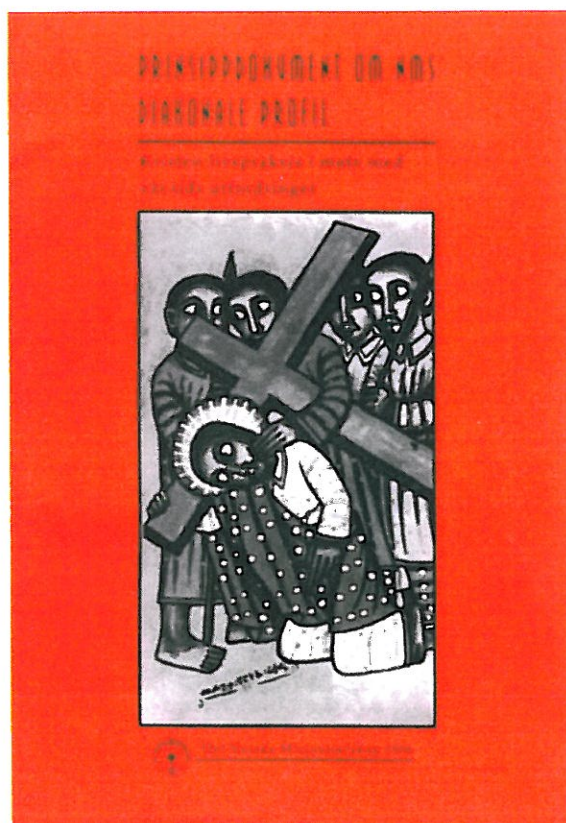


# A Document Outlining the Fundamental Principles Guiding NMS' Profile in the Area of Diakonia

Practical Christian Lifestyle  
Facing Today's Challenges



English version of the 1996 issue



**Norwegian Missionary Society**

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## Foreword to English edition

*This document was initially published in Norwegian more than five years ago. Since then it has been reprinted several times. In spite of the time that has passed since then, we are of the opinion that the theological basis and methodological principles that underlie the document still apply. Furthermore the document communicates in a meaningful way some of the basic theological and missiological concepts that contribute towards the shaping of NMS, what we consider important for our programs, and for our way of working. We would, therefore, like to share these reflections with our partners.*

*At the same time, we notice that in the world of Mission and of Diakonia, five years is a long time. On a number of points, we would have expressed our programs and our points of view slightly differently had the document been produced today. Financially, we are more pressed now than five years ago. The policies of NORAD towards private agencies, whether Christian or non-Christian, are changing. All this implies that some points need a bit of adjustment.*

*On the other hand we are pleased to note that during this time NMS has made moves in its concepts, programs, and structure regarding Diakonia and diakonal Service, and that the direction of these moves are in accordance with the basic understanding and suggestions of the document.*

*We are therefore pleased to present an English translation of the document, for the information of our partner Churches and co-operating bodies. And although it is primarily written with the Norwegian setting and public in mind, we hope it may contribute towards a meaningful and open discourse on the common responsibility of Church and specialised agencies within the large and challenging area of Diakonia.*

*Stavanger August 2001*

*Kjetil Aano  
Secretary General*

## FOREWORD

The purpose of this document is:

1. To contribute to portraying NMS' own self-understanding in light of today's situation.
2. To outline the main ethical challenges we face in the world we live in.
3. To stake out the course of action we, as an organization, commit ourselves to following.

This document wants to:

- provide directions for the diakonal profile of NMS.
- draw up realistic frameworks surrounding NMS' involvements.
- define the elements of a practical Christian lifestyle in the face of the human rights, environmental, and resource-distribution issues which we encounter in our world.

The mandate for this document was given by our *Department Heads' Meeting* (LM sak 17/95--i.e., Department Heads, issue #17/95) and reads as such:

"A new document outlining our principles concerning foreign aid. Three main issues should be covered in such a document:

1. A general overview of NMS' principle views concerning the issues of skewed distribution of resources, the lack of justice between different parts of the world, and our views on human rights issues.
2. Concretely focusing on:
  - 2.1 Which consequences this document should have on both the information NMS gives out, and, and on its proclamation of the Gospel in all contexts.
    - 2.1.1 An alternative lifestyle (God's people are called to be a people set apart)
    - 2.1.2 Concrete models of how we can best use freed-up resources in light of 2.1.1
    - 2.1.3 Possible methods of action we can take in an effort to influence our society
  - 2.2 NMS' responsibility regarding human rights issues
    - 2.2.1 A concrete plan of action concerning human rights issues
  - 2.3 A foreign aid and document which explains what NMS wants to focus on in specific developmental projects
    - 2.3.1 A clear definition of NMS' foreign aid strategy for each of the countries in which we are working."

This document will be sent to the Department Heads Meeting, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Directors. It is assumed that the contents of this document will be made known to the entire organization and that the organization and all of its employees will become familiar with the document and its contents. This document is meant to outline our guiding principles: a document, which will clarify how, NMS thinks and works in relationship to these issues during the given timeframe. It is also meant to be a tool for guidance: the document will provide directions as to how NMS wishes to deal with diakonal efforts/foreign aid in the future.

