wisely.
- Jesus speaks with authority which comes from the Father.

### *2. Relationship:*

- Jesus knew his identity as he was aware of his relationship with the Father – if our identity is secure in the Father then we do not seek power.
- Identity comes from our relationship with the Father.
- Leadership is entirely relational and servant-oriented.

### *3. Trust:*

- Divide and control is the main worldly philosophy for leadership but Jesus calls us to trust.
- Churches must be built on trust, just as Jesus trusted his disciples. Jesus 'went deep' with his disciples by disciplining them which built trust.
- Key ways to build trust as a leader (all biblically based):
  1. Tell the truth.
  2. Love your neighbour as yourself.
  3. Risk transparency (be accountable).
  4. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

## **Example of good leadership – a first follower**

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae – a church community where people were not trusting each other. Paul had learnt from Jesus how to lead and passed on his understanding to Tychicus. What qualified Tychicus to have leadership passed on from Paul was not charisma but godly traits:

- Tychicus shared the fellowship of believers.
- He was a faithful minister.
- He was committed to the Lord.
- He was a trusted communicator.
- He was an encourager of people.

## **Women in leadership**

Biblical examples of the value of women in the world:

- Men and women were created equal by God (Genesis 1:26).
- Miriam, sister of Moses and a priestess.
- Deborah, a prophetess – the leaders went to Deborah, a prophetess, for wisdom and advice (Judges 4).

- Abigail, wife of Nabal – she supported David and his men and then became David's wife.
- Huldah, a prophetess.
- Jesus spoke with women and had them around him all the time (John 4).
- Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the apostles.
- Paul respected women (Romans 16).
- '...you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

The two main controversial verses are:

- 1 Corinthians 14:34
- 1 Timothy 2:12

These two verses appear to be contradictory to other verses shown above. It is likely, however, that Paul was addressing specific issues within the churches he was writing to. He may also have been referring to the relationship between a husband and wife, where the wife submits to her husband but the husband should love the wife as himself and sacrifice his life for her.

In what ways does your culture influence your views on leadership and what changes can you make to help reflect Jesus better in your society?

## 2.3 Panel discussions

### 2.3.1 How do I reflect? Ways of learning about God.

*Hannah Swithinbank*

#### **How do we learn about God and how does this affect our relationship with him?**

- Creating time for reflection and worship after receiving information through a talk etc.
- Looking at the logical process behind the Lord's actions and understanding the depth that is behind them.
- Listening to sermons, reading the Bible and imagining ourselves in the stories in the Bible.
- Allowing time and space for God to minister and talk to us.
- Learning how to spend a quiet time develops gradually.
- Learning through giving.
- Spending time in prayer and reading the Bible assists with developing skills in teaching and preaching.

#### **How can we decipher between our interpretation of scripture and God's intended meaning?**

- Ensure we are reading a verse in the context of the passage in which it is placed and in the broader biblical context. This must be done prayerfully.
- Imagination comes from God. However, God is consistent so it is important that we ensure that our thoughts are consistent with scripture. God will always forgive us.
- Read the word and look at what the rest of the Bible is saying. Ask, 'How does it fit into God's purpose for the world?'
- The Lord dealt with people gently when they got things wrong (eg Peter). However, he did cut through to the point.
- We must not reduce our faith to reading the Bible like a technical science.



- It is easy to let our own preconceived ideas, experiences, cultures and social norms affect how we read scripture. We need to recognise that engagement with the Bible teaches us to be humble.
- We need to learn to follow Jesus in our own unique way, based on our circumstances but still following what Jesus taught (eg loving your neighbour as yourself).

#### **Where else do we hear the voice of God other than through reading the Bible and through prayer?**

- In nature and in seeing how plants start from a seed and grow to a plant. We must humble ourselves before the Lord to be able to show beauty. Examples given in the Bible regarding nature demonstrate the true wisdom of the Lord.
- We understand God's love and unceasing forgiveness through how we feel and respond to our own loved ones.
- The Lord can speak to us through other people.
- In books, films and music. The book *In the light of what we know* highlights that we do not know everything and that we only see one perspective from our own lives.

