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# Walking With Others: Case Studies of the Accompaniment Model

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As the world has become increasingly connected via technology and communication, the field of humanitarianism has grown and expanded in order to address the variety of problems and injustices now visible to us. Organizations upon organizations have emerged to combat these issues, and over time each humanitarian organization has developed its own philosophy as to how and why it does its work. While each organization has its own philosophy, however, many faith-based humanitarian organizations use similar methods, a good introduction to which can be found in William Easterly's book, *The White Man's Burden*. In this book, Easterly, Professor of Economics at New York University and co-director of the NYU Development Research Institute, gives a metaphor for some commonly used methods. This metaphor involves two groups: the "Planners" and the "Searchers." The Planners are the "advocates of the traditional approach," while the Searchers are "agents for change in the alternative approach."<sup>1</sup> For Easterly, the Planners are the ones who plan and are unable to figure out exactly what the people they are serving need, how it should be implemented, or if it is actually being implemented; they have the big picture and believe they have all the answers, even when they do not. Meanwhile, the Searchers believe they do not have all the answers; instead, they believe it is only the insiders who have the information and that "solutions must be homegrown."<sup>2</sup> Searchers are local and focused on little tasks, Planners are global and large-task oriented. The Planners are the ones who have achieved the most success, even though they have not always been successful.

While Easterly does not explicitly say so in this section of his book, a middle path between the Planners and the Searchers is the accompaniment model. In the accompaniment model, organizations walk alongside the populations they are serving. Both the population and the organization work together to form a solution. It is a model based in theology, and for that reason, this paper will examine how different Christian denominations use the accompaniment model, specifically focusing on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Roman Catholic Church.

### The Accompaniment Model

Before delving into the work each Church is doing, we must first define "accompaniment" in the field of humanitarian work. While accompaniment has been a part of liberation theology for many years, one of the first organizations to use this model was Partners in Health, led by Paul Farmer. Farmer, an American anthropologist and physician, is best known for his work providing developing countries with suitable health care. Partners in Health is a health care organization founded in 1987 to deliver health care to citizens of Haiti. Partners in Health has expanded since that time, and continues to strive to bring good medical care as well as long term care to developing nations and poor areas of the world. Farmer's accompaniment model is described in his address to the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. In this address, he states:

To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end... We're not sure

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<sup>1</sup> William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 5

<sup>2</sup> Easterly, 6

exactly where the beginning might be, and we're almost never sure about the end. There's an element of mystery, of openness, in accompaniment: I'll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate for a while. And by 'a while,' I don't mean a little while. Accompaniment is much more often about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed by the person or people being accompanied, rather than by the accompagnateur.<sup>3</sup>

Accompaniment is not just about helping and serving others but about actively being with someone else and sharing with them their joys and sorrows. It is first and foremost about sharing and solidarity. In the same speech, Farmer states, "true accompaniment does not privilege technical expertise above solidarity or compassion or a willingness to tackle what may seem to be insuperable challenges" because it "requires cooperation, openness, and teamwork," since "much more can be accomplished, looking forward, with an open-source view of the world."<sup>4</sup> There is no sense of hierarchy, just a working together with one another.

### The ELCA and Accompaniment

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) also takes this stance of accompaniment in its global work. In 1995, the Division for Global Mission (DGM) of the ELCA called for a reevaluation of the Churches' participation in Latin America. What resulted was the document, "Mission Strategy for Latin America."<sup>5</sup> The key part of this document was the concept of pastoral accompaniment. This is understood as "walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. The basis for this accompaniment, or what the New Testament calls *koinonia*, is found in the God-human relationship in which God accompanies us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup> The ELCA, in order to follow this thinking, has felt called, along with the Latin American Lutheran churches; to:

1. Affirm the diversity of viewpoints that exists among [their] sister churches; 2. Encourage [their] churches to question and analyze among [themselves] the priorities and practices of [their] churches; 3. Be transparent and engage in honest and sincere dialogue; 4. Move beyond the traditional relationships of the past between North and South and South to South; 5. Involve the churches and agencies affected by a decision in decision-making processes; and 6. Acknowledge that the churches in both the South and the North will be in solidarity with one another in their weaknesses, struggles, and mission.<sup>7</sup>

The underlying objective put forward here is to work with the local population in a variety of ways: through dialogue, decision-making processes, and moving beyond traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Farmer, "Accompaniment as Policy" (speech, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, May 25, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Farmer.