Stavanger, 14. September, 1995

Anne Karin Kristensen, Jan Sandsmark, Kjetil Aano



# 1. The World Today

## Christian Mission is Challenged Both Concerning Actions as well as Attitudes

The underlying principle of this document is that Christian diakonal effort and action are the same as human compassion in dealing with real people and their needs, unconditional of to what degree they outwardly seem to be in need. Practically diakonal action most often is a response to concrete emergency situations. Our world certainly does not lack challenges in this area.

### 1.1 GENERAL TRENDS

Awareness of the world's despair is increasing. We have more sophisticated means than we did a few decades ago, to access concrete information about war, suffering, and commotion affecting parts of the world. Continually we are being updated in times of accidents and catastrophes affecting peoples and nations.

The picture is not necessarily always negative, but we see definite general trends:

- Suffering and poverty are on the decrease globally, but are on the increase regionally, especially in Africa and the earlier Soviet Union.
- We are experiencing a series of conflicts and wars closer to us, as well as farther away. Most of these are related to ethnicity and identity, and could be characterized as civil wars.
- Environmental issues are more and more pressings both in the industrial world and in poorer countries. Conflicts of interest are more clearly seen. Although the technical possibilities of solving these problems are becoming more available, the necessary finances and accessibility to technological solutions are unevenly distributed throughout the world.
- In general, we notice two opposing forces which are at work:
  1. Through incredible technological and mass media developments, and because of increased travel possibilities and exchange of information, music, and impulses, there is a strong globalization taking place. To a greater degree, the world is becoming a large global village where a number of common trends are the rule of thumb. The downside of this development is the resulting fragmentation of local cultural foundations.
  2. We are noticing an increasing ethical awareness as well as a growing interest in both cultural identity issues as well as religious issues. This takes place in tandem with an increasing secularization and focus on money.

### 1.2 CERTAIN TRENDS THAT PARTICULARLY DEMAND THE ATTENTION OF NMS

NMS has close contact with peoples and churches who live under a variety of different conditions and who are confronted by innumerable problems and challenges. Mentioned here are some of the general themes we wish to focus on throughout this document:

1. Basic rights:
  - The problem of poverty and issues concerning social and economic justice both nationally and internationally; the North-South issue. These are questions which our missionaries, and we, as a missionary society constantly are being confronted with.
  - Human rights are being violated many places. Democracy, political rights, religious freedom, the right to gather publicly, law and order, and the solving of conflicts are issues which must be continually addressed.

2. The relationship between Mission - Church - society: In many places, we are confronted with huge, unsolved social problems: inadequate infrastructure, inadequately developed school and health systems.

3. Social transformations put both thought and practice to the test. In a number of societies there are huge changes taking place. This affects human migration patterns, it changes cultures and the foundations of cultures, and it creates a tremendous strain on both social and environmental levels-- such as, the depletion of forests and erosion. In many parts of the world, record high levels of urbanization are taking place, and this is causing an increasing marginalization of poor urban populations.

4. In addition, we are confronted with special challenges such as AIDS, female circumcision, child labor, etc.

These issues are mentioned because our organization and its representatives continually live with and struggle with. This document cannot possibly find answers to all these wish to provide guidelines as to how our organization should tackle these issues during the 5-year period for which this document applies.

## **2. The Theological Foundation of Diakonia**

### **2.1 THE UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MANKIND**

#### **2.1.1 The Christian Understanding of Creation and the Position of Man Within It**

A common, universal responsibility for taking care of the interest of our fellow human beings exists. This pervades the whole of creation and is the basis of human responsibility. It focuses on a God-given, universal responsibility for everything that was created, without aiming to transform neither the creation nor the culture of the creation into our own image.

#### **2.1.2 The Unique Position of Man Within Creation**

Our understanding of both human worth and the value of creation is built upon two pillars:

1. It is universal in the sense that it allows itself to be credibly and rationally justified without reference to a divine revelation.
2. It is distinctly Christian in the sense that it, in and of itself, clearly discloses the message of the Bible and it is to be realized in the life of the Church. Therefore, the Christian Church is especially responsible for upholding human worth wherever it is threatened or under siege and for upholding the integrity of all of creation as God-created and therefore valuable.

#### **2.1.3 Basic Ethical Principles**

This Christian responsibility reveals itself in a number of attitudes which can be argued to be universal, but which the Christian message confirms and emphasizes. At any given time, these must be confronted with the society and the realities that we encounter. A number of these universal attitudes include the following:

- justice
- human worth
- resource distribution
- attitudes toward poverty

- responsibility regarding suffering and despair
- brotherhood/sisterhood and solidarity

## 2.2 THE BIBLE CONFIRMS AND EMPHASIZES

As Christians we share a universal responsibility for our fellow human beings. Our responsibility is confirmed and emphasized throughout the message of the Bible. The Old Testament lays down a number of principles concerning human stewardship of creation, and about justice and compassion for our fellow human beings. These principles are the guiding forces in the lives of Christians in regards to their responsibility as citizens of this world. This same responsibility is confirmed in the New Testament, which at the same time both reinforces and corrects the demands put on Christians and the Church.