#### **How can we create space within churches to reflect on our work, our lives, our faith and our relationships etc?**

- Set time aside regularly – eg monthly catch-ups or retreats which create space to learn from each other.
- Leaders – encourage us to be vulnerable with each other. Out of this, a culture develops which creates ease in having difficult conversations.
- Ensure we are disciplined with time and are intentional with our activities. Eg spending time with the Lord is as much a choice as choosing to sit down and have a meal.
- 'Soaking': Churches to create time to allow the Lord's presence to flow into people's hearts. Eg put on a worship song and allow the congregation to reflect.
- Allow the church community to reflect on the word of God, eg through Bible study groups.
- Churches – encourage members to attend short courses on biblical literacy.

#### **What are some practical things we can do to help us to choose to spend time with God?**

- Spend a day every couple of months somewhere there is no internet or phone signal and spend the day with God, ignoring distractions.
- Have a personal coach to report back to on how we have been prioritising our time and spending time with God.
- Fight back on what the enemy tempts us with.
- If we do not come before the Lord it can be because we are disappointed or afraid he will not answer our prayers, but we must ensure that we bring these fears before the Lord.

### **2.3.2 How did you grasp integral mission and what does it mean for you?**

*David Westlake*

#### **What is your understanding of mission and of what we are mobilising the church to do?**

- Bringing the kingdom of God or 'the good news of the kingdom of God' into people's lives so everyone knows who Jesus is and can experience fullness of life here on earth before the kingdom of life is fully recognised in heaven.

#### **How do you see this working out in your ministry?**

- Mission is no longer just a Christian word as there is now Muslim mission etc. In order to be distinctive we are trying to demonstrate a Christian transformational ministry in our work. However, this is a big challenge in Bangladesh.

#### **How is political action part of your mission?**

- Jesus is not the king of Christian people but he is the Lord of all people. The ultimate aim of political action is to ensure all people are aware of this.
- It is important to practise what Jesus preaches as people will know that you are working for the Lord.

#### **How do you ensure that spiritual side of your work does not become an add-on and remains at the centre?**

- This is one of the biggest challenges: eg where government funding prohibits evangelistic activity. It can mean that though sometimes we say we are integral, this may not be the case.
- Ways this is being combated include always working with local churches, eg in giving out relief during a crisis. This means that a connection is made between the church and the community.
- This is also being combated through training churches on the need to be holistic and ensuring that they understand they have the skills to engage with their community.
- It is important to note that churches should never forcibly evangelise to a vulnerable person in a negative situation.
- It is also important to be constantly teaching staff in organisations about how to live with integral mission within their lives.

#### **What is the sustainability strategy of mission work at the local level?**

- The local church is the main way in which mission can occur. This happens through evaluation and developing a strategic plan.
- We must build integral mission into development programmes. Sustainability is not just financial but also has a number of other important tenets.
- We must ensure there is leadership development to enable sustainability.

#### **What are some initiatives EFICOR (The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief) carry out with the local church?**

- They teach the local church why God cares about injustice and about issues of injustice from a faith perspective.
- They train the local church to tap resources that are local to them.

- They build their capacity to think about a bigger mission, not just church planting. This is to ensure that the church uses local resources to address the needs of people and sees injustice in the systems which cause those needs.

#### **Should we train theological students as well, as they are upcoming church leaders?**

- Yes – this is very important. Some Bible colleges and seminaries are developing integral mission courses.
- Students must be able to have an open view with a changed and wider perspective in approaching injustice in the world.
- EFICOR has been working with partners to translate social messages about HIV, medication, health and sanitation etc, as well as providing translated Bibles.
- This is another way of encouraging students.
- It is also important not to forget the power of the Bible when it is allowed to work. There are materials to help seminary students and church members reflect on Bible verses that will assist in transforming their thinking.

