

## Community Service and Mission

### The Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor (Hong Kong) – Ms. Susanna MA

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## The Philosophy and Praxis on Poverty Alleviation of Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a prosperous region, the Gini Coefficient of Hong Kong that reflects the discrepancy between the rich and the poor remains high. It has not only exceeded the warning line of 0.4 but also kept raising through the years, which indicated the extreme disparity between the rich and the poor<sup>1</sup>. The reasons behind including the transition of economic development pattern, change in demographic structure, absence of policy, high property price and living cost, etc., as a result, various livelihood and social issues arose. According to the report of the Commission on Poverty of the Hong Kong government in 2014, the number of the poor population and the poverty rate were 1,320,000 and 19.6% respectively.<sup>2</sup> While the grass-root citizens are living in straitened circumstances, the workforce and elderly are also struggling financially. At the same time, Hong Kong, as a multiethnic city, apart from the Chinese with Cantonese as their mother language, there are also people with different nationalities who communicate with each others in English, the new arrivals from the mainland who are not familiar with Cantonese, the ethnic minorities who are mainly from South Asia, the refugees seeking for political asylum, as well as the domestic helpers from Southeast Asia. In order to provide service in such a culturally diverse society, cross-cultural missions strategies are needed.

Caring for the underprivileged groups is something the Bible values a lot, Micah 6:8 mentions about the Lord delight not in the burnt offerings but in people who do justly and love mercy. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly[a] with your God." Isaiah 61:1 also states that the Lord blesses the disadvantaged. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the

<sup>1</sup> According to the Census and Statistics Department, before tax and social benefits transfers, the Gini Coefficient in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011 were 0.453, 0.476, 0.518, 0.525, 0.533 and 0.537 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> According to the report announced by the government on Oct 10, 2015, the number of the poor population and the poverty rate post-government intervention were 960 000 and 14.3% respectively.

brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...”

Hence, Christians and churches are obligated to concern for the poor. According to the *Summary of Report of 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey* by the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement, social justice and poverty have indeed aroused the concern of the churches in Hong Kong (one third of the churches concerned about the issues), but at the same time, while only about 10% of the churches spent more than 5% of the church expenditure for the poor, nearly half of the churches did not spend any on them. For charity donation, over 60% (863 churches) of the churches used the donation to help their members, but only 18.2% (234 churches) and 16.9% (217 churches) of the churches spent the donation on supporting poverty-alleviation agencies or poverty alleviation work within the district respectively. The community care ministries of the churches usually focused mainly on worship service and prayer, while 40.0% of the churches visited or provided service to the community members, 29.7% of them provided financial or material assistance, which decreased by 8.7% and 16.6% respectively as compared to the survey conducted in 2009. 66.0% of the churches provided social service at the meeting venue, which increased slightly as compared to 63.9% in 2009. 14.5% of the service were related to poverty alleviation, which decreased by 1.6% as compared to the survey result in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

The result shows that in terms of poverty alleviation actions and the extent of social affair participation, there is much room for the churches to improve. The Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor (HKCNP) was therefore established. In 2002, there was acute unemployment problem in Hong Kong, the Church Campaign for the Unemployed was then set up by The Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, Hong Kong Christian Council and Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement jointly to provide employment support to the public. In 2006, the organization was formally renamed as Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor, which aims at connecting Christians and Christian organizations, providing various resources, assisting churches in promoting the ministry of caring for the poor, as well as establishing network to alleviate the problem of regional poverty.

## **2. MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY**

HKCNP has five mission focuses, which are Unity, Advocacy, Mobility, Community and Charity. Through these five focuses, the organization facilitates the cooperation of Christian organizations, non-government groups and government departments, so as to improve the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of the underprivileged and take the long term goal of alleviating the problem of intergeneration poverty as the common vocation. The service of HKCNP combines policy and care, integrates profession and resources from various sectors, which forms a community network for helping and supporting the citizens who are lack of resources and chances effectively, so as to build an inclusive and caring society.

Its goals of caring for the poor and community transformation are achieved by making use of the church network and unity. Here are the details of these two core values:

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<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement. *Summary of Report of 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey*, 52-56.