## 2.3 THE MAIN CHALLENGES OF THE DIAKONAL PROFILE OF NMS

### 2.3.1 Social Ethical Program and the Work of God's Kingdom

Working for God's creation and solidarity with our fellow human beings must be seen in the framework of and in relationship to the total commission of the Church. There is a direct relation between the witness of God's love through Jesus Christ and the practical care revealed through agricultural projects, health care projects, through schools and emergency aid. In our diakonal efforts both aspects must reflect each other: we carry a universal responsibility for our fellow human beings because we are brothers and sisters on God's earth, and we have a distinct responsibility as God's forgiven children. The latter means that diakonal efforts must always portray glimpses of the reality we have become a part of through our baptism: God's kingdom, which offers us the forgiveness of sins, and which puts us into a new relationship with God where the vicious cycle of sin is broken, and where God shows us in simple acts what the Kingdom of God is all about. For the Church, this does not mean that we are, in any way, trying to escape reality in a difficult world, but that we are making an active effort to alleviate suffering and despair.

### 2.3.2 The Relationship Between the Proclamation of the Gospel and Diakonia

Concerning the position of diakonia within mission work, this has the following consequences:

1. Proclaiming the Word and diakonal action mutually depend on each other. This **implicates** a critique of the idea that diakonal activities could be used to achieve goals other than the actual focus of diakonal efforts. But we must underline that there will always be a clear relationship between witnessing through our actions and witnessing through our words.
2. The situation that the Church and society find themselves in at any given time is decisive as to how this duality is to be revealed in practice.
3. Just as the methods by which the Gospel is to be proclaimed cannot be decided once and for all, because they will always be dependent upon the interaction of both text and context, the patterns of diakonia and our consequent actions also must adjust themselves to any given situation. This is a continual, interactive process.
4. Vibrant congregations are fundamental. This is where the patterns of action for diakonia are created. These reflect their own cultural framework and take into consideration local economic and social conditions, normally without seeking outside economic contributions. At the same time, the essence of true diakonia seeks to break down any oppressive limitations which may be in effect.
5. The shaping of the diakonal efforts of NMS is being developed through an ongoing discourse with professional foreign aid organizations and according to current ethical and social-ethical streams of thought. The goal of this discourse is to determine how the Church's contributions/foreign aid differ from other foreign aid, since it is the Church's context and its

message of revelation which clearly make the Christian Church's diakonal efforts distinctly unique.

### **2.3.3 The Relationship between Verbal and Nonverbal Messages**

We must dare to ask ourselves what nonverbal messages we are proclaiming.

- What do well-equipped development departments within the churches communicate, when the church leadership lacks the basics of life? Or for that matter: well-paid employees in situations where the local people do not have enough to subsist?
- What right do we have towards any given group claiming they need help, when they, themselves, have never indicated that they want help?
- What nonverbal messages does our "development work" proclaim, in relation to cultures who have values other than "development." Are we prisoners of our own limitations; do we unwittingly preach the "gospel of development" instead of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ?

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

The diakonal efforts within mission work spring from two sources:

1. The universal ethical responsibility that we share with all people and which is confirmed in the Bible.
2. The diakonal vision which is to go and act in the footsteps of Jesus, because through good works we are, in small ways, able to put into effect glimpses of the reality which he represented; a reality which we hope for and which we know will some day be accomplished completely--not because of our pitiful efforts through our limited projects, but by our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The goal of diakonia is also dual:

1. It is a question of making human worth a reality, demonstrating the clear Christian conviction that humans are created equal and that everyone is of infinite worth.
2. The goal of diakonia is to demonstrate through inter-personal relationships the reality which this springs forth from: To demonstrate through simple actions small glimpses of the essence of God's kingdom which the Church proclaims. Diakonia is the vehicle through which we catch small glimpses of the reality of God's kingdom in the midst of a world of pain.

This does not mean that diakonia must always take place at the same time and in the same place as the proclamation of the Gospel. But it does mean that the Church's diakonal task is one part of the whole of the Church's ministry. Therefore, diakonia must never be seen as a means of obtaining anything else. Diakonia inevitably belongs within the Church and springs forth from the Church's reality. It has intrinsic value in and of itself.

## **3. NMS' Areas of Involvement**

### **3.1 NMS, A VOICE OF CULTURAL CRITIQUE WITHIN THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY**

**3.1.1** As Christian individuals committed to Mission, we share the same ethical challenges that face our world and society today. (see 2.1 and 2.2) However, these challenges are considerably heightened by the intimate contact with a number of the problems of our world that we as a missionary society experience through our partnership with churches around the world, each in

different circumstances than the other. In dealing with the reality in which we live, we wish to underline our responsibility as a missionary society concerning the following challenges:

**3.1.2 Poverty and Unjust Distribution:** To a greater degree, we wish to contribute to an increased awareness concerning North-South issues. We see it as an important task to point out the ethical unacceptability of the existing skewed distribution of the world's resources, on both international and national levels. We seek to achieve this through a more deliberate commitment to information and a greater focus on internal and external shaping of attitudes.