#### **How can we move from the theological thought to action?**

- Theological thought must be considered in the light of the local context. The discourse of theology needs to be understood in tribal and small communities, not just in mainstream ones.

#### **2.3.3 Integral mission: challenges and opportunities.**

*David Westlake*

#### **How do we help to keep our teams walking with God?**

- Each person must see themselves as part of the mission of God and understand that they need resources from God to complete it.
- Those who work in integral mission are tasked with working in cooperation with others.
- We can support each other through prayer.
- We can encourage team devotions and group devotions.
- It is each person's individual responsibility to nurture their own relationship with God; however, we can reflect together on how we are journeying with God.
- We can offer prayer for the community and for patients within community hospitals.
- We can set up spiritual development departments within an organisation.
- We can create core and spiritual competencies for staff to adhere to and policies for how staff should work.
- We can hold devotional awaydays where, for example, we share three words to sum up where our heart is and then spend time praying for each other.
- World Vision stops to pray once a year as an organisation. Their staff also focus on how they work with other faith leaders and how to include faith perspectives within community work.
- If an organisation does not address the spiritual aspects of behaviour then a community is less likely to respond and change behaviour.

### **How do we address faith as part of our work?**

- Integral mission is oriented from our understanding of God's view of mission. The way we carry out integral mission can sometimes be misunderstood by others but we should continue to do what Jesus has called us to.

### **We have the chance to witness in front of other faiths – how do we do this well?**

- Ultimately it should be the church that does all integral mission. The NGO's role should be to encourage the church to do integral mission.
- It is important that we should be united in our work.
- Even when there are theological differences between two groups or organisations it is possible to work together organisationally.
- To do integral mission it is important to have diversity in order to recognise all aspects of the mission of God.
- Unity starts when an individual decides to think the best of others and to forgive others. People will know we are Christians by how we love one another.
- Perhaps we should stop talking about 'integral mission' and speak only of 'mission' as all mission work should be integral mission.

### **2.3.4 How have your churches engaged with urbanisation?**

*Hannah Swithinbank*

#### **Why do you believe the church is called to work with people in marginalised situations?**

- We are called to look after the marginalised because Jesus cared for the weak, the sick and the oppressed.
- It is important to remember that if we do not meet the needs of marginalised people, then who will?
- We often institutionalise mission, whereas we should remember that individuals need to do this too – it is what Jesus has called us to.

#### **How does your church help to develop disciples who love their neighbours?**

- Ensure there is a culture within the church of this behaviour.
- Churches need to understand the values held by a community to be able to work well with them; therefore it is important to educate the church community on these aspects.
- Begin new initiatives to support the local community, eg a school for slum children.
- Volunteering is an important way of helping disciples develop love for their neighbours.
- It is inspiring when we see people leave a slum situation and then choose to return to it in order to assist others.

#### **How do we support people who go back into slums to assist others?**

- Provide volunteer helpers and training/workshops for staff living in slums.
- Encourage colleagues to be 'providers' for other service providers as opposed to 'givers' of assistance.
- Encourage humility amongst staff.



- Ensure staff receive proper rest and times of refreshment.

**What examples to do you have in your organisations of Christians advocating to government and media on behalf of people living in slums?**

- It is encouraging that a Bangladeshi minister used to work for Caritas.
- Public prayer and partnership.
- One organisation is developing public partnerships between slum dwellers and local churches in order to forge a relationship with their parliamentary representatives and to advocate for change.
- Unfortunately there doesn't seem to be a strategic plan on how Christians in the city should respond to urban challenges. Any work being done seems to be needs-based rather than forming a strategy and planning projects for the future to bring about readiness, rather than just response.
- It is important for all churches and organisations in a city to collaborate and combine their strategic plans to form one large plan to reach all parts of the city.

**What do you think is the one big challenge of urbanisation that you would like to see churches and NGOs working together to resolve?**

- Keeping in touch with all the people affected; this could be difficult if there is one big strategic plan.
- Peacebuilding is very important and requires further work.
- Getting churches to be more influential in country policy.