For **caring for the poor** and **community transformation**, though HKCNP does not mainly provide service directly, it plays the role of promotion and support, and with the partner organizations from various sectors, it assists the front-line organizations such as churches and Christian organizations to find out the needs of the people in the communities they are in, so as to provide support correspondingly. The scope of services including food aid, family counselling and other social services. Besides, by liaising with different agencies, HKCNP help improve the competence of the disadvantaged citizens. For example, by providing career counselling and helping them take care of their family (e.g. providing childcare service) , the service recipients can go to work. With the assistance from labour organizations, companies and employers, HKCNP develops job and start-up business opportunities for the grass-roots within the district (e.g. establishing social enterprises), so as to promote the local economic development.

Apart from the above services, HKCNP also focuses on building community capacity. By providing advisory services, such as discussing the ways to launch poverty alleviation projects with churches, holding regional network meetings or seminars, completing and promoting the research reports which based on fact for the organization itself and its partner organizations through its extensive community network (refer to the passages below). These data are the basis of advocacy, which allows HKCNP to put forward effective poverty alleviation policies at the government level and provide top-down assistance in poverty-related issues. As a result, people in the district would become stakeholders who involve actively in community issues. They can make contribution by providing their resources and using their abilities, and with the knowledge and skills, financial resources and network of various units, which are highly complementary, a community can be built. At the same time, the Christians who take part in the activities can implement the principles of gospel, the life of a disciple can be molded, and during the process of providing services to the poor, more disciples can be found for Christ.

For **building network** and **unity**, with the rise of church, the mode of ministry of HKCNP is to work with other organizations (social welfare organizations, government units, schools, business sector), while each of them can apply their expertise, a support network can be built for the poor in a certain district. As of 2014, HKCNP has been working with up to 380 partner organizations across Hong Kong. HKCNP values the collaboration of different organizations in the community. It also encourages and help the organizations in the community liaise with organizations outside, so as to get the resources needed by the community as well as maximise the welfare of the underprivileged. HKCNP also emphasizes the unity of churches, it is hopeful that churches can work across sects to carry out the mission of serving the poor.<sup>4</sup> HKCNP acts as an intermediary to lead various sects and allocate resources, it can also promote various ways of resource allocation and advocate poverty-alleviation actions and policies among churches, the government, business sector and various organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> The *2014 Hong Kong Church Survey* mentioned above showed that many local churches (66.4%) cooperated with other churches in the district in the past 3 years, but they mainly focused on evangelization, only 11.4% of all the churches on Hong Kong provided support in poverty-alleviation activities. HKCNP hopes churches in different scales can cooperate so as to create greater synergy. Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement. *Summary of Report of 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey*, 19.

### **3. ACTION RESEARCH: LOVE IN ACTION AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAM**

HKCNP has four core services, which are "Love in Action", "Mentorship Program", "Advocacy & Education" and "Promotion & Development". The last two are educational and promotional work which mainly carried out by the committee members of HKCNP to voice out for the poor. Changes would be made to policies and structures only if the voice of the grass-roots can be heard by the people in power. Also, cross-cultural practice is involved.

This report will focus on the categories of "Love in Action" and "Mentorship Program" with concrete examples and data stated, so as to demonstrate how HKCNP promotes the disciple mission practice of Christians and cross-cultural gospel ministry for the poor.

#### **3.1 Love in Action: Cross-cultural Social Inclusion**

Material aid can satisfy the living needs of the poor directly, at the same time it helps churches to establish relationships with the needy to provide long term caring. HKCNP has assisted churches in liaising with partner organizations (including non-government organizations and the business sector) to obtain related materials, such as food, vouchers and free services, and provide organizational administrative and case referral support since 2009, so churches can start to serve the poor. The churches participated in were responsible for providing venues and volunteers, which allows the members to take care the psychological needs of the residents during material distribution activities, and further actions such as home visits could be taken.

