



**Department for Mission**  
Lutheran Church - South Australia / Northern Territory

# Jesus' Mission through his Church

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**Any talk of mission begins with Jesus Christ. The Father sent Jesus to become a human being, live, suffer, die and rise again for us. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus sends the church into the world in the power of the Spirit. [John 20:21-23] The church does not send a few of its people to do mission, the whole church is sent by Jesus into the world. Mission flows from the Triune God.**

**The church, therefore, does not have a mission; Jesus' mission has a church!**

## **In Community with God**

Jesus took on flesh and became a human being (the *incarnation*) and lived in a community in our world so that he might redeem us and finally restore the world to what God intended in creation. That is Jesus' mission to the world. We are part of that mission as we go and become incarnate in the cultures of our world so that we might live the life of God in their midst. Just as the Trinity is three persons in community (*koinonia*) so we also go into the world together and not as individuals. Mission is relational with interdependence and 'mutual indwelling' (*perichoresis*), as is the Trinity. [John 14:8-11; 17:20-24] We invite others to join us in being drawn into the life of Jesus through the forgiveness of our sins.

## **One Loving God; Two Hands**

We do not have our own mission. We are sent as part of God's mission (*missio Dei*) to God's world. This work of God in the world has two aspects to it. They are to be distinguished but not separated. It is the same God who works in both spheres. God is King and Ruler of all.

[The work of God's left hand](#) uses God's law to provide government, the rule of law and structure to our world. God does this through the authorities he establishes, such as parents, teachers, rulers etc. This includes issues such as justice, ecology, care for the poor and marginalised and the like. These are issues that all Christians should be passionate about (because God is passionate about them) and the church has both an educative and prophetic role in regard to them. We are part of the mission of God's left hand working together with others including non-Christians.

[The work of God's right hand](#) is the work of Jesus through the gospel (the *missio Christi*), the bringing people to repentance & faith so that they might be reconciled to God. It therefore has to do with the means God uses to bring these gifts to us: his Word, the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. It is about law and gospel; the forgiveness of sins and justification. This is why God put the church into the world: So that all people might hear about Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for us.

## **The Promises of God**

The work of God's right hand (the *missio Christi*) is rooted in the *promissio Dei*, the promises of God [Luther]. The promise of God to Abraham and the patriarchs, to Moses and the prophets, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is the promise that God will reconcile us to himself through the forgiveness of our sins for Jesus sake. [2 Cor 5:14 – 6:2] This promise meets head-on all the other 'promises' that people trust such as the consumerist promise (*buy this and you will be happy and fulfilled – perhaps even sexy*); the cosmetic surgery promise (*a little nip & tuck and eternal youth – and happiness – is yours!*); the wealth promise (*money can buy anything!*); the security promise (*invest and insure and nothing can hurt you!*); the status promise (*take this job and you will get the recognition you deserve!*); the religious promise (*sincerely try to be a good disciple of Jesus and obey him and it will go well!*). The promises of God require faith, *faith alone*. Repentance is turning from these other promises to the promise of God; from false faith to true faith. This is not primarily a moral turnaround. As the promise of God takes root in human lives it generates what is 'new' in the 'good new...s' – new faith, new obedience and new identity, until finally it becomes a new humanity and a new creation.

## **This is God's Mission**

Jesus is in charge. Mission is therefore not something we can control. Even our ability to plan is limited. Luther liked to say it was similar to *Platzregen*, a moving thunder shower. We plant but God gives the rain and the growth. The word takes root in some lives and not in others. Showers fall in one field and not another. This is often a hidden reality in our world. Just as the glory and power of God was hidden under the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross so the work of God in the world today is not visible to all. With the eyes of faith we can sometimes see where the thundershower falls but we cannot control where it hits. Thus we need to follow Jesus – discern where he is at work and work with him. New projects might therefore not be centrally planned, but may bubble up out on the mission field as God's people work and pray.



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## A Flotilla or a Cruise Ship?

Kennon Callahan said

A denomination is not like a huge ocean liner that must be turned slowly, ever so slowly, to a new course over a long period of time. A denomination is better understood as a flotilla, a fleet, a convoy of many ships of different sizes and shapes. The art is to help now this ship, and another, and yet another to chart a new course. As enough ships chart the new course, the rest of the fleet will see the new direction. Without a vision, the people perish. Hope is stronger than memory. We are the Easter people. We are the people of hope.<sup>1</sup>

The D<sup>4</sup>M is using this approach. We are united by our confession of faith and we walk together as we gather at Synod where we decide policy and overall direction. But synodical resolutions do not in themselves bring change. Change happens when individual ships begin to find a new direction in mission and set a new course. That is what is now happening in our district. We see similar things as we also support mission in other parts of the world through the work of the Board for Mission.

## The Church in the World

The church is present in the world when the baptised people of God gather to hear the gospel and celebrate the Lord's Supper. Where such a community exists it is "church". Both the universal Christian church of all times and places, and local expressions of church in a particular time and place, are "church".

Of course there are other things that are fundamental to being a local church such as its relationship with the rest of church in the world and its nature as a community sent to the world by our missional God. In addition there are other good things such as styles of music, publications, forms of outreach, buildings, small groups, children and youth ministry and the like. It is not so much that we can do without such things – why would we want to? – but that they will vary in different times, places and cultures, and this does not put our unity, or that this can be 'church', into question.

## Therefore we find it helpful to speak of

### Fresh expressions of church

- Where the people of God take the unchanging word of God and let it become incarnate in changing human cultures so that the culture in which the gospel is 'wrapped' is a help, and not a hindrance, to it being faithfully communicated.
- Without such fresh expressions many will never hear the gospel.
- Not all such fresh expressions will endure for a long time, and that is ok.

<sup>1</sup> Kennon L Callahan, Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys, Harper & Row 1990, 265.

### Inherited expressions of church

- They were the 'fresh expressions' when they first appeared.
- They have stood the test of time and been a blessing to many people.
- They are still culturally relevant to segments of society, but not to others.
- We have inherited more than one such 'expression' of church.

### Diverse expressions of church

- A congregation may host both fresh and inherited expressions of church.
- Congregations that have both a 'traditional' and a 'contemporary' Sunday service already host diverse expressions of church.
- Just as a congregation may have more than one service on a Sunday morning so it may also have other sacramental worshipping communities that gather under its auspices, even though they may not use its buildings.

## From Mission Initiative to Fresh Expression

When does a mission initiative become a fresh expression of church? Some will stay as mission initiatives that are part of existing congregations or schools. When a mission initiative becomes a group of baptised believers who do not gather as part of another worshipping community then they are "church" and need to be served with both word and sacrament.

## From having a Mission (or 2) to being Missional

When I was a kid we were happy if a congregation had an outreach project or two that provided some *focus*. Then we came to see that a congregation should be in mission; that is *flavoured* by mission. Now we understand that Jesus sends his whole church into the world. All of us are involved in some way and the congregation is missional; that is *shaped* by its mission. We don't just expect people to come to us, we go to where they feel at home and our congregation is structured to serve those who are not yet members.

## The Department for Mission has a twin focus:

1. Assisting our congregations to become more 'missional' in their life and ministry. Our God is "making all things new." [Rev 21:5]
2. Encouraging new mission initiatives and fresh expressions of church, mostly without extra buildings and salaries.

**Our vision is to see all our congregations hosting a diverse range of expressions of church, where reaching into the community with the good news of Jesus Christ is seen as our calling and purpose and where location, culture, time and size of worship gatherings reflect the needs of those we are trying to reach and not the traditions of the congregation.**