### **2.3.5 How does your faith guide your leadership?**

*Deepak and Celia Mahtani*

**How does your faith guide your leadership?**

- A calling to serve the community.
- Working together with the community – collaboration.
- Despite a feeling of unworthiness, an awareness that God has a way of calling and providing opportunities to be a leader.
- One of the main types of leadership in the Bible is servant leadership – but we need to be clear how we understand the word ‘servant’.
- There is significant difference between power and authority:
  - Power = force
  - Authority = can be quiet but it also implies strength

**Can you give an example of how leadership will be evidence of the unity of Christ?**

- Different people have been called by God to have different roles but we can all work together; unity is not uniformity.
- Unity can be seen as working together for a common goal or purpose, whereas uniformity is all moving towards the goal in exactly the same way.
- In Bangladesh there is the National Council of Churches, which is very encouraging.

**How do we balance relationship-building with ensuring right from wrong in leadership? What is the limit to building a relationship while ensuring God's principles get upheld?**

- Upholding a relationship does not mean always saying 'yes'.
- A true relationship means being able to disagree with love and respect.

**What is the role of women in leadership?**

- It is God's desire to be at the forefront of any leadership, regardless of whether it is a man or a woman in the leadership role.
- We are created equal by God. Men and women are both co-heirs of Christ.
- When women are valued and respected they flourish and help to raise better children. When women's gifts are used, the church and community benefit.
- Across nations, women have been in tears because they feel their giftings have been ignored or put down. This can be seen as a result of the fall.
- If we are to be 'kingdom' people then both men and women need to examine their hearts before God and ask for forgiveness for any prejudice.
- A question also to consider is, 'What is the importance of women in leadership?' Influence is becoming more and more important in leadership. Women are frequently very good influencers and can tend to have this kind of leadership in a marriage setting.
- Ephesians 5 states that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave his life. Christian men should be challenged by this to see the responsibility they are called to. Perhaps if men examined their hearts to ensure they are providing this kind of love then women would have a very different experience in the Christian world.
- God gave man a helper to build strength.
- Women's leadership is needed to ensure the women's needs in a church are met.

**Are leaders born or made and how do we balance this with people who are called by God?**

- Women can experience a passion and a calling as much as men and can be called equally by God.
- Both men and women can encourage each other to be in leadership roles. The more men encourage women to step forward, the more women in leadership there will be.
- An individual is not necessarily born with specific skills which make them a leader; rather it is the way they respond to the calling of God which makes them a leader.

Delegates were encouraged to take this conversation back to their churches and organisations for ongoing discussion.

**How do we respond when church leaders are no longer respected in diverse communities?**

- Church leaders seem to be respected in Bangladesh which contrasts to the situation in Nepal.
- When asking this question we also need to ask, 'Why are church leaders not respected?' Respect is earned so perhaps the church leaders are doing something the community cannot respect.

It is important to remember that God reveals his kingdom to those he loves.

### What role should young people have in leadership?

- Leadership is available for all those whom God has called and for people who want to be a leader in the way God has called.
- Leadership development groups have been created for women and young people.
- Rick Warren states that 'every believer is a member and every member is a ministry'.
- Young people should contribute so that they can take on leadership in the future.

## 2.4 Workshops

Nine different workshop sessions were held during the conference. Within each session, delegates were able to choose which workshop to attend.

### Day 2: Workshop session 1

#### 2.4.1 Training for integral mission 1: mapping our work.

*Steve Collins and Hannah Swithinbank*

In this workshop delegates learnt about Christian organisations and theological colleges working together to train pastors in integral mission. There was also time to reflect on what has been learnt from this process. Below are some images of the group discussions and mapping that took place.



Ways for delegates to facilitate collaboration between Christian organisations and theological colleges include:

- Integral mission workshops for both NGO staff and Bible college students.
- NGOs teaching modules on small businesses (applying integral mission) in theological colleges.
- Enabling Bible college students to get practical experience of applying integral mission principles.