For example, HKCNP cooperated with Rainbow Foundation to hold the "Fun Trip to Noah's Ark" between 2014 and 2015. The activity accepts applications from partner churches and organizations, 50 to 200 grass-roots citizens could participate in it each time. Besides the entrance ticket sponsor, the organizer also provides free lunch, so churches and organizations only need to provide shuttle service. Only in 2014 summer, up to 2000 citizens joined the trip. In 2015, HKCNP took 7085 grass-roots citizens to the Noah's Ark and let the underprivileged to enjoy a trip to the theme park. Material aid only acts as a medium to establish the relationship, went on a trip together provided a chance for the church members to meet the grass-roots citizens, as the cultural gap could be bridged, the love and gospel of the Lord could also be delivered gradually.

Moreover, HKCNP also assisted a English-speaking church to liaise with a church for the grass-roots in Sham Shui Po, the middle-class church members could therefore meet can serve the grass-roots families. Christians provided private tuition for the children from those families and offered them gift boxes, they also invited the families to go on a trip to the Peak with them for free.<sup>5</sup> In one of the case, the son from the family was originally a typical grass-roots teenager who was lack of confidence and with restricted social circle. But after meeting friends from middle level, he received academic guidance and explored his own interest in music, he then gradually became confident. His father was unemployed, he later found a job with the help of another church. They have been friends for two years, though the family has not become Christian yet due to the original religious belief of the elderlies in the family, the

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<sup>5</sup> The Peak is a high-class residential area and tourist spot in Hong Kong, the transportation fee is too high that grass-roots families can hardly bear.

mother volunteered in church and told others to go there too as the church helped her and she knew that it is a trustable place which belongs to the Lord. This family received material aid first and widened their social circles later. They became helpers from those who received help. The case showed us that through long-term visits, Christians can indeed make changes in other people's life.

Besides the cultural gap between people from different classes of the society, bridge is also needed to span the cultural divide between Chinese-speaking and English-speaking churches. HKCNP assisted the Union Church, an English-speaking church situated at the mid-level for Christians from middle class and upper class, to connect with a Chinese church in Tung Chung<sup>6</sup>, which allowed the middle-class Christians to enter the grass-roots community, learn how to find out the needs of the grass-roots citizens humbly and walk with them. They supported the residents in the community not only by making traditional donations but also providing them with free musical instrument trainings.

HKCNP's role of a facilitator is more prominent in the Peacebox Campaign. The campaign was held jointly by Hong Yip Service Company Ltd., Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong and Saddleback Hong Kong Church<sup>7</sup> to offer the grass-roots citizen gift boxes which the organizers collected from various sectors. HKCNP, as a intermediary, liaised with partner churches to send the gift boxes out. In 2015 April, the organizer collected 7592 gift boxes in total, HKCNP passed on 6950 of them to 25 churches. HKCNP was responsible for the transshipment and storage of the materials during the campaign, while the churches were responsible for providing direct service. At the time the church applied to claim the gift boxes, they needed to let HKCNP know the purpose of the gift boxes briefly. Some of the churches made use of the gift boxes to attract the grass-roots in the community to join various community functions; some of the gift boxes were presented in visits; some churches gave them to the service recipients in the free canteen, while others turned them into presents of carnival. No matter how the churches presented them, nearly 7000 gifts were sent to the grass-roots citizens (children, teenagers, families and elderlies) as an Easter blessing.

As a facilitator, HKCNP provided support in different extent and because of its extensive church network, it performed crucial functions of receiving and transshipping the gift boxes. The organization not only assisted churches and the partner enterprises in spanning its own culture to meet the service recipients and cooperate with each other, it also gave Christians the chance to practice the disciple mission and understand the needs of the poor, through the provision of various aids, community capacity can be created.

### **3.2 Mentorship Program: Mobility and Discipleship Training**

The mentorship program started in 2007, at that time HKCNP discovered that there was a problem of intergeneration poverty in Hong Kong society, the mentorship pioneer program was therefore launched with its partner churches. They recruited mentor from churches, who would be paired up with a grass-roots teenager for one year and be his life guide. By helping the teenager to build a positive character, the problem of intergeneration poverty can be alleviated.

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<sup>6</sup> The public housing estates in Tung Chung have the highest proportion of disadvantaged teenagers.

