

Christ's Ideals of Serving the Poor from Book of Mormon Texts

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Dr. Warner Woodworth, Visiting Faculty, University of Utah

Email: warnerwoodworth@gmail.com

Abstract: My love of Jesus Christ began when reading of him in the *Book of Mormon* at age 8. This paper will include a *textual* analysis that compares and interprets his teachings about practicing love through caring for God's children who suffer. I hope it will motivate deeper *Book of Mormon* study and also inspire Latter-day Saints to engage in innovative humanitarian strategies that build self-reliance, above and beyond the Church's large, official programs. The scholarship I envision will not be strictly academic but instead will offer action research for improving the world.

I have lived my life understanding Jesus through a multitude of *Book of Mormon* scriptures that quote his teachings through his servants. From King Benjamin, for example, we learn one of the most poignant of the Savior's doctrines: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (*Mosiah* 2:17–18). These words have inspired my four decades of laboring among the "least of these" in the mud huts of starving Africa, the mountain villages of Bolivia, the coastal communities surrounding the Indian Ocean after the Asian tsunami killed 230,000, and hundreds of other locales. Ammon's example in *Alma* 17 reveals Christ's encouragement and the power of serving others.

Decades of my personal labors among God's children have been motivated by Christ's appearance, recorded in *3 Nephi* 12:41–42: "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn thou not away." I've given cash and provided job training to beggars in many countries. I've washed the feet of lepers in India. With LDS bishops and Area Seventies, we've built dozens of schools in rural Africa. I've even been privileged to recruit Utah Relief Society presidents to labor high in the Andes with others to establish huge greenhouses to double poor farmers' growing season, as well as to install high-tech computer centers to enhance economic development. On one trip, we constructed a "Moroni Community Center" in a village at 12,000 feet so that peasant women could gather for mutual support and learn in literacy classes. These precious experiences have inspired my living the "pure" gospel of Christ.

The historian Richard Bushman, an eminent LDS professor at Columbia University, penned an Opinion Piece for Salt Lake City's *Deseret News*, titled "Embracing a 'Radiant' Mormonism" (2017), in which he wrote of Latter-day Saint innovators who are positively impacting societies throughout the world. His argument was that, above and beyond traditional LDS activities long considered the routine actions of the church—such as reading scriptures, performing missionary work, attending and participating in church meetings and other activities, listening to or reading church leaders' formal speeches, tracing one's family history, serving in a temple, and many more—in recent years there has been a virtual explosion of LDS "influencers" reaching out to improve many levels of society. Whether they be politicians, insightful authors, creative contributors in the fine arts, or many other kinds of individuals, these influencers are truly making the world a better place, bit by bit, year by year. Bushman cited some of my own humble efforts in mobilizing individuals to reach out to reduce human suffering by contributing their money, time, spiritual energy, and talents, in ways that go above and beyond traditional church programs:

They are funding micro-nutrients for starving populations in New Guinea; helping the children of lepers in India; teaching...principles for successful living in inner-city schools; funding an orphanage and school in India again; advancing cancer or other research; and many others. I was

vaguely aware of all this activity because of Warner Woodworth's argument that Mormons would bring in the law of consecration individually by creating a multitude of private charities. To prove his point, Woodworth named scores of these enterprises. Through my fundraising, I have learned for myself how accurate Woodworth was. There is no doubt that Latter-day Saints are into philanthropy in a big way.

I have discussed Bushman's perceptive analysis with various Brethren and government leaders globally. He creatively labels this new, expanded, and sweeping movement among church members the practice of "Radiant Mormonism," suggesting that these examples are "indicators of growing Mormon influence in the world." For years, he and I have spoken together at various conferences and seminars, yet his words in this instance struck a chord deep in my heart as I've searched for ways to explain my life's work in mobilizing church members to reach out and make a difference. I have keynoted major global conferences of LDS international officials from multiple governments, spoken to top executives from major corporations across the US and around the world, consulted with LDS Church leaders at Salt Lake City headquarters and internationally, advised and trained mission presidents, and worked with area presidencies and the church's women's leaders. Much of my work has been what I consider *a call to social action* as well as a plea to empower the poor. The texts in the inspiring *Book of Mormon* have been the impetus for my humble labors among those who are impoverished. I have dedicated more than four decades of my life to helping individual Latter-day Saints learn how they can personally become change agents to reduce human suffering. I devoutly hope my paper for the Sperry Symposium brings God's word and my experiences together and shows how church teachings, combined with gospel-based social innovations and best practices, can generate significant as well as long-lasting social impacts among the world's poor (Woodworth, 2022).