### **2.4.2 How do I work out my part of integral mission?**

*David Westlake*

In this workshop delegates thought about how we discern our role in the mission of God. They reflected on how the Bible shows us that our different gifts and skills are used by God to demonstrate his love to the world.

### **2.4.3 How do I inspire my church?**

*Dr Albert Walter*

In this workshop delegates spent time considering what the Bible says about the mission of the church and thinking about how to inspire our churches to participate in this mission.

## **Day 2: Workshop session 2**

### **2.4.4 Training for integral mission 2: working together in future.**

*Steve Collins and Hannah Swithinbank*

In this workshop delegates discussed what they had learnt from previous experiences of Christian organisations and theological colleges working together to train pastors in integral mission. They also discussed and planned ways of staying connected, sharing ideas and supporting each other's work in training people for integral mission.

The group discussed three key questions, detailed below.

#### **1. When developing integral mission teaching materials, what are the most difficult challenges that you face?**

- Inter-denominational conflict and competition can prevent a common platform, eg one denomination fears that its Bible school or training programme might suffer as a consequence.
  - Theological differences between denominations
  - Breaking through existing systems and methods
- Power struggles and dynamics can make planning and delivering a project difficult, and can prevent the development of shared ownership and common goals.
- Need to shift the understanding of mission in churches and colleges so that courses can be welcomed.
- Different levels of audience (eg literate or not, different language barriers).
- Limited time and resources, including capacity for teaching and facilitating.
- Covering the necessary information in the time available for a course or training sessions.
- Making decisions about the structure of a course and what to include or not.
- Lack of (or knowledge of) existing models.
- Need to contextualise ideas of existing material.
- Following up with delegates for further training and for monitoring success and impact.
- Government restrictions on NGOs and churches.



## 2. How might you overcome these challenges through a network?

- Sharing of existing models and research, and the ability to access existing resources; this would save time/resources and avoid duplication.
- Receiving advice from others about their experiences.
- Creating a common platform for denominations to share ideas and learning.
- Establishing standardised terms and vocabulary to make communication easier.
- Creating better relationships and unity between denominations.

## 3. What form of follow-up do you think would be most effective to help you link with others and give to / benefit from them?

- Sharing contact information and summaries of existing courses, so that people can ask for more information about the courses they are particularly interested in.
- Creating a platform to share resources, learning and stories or evidence of the impact of courses.
- Making use of existing platforms: eg the national Micah Network groups.
- Developing facilitation skills and training trainers to teach integral mission.
- Holding follow-up workshops, eg for the subcontinent.

### 2.4.5 One body with many parts: our different callings in seeking the kingdom.

*Dr Albert Walter*

Key learning from this workshop included:

- We should value the unity and harmony of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).
- Do not underestimate your importance to the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:14–20).
- Do not overestimate your importance to the body of Christ – the body needs both the hand and the eye (1 Corinthians 12:21; 12:22–24a; 12:24b–25; 12:26).
- We should celebrate the diversity of the body (1 Corinthians 12:27–31).
- The group also reflected on these questions:
  1. What are some of the challenges you face while working together with others?
  2. How do you deal with such challenges and try to overcome them?
  3. What impact do these challenges have on you and what actions do you intend taking?

### 2.4.6 The persecuted church

*Suchitra Behera*

- Distinction between violence and persecution:
  - Violence: ‘The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation.’
  - Persecution: ‘The systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another individual or group.’
- Violence can be:
  - Self-directed