<sup>7</sup> The three units are property management company (business sector), Christian organization and church respectively.

In the first phase of the program, 21 churches and 75 mentors from Sham Shui Po district, Yau Tsim Mong district, Kwun Tong district and Tung Chung district were gathered by HKCNP to serve 75 senior primary school students or junior secondary school students from families with low income. In 2008, the government adopted the format of the program and added "Mentoring" as a core element during the implementation of Child Development Fun (CDF). The program was implemented on a time-limited basis for three years, which paired up children between the ages of 10-16 from low-income families with mentors. The mentors would help the teenagers to set their individual development plan as well as encourage targeted saving at their early age, while the children's ability of resource management and future planning could be enhanced, it was also a significant step towards alleviating and tackling the problem of intergeneration poverty in Hong Kong.

In order to promote the participation of the partner organizations, HKCNP matched funds to support various organizations, such as Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship, Christian Action, The Urban Peacemaker Evangelistic Fellowship, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service, Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council, in the application of CDF scheme, and worked with them in more than 20 schemes to serve up to 2000 children. At the same time, since the program needed a huge amount of mentors, HKCNP liaised with numerous sects, including Evangelical Free Church of China, Evangelize China Fellowship, The Methodist Church Hong Kong and Baptist, so far up to 3000 Christians have become mentors.

In order to realize the physical, psychological changes as well as changes in faith of the participants of the Child Development Fund Pioneer Project after they took part in this faith based project, in 2013, HKCNP, with Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship and Christian Action, commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct the Faith based Child Development Fund Pioneer Project Follow Up study. The study result showed that the Faith based CDF project can effectively enhance the positive inner quality of the participants and they were provided with a chance to know more about Christianity. 101 participants were involved in the follow up study, about 30 of them knew more about Christianity due to the project and even went to church after that. Apart from that, the study also found out that those participants that were more actively involved in the project had better performance in the aspect of self-exploration, self-identification and community activity participation. On the other hand, the positive impact of the project depended on the closeness of the peer relationship between the mentees and the mentors. By teaching and modelling for the mentees, as well as sharing the faith, the mentees would self-reflect and their self-esteem, faith-seeking property and religious belief could be enhanced, their personal qualities (such as be thankful, seeking the meaning of life, having hope and making life planning) would thereby be enriched. All these would get the teenagers ready for their long-term life development. Under the guidance of the mentors, while the mentees had their personal growth, the will of Lord was also achieved, the mentors would have their spiritual growth (will be elaborated below in part 3.5), this would become an important venue for discipleship training.

The Mentorship Program provided the underprivileged participants a unique way to lift themselves out of poverty. On one hand, having an adult with more social experience and more extensive social network to accompany with, the participants' social capital could be increased; on the other hand, with the guidance and inspiration of the mentors, the participants' self-reflection ability, self-esteem and the desire to pursue life values could be

enhanced, which strengthened their resistance to adversity and fostered their positive motivation. The program also provided the adult Christians who participated in with a unique chance of personal growth, they influenced another lives with their own lives and manifested the spirit and vitality of faith.

In 2012, HKCNP provided assistance in the development of the Youth-up Development Pioneer Programme of the Lantau Development Alliance. The programme integrated mentorship, the training courses of Vocational Training Council and internship opportunities of the business sector, which provided supervision and training to the grass-roots youth. The programme further influenced the poverty-alleviation policy of the government, and with the mentorship culture that HKCNP has been actively promoting of, the government also echoed and carried out across Hong Kong. In October 2015, the government announced the cross-sector Youth Upward Mobility Mentorship Program and recruited people from various sector to provide career guidance and mentorship to the grass-roots youth, so as to help them to pursue their dreams and passions, develop their own career and seize the opportunities of upward mobility.