Poverty and Disease Today

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland lamented the devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic at general conference in October 2020, one of the worst periods of collective sufferings globally in a century, with hundreds of millions of people falling ill (more than 222 million as of early September 2021 when the beloved apostle was speaking) and the subsequent millions of deaths that have rocked the world. Today as I write this Sperry Symposium paper, the numbers of God's children suffering are even more horrendous. According to global data for June 14, 2022, those afflicted with the pandemic's illness worldwide number more than 541 million people, while the number of dead has now risen above 6.3 million (Worldometers, 2022). Elder Holland raised the ugly specter of individuals feeling deep sorrow, considering that "we are waging an 'all hands-on deck' war with COVID-19, a solemn reminder that a virus 1,000 times smaller than a grain of sand can bring entire populations and global economies to their knees. We pray for those who have lost loved ones in this modern plague, as well as for those who are currently infected or at risk. We certainly pray for those who are giving such magnificent health care. When we have conquered this—and we will—may we be equally committed to freeing the world from the virus of hunger, freeing neighborhoods and nations from the virus of poverty" (Holland, 2020).

This paper will remind the reader of prophetic admonitions on the ancient South and North American continents that we should serve others. It's also a call to action for Latter-day Saints and friends to work toward freeing the masses from the terrible pandemic suffered by those who are extremely poor. And it's a call for members of our church to take up the plight of absolute, suffocating human poverty. To lift up heads, hearts, and hands by responding to church leaders' messages calling for assertive actions. To act, rather than simply awaiting the "big solutions" of governments, businesses, the Red Cross, the United Nations, and huge healthcare institutions. To serve and not stand by passively in the face of examples of growing poverty arising from the pandemic's destruction. In sum: *to reach out and make a difference*.

I will draw on the scriptural texts as well as the work and experience of some of the best and brightest among members of the Church who seek to deeply practice Book of Mormon admonishments to give of their time, intellect, spiritual strength, leadership skills, and even personal funds to help improve

society, especially in places where hunger, poverty, civil conflicts, oppression of women, and lack of schools and jobs, among other crises, all prevail. Do Latter-day Saints have anything to say about such travails? Equally important, do LDS adherents play any part in combating such egregious and perplexing human problems? Let us ask ourselves if we are up to the task—not just institutionally through the formal leadership of the LDS Church, with its brainpower and considerable wealth, but also through the hearts and minds of its everyday members, who consider themselves humble disciples of Christ: the Living Christ who commands us all to “love thy neighbor.”

Consecration and Stewardship

President Russell M. Nelson has declared “Our Heavenly Father is concerned for [the poor and needy]. They are all his children. The poor—especially widows, orphans, and strangers—have long been the concern of God and the godly.... To those who cared for the poor, blessings were promised” (1986, p. 25). Thus, we are called to become “godly” by serving those who suffer. The prophet Alma taught his converted people in the wilderness that they should live “having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another” (*Mosiah* 18:21). Elsewhere, scriptures contained in the *Book of Mormon* suggest that to actually create a righteous society, God’s people must labor to ensure equality: “And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (*4 Nephi* 1:3).

This paper shows how thousands of modern Latter-day Saints with whom I have worked over the last several decades have awakened to the clarion call of scriptures and prophets down through the ages—to do good and to serve the disenfranchised, according to sacred scripture.

Approaches to Serving the Poor

We as disciples of Christ have several ways to do good and to provide humanitarian service:

- First, the traditional church programs for the Saints include paying tithing and fast offerings, carrying out LDS welfare efforts for our members, donating to the church’s Perpetual Education Fund for returned missionaries, and so on. We learn in *3 Nephi* 24:8–10 of the critical importance of tithes and other offerings, per this *Book of Mormon* teaching. I’ve come to believe that this kind of service—these LDS offerings, the tithes that we give to bless the Saints, and others—should be a top priority.
- A second area of outreach and humanitarian assistance consists of a variety of church programs for our non-Latter-day Saint neighbors. These include the church’s Humanitarian Fund, which was established in the 1980s, as well as Latter-day Saint Charities, which began in 2000, together with the church’s many other efforts to partner with other institutions. The church partners with other religious groups (like Catholic Relief); governments in times of crises (such as the tsunami in Indonesia); other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) beyond our own, such as the Muslim Relief Society; as well as businesses and various other LDS-sponsored outreach efforts to bless our nonmember neighbors in need. The *Book of Mormon* text holds many admonishments about humanitarian work, including that of King Benjamin: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.... [A]nd if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?” (*Mosiah* 2:17–18).
- A third category for providing humanitarian assistance is our direct engagement in individual acts of consecration and stewardship. These are what we might refer to as personal initiatives, ones not prompted by the church’s programs, but rather individual acts that often arise after we pray about how we might help those around us, or when we see on network news the devastation affecting a community or a region or a country and those we see suffering and struggling in our own community, even those next door. Jacob taught that we should “Be familiar with all and free with your substance” (*Jacob* 2:17), and from Mosiah’s record we read that we are to “teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve

one another” (*Mosiah* 4:15). Thus, a major theme throughout the *Book of Mormon* is that *it is crucially important that we engage in all three kinds of activities, globally*.

This paper primarily emphasizes the third category of actions—those that President Hinckley referred to when he voiced his concern that we not depend solely on large organizations or the institutional service, even of the Church. According to him, “We must take care of [the poor] and we must have the facilities to do so. But we must be *careful not to over institutionalize that care*.... I think there is a tendency among us to say, ‘Oh, the church will take care of that. I pay my fast offering. Let the church take care of that.’ We need as individuals, I think, to reach down and extend a helping hand without notice...to give of that with which the Lord has so generously blessed us” (Hinckley, 2016, p. 459). Thus, he advocated that we also engage in noninstitutionalized acts of service to the poor. In my mind, President Hinckley was following precisely his predecessors—the ancient *Book of Mormon* prophets—who made similar admonitions that it is up to *us* as individuals, not the church as an organization, to help the poor.

Practicing *Book of Mormon* Values in Our Personal Lives to Serve the Poor and Needy

What are some grassroots ways in which Latter-day Saints have initiated creative and inspired efforts to serve the poor? I will articulate several efforts inspired by *Book of Mormon* textual sources to practice what we preach around the globe. Each is personal and extremely hands-on for me, as I established and helped lead each one. These programs, known as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)—more commonly termed “nonprofits”—have motivated thousands of church members to collaborate with me and my associates, as well as a multitude of others *not* of our faith, to serve the poor. Essentially, each is a case of practicing pragmatic LDS values, or, as I sometimes say, “Practical Mormonism.” Below are seven cases or illustrations, along with *Book of Mormon* scriptures and teachings that motivated such efforts of mine and my many colleagues and volunteers in recent years.

Sustain Haiti: Drawing from *Mosiah*, this Non-Governmental Organization heralded the dedicated efforts of LDS students in a BYU course following the 7.0 destructive earthquake that flattened most buildings in the Caribbean island nation of Haiti. We were inspired as academics and college-age young adults to sacrifice our time, effort, and money in seeking to rebuild schools, orphanages, and numerous other institutions in that ravaged country. *Sustain Haiti’s* past decade of work has established a better future for new LDS converts as well as the Haitian people at large. When we designed this initiative, I encouraged my BYU students to read and apply the values in *Mosiah* 18:27: “And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.” Verse 28: “And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.” Verse 29: “And this he said unto them, having been commanded of God; and they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants.” Sharing our abundance with quake victims who survived, our efforts have continued over the last decade, blessing the people of Haiti as well as letting us experience joy from such efforts.

Ouelessebougou Alliance: This effort generated amazing work in Mali, West Africa, by LDS leaders like Sister Chieko Okazaki of the Relief Society’s General Presidency and Elder Marion D. Hanks of the Presidency of the Seventy, both of whom served on the community board of trustees that formed a mixed group of LDS, Catholic, and Muslim Utahns. They saw the terrible Ethiopian crisis hit East Africa that led to a million deaths from starvation and drought. Over three decades, the Alliance has inspired thousands of church members and Utah friends alike to initiate sustainable programs in Mali, saving many lives. Their work was a response not merely to an overnight disaster, but to the gradual impoverishment and decades of regional drought that had gradually drained the former French colony of crops, wildlife, and other sources for a good quality of life. Over the decades that I helped lead the

Alliance, I often reflected on the great speech by King Benjamin to his people as recorded in *Mosiah* 4:16–19: “16: And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. 17: Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just— 18: But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God. 19: For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?”

