

# BUSINESS AS MISSION

*extending God's kingdom*



**INTERSERVE** VISION & PRACTICE SERIES



Interserve is an interdenominational and truly international community of Christians, bringing God's love to the peoples of Asia and the Arab World through word and action. Wherever we work, we do so in partnership, serving the global church and encouraging newer mission movements. We serve in some of the hardest places in the world in obedience to Jesus' commission to "go and make disciples of all nations".

The purpose of the Vision & Practice series is to promote and build a greater understanding of Interserve's ethos and direction.

**Vision & Practice Series:**  
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## INTRODUCTION

**Interserve has been practising wholistic mission since its inception, and sees work and business as part of God's mission.**

Interserve has defined wholistic mission as “*intentionally bearing witness to the whole character of God and his mighty acts of redemption through proclamation, service, and fellowship*”. We desire that everyone in Interserve practises this wholistic mission.

The majority of our mission Partners are what we would call ‘tentmakers.’ Our tentmakers engage intentionally in wholistic ministry in a cross-cultural context, by using the professional skills that are the practitioner’s primary identity. A smaller number are involved in ‘marketplace ministry,’ which harnesses the potential of working in business for intentional mission impact. Beyond these, a small but significant minority are involved in a relatively new strategy: business as

mission (BAM). Interserve defines this strategy as “marketplace ministry that harnesses the potential of business for intentional mission impact with a view to profitability and sustainability.”

This document provides key concepts which shape the understanding and practice of business as mission within Interserve, and outlines this strategy within our wider objective of wholistic ministry, of which business is just one aspect. Interserve does not presume to give ‘the’ definitive definition of business as mission, nor does it claim to dogmatically define criteria or outcomes. Rather, the focus is on three distinct objectives:

*To define business as mission from the perspective of Interserve;*

*To explain why Interserve is involved in business as mission;*

*To describe Interserve’s strategy for engaging in business as mission.<sup>1</sup> ❀*

“ BUSINESS AS MISSION IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACT IN A WHOLISTIC, MISSIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL WAY TO EXTEND THE KINGDOM OF GOD. ”

## WHAT IS BUSINESS AS MISSION?

**Interserve distinguishes between business ‘for’ mission and business ‘as’ mission. Both are good and both have a role to play in God’s purposes.**

Business *for* mission typically focuses on the issue of using business profit for charitable, humanitarian or religious activities. Business *as* mission (BAM), however, is concerned with the whole set of activities which make up a business enterprise, seeing them as intrinsically good and an opportunity to act in a wholistic, missional and transformational way to extend the kingdom of God<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout history we find practitioners of business as mission:

**ABRAHAM:** He is primarily remembered as the father of our faith, was also a highly successful entrepreneur, with a huge ranching business and other commercial activities.

**LYDIA:** She was commended for her early response to the message of the gospel in Philippi was, in turn, a highly regarded trader in the textile industry.

**PRISCILLA AND AQUILA:** They played a vital role in the establishment of the early church, enhanced and to some extent made possible by their commercial activity as tent manufacturers.

**THE NESTORIANS:** Moving beyond the New Testament era, the Silk Road traders known as Nestorians were passionate in their commitment to the spread of the gospel, and left an enduring legacy across Central Asia.

**THE MORAVIANS:** These Swiss/German merchants, represented an entire movement of Christians who practised business as mission, positively impacting large portions of the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

Present-day examples of business as mission abound, and simply continue the legacy in new and creative ways. Because business as mission is defined by the people who practise it, more than by theories about it, we recognize common characteristics in the life of a 'BAM' practitioner:

- ◆ Commercial success is a stated goal of dedicated BAMers.
- ◆ True BAMers recognise and model the need for mobility, risk taking, and commitment to make the business succeed, and do not just use BAM simply as a platform to gain entry to a country.
- ◆ BAMers serve the purposes of God's kingdom through consistent demonstration and proclamation, and participate in the nurturing of people and communities in the faith.