- Interpersonal
- Collective
- Persecution can be:
  - Religious
  - Ethnic
  - Political
- The Greek and Hebrew words translated as 'persecute' typically carry a sense of serious violence, aggression and hostility or threat.
- The Greek word 'dioko' used in the New Testament (eg Matthew 5:12; Acts 22:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:15) means 'pursuing or driving away'. The term 'thilipis', means to 'oppress or afflict' (Matthew 24: 9; Acts 3:14; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:10).
- Examples of persecution in the Old Testament:
  - **Lot**, 'a righteous man who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless' (2 Peter 2:7). Lot stood up to these men who 'kept bringing pressure on [him] and moved forward to break down the door' of his house in Sodom (Genesis 19:9).
  - **Abel**, who offered a better sacrifice than Cain (Genesis 4:4–10; Hebrews 11:4).
  - **Elijah**, who spoke against the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:25–40) and against the idolatry of Israel (1 Kings 18:16–21), and was persecuted by Jezebel for his godly stand (1 Kings 19:1–3).
- Examples of persecution in the New Testament:
  - **Paul**, who was persecuted, beaten and imprisoned as he preached from place to place, and was finally killed in Rome (2 Timothy 4:6–8).
  - **Jesus** himself, who preached God's grace and judgment (Matthew 4:17; 11:28–29), was persecuted by his hearers (Luke 4:28–30), plotted against by his adversaries (Mark 3:6), rejected (John 6:66), tried (John 18:12–40) and finally crucified (John 19:16–37).
- Our attitude towards persecution:
  - 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first... Remember what I told you, "A servant is not greater than his master". If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.' (John 15:18, 20)
  - 'Rejoice, and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' (Matthew 5:12)
  - 'However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.' (1 Peter 4:16)
- The group then discussed different forms and acts of persecution in their communities and countries. They considered different ways that the church can respond and reach out to offer love and support to those being persecuted.

## Day 3: Workshop session 3

### 2.4.7 Working together in the city

*Michael Roy*

In this workshop delegates discussed how Christians and the church can work well in the city – a place of rich diversity. Discussions included how Christian organisations and the church can engage in interfaith dialogue and working. Delegates also explored the opportunities and challenges presented by urbanisation.

### 2.4.8 Living in the middle of diversity

*Deepak and Celia Mahtani*

- To be successful in living in the middle of diversity we need to be:
  1. Relational
  2. Creative
  3. Entrepreneurial
  4. Bold
- People will not listen to us if we are not respectful.
- How do we see those who are different to us? As a threat to be removed if possible, as a different group to be left alone, or as an opportunity for making new relationships?
- Jesus' approach to living in the middle of diversity was:
  - relational (he often drank and ate with people)
  - gentle
  - recognised openness
  - focused
  - pointed to the Father
- Believing, behaving and belonging are all important in the church. However, people can belong before they believe and before they behave.
- There are many different names for Jesus across other faiths.
- Key biblical texts supporting the need for respectful recognition of difference and for relating well to those who are different from us:
  - 1 Corinthians 9:20–22
  - Colossians 3:1
  - Matthew 5:45
- Our outreach must be both relevant and reverent.
  - Relevant*
    - culturally
    - use of parables and/or pictorial illustration
    - use of dance, drama or music
    - stories and testimonies
  - Reverent*
    - not compromising
    - not apologetic, but prophetic
    - upholding biblical, not cultural, truths

- not watered down
- If our outreach is to be effective, we need to examine our three Ms: our Motive, our Method and our Message.

*Our motive*

- must be HONOURABLE
- friendships/relationships must be genuine
- do not drop someone just because they refuse or reject the first time
- people will see straight through to our motives

*Our method*

- must be RELEVANT
- in terms of language and type of communication
- must be relevant to an individual's situation and where they are at

*Our message*

- must be CONSISTENT
- present the heart of the Gospel – Jesus
- focus on Christ, not Christianity or church-ianity

- Once we have ensured our three Ms, we move on to our three Es:

*Encourage relationships*

- 'You and your household' (a promise) – extended family, community, children, women, men's groups

*Engage in the culture*

- use the people's culture to reach them
- recognise the importance of food, festivals, dance, music, language
- use audio/visual

*Enter into their souls*

- present the heart of the gospel – Jesus, his life and his teaching – not western culture/dogma
- healing, prayer and deliverance

- Summary of a biblical approach to living in the middle of diversity and sharing our lives with those who are different from us:

- pray for them regularly
- offer hospitality (tea or a meal)
- ask them what they believe
- share your own story (all are called to be witnesses, not necessarily evangelists!)
- point to Jesus, not to the church
- invite them to the kingdom feast
- be willing to be vulnerable and share your life with them
- show love!