<sup>5</sup> "Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission," 5.

<sup>6</sup> "Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission," 5.

<sup>7</sup> "Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission," 5.

relationships. This objective is the basis for the ELCA's work in Latin America. By examining the Pan-Lutheran relief organization Lutheran World Relief (LWR), we will see how this theory applies in practice.

Before I begin my analysis, it is important to note exactly what it means to be a Pan-Lutheran organization. What 'Pan-Lutheran' means for LWR is that they are not directly affiliated with the ELCA, LCMS (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod) or any other Lutheran church body. Nevertheless, while they are not directly affiliated with the ELCA, I am using their work as an example of the ELCA in action. LWR is an organization that "affirms God's love for all people" as they "work with Lutherans and partners around the world to end poverty, injustice, and human suffering."<sup>8</sup> One of their tools for achieving this mission is accompaniment. They "endeavor to walk and work with partners" and "engage in critical and self-critical reflection", "develop cultural competency" while "support[ing], encourage[ing], and learn[ing] together within long-term relationships of trust and reciprocity."<sup>9</sup> LWR works to use both their expertise and the expertise of those they are serving in order to create the best possible programs to assist the various countries they serve.

One of these programs is Resilience Plus: Community Led Food Crisis Recovery in the Sahel (CORE). Located in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, this program was implemented to help boost agricultural and livestock production following droughts and food crises. In executing it, LWR worked with the local population, asking them what they most wanted to grow. Based on the results, LWR helped local farmers grow the cereals that were most important to them by giving advice and also listening to the farmers and their ideas. The effects were positive; the volume of cereals produced generally increased or stayed the same, as can be seen below:

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<sup>8</sup> Lutheran World Relief, "Mission, Vision, and Values," <http://lwr.org/about/mission>.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

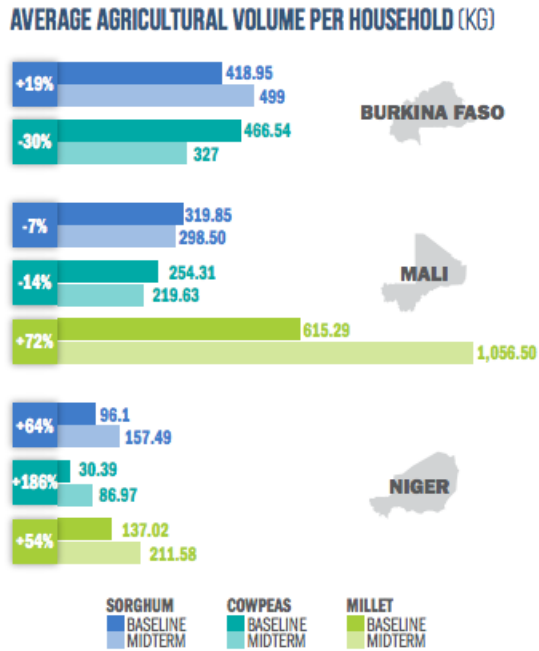


Table 1

Source: Lutheran World Relief, “Evaluation Summary, Resilience Plus: Community Led Food Crisis in the Sahel (CORE), Midterm Evaluation of the Core Project After One Year of Implementation,” (2015), 2.

The first bar indicates the agricultural volume per household in kilograms for the baseline, and the second bar is for the midterm period. Sorghum and cowpeas did not do as well in Mali, but everywhere else, agricultural production increased. Through situations like the one in Mali, LWR and the local populations learned what to do and what not to do.