**3.1.3 Consumerism and Practical Christian Lifestyle:** We must dare to raise a critical voice against facets of our own society. Our intimate contact with our fellow human beings living under very different conditions than our own must lead us to a clearer and a more outspoken criticism of materialism as a lifestyle. Through information, proclamation of the Gospel, and action, NMS must seek to renounce faith in buying power, which professes that the meaning of life is found in the continual acquisition of more and nicer things. We must fight on behalf of ourselves and our fellow human beings to turn our backs on a price-index-regulated sense of human worth.

**3.1.4 Building of Attitudes which Lead to Action:** In this work it is important to provide a realistic picture of our possibility to change the world. At the same time it is essential to call into question the belief that says that nothing can change.

**3.1.5 Models of Attitude and Action:** Therefore, we want to develop models of attitude and action in our work which include the following four elements. These four elements are not meant to build upon each other, nor are they four different alternatives, but they are four elements of action which must happen simultaneously:

1. *Social ethical responsibility which seeks political solutions:* NMS is a missionary society and as such has neither the possibility to nor the wish to do everything by itself. But the challenges we face are of such a nature that they call for solutions on political, structural, and economic, as well as other, levels. NMS meets these challenges with a *clear* emphasis on our duty to inform. Intentional efforts to shape attitudes is necessary, but the practical implementation of the desired effects must be entrusted to others, either public, or political, or volunteer organizations. Missionaries and other NMS related supporters exercise their ethical and political responsibilities through these channels.
2. *Individual responsibility:* It is an important task for NMS to seek to raise the consciousness of our employees and support groups concerning their personal stewardship of resources. Personal lifestyle choices and personal patterns of consumerism are important. Structured and systematic stewardship, combined with a tidy pattern of committed giving, and intentional consumerism, can considerably free up a person's available resources. Through the proper use of these, the world can actually be changed!
3. *Make the effects of NMS' efforts visible:* It is important to NMS that we create structures where the contributions of individuals are effective and where those effects are made visible. Equally important is to let it be seen that all contributions in every facet of mission work, not only the diakonal aspect, actually change the world both for whole groups of people, as well as for individuals:
  - Through our diakonal programs, we change the conditions of life for both groups of people and for individuals; we contribute to building new structures which provide new possibilities.
  - Through Christian proclamation of the Gospel, we participate in creating a new universe which gives people new hope, new self understanding, and which gives our fellow human beings a glimpse of heaven in their everyday lives. This changes the world for them. That



does not happen by separating them from the world, but it does mean that the world takes on a new dimension. All experience shows that in both a concrete and a spiritual sense this sets in motion processes which create change.

4. *Systematic prayer*: Prayer belongs to a living faith in God. Believing that prayer changes the world is nothing less than putting into practice our faith that God is actually to be found. Christian Mission is established upon this. There is an ultimate connection between prayers for justice, peace, change and for the growth of the Church, the work of missionaries, and the advancement of the Gospel.

## 3.2 FACING OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE

Faced with concrete injustice, political oppression, religious intolerance, and cultural aspects which deviate from our own Christian, western-oriented view of human worth, we are constantly challenged to find the right balance between cultural-relative understanding and attitudes which allow for “beyond-culture,” or universal values.

**3.2.1** We have a responsibility to follow up our representatives, missionaries and otherwise, who are confronted with difficult ethical choices and considerations. We wish send to clearer signals in such situations. This must be in cooperation with and throughout discussions with the local church and with knowledge and understanding of the local context. We cannot obligate ourselves to follow the local church’s thinking in every situation, but we must always seek solutions which take into proper consideration the situation of the local church’s and the local Christians’.

### 3.2.2 NMS’ Areas of Activity

NMS is a missionary society, and has mission as its objective. The line of thought presented here requires reflection concerning ethical, social-ethical, and diakonal challenges. On the other hand, we seek to point out that personal commitment to mission work is social-ethical action of the highest order.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that NMS has considerable limitations:

- The organization’s statement of purpose: We must identify important tasks, but the implementation of any practical solutions to political issues, environmental issues, human rights issues, etc. must be entrusted to others.
- Economy: Our organization has limited resources. Often we do not manage to accomplish worthy goals which we so very much want to undertake. It is important to see our role as a small piece in the whole puzzle. At the same time it is painful to not be able to accommodate real need.
- Administratively: NMS must choose a profile of action and geography. It is important to concentrate on specific tasks so that the emphasis will be strong enough to give optimal effect. Our limitations force us to act along this line.