## 2.4.9 Church and government

*Fr Emmanuel K Rozario*

Key learning from this workshop included:

- There are many examples in the Bible where Christian individuals and churches engage in politics. For example: Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 38–42) and Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1; 2; 6).
- The church (group/individuals) is called on by God's word to seek the nation's peace and prosperity (Jeremiah 29:7).
- The church can educate its members on political matters and encourage them to perform their civic duties.
- The church can advocate for the needs of their communities.

*To find out more about the role of the Church and advocacy please visit*

[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/church/church\\_and\\_advocacy/why\\_involve\\_the\\_church\\_in\\_advocacy/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/church/church_and_advocacy/why_involve_the_church_in_advocacy/)

### 3. DELEGATE LEARNING

On the final day, delegates were given the opportunity to write down one significant thing they had learnt. Some of the frequently shared learning points included:

- The need to spend more time in prayer and reflecting on the word of God so we can continue to apply biblical principles and teaching to our work.
- We need unity among church communities – but unity requires us to love and accept each other amid diversity.
- We need to recognise our diversity and celebrate it, while seeking unity and opportunities for collaboration.
- We need to put Christ at the centre of all we do.
- The need to build the capacity of the church for integral mission and encourage people to reach out to meet the needs of our communities.
- The distinction between ‘thin’ gospel and ‘full’ gospel.
- We need to have a commitment to Jesus, his character and service, prayer and the church. We can model these commitments in both our daily and organisational lives.
- Holistic mission requires us to focus on social, economic, political, spiritual and environmental needs.
- Importance of focusing on my walk first – transformation starts with me.
- Relationships – the importance of nurturing our relationship with Jesus and with others.
- We need to have professional excellence and spiritual compassion.
- The heart and ART of leadership.
- How the church can respond to the challenge of urbanisation.
- NGOs can seek partnership with the local church.
- Women have a role to play in leadership.
- Biblical leadership: leadership needs to be underpinned by biblical characteristics, including being committed to the Lord, being trustworthy and being an encourager of people.

Delegates were also given an opportunity to comment on how the conference had changed their understanding of integral mission. Comments included:

- ‘Live my faith in action like Christ did. Use my every means to bring and glorify Christ wherever I go and live.’
- ‘Since I am working on integral mission for the past seven years, I got refreshed in this conference.’
- ‘We should work together and help each other.’
- ‘It challenged me to build the capacity of the church, work with the body of Jesus Christ and focus on the transformational development of God’s kingdom.’
- ‘Importance of integrating Christ Jesus in social development projects.’



## 4. CONFERENCE ASSESSMENT

At the end of the conference, delegates completed evaluation forms. As mentioned in the overview section of this report, feedback was on the whole very positive.

### 4.1 Overall quality of speakers

Delegates rated the quality of the speakers as follows:

- Excellent – 6 per cent
- Very good – 47 per cent
- Good – 35 per cent
- Satisfactory – 12 per cent

### 4.2 Plenary Sessions

Of the delegates, 76 per cent rated the structure and format of plenary sessions as Excellent, Very good or Good.

The best received plenary session was ‘What does integral mission mean for you?’ All delegates (100 per cent) said that this session represented a major interest or relevance for their church or organisation.

Other sessions that were extremely well received were:

- What is integral mission?
- Integral mission: challenges and opportunities.
- Leading like Christ.

Of the delegates, 97 per cent stated that these session topics represented a major interest or relevance for their church or organisation.

### 4.3 Panel Sessions

Delegates rated the structure and format of the panel sessions as follows:

- Excellent – 13 per cent
- Very good – 30 per cent
- Good – 27 per cent
- Satisfactory – 30 per cent

### 4.4 Workshops

Delegates rated the number and topics of workshops available as follows:

- Excellent – 10 per cent
- Very good – 43.33 per cent
- Good – 43.33 per cent
- Satisfactory – 3.33 per cent

On average, delegates rated the quality of the workshops as follows:

- Excellent – 4 per cent
- Very good – 33.33 per cent
- Good – 43.33 per cent
- Satisfactory – 13.33 per cent

#### **4.5 Application of learning**

In total, 100 per cent of delegates said they expect to use the things they learnt during the conference in their work or church.