HELP International: This is the courageous story of young Latter-day Saints responding to Central America’s destruction by Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and beyond in late 1998. The United Nations and the World Bank assessed the destruction as having set back that already impoverished nation by some 50 years. Midcareer in my life as an MBA professor, I prayed strenuously as to what I might be able to do in order to reverse the devastation, at least for a few Hondurans. Inspiration hit me one night as I was studying the *Book of Mormon*. My mind and heart were illuminated by the following verses, in chapter 4 of *Alma*, wherein the prophet Alma felt concerned about the suffering of his people and the fact that many human needs were ignored: “12: Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted. 13: Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ’s sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy; 14: Looking forward to that day, thus retaining a remission of their sins; being filled with great joy because of the resurrection of the dead, according to the will and power and deliverance of Jesus Christ from the bands of death. 15: And now it came to pass that Alma, having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God, and the persecutions which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people, and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful; nevertheless the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him.” Thus, Alma took significant action, and so did we, beginning in 1998 and 1999.

These verses ultimately led to our designing a creative proposal for a few of my Marriott School students after Hurricane Mitch wreaked havoc in Central America. I pointedly asked them: “Does our university have any relevance when widespread disaster wreaks havoc on a small country?” The question immediately became a challenge to my students and, starting from a couple dozen volunteers, we soon grew into a veritable “LDS army” of global change agents! For the past 23 years, HELP has expanded from our nonprofit’s initial efforts to serve victims of the disaster by using microfinance, education, Square-Foot-Gardening techniques, orphanage volunteerism, and numerous other humanitarian tools to bless the poor. Over time, the efforts of HELP’s 2,000 or more volunteers have expanded to serve some 17 countries in the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. HELP continues moving strongly forward even today.

Mentors International: In the 1980s, having worked with numerous Filipino students during a year while I taught at BYU Hawaii, I noted that they kept requesting that I take my strategies for helping the poor to their island nation in Southeast Asia. It had been the second-best economy of Asia decades earlier, but over time had fallen to second from the bottom. Its people experienced increasing poverty, unemployment, and hunger. Even among the local Latter-day Saints, each new generation became poorer than the one before it. After I returned to my professorship in Utah, the Philippines seemed very far away, and my growing family of ten children was consuming much of my time and energy. However, I became inspired to aid those who suffer greatly, after heeding King Benjamin’s powerful admonition in *Mosiah* 4:16: “Ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain and turn him out to perish.” In addition, the following

great message from the prophet Jacob also arose in my heart, prompting me to take action: “[A]fter ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (*Jacob 2:19*). So, with several well-to-do friends, returned mission presidents, and even students, I launched an innovative effort to build economic self-reliance in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, beginning in 1989–90, which is still going strong after more than three decades (1990–2022). Two other Latter-day Saints and I formed a board with LDS executives to establish an economic development strategy focusing on training and microfinance. Since our early days, Mentors International has served more than five million people throughout the many islands of the Philippines, having raised capital totaling some \$174 million in microloans to create jobs as a “hand-up, not a handout.” Encouraged by various General Authorities, and honored by the First Presidency, Mentors was lauded as a pioneering LDS-related NGO, not of the established church as an institution, but instead working in parallel with LDS efforts that came later, such as LDS Charities. The NGO has gradually expanded to serve in both Central and South America, and even beyond. (Remarkably, I recently learned that an initial donor to Mentors who heard me speak back in 1992 has been giving funds to the NGO every year for three decades.) All this emerged from my faith in Christ and the powerful teachings of *Book of Mormon* prophets.

Eagle Condor Humanitarian: Another case highlighting ways in which innovative church members can apply their testimonies of the truth of the Book of Mormon to improve society is the fascinating story of a Utah nonprofit working in Peru. Eagle Condor began some two decades ago with the objective of mobilizing LDS returned missionaries who had served indigenous villages in Andean countries, thus honoring the descendants of Book of Mormon Lamanite ancestors. After ending their labors after 30 months of service, they gave away all but the clothes on their backs to indigenous poor high in the Andes mountains. They also promised that after becoming better educated themselves back in the States, and also materially successful, they would return to help impoverished church members. They chose to pool some of their funds while building on their career successes by returning to Peru. Their promises were fulfilled after they became dentists, entrepreneurs, or business leaders, and after achieving successful careers. Eagle Condor became the successor to two earlier NGO predecessors with the same returned missionaries who had expressed a lifelong commitment to their beloved Peru. Helping with agriculture, clean water, microcredit, and literacy training, their quest continues today. During my leadership role on the Eagle Condor board, I was struck by meaningful verses from *Alma 5*. They had long inspired my years of volunteerism in serving the descendants of Father Lehi, Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel from centuries earlier: “53: And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches? 54: Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—55: Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?”