## 4. PATTERN DEVELOPMENT

### 4.1 Implementation procedure – Promotion and Coordination

The “Love in Action” and “Mentorship Program” of HKCNP have been mentioned above, HKCNP’s mode of ministry of network expansion and coordination would be elaborated below. Here are the ministries of HKCNP at different levels:

Work level	Example
Direct service or provide support for local churches to take part in poverty alleviation ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Held the Rich and Poor Feast</li> <li>● Assisted in liaison with churches in the district (and related units, such as Food Angel) to hold Love Canteen</li> <li>● Contacted and assisted churches in the district to take part in schemes like food bank and Child Development Fund</li> </ul>
Provide resources, consultation and opinion to support the churches in the district to participate in poverty alleviation activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Liaised with churches in the district and provide consultation service and service support</li> <li>● Allocated resources (such as musical tickets and Noah’s Ark tickets)</li> </ul>
Provide network support for churches and organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Held local network meeting</li> <li>● Held seminars in Kwun Tong and Shatin district</li> <li>● Sponsored eight organizations which joined the Child Development Fund to carry out faith based study and use the data collected for future development improvement</li> </ul>

Support and enhance the participation of local religious non-government organizations in poverty alleviation work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Matched funds for organizations which joined the Child Development Fund program</li> <li>● Sponsored the partner organizations which ran food bank</li> </ul>
Discuss poverty alleviation strategies with religious and non-religious organizations, explore collaboration opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provided E-learning Program</li> <li>● The district based Youth-up Development Programme in Lantau Island; the enterprise based program of Hong Kong Broadband Network</li> </ul>
Advocacy and education: share vision, promote the idea of poverty alleviation to strengthen the serving mind of Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Held the HKCNP 10.10.10. Anti-poverty Campaign among churches and promote the message of caring for the poor regularly in churches</li> <li>● Invited leaders of the churches to lunch meetings</li> <li>● Held the Rich and Poor Course with churches jointly (such as Shatin Baptist Church) and held experiential functions for caring the poor</li> <li>● Educated the public: Radio interview, sharing on newspaper</li> <li>● Advocated its views on the Policy Addresses that put forward by the Chief Executive</li> </ul>

From the above table, it can be seen that the positioning of HKCNP is not about the front-line work but to liaise with churches and local organizations, and promote visions and coordinate various units for them to share resources. HKCNP need to identify the units with common vision and concern, so they can cooperate and start their poverty alleviation plans. HKCNP also need to liaise with the organizations which may cooperate with it in the future, so as to increase the number of partners and expand its poverty-alleviation network. If there is a church which would like to start the poverty alleviation ministry but don't know how, HKCNP could then make use of its own network and help the church to realize the related data of the district and the units that are currently working on the issue, so they can analyze how the church can get involved and draft the service year plan.

The role of facilitator allows HKCNP to connect different churches regardless of their sects, the barrier between them can thereby be removed. For example, the Shui Chuen O Estate in Shatin was newly built, about 30000 residents were going to move in from other districts, HKCNP therefore gathered the leaders of the churches in the district and prayed together for seeking the guidance of the Lord for the new residents before making any plans. HKCNP also contacted the Shatin District Social Welfare Officer of the Social Welfare Department to communicate with the government before church services were provided. After more than a year, all the churches could still cooperate smoothly regardless of their sects. Together they recruited volunteers, distributed leaflets and invited residents to join the gospel meetings; they helped the residents to tackle actual living problems, and the residents became the motivation of the

community from service recipients. A faith based community was thereby built and social problems could be prevented (such as the socially withdrawn youth).

Moreover, HKCNP held seminars and district meetings for the stakeholders to meet and further strengthen the cooperation. In 2012, HKCNP held a local poverty alleviation seminar in Kwun Tong district, and the Poverty Relief Network of East Kowloon was then established. The local poverty alleviation seminar in Shatin district was held in March 2014, the District Social Welfare Officer of the government came and introduced the poverty problem of the district, this facilitated the cooperation after the completion of Shui Chuen O Estate, the churches could apply their expertise and help the new residents. In November 2014 and January 2015, HKCNP held two more sharing sessions which integrated the experience and mode of cooperation of various district and used them as reference, so as to promote the communication and cooperation of churches, organizations, government departments and the business sector in various district.

