

Chapter 1

Project description

Background

Hong Kong Churches are in need of the vision of urban mission

Most churches in Hong Kong were established after 1949, the year in which the Communist rule in China began.¹ Most Christians were refugees from the Mainland with conservative theological disposition and conservative attitude in social participation. They were mainly concerned for individual soul redemption regarding this world not their home, and they would not care much about other things else. They would insist that the Church and the State should be separated. Church should not talk too much about political and social issues. On the contrary, Church should engage herself more in evangelism under the religious freedom environment and should dedicated to the Great Commission by seeking church growth in term of both quantity and quality.

It does not mean that the Hong Kong Churches are totally separated from the society and do not participate in social affairs. As reviewed from the past 50 years, churches could respond to the great influx of immigration from the Mainland by providing education, hospital nursing, elderly care services, and marginal group services such as drug rehabilitation, mental rehabilitation etc. There are different motives behind these social responsibilities. The most obvious one is that churches engagement in the provision of social services is an effective means to plant new churches particularly in newly developing area because these social service centers can provide both the assembly halls for the new churches and the social contact points for evangelism. Church engagement in social services took on a new dimension after 1970 with the emergence of many para-church organizations that was accompanied by the second generation growth in the Hong Kong Churches. These para-church organizations in reacting to churches, neglect of those social groups marginalized in the process of urbanization often have to struggle with two

issues. One is the integration of evangelism with social service, and the other one is that the local churches cannot absorb the converts from these marginal groups. So para-church organizations have to sidetrack to plant new churches for these new converts. Social services are always on the agenda of church growth or church expansion. Actually most Hong Kong churches are just ecclesiastically self-centered, lacking the view of Kingdom of God and urban theology.

To the Hong Kong Churches, the experience of urban mission is too green. Many pastors, ministers, and leaders take the view that as they live in the city, whatever ministry in the city is regarded as urban mission. In 1980s, Dr. Bakke had visited Hong Kong several times and introduced the concept of urban mission. But some pastors and leaders up to now still think that urban mission is local ministry with social action and they get the impression that urban mission does not put evangelism in the first priority. So in the past ten years urban mission did not get much attention from church leaders, and the term “urban mission” is more used in relation to overseas mission in the context global urbanization. Generally speaking, urban mission is still marginal to the Hong Kong Churches.

In view of the lack of urban theology to guide the churches in their mission, some pastors and Christian leaders come together to form a new organization: “Urban Compassion”.² They recognize and share the visions as below:

1. The Hong Kong Churches may take a proactive approach in caring about the agenda of the city in light of urban theology and renew their mission from church growth to urban transformation.
2. The pastors in Hong Kong can mobilize the lay Christians to serve in the city neighborhood context and support them to become the neighbor of the vulnerable.
3. The Hong Kong Churches and the urban ministry organizations may have the effective network and synergy dynamics to address the needs of the city and bring forth the powerful witness for the Kingdom of God.

Project vision and objectives

Kei To Church may renew

her mission for the city

I am the full time pastor of Kei To Church since 1991. Kei To Church was conservative in theological disposition, typical of the churches mentioned above. I followed the line of the church founder Rev. Kenneth Lo who strongly supported the church growth theory. When I was ordained in 1994, Rev. Lo gave me his book *An Indispensable Growth*³ that represented his theology about church mission and church development. In 1998, I had the chance for further study and to learn about the idea of urban mission under the guidance of Dr. Ray Bakke. I found that there was a broader perspective about church concept and church mission. Dr. Ray Bakke gave me his book *A Theology as Big as the City*.⁴ I like it very much because the content is biblical and it covers the searching process for renewal in his theology and church mission. I discovered that the Hong Kong Churches especially Kei To Church are in need of this vision and renewal experience. So my vision is that Kei To Church can transcend her ecclesiastically self-centered position and become one of the agents, networking with other para-church organizations and engaging in urban mission movement by the project: “**The renewal of the ecclesiastically self-centered church searching mission for the city**” (hereafter called the “Mission Renewal [MR] Project”). In the process of carrying out this project I translated Bakke’s book into Chinese and the China Alliance Press published it in 2001.⁵

The first and foremost objective of the project is that the congregation of Kei To Church should be made aware of the need to renew their mission. They should be committed not only to attaining church growth but also to building the church as an agent that can transform the city in favor before God. To meet this objective, the congregation would reflect on the mandate of the church and learn the importance of the city in God’s salvation plan, so that they would love the city as they love the church, and they would serve the needs of the city because “Jerusalem” is the eschatological picture in the Bible.