We stress three core attributes of authentic business as mission. These are attributes to which all our colleagues in Interserve are committed, regardless of their professional sphere of involvement.

**Integrity** – being who we say we are. Our claim to be doing business in a host country is backed up by real, verifiable commercial activity, to an extent which makes credible sense to those observing us and our lives.

**Integration** - work is ministry. Consistent with our theological understanding of the sacredness of work, we engage in business as a holy calling, and as a primary context in which our ministry is lived out through servant leadership in the marketplace.

**Intentionality** – in being and making followers of Christ. Recognising that we are simultaneously aliens on earth and citizens of heaven, we are not content with a limited vision or understanding of our identity and purpose. ☸

*An artist with a passion* for justice, I run a company which provides training in design and product development in tailoring and crafts, and helps build sustainable enterprise in marginalised communities where few other opportunities exist. The products are mainly sold in the UK, but we have plans to expand so that other communities, and even other countries, can benefit from what we do.

The women we work with enjoy the challenge of developing valuable skills, and also gain new status within their community. One of our young woman recently informed us that she wants to start her own tailoring business within the next three years, using the skills that she has learned, and plans to provide employment for up to five people.

Our business also has an impact on the local community: we recently helped fundraise for a new medical centre, which will benefit several hundred farming families. ☸

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
INDIA



## WHY IS INTERSERVE INVOLVED?

**Interserve is compelled to be involved in business as mission because of three important affirmations.**

The first is that the gospel is wholistic, addressing the totality of human need. Interserve believes that many of the world's most pressing issues have business-related solutions.

Secondly, the mission mandate is global, directed towards individuals, communities and the family of nations. We are called to serve the less reached peoples of the Arab World and Asia.

And finally, business is a vocation given by God to the people of God. We seek to bring men and women with business

skills into a direct participation in the work of God<sup>3</sup>.

Our involvement in business as mission is based upon four crucial theological ideas.

- ◆ God is just, creative and kind. Doing business his way mirrors His character. A more equitable provision of capital, creating dignified employment, and our godly treatment of others, are all means by which we can show Him to the world.
- ◆ God's truth can transform lives. Successful and ethical business models are a tangible proof of the power of the gospel.

**“BAMERS OPERATE WITHIN THE WORKPLACE, INFLUENCING PEOPLE WHO MAY OTHERWISE BE OUT OF REACH FOR MOST OF THE CHURCH.”**



- ◆ The people of God are found in the workplace. Non-traditional methods and contexts for making and gathering disciples are a new global reality and necessity.
- ◆ Credible and natural witness is possible within business. Employees, suppliers and customers are crucial relationships in the business environment. Although these individuals may often be out of reach for most of the church, they are within the circle of influence of BAMers.

Business as mission can make visible the ethics of the kingdom in a critical domain, which is moulding the thinking and behaviour of individuals and societies.

An objection frequently raised against business has to do with the morality of its practices, or the impracticality of engaging in ethical enterprise in the corrupt environments in which Interserve is typically at work. In

answer to this objection we would say that many businesses are run ethically, and we would hold that nothing is too hard for God.

While recognising the complexity of many situations, Interserve emphasises three broad areas in which ethical decisions and conduct should and can be made: integrity compels us to practise the values of honesty, diligence and fairness in all our relationships; stewardship leads us to exercise care over all the resources at our disposal, including the 'natural' resources of creation, and to realise and use profits legitimately; and a sense of responsibility motivates us to contribute to the social and economic development of our community.

To summarise, Interserve is involved in business as mission because we believe our calling is to be like salt and light, allowing the redemptive power of the gospel to influence every part of society, including the business environment. ❀

*Since 2001* we have been running a small software company in this mountainous country of South Asia - we make software that helps keep track of medicines. It's a country that has a rapidly growing Christian population, a culture based on distrust, and a rather weak economy. In the midst of this, we're just one small company trying to do a bit, talk a bit, and be a signpost announcing that there's a different way. For us, being involved with a business as part of one's calling isn't a second-rate option.