For the support for front-line service organizations, HKCNP helped not only in mobilization of participants but also assisted with fund-raising. For example in 2009 and 2010, HKCNP matched funds to support the Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship, Christian Action and The Urban Peacemaker Evangelistic Fellowship in the application of Child Development Fund program. When mentors were needed, HKCNP held briefing sessions in churches in different district. It also operated training courses to equip the participants, 186 and 500 mentors from 51 and 63 churches/ organizations respectively took part in the program during these two years.

Apart from receiving financial and material donations from the business sectors for "Love in Action" and training Christians in the business sector to act as the mentors in the Mentorship Program, HKCNP even made use of the experience and resources of the business sector in workplace to provide on-the-job training and job opportunities for the grass-roots youth, which offered a helping hand for their upward mobility. Take the above-mentioned Youth-up Development Programme as an example, with the Mentorship Program, HKCNP worked with its district partners and Vocational Training Council to provide the underprivileged youth who did not performed well in their academic result a support net.

HKCNP also established partnership with various government departments, especially the District Social Welfare Officer of various district, so it can get involved more effectively. At the same time, the members of Board of Directors would meet with relevant government officers, such as Mrs Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, the Chairperson of the Commission on Poverty and the Chief Secretary for Administration, and Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, to discuss poverty alleviation policies. From 2012 to November 2014, HKCNP advocated its views to the government every year on the "Suggestion for the Policy Address" that put forward by the Chief Executive and pointed out the loopholes of the current policies.

For the public, HKCNP also promotes advocacy, such as the "10.10.10. Anti-poverty Campaign" that has been held since 2012, the organizer encouraged the public to skip a meal for making donations to the Love Food Bank.

HKCNP has already implemented the above-mentioned format in different districts; it also invited the student from the Hong Kong University to conduct the "Community Transformation Format Research". The report showed that the food banks that ran by churches and the business sector jointly distributed in various districts, which could help and satisfy the living needs of those potential needy who did not fit the requirement of the government and could not receive the help from the government food bank. Furthermore, the business sectors and churches which participated in the campaign would go further and help the residents in the district to tackle their problems in finding jobs and hope they can get employed in the current job market. At the family level, their front-line social workers would refer the case in need to professional counselor and help the families with disputes to solve their problems. Some of the district organizations even help the residents to enhance their skills, such as the "Youth-up Development Programme" of the Lantau Development Alliance, which helped many of the youth living in the district to plan their future (including employment and career planning), as a result, their living and vocational skills could be enhanced to a certain extent.

#### **4.2 Pros and Cons of the Format**

The advantage of building network is that the expertise, resources and network of various organizations can be integrated and generate synergy, so they can complete something which cannot be done by one organization alone. As the organizations have different professions and come from various sectors, they are complementary and able to tackle some complicated social problems. Take the "Youth-up Development Programme" in Lantau Island as an example, the education was provided by Vocational Training Council while the job opportunities and on-the-job trainings were provided by AsiaWorld-Expo, with the "Mentorship Program" of churches, the youth who took part in could have comprehensive support (including academic, vocational, moral support). The causes of the social problem of socially withdrawn youth were complicated and it is so hard to tackle, yet, this kind of collaboration projects can prevent the problems from appearing and tackle the issue thoroughly. Besides, the philosophy of building network also conform with the values of Christianity. Loving each other and unity are the Jesus's teaching, when the churches are united, not only the impact on poverty alleviation work can be multiplied, the crucial faith of Christianity can also be implemented and be witnessed. The partner organizations which took part in the HKCNP activities also agreed that by working with organizations within the district, the impact of poverty alleviation work could be enhanced, they therefore hope both the frequency and extent of cooperation can be deepened.

Though there are numerous advantages of building network, it is not an easy task to find partners and build up partnerships with mutual trust. Not to mention about the fact that it is time-consuming, it is challenging for HKCNP to maintain the extensive cooperation network across Hong Kong. Moreover, as some of the units thought that the activities held by HKCNP were too religious that they cannot work closely with each other, HKCNP lost a small proportion of organizations which differed in view. Even if it is a religious organization, HKCNP still cannot build up partnership with it if it do not share the same vision as HKCNP, and only friendly relations can be maintained temporarily. On the other hand, as HKCNP does not serve the needy directly but only promote and back up the front-line service, it is rather hard for HKCNP to apply for sponsorship that the income of the organization is now all depends on donations.