The second objective is to redefine the mobilization of the congregation in serving Jesus Christ. To serve Jesus Christ is to take up duties or roles not only in church gathering settings, but also outside the walls of the church. To achieve this objective, the congregation would either discover the need for integration of faith witness with their occupation, or the congregation would discover the needs of their neighbors and make every effort to meet these needs in a holistic way.

The third objective is to make use of this renewal process as the reference material that some renewal

principles may be drawn for churches similar to Kei To Church. To meet this objective, “Urban Compassion” which was formed in the process of this project, will hold a consultation meeting or a seminar after the completion of the project and may use this dissertation for case discussion. Or the bible discussion materials on urban mission used in the project may be published in the form of a booklet.⁶

Overview

the steps in taking forward the project

There were following six steps in carrying out the MR project that Kei To Church got started in urban mission from July 1998 to December 2002:⁷

Step 1: Sounding the call and forming a visionary leading group

This is a very important step. One person alone can do no ministry. As I began my study in the program of Doctor of Ministry, it was proposed to set up a “Ministry Support Group”. Because this project was started in Kei To Church, I shared the vision and my study with the Deacons. Finally two of the Deacons became my supporting group members. We often come together, pray for God’s guidance, and discuss about the future development of Kei To Church.

Step 2: Reflection on the church mandate biblically, historically, culturally and theologically

Different views on the church mandate lead to completely different results. In order to renew the church mission, the biblical grounds for both church growth and urban mission should be carefully compared and assessed. One significant question is why Chinese Churches are so ecclesiastically self-centered? We have to trace back to the basic norms in the Chinese culture for the answer. The cultural roots usually affect the interpretation of the Bible leading to the bias of theological thinking. More understanding of the cultural factors may help us to get a more relevant perspective on church mission.

Step 3: Expansion of the vision of urban mission among the congregation along different scales and the final establishment of the section for urban ministries.

Through pulpit sermons, bible discussion in fellowship meetings, Sunday school programs, prayer walks and study of the community, festival celebrations in public square and park, the perspective of the

congregation would be widen, ready to see the needs of the community. As the result, Kei To Church decided to set up a new section to coordinate the urban ministries.

Step 4: Engaging the congregation in programs that meet the needs of the city.

Christian organizations would partner with Kei To Church in serving different social groups such as the Mainland immigrants, sick people, drug addicts, etc. A good network will facilitate the participation of the congregation in this respect. In urban mission, some Christians are Nehemiah in building the community, some are Ezra in building the spirituality, and some are Esther in building the lawful environment. This three partners' model gives a clear direction in engaging and mobilizing the congregation in urban ministries.

Step 5: Extending the congregation ministries to their workplace and families

Christians come together on Sunday and in the remaining six days spread themselves all over the city in workplace, schools, offices, and homes. They have their neighbors to serve. Church always counts the ministries in gathering settings but neglects the ministries in spreading settings of the other six days. In this project, the indicators of congregation mobilization will be redefined so as to work out a more realistic picture of their ministries and to raise the congregation awareness of how the church can be an agent of change in shaping the city in favor before God.

Step 6: Continuing with the search for the right agenda that can get the city for God strategically

A city is composed of many complicated systems. Kei To Church is a small unit only among the many of God's agents. In order to fulfill the mandate to get the city for God, one of the challenges ahead is to define the agenda for Hong Kong. Without the clear urban agenda, the churches and the Christian organizations may not easily come together in synergy. Although this part of discussion is out of the scope of this project, some projections on Hong Kong future may help Kei To Church to play a more relevant role in the process of searching the mission for the city.

The above steps will be analyzed in greater details in the following chapters:

Chapter 2:	The historical and theological roots of Kei To Church
Chapter 3:	Why in general Chinese Churches are "ecclesiastically self-centered"
Chapter 4:	Reflection on the church mandate for the city
Chapter 5:	Growing of the urban mission concept in the congregation

Chapter 6:	Engaging the congregation in the ministries in urban lens
Chapter 7:	Extending the congregation mobilization for urban mission
Chapter 8:	Conclusions: The challenges ahead

Before the discussion on how the MR project was carried out in Kei To Church, we need first to understand her historical and theological roots of which will be discussed in the next chapter.