## 3.3 PROGRAM AND INFORMATION

1. NMS centrally outlines annual themes. These are actively used throughout the entire organization. These themes provide sufficient room for diakonal and social-ethical aspects
2. The themes and centrally developed material are sent to all employees including specific study demands, and the use of this material in proclaiming the Gospel, and within group work.
3. Through the systematic use of themes and of other developed support material, we obtain a better use of our missionary gatherings and our regional assemblies.
4. The annual theme is reflected in all of NMS’ information and in all of its products:
  - Misjonstidende (the bimonthly missions magazine)/the Yearbook



- Publications for Children and Youth
- Study materials
- Regional assemblies, missionary gatherings, and other important gatherings

### **3.4 ATTITUDE SHAPING EFFORTS**

All information given out by NMS should be characterized by the following attitudes:

- A Christian view of human worth: It is important to emphasize equality. We wish to avoid creating images of “the others” as mere recipients of our pity. We want to counteract stereotyping by giving credible, authentic images of others.
- Explanations of cause: Avoid simplified, cliché-like explanations concerning people (e.g. national character, deficiencies in personality/ability), culture, religion, or politics. Show respect for the fact that things are interconnected.
- Self-criticism: Be willing to focus critically on facets of our own reality, our own self-image, and our own culture, our own methods of doing things, and our own institutions.

### **3.5 THE DIAKONAL PROFILE OF NMS**

Diakonia is Christian faith through actions of love and will always be an integral part of NMS’ commission in its work with people. NMS considers all of its efforts to improve the conditions of people’s life as diakonia. The diakonal profile of NMS sits at the intersection between outside demands mainly presented through the cooperation with national churches, and NMS’ own understanding of itself as a missionary society. The specific development will depend upon both external conditions as well as the target group's priorities.

#### **3.5.1 The Sick, the Poor and the Marginalized**

NMS has a long, historical tradition of caring for people who find themselves in particularly difficult situations. Compassion for the sick, the functionally disabled, and the poor has always been one of the Church’s most important priorities. NMS aims at motivating and strengthening national churches in their work among the sick and the disabled. A new group of stigmatized people is those infected with the HIV virus and those suffering from AIDS. Urban areas are often the arenas where these people fight for their existence and the local congregations must be challenged to involve themselves within diakonal efforts. The churches need knowledge and guidance in the area of preventive work and support in their efforts in helping the sick.

#### **3.5.2 The Living Standards of Women and Children**

The circumstances in which women and children live, demand special attention. The economic prosperity within a given society does not include fair distribution of resources to these groups. NMS wishes to support diakonal assistance which especially focuses on improving the economic and social position of women. Changes in the view of women within the local setting will, in the long run, be essential in allowing for positive change. But we must keep in mind that the profile a given project makes for itself will either strengthen or weaken these attitude-shaping efforts.

#### **3.5.3 Education and Competence Promotion**

The availability of education and training for everyone is a central element in the structure of a just society. From NMS’ point of view, the responsibility for providing this service lies primarily with local governments. However, many people do not have access to these possibilities due to either geographical, economic, or social reasons. NMS wants to support local churches in their demands for a just distribution of government resources for education. NMS can in certain circumstances support general education, but prioritizes training literacy for groups who are provided no such

public opportunities. The training of local personnel to fill central functions within partners' project activities will also continue to be highly prioritized.

#### **3.5.4 Fair Distribution of Common Resources**

Sickness, social despair, oppression, and conflicts usually arise when resources are limited and/or unfairly distributed, both globally and locally. NMS has a responsibility to point out this imbalance, both here in Norway as well as globally, and to direct attention to the part we ourselves play in this unfair distribution of common resources. NMS must, from a Biblical standpoint, look critically at its own cultural relationships and work for a more just distribution through practical arrangements, through information, and through attitude-shaping efforts.

#### **3.5.5 Increasing Food Production**

NMS wishes to support projects together with partners who promote local growth and production and who take into consideration both the environment and access to resources. Since between 70-80% of the population of several of the countries where NMS works, have their income from activity related to agriculture, animal husbandry, or fisheries, these sectors will be natural areas of commitment. Education, guidance, and the possibility of receiving credit for the buying of necessary materials should be able to increase both production and the use of available resources.

#### **3.5.6 War and Conflicts**

In a society experiencing accelerated changes, war, and inner conflicts, weak groups within that society are vulnerable to social, economic and physical abuse. NMS wishes to stand together with the local churches and strengthen their efforts in helping these groups. NMS must also help the local partners to take clear ethical and moral stands in cases where these conflicts have ethnic and nationalistic overtones.

#### **3.5.7 Our Profile of Cooperation**

For the most part, NMS works together with independent national churches. NMS wishes to clarify its profile with these partners in order to find common prioritized tasks. The local partner defines the needs and NMS evaluates whether they fall into NMS' own diakonal profile. Successful cooperation is dependent upon clearly defined areas of responsibility, openness, and predictability. Many conflicts have arisen due to the fact that one of the partners has had unspoken expectations towards the other partner. Clear written agreements must therefore regulate the cooperative relationship.

#### **3.5.8 Organizational Development**

In many countries, it can be necessary to strengthen the partner's administrative and organizational capacity so that the partner has a realistic chance for directing and advancing any given ongoing activity. NMS sees the importance of supporting the development of good organizational skills among our partners.