And as a supporting force, it is also not easy to attract volunteers, which limits the human resources of HKCNP.

### **4.3 Potential Challenge**

Collaboration needs time, from forming a network, implementing plans, cultivating to target achievement, careful planning and promotion are needed. When HKCNP shared the poverty alleviation needs with the elders and pastors in the community, the plan of the Lord would be rooted in their churches only if all the leaders were willing to listen modestly and refocus. For the tepid churches with strong cohesion, no matter how outstanding was the HKCNP member's persuasion technique, those churches were still too hard to mobilize. Some of the groups with extremely strong in-group culture could hardly accept others' opinion, some of them only focused on their own business and they think churches had nothing to do with the community, all these hindered the work of HKCNP when it shared visions with the churches.

Whether the network can maximize its impact also depends on the relationship between the members. As too many units are involved, the stakeholders need to have magnanimity and not focus on their own agendas but make their resources open to all and walk humbly with other organizations for the well-being of the poor. This is a huge challenge to HKCNP as well as the partner organizations. "Cross-cultural" does not only mean the gap between race and language, such as the difference between ethnic minorities and local Chinese, it also means the difference between the mode of operation of churches with different scales, the all along dividing line between local church and English-speaking church, the inevitable divergence between religious groups and the business sectors, as well as the contradictive value and culture of the world and the Kingdom of Heaven. Hence, HKCNP regards serving the poor as a cross-cultural evangelization challenge of the church. Cooperation is crucial as only by integrating resources from various sides, sophisticated social problems can be addressed and prevented, we can then voice out for the poor and fight for their rights and interests.

As an intermediary and consultant, on one hand, HKCNP needs to share vision effectively and be sensitive to the needs of the district so as to formulate the related plan; on the other hand, the organization needs to put the various partners in the right place for them to apply their expertise. Moreover, when so many organizations with different backgrounds are involved in one ministry, conflicts of interest can hardly be avoided, HKCNP need to balance the interest of various parties and strive to resolve the conflicts. Even for HKCNP, as it took the role of an intermediary, it had contradicted opinion with the front-line organizations and even conflicts were caused. Therefore, HKCNP also need to pay attention to the maintenance and coordination of the relationship between each others. Besides, an effective platform for co-operation is of paramount importance, only when the leaders and members are in their positions and resources are shared with a clear mechanism, ministry can maximize its impact. HKCNP also has a mission that is to let the partner organizations to understand that poverty alleviation is not only about serving the poor directly, but also about changing the government policies, so as to improve the living conditions of the poor thoroughly and voice out for the poor of one mind.

#### **4.4 The Possibility of “Sustainable Development”**

HKCNP was founded by three major Christian organizations, which have HKCNP a solid foundation with many potential partners. As the impact of the HKCNP ministry depends on the extensiveness of the network, the more the partner organizations, the more the resources can be shared and used to satisfy the needs of the poor, therefore the number of potential partners can prove that sustainable development is possible for HKCNP.

However, it will be a huge challenge for HKCNP to maintain close and organic relationships with the numerous partners. It needs talents, manpower, resources and also the guidance from the Holy Spirit. With the coordination, donation and labour resources from churches from various sects, this format has the potential to develop sustainability.

#### **4.5 Serving the Poor and “Discipleship-driven Cross-cultural Mission”**

The ministry of HKCNP values the participation of Christians, if the partner churches cannot find volunteers, the front-line services will need to be stopped. Those projects are only tools for the organizations to start helping the poor. Only when Christians can walk with the poor with the love from the Christ, life of the poor can be transformed. In the various projects of “Love In Action”, through visiting, distributing materials and liaising with Christians in the district, only resources from all sides can be transferred to the poor. By taking part in the “Mentorship Program” and work as mentor, one’s words and acts can directly affect the life quality of the youth.