MicroBusiness Mentors: For 20-plus years I sought to figure out how we could draw on Book of Mormon texts about community poverty, especially toward fellow Utahns forced to flee their circumstances in other nations as they sought jobs, schooling, peace, and better lives for their children. Many whom I’d met with through my years in Utah Valley have told of hardships in their homelands, as well as their struggles upon locating in Utah as Latino immigrants and refugees. Ultimately, graduate students whom I taught in the MBA and MPA programs at BYU’s Marriott School of Business used their Microfinance class project to set up a new nonprofit and begin serving poor families in Utah Valley by designing a mentoring program for migrant residents. Why? Because they felt troubled by the growing

gap between rich and poor in Provo and in our valley. We collected data just within Provo City documenting that “brown-skinned” residents from Latin America had to rent and live in run-down apartments, move constantly, suffer more joblessness, have children doing poorly in school, and families consuming fewer calories daily, along with the overall lack of adequate healthcare. The social class differences were enormous.

All our research demonstrated a major bifurcation between Provo’s white, LDS, college-educated, returned-missionary-residents’ comfortable lifestyles and the neglected, poor Latinos in our larger community. So, my students determined to take action, as they had learned from their studies of the *Book of Mormon* as well as from observing ugly realities of poverty and suffering while serving missions to developing nations. The scriptures inspired our collective actions in designing a creative new strategy—not by government or church initiatives, but rather by young adults themselves, of their own volition. To quote from *Alma*, chapter 4: “6: And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel. 7: Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma had consecrated.... 12: Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted. 13: Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ’s sake....”

Thus, our modest little NGO was launched to succor those in need, whether LDS members, or more likely members of the Catholic population from south of the Mexican border. MicroBusiness Mentors began applying microcredit and training approaches in 2003 to help such families settle in Utah, open bank accounts, develop microenterprises for self-employment, receive microcredit loan capital, and launch their own tiny entrepreneurial businesses toward a better future. To date, the program has blessed and improved the lives of several thousand LDS and Catholic families. I consider the amazing efforts of MicroBusiness Mentors to be a kind of offshoot of the prophet Jacob’s concerns about the evils of racism—a plea that rings true today, that the white majority of LDS members should neither judge nor ignore darker-skinned people who may be in the minority, impoverished, less educated, and more humble, but rather that we must especially love and serve them (*Jacob* 3). Thousands have thus benefited, and in some cases, our Latino clients have even joined our church.

Unitus: A final, impressive story of private LDS initiatives that have improved people’s lives tells how several wealthy LDS business associates and I designed and launched a big, new “microfinance accelerator” based in Provo, Utah. It was the first of its kind in the world. Its initial international venture was in Tula, Mexico, at the dawn of the new millennium in 2000. Since its launch it has spread to more than 20 nations, raising some \$1.2 billion. “Unitus” was the name we gave it, chosen to signify *Book of Mormon* ideals of “unite us.” We even designed a “Title of Unity” drawing on Moroni’s “Title of Liberty” (*Alma* 46:13), which numerous LDS influencers signed, including President Gordon B. Hinckley and other Brethren. Encouraged by General Authorities, mission presidents, and a number of top LDS executives, along with younger returned missionaries motivated to change the world, Unitus took off dramatically. We as founders felt the Spirit of God prompting our first steps, as we rolled out strategies by which we could accelerate the microfinance movement globally. The rollout of large-scale efforts by Unitus began in 2000, endeavoring to reduce extreme poverty, especially in the Third World (also called the developing world). It focused on training, loans, jobs, and offering a more sustainable future for some 21 million families. Our board members joined us as volunteers, while holding their positions as VP of Microsoft in Seattle, the head of Bain Capital, the founder of a major global consulting firm based in

Utah, and a leader who launched the MacIntosh at Apple Computer in the Bay Area. We gained the leadership of a number of former mission presidents and General Authorities.