#### **3.5.9 Nationalization**

The timeframe for joint cooperation in the case of each individual project must be defined already in the planning stage. If the national partner is to continue the project on its own at some point, the appropriate arrangements must be put into place well before the phasing out begins, and the timing of the phasing out must be clearly agreed upon. Nationalization must be an implicit principle when planning new projects. The necessary conditions for national assumption of full responsibility, such as economic, administrative, and professional/technical competence must be evaluated carefully and organized before the phasing out takes place. NMS must not be left standing as "the owner" of projects in which the local partners feel no responsibility nor involvement in the project/process.

Projects, which are evaluated as "unnationalizable" or "not able to stand on their own" should only be initiated under very special circumstances.

### **3.6 DIALOGUE WITH FOREIGN AID ORGANIZATIONS**

**3.6.1** NMS has long experience in cooperating with persons and groups of differing cultural backgrounds and languages. Long-term activity and physical presence over many decades in a variety of countries has provided us with a knowledge of culture and an insight into local conditions which are invaluable. This competence in communicating across cultural and language barriers and our knowledge of other people's conditions of life and perceptions of life are valuable assets which NMS must share with the larger community of foreign aid organizations. NMS has a special responsibility for seeing that the fundamental aspects of human life such as religion and culture are included in the general ideas of foreign aid and that these aspects are considered as essential elements in the planning of all foreign aid activity, both private and public.

NMS should seek to be an active participant in the national foreign aid debate and in this way contribute to the forming of Norwegian foreign aid politics. In this forum NMS has much valuable knowledge to contribute. At the same time, participation is important for NMS in order to be able to take advantage the experience and expertise of others.

**3.6.2** Competence building within NMS as an organization is necessary so that the experience and the knowledge of individuals within the organization will not be lost. Systemizing and formalizing this base of knowledge is necessary. In order for the diakonal effort of NMS to maintain a sufficient professional level all foreign aid personnel should be offered the chance to update their knowledge within their appropriate skill areas.

### **3.7 FACING SPECIFIC CHALLENGES**

#### **3.7.1 Poverty, Injustice and Despair**

NMS' personnel are often inadequately prepared to mentally face, on a daily basis, the despair, poverty, and injustice may be found in many of the countries in which they work. Their reactions can differ, but no matter what the personal solution may be, this problem can cause terrific mental strain during a long-term stay. NMS' representatives must have the opportunity for discussing such problems thoroughly during their preparations for departure. These problems should also be discussed with representatives from our partners for each country in order to gain proper insight into the problem and to shed light on aspects of the problem which are difficult for a foreigner to gain knowledge of.

#### **3.7.2 Human Rights**

Violation of elementary human rights occurs regularly in many of the countries where NMS is working. Our credibility as Christians and our solidarity with the local population demand that we do not close our eyes to this. An ongoing discussion on proper mode of reaction should take place with churches and NMS leaders. It is important not to contribute to a deterioration of a given situation for individuals on the one hand, but on the other hand mission work and the Church should never stand silently by when others are being violated. This must apply both in Norway and in the countries in which we work regardless of whether it is our "own" people or "the others" who are affected.

### **3.7.3 Political and Religious Persecution**

In cases where the country's own government is oppressive and violates human rights, special vigilance is necessary because action may lead to negative consequences for our partners when violations are openly criticized by our missionaries. However, silence would mean collaboration with the oppressor. It is necessary to develop a procedure of cooperation between our partners and with NMS headquarters as to how a missionary should conduct himself/herself under such conditions.

### **3.7.4 Local Culture and Christian Ethics**

NMS wishes to work towards preserving the local culture. In any given local environment, we represent an alien culture, therefore we must be critical of our own cultural behaviors and attitudes. It can, nevertheless, be necessary to stand up to local cultures when they contain elements which cause suffering, loss of worth, or loss of freedom. NMS must side with the weak and fight for their well-being, even if this leads to changes within the local culture. However, we wish to avoid drawing simple conclusions in matters that we see as incompatible with Christian ethics. A concrete example of this would be in the case of female circumcision.

## **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The diakonal effort of NMS is an expression of Christian love for one's neighbor in dealing with concrete challenges.

It is important that great respect is shown towards people living under difficult situations. Our diakonal effort must not be part of a strategy whose goals are to attain results other than those we openly acknowledge (or which have been agreed upon).

Our aim is to support the local partner/target group in such a way that it takes responsibility for its own situation and that it mobilizes available resources in an effort to obtain the desired results.

## **4. Possibilities and Limitations within NMS' Diakonal Service and Projects**

### **4.1 ECONOMY**

**4.1.1** Through the network of donors assembled by the fundraising apparatus within our organization, NMS has large resources at its command. With the help of collected funds, NMS contributes assistance to our partners so they can carry out extensive diakonia. Local forms of diakonia, which are not dependent upon external financial support, have been established through congregational growth programs. In some cooperating partner countries, NMS is involved in long-term projects to which larger sums of money are being transferred. In addition to our own resources, NMS has the opportunity to apply for Norwegian State Aid (NORAD) funding for our foreign aid projects.