In this kind of discipleship-driven ministry, the Christians – those who serve at the front-line – challenges would be met, at the same time, the will of Lord would also be achieved, the mentors would have their spiritual growth as well. In Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus told his disciples. This means to Christians need to leave the culture they are familiar with, and witness the Lord in an unfamiliar place. Also, during the process of serving the poor, Christians can also evangelize in a cross-cultural way. For example, when a middle-aged Christian who lives in the world of middle-class and with distinguished career, needs to spend three years to accompany a teenager from broken grass-roots family who has no hope, the Christian needs to bridge the huge cultural gaps between them, which are not just the disparity between the rich and the poor, but also the difference in age and value. When an enterprise hold a poverty alleviation function with a church, the members of both organizations must go across the gap between business sector culture and church culture, and not focus on their own business and interest but walk humbly with the others.

It is said that “discipleship training” is what the Chinese churches need most nowadays, truth practice is actually part of it, Christians must practice what they have learnt. “When I touch a poor child who lives in slum housing, I touch Jesus Christ... Among the poor God is hidden. There is mystery among the poor.” Said Mama Maggie Gobran, who also known as the Mother Teresa in Cairo. When the Christians serve the poor, they can meet the Lord and feel his love for the poor and our vocation of helping the underprivileged. Just like what Jesus taught people in John 12:26, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” At the same time, when looking at with

the poor, Christians will be able to feel the grace of God they received more clearly, as when one has nothing, God becomes everything. Christians may find out their spiritual poverty when they compared with the poor. In fact, in the eye of the Lord, both the poor and the Christians who serve the poor need him in their spirit.<sup>8</sup> Jesus therefore promised the “poor” in Luke 6:20, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

Hence, the poverty alleviation ministry is also a venue for the discipleship training. When Christians are willing to step out of their comfort zone, their lives will be molded in various challenges. One of the youth from a partner church who took part in “Love in Action” and worked as volunteer in the free canteen, was deeply moved after he met the poor in the community for several time, later he decided to take a social work course so as to serve more needy. One of the mentors who took part in the Mentorship program discovered that his own weakness was actually the strength of the Lord, when he thought that he was not capable of providing counselling service to the youth, he surprisingly found out that God has prepared him with more than enough communication skills. Serving the poor is a kind of spirituality and discipleship training.

## **5. EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION**

HKCNP has a wide range of work at various levels, so far evaluations have been done only on “Love in Action” and “Mentorship Program”. As mentioned above, HKCNP has started a research on the “Mentorship Program”, which further study the function, role and participation of the mentors, and especially focus on understanding how faith and organizations supported the long-term service of the mentors. In long term, HKCNP has more work at different levels that can be evaluated so as to enhance their effectiveness, such as the building and capacity of network, the long-term impact of building network to the community. However, all these still need the cooperation and coordination of other sides so as to evaluate the effectiveness accurately.

## **6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

HKCNP regards itself as a missional community which founded to complete the trinity mission of telling the poor the complete gospel. It rely on the Holy Spirit, act to conform with the word of Lord, love and care for each other, develop ministry in unity. The format of work of HKCNP is to mobilize the extensive network and resources of church, encourage the growth of the Christians as well as the active participation in poor-serving gospel ministry. This is a feasible way with potential, however, to carry out further development, cooperation and exchanges between the HKCNP itself and other churches are needed, the impact can thereby be further enhanced. The building, maintenance and expansion of the network is the largest challenge the HKCNP has, if all the churches can embrace the heart of the Lord for the poor and respond to his vocation, the resources of the churches would become part of the poverty alleviation network, which has huge development potential. As a result, the missional community can

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision: An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism* (Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1992) 39.

expand continuously to protect those disadvantaged on Earth.

By taking part in poverty alleviation projects to build a disciple life is the most needed and suitable discipleship training in the 21st century. HKCNP takes the building of cross-cultural network and disciple life transformation as its core poverty alleviation format, though the format is now still in the stages of implementation, testing and deepening. This report is a valuable chance for the organization to summarize the experience of the implementation and share it with the Christians all over the world. It is hopeful that this report can help motivate Christians to think about the direction and contributions could be made by the church on poverty alleviation work.

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