I personally reflected on our collective efforts to practice the laws of consecration and stewardship by recalling several verses toward the very end of the *Book of Mormon*, in *Moroni 7*, wherein Moroni shares the deep counsel of his father, Mormon, regarding genuine righteousness: “1: And now I, Moroni, write a few of the words of my father Mormon, which he spake concerning faith, hope, and charity,” the most important values of true Christians.... 4: And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.... 12: “Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God.... 13: “But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. 43: And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart. 44: If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. 45: And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 46: Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail— 47: But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. 48: Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.”

The humble leader, King Benjamin, preached a core principle that should motivate Latter-day Saints in developing the capacity to personally apply the wonderful teachings in the *Book of Mormon*. He taught that *service to others is, in fact, service to heaven*. “I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (*Mosiah 2:17*).

Core Purposes of the Church

In 1982, President Spencer W. Kimball articulated three missions for the church: (1) to proclaim the gospel, (2) to perfect the Saints, and (3) to redeem the dead. Each of these parallels *Book of Mormon* scripture to help guide us in fulfilling these objectives. *Preaching the gospel* mirrors *Mosiah 18:20*: “He commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord” and other verses. As to *perfecting* the church members, he may have reflected on such relevant verses as “having a *perfect* knowledge like unto us” (*2 Nephi 9:13*), attaining a *perfect* knowledge of him” (*Jacob 4:12*), “all things shall be restored to their proper and *perfect* frame” (*Alma 40:23*), and, from Christ Himself: “I would that ye should be *perfect* even as I” (*3 Nephi 12:48*) (italics added). To *save the dead* fits well with *1 Nephi 21:9*, which is about freeing those in the spirit world without the gospel: “That thou mayest say to the prisoners: Go forth; to them that sit in darkness: Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”

For decades, these statements guided much of the church’s policymaking and practices, by providing a framework for emphasizing the work that we members should perform as a major global religious organization. They were articulated precisely at a time when many corporate consultants, including myself and numerous colleagues, as well as CEOs and other institutional leaders, were attempting to make explicit their organizational purposes so that they could achieve maximum results in their work, hit higher outputs, bank larger profits, and reach greater “excellence.” So, some 40 years ago,

President Kimball made three such mission statements to better focus the aims of the church that would guide LDS members in the future.

Adding a New LDS Church Fourth Mission

Through the years since, some of the church's leading Brethren sensed that the church's traditional welfare programs, which typically served only the Saints, needed to be increased and widened. The traditional threefold mission, they proposed, should be expanded to place heavier emphasis on helping people in poverty of other faiths, or even of no faith at all.

In this respect, over time, a number of what I regard as miraculous changes occurred. One of the first happened in the mid-1980s, when the *Church Humanitarian Fund* was established. It was, in part, a response to the petitions of many Latter-day Saints throughout America and Europe who called for Church Headquarters to take action to address the massive East African crisis in which millions of children, and even some of their mothers and fathers, were perishing of starvation because of drought and civil wars. The Brethren felt inspired to take action, and called for two general fasts, resulting in the collection from members of more than \$10 million for relief in 1985 alone. Elder M. Russell Ballard traveled to several refugee camps—his first experience witnessing miseries on that scale—and later said it was a life-changing experience. Ever since then, I have wished that every Latter-day Saint would seek to have that same experience today, by aiding various causes.

Yet, while much good was accomplished through the Humanitarian Fund, LDS efforts could not reach certain regions of the world, because the church had no official recognition or legal status there. True, in some cases, we could partner with Catholic Relief Services or other entities, but assistance was limited.

A second innovation occurred a few years later with the creation of a church-founded NGO called *Latter-day Saint Charities (LDSC)*. This happened in 1996 under the direction of the First Presidency. Then-President Gordon B. Hinckley had felt keenly aware of the world's suffering masses, as he became the most-traveled prophet in the church's history. So, he approved its establishment. Since then, LDS Charities (to use the shorter name) has been registered as an NGO in a number of nations hard hit by civil unrest, floods, famines, earthquakes, and other disasters. LDSC's varied activities have enabled the church to channel hundreds of millions of dollars in relief and development around the world. Its work can be seen as a direct application of certain *Book of Mormon* texts, including the following prophetic plea: "Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another.... Therefore they did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness" (*Mosiah* 23:7, 18).