**4.1.2** A substantial part of the NMS-supported diakonal efforts within local churches are financed through the help of NORAD funding. Being able to tap into this funding source is what has given NMS the opportunity of having a high profile within the diakonal sector. Each project has its own agreement with NORAD concerning finances and the timeframe for taking over. In some cases these timeframes have been extended. In most cases NORAD requires that NMS finances the initial



20% of the costs of these projects, the costs of which must then be carefully weighed in light of all of NMS' financial commitments. In the case of second-world countries, NMS' deductible is likely to be raised to 50%. At NORAD's suggestion, NMS directs two projects in Madagascar which are 100% NORAD financed.

**4.1.3** It is important that NMS always preserves its own identity and that NMS always acts in accordance with its own strategies throughout all its involvements. With this in mind, NMS must always be aware of to which degree it wants to be dependent on public funds. The Norwegian government's shifting politics in the area of foreign aid can be difficult to relate to in those cases where the allocated funding for our projects are dependent upon adopted political resolutions which change according to which party is in power.

**4.1.4** NMS will make use of the opportunity of acquiring NORAD funding to a greater degree throughout the coming five year period, assuming that our own share of the funding for these projects can be found within our budget. This must be considered in the light of the total situation and weighed against our strategic priorities.

**4.1.5** Part of NMS' diakonia is financed through other Norwegian support organizations. This support is tied to special projects or to the funding of salaries to missionaries or local employees holding diakonal positions. Such support organizations could probably be encouraged to finance NMS' deductible in NORAD-funded projects.

**4.1.6** Unfortunately NMS' financial reports in later years show a steady decline in donated income. This puts definite limitations on our activities forcing us to rethink our priorities within the framework our financial resources set for us. This is painful, especially in light of the fact that many of our partner countries have been subjected to dramatic socio-economical setbacks in recent years.

## **4.2 THE USE OF EXTERNAL FUNDING**

**4.2.1** The majority of the projects in which NMS is involved the external founding is of moderate dimensions. Smaller projects usually have more opportunity for directing their own strategy and development than larger projects. The diakonal work being built up, must be able to function within the local community, at the economical level, as well. Experience has shown that a project that has very good finances due to external funding, can easily cause alienation to the extent that local initiative and participation can be suffocated and in some cases be a hindrance to development. A fund in order to support small, locally initiated projects should be established, to ensure a speedy processing of applications requesting funding for smaller amounts.

**4.2.2** There will still be certain projects which will require large initial investments. In these cases the partners own strategies are crucial. Selection of projects should never lead to the partners being forced to compromise its own strategies simply in order to get additional funds into its accounts. NMS' limited resources challenge us to reorganize diakonal areas of activity into smaller units which also can result in good developmental effects. Large transfers of funds to certain, choice projects can lead to an unfair distribution situation as compared to smaller projects receiving smaller transfers of funds but which could probably make an equal contribution to the promotion of development.

### **4.3 NATIONALIZATION OF ACTIVITIES**

**4.3.1** It is a fundamental principle that projects should eventually be able to be nationalized. From the start NMS wants the projects to be viable and to be able to function at local funding levels on a long-term basis so that these projects do not represent alien elements within the local culture. It is not desirable to establish larger activities than what the national partners are capable of assuming full responsibility for, because this could tie up NMS' resources so that our missionary society will also be responsible for its future operation. There is also danger that the partner's resources could get bound up in such a way that it hinders their possibility of moving into other activities.

**4.3.2** In today's situation it may seem unrealistic to demand that the poorest partners should be able to assume full responsibility for projects within the given timeframes. This also applies to newly established partners who still have not built up their own internal structures or who still do not have a strong grassroots movement. In many cases new socio-economic and political circumstances have changed the initial conditions for the assumption of full responsibility. Demands for a quick phasing out on our part can in some cases seem paralyzing to creativity and initiative because the necessary processes for local participation demanded by a project for which a local cooperating partner is to assume full responsibility can never be set in motion. In some cases it may be necessary to shut down a project even if the desired results are not yet achieved because the project is based on conditions which no longer apply. NMS will have to work out what criteria have to be fulfilled before local assumption of full responsibility can begin and be carried out. For some projects NMS will seek to contact international, non-Christian organizations who can accept responsibility for external funding for the running of the project.

### **4.4 COOPERATION BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS**

**4.4.1** The Norwegian Foreign aid Report (NOU 5/95 "Norwegian South-politics for a *Changing World*") makes the requirement that foreign aid funding be granted to organizations who cooperate with related organizations. NMS has the unique opportunity for cooperation through its worldwide network of local churches which we have played a part in building. These churches represent grassroots movements which are organized at both the national and the international levels.

**4.4.2** Missionaries have often held the responsibilities for administrative and financial management within the local churches. Therefore, strengthening the local organization through training in leadership and administration is important. This is the key to our long-term goal of developing equality in our partnership relations.

**4.4.3** NMS' objective is to continually reach out to new areas and people groups. In the area of diakonia, situations may arise where it might be difficult to get public funding for foreign aid projects that are characterized as pioneer work because a Christian local partner does not yet exist. In such cases the challenge will be to work with local non-Christian organizations.