## 5. SUMMARY STATEMENT

At **Thinking Theologically: Bangladesh** there was widespread appreciation and understanding that as we seek to follow in Jesus' footsteps and loosen the chains of injustice, set the oppressed free and proclaim good news to those in poverty, we must intentionally nurture our relationship with God and with each other. In this way our discipleship shapes us to be a part of the mission of God.

We need to consciously ensure that our development practice is based on biblical reflection. As we reflect upon the Bible we see that social, economic, spiritual, political and environmental issues matter! If we want to see individual lives and communities transformed, our approaches and programmes must be holistic.

We must keep Christ at the centre of all we do and be united as the body of Christ. In our diversity as people of different nations, churches and organisations, we have a common identity in Christ and a common calling – a calling to love God and love one another. By showing the world that we can be united despite our differences and diversity, we are able to bear witness to the gospel and show the world the nature of the kingdom of God.

## 7. NEXT STEPS

Different initiatives will be taking place to help delegates continue to learn from, support and encourage one another as we seek to live out our calling to integral mission.

### 7.1 Tearfund UK initiatives

#### 7.1.1 Communities of practice

**Thinking Theologically: Bangladesh** delegates were invited to join one of Tearfund's communities of practice. You can find more about these communities of practice, and join one, by visiting the following webpage: [www.tearfund.org/communitiesofpractice](http://www.tearfund.org/communitiesofpractice)

#### 7.1.2 Tearfund International Learning Zone

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency working to see millions of people released from material and spiritual poverty through a network of local churches. For the last 40 years, Tearfund has been gathering knowledge and sharing it with those who want to see poverty reduced and justice restored across the world. All Tearfund's resources are available to download free of charge; these include training materials, case studies, our international magazine *Footsteps* and more. To browse and download the resources please visit [www.tilz.tearfund.org](http://www.tilz.tearfund.org)

### 7.2 Tearfund Bangladesh initiatives



Tearfund has been working in Bangladesh since 1971, partnering with churches and Christian organisations. Tearfund Bangladesh is partnered with six church-based organisations. These are mainly working on Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation, Livelihoods and mobilising local churches for Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) and integral mission.

After the **Thinking Theologically** gathering in October 2015, the Theological Association of Bangladesh arranged a follow-up conference at the Nazareth Centre in Dhaka on 7 November 2015, with the participation of 13 theological colleges. A total of 174 students and faculties from the 13 theological colleges attended the conference. As a result of the gathering and this follow-up conference, some theological colleges decided to incorporate a new integral mission curriculum into their regular syllabus. Additionally, some prayer groups were formed and are now regularly meeting to pray. Tearfund also continues to train local church pastors and leaders on CCM and integral mission.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the wonderful support and enthusiastic cooperation of the Tearfund staff in Bangladesh. Thank you for your willingness to host a **Thinking Theologically** gathering in Bangladesh and for all your efforts in making the gathering possible.

Special mention must also go to the **Thinking Theologically: Bangladesh** programme team. This team was made up of Suchitra Behera (Tearfund Country Representative for Bangladesh), Steve Collins (Tearfund Geographic Head for Asia Region) and Hannah Swithinbank (Theological Development Manager, Tearfund UK). They committed time and effort to ensure the gathering consisted of engaging and informative sessions, and brought together some of the very best speakers on integral mission and the topics covered.

Finally, we would like to express appreciation to all the individuals who attended the conference. Thank you for your interest in and passion for integral mission. We recognise that it is only through individuals, churches and organisations seeking to respond to the holistic needs of people and communities in a Christ-centred way that we will truly see people flourish and communities thrive.

Stephanie Haydock  
Project Manager, Tearfund