There is always more to do at work than there is time. I can measure my own life balance by the frequency we have staff meetings, which get squeezed out if I am too busy. These meetings are often valuable for both introducing the love of our lives to those who don't follow, and for challenging and broadening the understanding of those who do.

At one staff meeting a Christian staff member described a tax inspection at another office where he also worked, and their being caught out falsifying documents. "What do you do now?" I asked. "Oh, now we hide the documents much better," he replied. There's lots to be done to get Christians, as well as friends from other faiths, to understand what following Jesus involves! ❀

INTERSERVE PARTNER  
SOUTH ASIA

## WHAT IS INTERSERVE'S STRATEGY?

### **Business as mission is a strategic subset of our methodology for 'tentmaking' and for 'marketplace ministry.'**

Both of these are positive and necessary; they share important similarities but have significant and distinctive differences.

- ◆ Tentmaking broadly applies to a whole range of professional callings in a wide variety of cross-cultural settings.
- ◆ Marketplace ministry is tentmaking in a for-profit trading context.

**“ PARTNERSHIP  
IN BUSINESS AS  
MISSION SHOULD BE  
GLOBAL...  
IT IS GOD, NOT  
ANY ONE COUNTRY  
OR CULTURE,  
WHO IS LEADING  
THE WAY. ”**

Business as mission focuses more on commercial enterprise which is intentionally missional and transformational, in which the practitioner typically has an ownership and/or a leadership role in setting and executing the overall vision of the business. There is no universally agreed theoretical or operational template, or locus of control for the tentmaking, marketplace ministry or business as mission movements.

### **OUR BAM STRATEGY IS FOCUSED ON ASIA AND THE ARAB WORLD**

Interserve is committed to working in these specific regions where the physical and spiritual needs are profound, the church is practically non-existent, and believers are often harassed or persecuted.

### **OUR BAM STRATEGY IS LINKED WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The business as mission domain includes some portion of the micro-enterprise development (MED) sector, the small to medium enterprise (SME) sector, and the larger, typically overseas, private equity (OPE) sector. Each sector has its unique characteristics and challenges, and each provides particular opportunities for transformational impact.

**“ WE ARE INVOLVED IN BAM  
BECAUSE WE BELIEVE OUR CALLING  
IS TO BE LIKE SALT AND LIGHT,  
ALLOWING THE REDEMPTIVE  
POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO INFLUENCE  
EVERY PART OF SOCIETY,  
INCLUDING THE BUSINESS SECTOR. ”**

### **OUR BAM STRATEGY INTEGRATES SEVEN KINDS OF 'PATIENT' CAPITAL**

'Patient' capital is another name for long term capital, i.e. resources provided and available to the business over a long period of time.

- ◆ **Human capital** – the men and women with business skills who will go from all nations to all nations in obedience to Christ, sent by the church to serve in His Spirit.
- ◆ **Intellectual capital** – the knowledge of experienced business people which can be made available to on-the-ground practitioners to help them solve a variety of business challenges.
- ◆ **Spiritual capital** – the resources of godly individuals which form an indispensable part of effective business as mission, in the form of pastoral care, missiological and cross-cultural insights, prayer, and other means.
- ◆ **Social capital** – the interconnected web of relationships across local, national and international environments which are all essential to the effective conduct of business as mission.
- ◆ **Financial capital** – the provision of adequate and appropriate resources

to support the commercial activity and facilitate its sustainable impact.

- ◆ **Infrastructural capital** – resources relating to telecommunications, transportation, banking systems, etc., which facilitate commercial operation.
- ◆ **Natural capital** – environmental resources such as air, land, water, upon which the business depends and has an impact. Including these resources is a reflection also of our concern for the environment and of our calling to be good stewards of creation.

## OUR BAM STRATEGY IS LINKED WITH GLOBAL RECRUITMENT PRIORITIES

Business as mission needs both entrepreneurs and business professionals.