### **4.5 THE TASK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH VIS-A-VIS THE TASK OF THE MISSION AGENCY**

**4.5.1** A local church has a comprehensive responsibility. NMS has as a missionary society a specialized agency and cannot possibly take upon itself the full spectrum of the Church's tasks. The nature of Mission implies reaching out. NMS does not wish to be a static organization, but will seek to liberate its resources in order to pioneer work.



**4.5.2** Diakonia is an integral part of the total task of mission activity. As such, the extent of diakonal activities must stand in proper relation to the whole spectrum of mission activities.

**4.5.3** Scarcity of resources will involve stricter prioritizing in relation to the principal goal. It is where the local church's priorities correspond with NMS' priorities that resources can be set in. In countries which have several partners the work of a common strategy in relation to the cooperating church/partner must be given priority.

## **4.6 DIAKONIA WITHIN THE CHURCH**

**4.6.1** It is important that diakonia does not become equated with institutional work. Instead, spontaneous diakonal efforts should be encouraged, such as in cases where congregational-level diakonia springs from a vibrant Christian fellowship. Our goal is to challenge our partners to set free local resources which can lead to the building up of local structures.

**4.6.2** NMS has participated in building up many institutions which are operated in the name of the partners. Many of these are carried out according to the initial intentions, but the local churches often struggle with large institutions organized according to western-style management models. NMS' challenge is to find new forms for this institutional work, which do not require large running expenses.

**4.6.3** There is the danger that large transfers of funds can actually create barriers so that diakonia ends up as a free-standing undertaking which sits on the sidelines of the local church's structure. This can create unwanted tension. Ideally, funding by mission agencies should only be a supplement to the economy of the local church.

**4.6.4** A diakonal project should have a board of directors elected through the local structure in such a way that the ties between the project and the local church are strengthened. NMS wishes to actively work toward diffusing tension between the employees of a diakonal project supported by external funding and the other workers within the church, e.g. in the area of levels of salary between the two. Efforts to encourage interdisciplinary cooperation between all of the local church's areas of activity will hopefully strengthen interdependence within the church.

## **4.7 PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE WITHIN FOREIGN AID**

**4.7.1** NMS is one of 13 member organizations within the Norwegian Missionary Council, Office for International Development Cooperation (BN), all of whom possess the necessary professional competence in administering foreign aid programs. The Project Secretary of NMS has foreign aid as his/her special area of competence. In addition, the Center for Intercultural Communication (SIK) at the School of Mission and Theology (MHS) is an important resource both in terms of practical and theoretical expertise.

**4.7.2** The strength of both NMS and its missionaries is their knowledge of cultures and languages, and their familiarity with their target groups, built up through many years of experience in working with local partners. It is nevertheless our challenge to strengthen the development of this expertise through adequate preparation prior to missionary service. NMS can also engage in a more systematic development of the necessary professional competence needed to carry out specific tasks.

**4.7.3** NMS should also aim at strengthening continuing studies of missionaries by identifying and systemizing the skills of experienced missionaries. This should happen through close cooperation with SIK. The missionaries inhabit leading competence which could be more actively utilized even

after they have resigned from active missionary service. This competence would be especially useful in meeting the challenges of an ever-increasing multicultural Norway.

#### **4.8 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENTS**

**4.8.1** A main principle in the stewardship of the Norwegian state's foreign aid grants is the strengthening of the partners are not on speaking terms with their governments. It is nevertheless important that the local partners listen to what the government says and if possible enter into dialogue with them. NMS must be clear that through their NORAD-funded projects they are administering Norwegian government funding. In this way one can create understanding that it is possible to create synergy between civilian and public authorities. E.g. in the case of fighting poverty, this is essential in achieving long-term results.

**4.8.2** In certain countries the local churches involve themselves in areas which primarily ought to be the responsibility of the state. These churches engage themselves in school- and health-work, and they build up the infrastructure of their countries by building roads and bridges, providing clean water supplies etc., and in this way take responsibility for the society in which they live. When NMS involves itself in this type of foreign aid it should happen with an attitude of complete openness and it should be as much as possible in line with plans and regulations decided by the local government. Often the government is not capable of or is not willing to take upon itself work already set in motion when the time agreed upon for taking over arrives. NMS has in some cases seen the necessity of extending the timeframe for its involvement, but generally NMS should not contribute to providing foreign aid funding when our involvement could impede the government in taking primary responsibility for its own local population. NMS should continue to question whether a private organization should ever take upon itself tasks of the state in light of the unintended consequences that involvement can have for both the state and the organization.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

In general the part diakonia plays in the total ministry of NMS should not be diminished. Increased utilization of public funding and cooperation with other support organizations can allow NMS to continue to have a high profile within the sector of diakonia. It is especially important through our efforts in attitude shaping to focus on motivating the locally-initiated diakonal efforts started on a volunteer basis at a congregational level. Work to promote the building of organizational structures and training in leadership and administration are also a highly prioritized.

#### **AFTERWORD**

NMS' diakonal plan of action is made concrete in another document which has a paragraph on foreign aid for each of the individual countries. This document is developed separately from the document presented here, and is adjusted more often than this document when sudden changes in conditions either at home or out in the field call for it.