An additional part of this program involved the selling of the cereals and selling of livestock, and there were some areas, once again, where this was not successful. Instead of giving up, both LWR and the local population worked together to create a new strategy in order to become successful sellers.<sup>10</sup> LWR, like the ELCA, asked people to question the program, be transparent, create new relationships, and be in solidarity with one another.

### The Catholic Church and Accompaniment

Similar to the ELCA and LWR’s vision, Pope Francis outlines the concept of personal accompaniment in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. He states that, “We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur.”<sup>11</sup> Listening, which is crucial to accompaniment, is so crucial because it allows human beings to become even closer, according to Pope Francis. He also states that:

<sup>10</sup> Lutheran World Relief, “Evaluation Summary Resilience Plus: Community-Led Food Crisis Recovery in the Sahel (CORE).”

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World” (Vatican Press, 2013), 134.

one who accompanies others has to realize that each person's situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without... Someone good at such accompaniment does not give into frustrations or fears. He or she invites others to let themselves be healed, to take up their mat, embrace the cross, leave all behind and go forth ever anew to proclaim the Gospel. Our personal experience of being accompanied and assisted, and of openness to those who accompany us, will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow.<sup>12</sup>

What Pope Francis says here is since all have been accompanied at some point in their lives, it is easier to accompany others and know how to walk alongside them and help them grow, as everyone is open to being accompanied as well. People who are able to trust in their Lord and who leave all behind to go help others, and be open to receiving help, are practicing personal accompaniment.

One Catholic organization that uses this philosophy is Catholic Relief Services (CRS). This organization "carries out the commitment of the Bishops of the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas."<sup>13</sup> It is "motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to cherish, preserve, and uphold the sacredness and dignity of all human life, foster charity and justice, and embody Catholic social and moral teaching."<sup>14</sup> In order to pursue this mission, CRS looks at how to let each person aid him or herself, while still assisting and providing help that person is not capable of providing on his or her own. This effort ensures each person is able to help him or herself with some support, but mainly just having the support so that person can use his or her own skills. CRS does this by building up the capacity of partners; proving and taking to "scale evidence-based approaches that respond to local needs and foster local leadership"; cultivating strong relationships through the global Catholic network; and "building connections across the public and private sectors and civil society to create lasting, positive solutions to poverty and injustice."<sup>15</sup> In other words, CRS is about walking with the people one is helping by not dictating the person's life but accompanying him or her through it.

One project in which CRS follows this model is the "Feed the Future Zambia Mawa Project". This project seeks to improve food and economic security, provide farmers with skills, experiment with new methods, and provide nutrition assessment, counseling, and support. In her testimony to the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Committee on Foreign Affairs on October 7, 2015, Carolyn Woo, president and CEO of CRS, noted that "this project helps smallholder families prosper by finding the balance between harnessing agriculture for consumption and for income through engagement with markets."<sup>16</sup> To help find that balance, the farmers are taught skills through community groups, obtain loans, and labor alongside workers from Mawa in order to learn. Although there does not

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Catholic Relief Services, "Mission Statement." <http://www.crs.org/about/mission-statement>.

<sup>14</sup> Catholic Relief Services, "Mission Statement."

<sup>15</sup> Catholic Relief Services: From Hope To Harvest, Agency Strategy 2014-2018, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo, Hearing on Food Security and Nutrition Programs in Africa. Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Committee on Foreign Affairs. October 7, 2015.

seem to be as much input from the community in this project as in some others, CRS is still walking alongside those it is helping and not dominating the program.

By looking at some of the documents written by the church leadership in these two denominations, and then comparing those to two of their affiliated humanitarian organizations, we can see that the theology of each church body has influenced the work its humanitarian organizations are doing. Both Lutheran World Relief and Catholic Relief Services practice accompaniment; they walk alongside those they are serving, an approach that is in line with their denominations. The projects and organizations chosen as examples for this study suggest that the ELCA's use of the accompaniment model involves more sharing of ideas, but both the ELCA and the Catholic Church endeavor to walk alongside those they are serving. LWR and CRS, in turn, attempt to model accompaniment in their everyday work, and they have been successful thus far.

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