- ◆ Entrepreneurs are the business creators. These uniquely gifted individuals have the ability to spot opportunities, envision others, and create something that previously did not exist.
- ◆ Business professionals are the business builders. These talented individuals bring a wide array of skills to the commercial enterprise that are essential to its sustainable impact and growth.

For every one entrepreneur it is likely that as many as ten other business professionals will be required over the life cycle of a BAM enterprise. We recognise and affirm that in some cases, personnel have not gone to their country of service initially to do business as mission, but may have developed along these lines; these individuals may need extra encouragement and coaching as they respond to God's call.

National Offices are engaged in casting a vision for business as mission among those with experience in management, finance and accounting, sales and marketing, human resources, and any number of technical specialties.

## OUR BAM STRATEGY SEEKS BUSINESS AND MISSION IMPACT THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Business as mission engages employees, customers and clients, vendors and suppliers, investors and lenders, government authorities, governing/ advisory boards, family, church, and the larger community and society. It also impacts on sending and receiving churches, National Offices, Country Teams and other Interserve personnel and entities, on donors, family, local authorities and other nationals.

## OUR BAM STRATEGY RECOGNISES THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIP

Consistent with our practice of mission across Interserve, partnership is vital to the effective conduct of business as mission. In particular, we believe

that the best chance for sustained, effective impact for business as mission will be realised as the BAMer, Interserve and appropriate business partners collaborate. Each partner will bring their particular strengths and competencies to the partnership.

- ◆ Partnership in business as mission should be global. It is God, not any one country or culture, who is leading the way in the business as mission enterprise.
- ◆ The practice of business as mission needs to be multi-disciplinary, with commercial skills and problem-solving abilities being combined, for example, with theological and missiological reflection and insights.

Managing the interface between these partners requires healthy relationships, good communication, accurate documentation, clear and realistic expectations, healthy accountability, willing transparency, mutual respect and adequate problem resolution strategies.







**OUR BAM STRATEGY INCLUDES COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES**

Each party contributes specialised competencies. Interserve's expertise is primarily in missiological and cross-cultural effectiveness and in member care, while others bring expertise in areas such as business analysis, mentoring and financial capitalisation.

**OUR BAM STRATEGY INCLUDES RECOGNISING AND AVOIDING FOUR SERIOUS PITFALLS**

- ◆ Acting under a flawed notion of grace which continues to fund failing business.
- ◆ Adopting an employment agenda which might be unwisely biased towards hiring 'converts'.
- ◆ Embracing a covert deployment agenda which is oriented towards sending personnel ill-equipped to do genuine business.
- ◆ Mixing together mission funding with capital required for for-profit ventures. ☸

*In a tiny, remote town* in the mountains of East Asia, where the people were very resistant to the gospel, a few national believers from a distant city came to open a small curry restaurant business. They also came to intentionally share the good news to the local community, and after a year or two, it resulted in a handful of new believers who are now being disciplined discretely by these restaurant owners. ☸

## CONCLUSION

**Interserve's philosophy of business as mission is fundamentally grounded in, and compatible with, its broader philosophy of wholistic ministry.**

Wholistic ministry intentionally bears witness to the whole character of God and his mighty acts of redemption through proclamation, service and fellowship. Interserve is committed to harnessing the potential of business for positive impact on intentional mission, with a view to profitability and sustainability. Interserve seeks to partner with the church around the world in this profound calling. ☼

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The shorter term BAM is also used in discussion from time to time.
- <sup>2</sup> BAM is missional and transformational and profit making, demonstrating kingdom values, creating jobs, enabling honest lifestyles and underscoring a Biblical understanding of work.
- <sup>3</sup> By providing employment, empowering people, restoring human dignity and seeking to provide alternatives for poverty and crime, BAM seeks to participate in the work of God.

Business as mission (BAM) is a relatively new strategy that harnesses the potential of business for intentional mission impact. In this booklet we define Interserve's perspective on BAM, explain why we are involved, and share our strategy for using BAM for the expansion of God's kingdom.

*Lives and communities  
transformed through encounter  
with Jesus Christ.*