The church's next major application of Book of Mormon principles in the evolution of service to those in need was the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF). President Hinckley announced this program at General Conference on March 31, 2001. It drew from the early LDS pioneer model known as the Perpetual Emigration Fund. In the mid-1800s, the Church brought thousands of converts, mostly from Europe, to settle in Utah and build Zion. Beginning in about 1995, along with a few associates, I began to solicit private donations from wealthy Latter-day Saints to create education funds for returned missionaries (RMs) in such countries as Brazil (where I had served my mission), Chile (where one of my sons served his mission), and Mexico. We called those efforts, in Portuguese or Spanish, "fondos perpetuos de educación" (perpetual education funds, or "PEFs"). We saw the need—and we realized that with effort we could pull together the necessary funding through our various NGOs.

Imagine my joy, then, when the church finally announced the creation of the new PEF for RMs in 2001! I dropped to my knees and gave a prayer of thanksgiving, because I knew firsthand how such small loans would transform many impoverished Saints—especially those who had returned to their home countries where they typically lacked job opportunities. As that church-sponsored fund has since swelled to many hundreds of millions of dollars, I have seen the transformation of many young adults' lives in a number of developing countries. In fact, the PEF program became so successful that it has grown to an estimated \$1 billion. Eventually, the First Presidency broadened the PEF agenda to what is now called

LDS Self-Reliance Services (SRSS), a program that offers tools and teachings to assist many impoverished LDS members (not strictly RMs) to improve themselves educationally, financially, professionally, and even socially.

Moving beyond the 1980s, after the church's threefold mission had been proclaimed, ultimately a *fourth* was established. After President Thomas S. Monson was set apart as the Church's prophet and leader in 2008, a new fourth mission was established. He, much like King Benjamin of old, has long been known for his personal sensitivity regarding those near death's door, whether in a hospital, in a nursing facility, or at home. He often admonished the faithful, by both precept and example, to "visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction" and to give generously of their time and energy to minister to the "have-nots" in their own community as well as around the world.

Ultimately, President Monson was inspired to design and launch a core value we learn about in the *Book of Mormon*—the principle of helping those who suffer everywhere, not merely church members or missionaries. Sacred texts about this matter include the teachings of *Mosiah* 18:27–28: "And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given. And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul."

So President Monson called for a new, *fourth purpose of the church*—"to care for the poor and needy"—that would elevate the prominence of doctrines admonishing us to become more aware of suffering, to reach out to others more broadly, and to provide community service to the downtrodden. This would be accomplished, not only through ecclesiastical encouragement as a church growing in membership globally, but also by individual members, from the bottom up, so to speak.

We can also attribute the Church's greater emphasis on social justice to the growing context of human suffering that we see around us. Statistics from Action Against Hunger (2020) suggest that some 780 million people currently live in "extreme" poverty—that is, they are eking out an existence on under \$1.90 per person per day. More poor people struggle to live in the world today than ever before. Some 328 million of these poor are children under age 18, roughly two million of whom die each year, most from malnutrition. We can add other factors that make these statistics even worse: poverty and preventable diseases.

Resistance to Serving and Loving Others

As with most things in life, following the path of Jesus and his ministry to those who suffered in the Meridian of Time, as well as before and after, is contradicted and rejected by unbelievers. The *Book of Mormon* texts record two clear and tragic examples of such opposition: the cases of Nehor and Korihor. These men were the very epitome of the world's pride, greed, and disbelief.

Nehor: In the man Nehor, we read of a deceitful, lying manipulator who taught the exact opposite of King Benjamin's plea that we serve one another and live simply as believers in Christ. Nehor emerged at the beginning of the reign of the judges around 90 BC, coming on the scene as a man caught up in his sheer physical size, his pride, and having considerable power. Nehor argued against priests having to work to support themselves, claiming instead they be supported by the believers (*Alma* 1:2–4). Not one to labor with his own hands, he criticized the religion taught by prophets while enjoying "very costly apparel" and promoting his large ego (verse 6). That led to conflict with a humble saint named Gideon, ultimately leading to that elderly righteous leader being slain (vs. 8–9). For the murder, Nehor himself was slain, according to the law (vs. 10–15). Yet his many deceptive teachings—such as promoting "priestcraft" by advocating materialism and the "vain things of the world," false doctrines for "the sake of riches," "honor," and selfishness—crept further into the prevailing righteous Nephite culture, until "the hearts of many were hardened" and "many withdrew themselves from among them" (vs. 16–24).

Fortunately, in spite of false teachings, the Saints prevailed for a time. *Alma* vs. 26: Thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. 27: And they did impart of

their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely. 28: And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.... 30: And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.”.

While Nehor was bad enough, another critic of the church in the Nephite society, an individual named Korihor, was perhaps worse.

Korihor: In this instance, the *Book of Mormon* enlightens us with another case as to how we should not accept evil, but instead should live lives of true discipleship and fend off the world’s values of selfishness and the thirst for power and riches. The story of Korihor, who lived about 74 BC, is relevant in considering several *Book of Mormon* texts that deal with serving others. We can quite appropriately view Korihor’s efforts to reject God’s teachings and glorify the vanity of people as a dramatic contrast to the preaching of humble prophets such as King Benjamin, Nephi, Mormon, Alma, and Mosiah, to name a few. Instead of love, humility, service, and faithfulness, Korihor became the anti-Christ (*Alma* 30:6 and 12), preaching the falsehoods of pride, selfishness, and greed, telling those he deceived to “look up with boldness,” to “enjoy their rights and privileges,” and to “make use of that which is their own” (27). He claimed there was no Christ and that such believers were “bound down under a foolish and a vain hope” (13). Apparently, principles such as service to others, faith in Christ’s atonement, and other basics of righteousness were anathema to the atheism he advocated in arguing that there is no crime or sin, no fairness or unfairness, no cause for shame because of one’s bad choices, and no eternal consequence of actions because “ye cannot know of things which ye do not see” (15). His devilish message was that accepting Jesus was “a foolish and vain hope” (13). Rather, people should pursue “boldness” and seek power along with one’s “privileges” (27). Righteous priests who had long labored with their own hands he vilified as authoritarians, not servants, as they enjoyed power “for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people” (31).

The classic words of Korihor that suggest his values most vividly are these: “every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime” (12). Thankfully, such heresies were powerfully refuted by the prophet Alma, who eventually gave Korihor the sign he demanded, upon which he was struck dumb. I have at times noted the irony of this event, in that after this incident Korihor was humbled to the extent that he himself ended up having to go “from house to house begging for his food” (56), having to depend on others to be true Christians in serving the poor, even aiding this once-proud, but now desperately hungry, Korihor.

Conclusion

Thankfully, in our times the Church continues working to create a culture of caring for the poor. This took on particular significance both during and after the Great Recession of 2008–2010. Now in 2022, Latter-day Saints and others globally are facing massive challenges of inflation, high fuel prices, unaffordable home purchases, and rising food costs, among many other tribulations, resulting in even greater difficulties for the have-nots.

Extreme poverty alone appears to be a never-ending phenomenon that continues to dampen or even tank the national economies of a hundred-plus countries. By 2030, if “business-as-usual” thinking continues to dominate economic policies, it is likely that *hundreds of millions more* human beings will be trapped in the ugly realities of extreme poverty. The old folk-adage about “the rich getting richer and the poor poorer” seems to still describe economic reality.

Yet perhaps the LDS prophets of today sense that neither Big Business nor Big Government will solve society’s inequities on their own. It will take a new sector—a social innovation movement in which

we average folks begin to assert our personal agency to design new initiatives, not from the top down but from the bottom up. Happily, we can acknowledge that our church is dramatically moving in the direction of maximizing humanitarian aid to the millions of hungry, jobless, uneducated, young, and often-female people around the globe who struggle every single day simply to survive.

I myself feel grateful that the cries of the poor have not entirely gone unheard. The suffering of the widow has not been ignored, as we read in *James* 1:27 regarding “pure religion.” Self-reliance, humanitarianism, and economic assistance in Zion-building are increasingly becoming social innovations by Latter-day Saints at the grassroots level that dramatically empower the poor. The sacred texts from the *Book of Mormon* show us the way to not simply *believe* in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but to go beyond that to deeply *practice* its truths. I conclude with the millennial promise gradually being fulfilled in our own day from 2 *Nephi* 30:12, in which the prophet Nephi promises a utopian future when there will be no wars, hunger, or suffering: “And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion...and a little child shall lead them.”

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Author Background: Dr. Warner Woodworth has been an LDS institute director in Ann Arbor, MI, a fulltime seminary teacher at three high schools in Utah, and a professor at multiple colleges, primarily at the Marriott School of Business, Brigham Young University. He is the author of 12 books, 300-plus articles, and more than a thousand conference papers and proceedings. Beyond his teaching on campuses, his life’s mission continues to be that of laboring among the global poor as a social entrepreneur. He has established 41 NGOs, which are currently operating in 62 nations. Married and blessed with 10 children, he has served in multiple bishoprics, in a mission presidency, and on several high councils.