

Lutheran Mission Matters



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Inside This Issue: Wholistic Witness

“Witness always, use words when necessary” is a popular Christian adage. From apostolic times Christians have been reaching out to the whole world with the Gospel of God, heeding the Lord’s commission to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20). The four Gospels conclude with the exhortation that the Gospel must be proclaimed as a testimony to the whole creation before the Lord will return to judge the world and consummate His kingdom (e.g., Mt 24:14; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:44–49; Jn 20:21–23). The Gospel calls all people to repentance, and declares forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Book of Acts shows that the apostles continued the Lord’s mission on earth. Empowered by the Spirit, they preached and taught the message the Lord entrusted to them, accompanied by signs and wonders that manifested the Lord’s rule and reign on earth. Acts is the narrative history of the Early Church, emphasizing that the community of believers was spreading in the immediate neighborhoods, and to the farthest areas such as Rome, in one generation. More recently, however, missionary engagement has begun to build further on the platform the Lord outlined in Luke 4:18–21, giving Christian mission a wholistic outlook. Here the Lord speaks of Himself as sent by God to proclaim the good news to the poor, to recover sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. The Lord’s ministry and mission was wholistic.

Wholistic witness¹ is a term of recent coinage. Old Testament scholar and missiologist Christopher Wright has proposed a three-dimensional approach to the church’s mission. These include (1) cultivating the church through evangelism and teaching to bring people to repentance, faith, and maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ; (2) engaging society through compassion and justice in response to Jesus’ commands and example, to love and serve, to be salt and light, to be doers of good; and (3) caring for creation through godly use of the resources of creation in economic work along with ecological concern and action.²

Elmer Martens explicates that God’s design for humanity has four components that together illustrate how His care extends to the total person, the society, and the environment. God’s design for His creation encompasses His acts of deliverance, building up and sustaining the community, imparting the knowledge of God, and the provision for an abundant life.³ If one part is missing, God’s purpose for human lives will remain incomplete, and will not be wholistic as God has intended it. In Christ, God meets the world and His people wholistically, Martens claims.

Lutherans could not agree more. Luther himself gives us sufficient cause to engage the world wholistically as God’s witnesses. In his Small Catechism, Luther explains at the basic level that God gives each person body and soul, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all

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provisions needed to support body and life. Out of His infinite mercy and fatherly affection, God also defends His people against all danger and guards and protects them from all evil.⁴

We acknowledge that Lutherans have lagged in addressing wholistic mission theologically at a deeper level. Nevertheless, expatriate missionaries and overseas mission agencies strive to keep their Lutheran identity intact in non-Christian and sometimes hostile environments. Missionary chronicles bear witness that mission endeavors have been wholistic as they were involving peoples and communities that suffer socioeconomic deprivation, oppression, segregation, and persecution. In this issue, *Lutheran Mission Matters* is introducing a Lutheran exploration of wholistic mission. Further conversations are necessary to exhaust this important topic.

John Mehl argues that in today's context, it is important that sending agencies should be thinking and planning for God's mission outside the church's walls, resisting the tendency to turn inward.

Klaus Detlev Schulz posits that Christian mission is a demonstration of the Gospel in word and deed. Gospel proclamation must therefore be linked to showing compassion to the neighbor.

Michael Newman points out two examples from the early history of the LCMS to show how in the formative years the Missouri Synod was pressed into new behavior by hostile social conditions from the developing American culture.

John Juedes suggests that Lutheran theological education and pastoral formation in the majority world seminaries necessitates recognition of the contextual realities of language and culture in new ways for the sake of speaking the one Gospel meaningfully in non-Western cultures.

Samuel Fuhrmann and Werner Klän offer essays based on presentations to the International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of Lutheran churches. The authors reiterate that the Lutheran way of confessing the faith works across cultures when missionaries and pastors relate to other cultures with respect. Fuhrmann focuses on *favelas* culture that is native to Brazil and shows that our Lord's use of the parable of the sower and the seed can speak in an agrarian context even to city dwellers. Klän asserts that confession is crucial for Lutherans and as confessors of the faith they need to appreciate and be sensitive to the context in which Christians make confession of the Gospel.

Encountering Mission inside this issue presents a medley of articles showing how the mission of God takes place wholistically in a variety of contexts, worldviews, and across cultures.

Steve Hughey explains the apostle Paul's ministry in the marketplace of the Aroepagus as a strategy for serving the Gospel cross-culturally.

Tim Norton and David Sternbeck together present various challenges Christian mission has faced interacting with native American (First Nations) culture, which differs radically from a dominant Euro-American worldview. They argue that wholistic mission is biblical and speaks directly to any culture.

Herb Hoefler's essay on counterintuitive grace illustrates how world religions, especially Islam, interpret the idea of grace. It shows the importance of ongoing conversations with our neighbors as we present the unique way God has manifested His grace for all people in Christ.

Brenda Segovia reports on how the Rio Grande Mission Action Council in Texas serves in the borderlands, with missionaries caring for individuals and communities along with presenting the message of Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord.

In "A Student of the King and Teacher in the Kingdom," Miriam Carter celebrates a lifetime of missionary service offered by Deaconess Carol Halter in Hong Kong and China as she dedicates her life to serving as a student of the King and a teacher in the Kingdom. Halter is a textbook example of incarnational ministry.

Annissa Lui speaks as an insider as she narrates the wholistic missionary work of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service. Like Paul, sharing with all people the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord is the goal God has set (Phil 3:8-9).

Miriam Carter's review of a book by a former professor of Concordia Seminary St. Louis shows that wholistic mission was not a stranger to our church body several decades ago.

Lutheran Mission Matters is spreading its wings across continents, to other countries and cultures without compromising its Lutheran identity. We are grateful to Professor Samuel Fuhrmann for this initiative in Brazil. The Brazil edition is known as *Missio Apostolica Brasil* reflecting LMM's original name assumed in 1992.

The forthcoming November 2021 issue focuses on mission and ministry in, through, and after a pandemic, drawing lessons for the present and for the future. An invitation to write is already available on the lsfm.global website as well as on page 170 of this issue.

We recognize the decade-long service of our editorial assistant, Stacey Parker, for the production of the journal. Stacey will be sorely missed, but we wish her well as she is moving on to another career in the service of the Gospel.

This issue holds fast to the high standards the Lutheran Society for Missiology has set for the journal. These pages present for theologians, pastors, and laypeople of the church quality materials on ministry and mission for theological reflection and practical application in our everyday life and service to the church and world.

Victor Raj, editor, *Lutheran Mission Matters*

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Endnotes

¹ The editor prefers the term *wholistic witness*, reflecting the comprehensive nature of Christian mission and ministry. For the sake of consistency, we have taken the liberty to change *holistic* to *wholistic* in some essays. In other instances, we have allowed *holistic* to stand as is without altering the author's intent. For a balanced approach to wholistic witness in the Early Church, see Glenn K. Fluegge, "The Dual Nature of Evangelism in the Early Church," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 305–321.

² Christopher Wright, "Participatory Mission: The Mission of God's People Revealed in the Whole Bible Story," in *Four Views of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 63–97.

³ Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design*, 3rd ed. (N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 1998), 137.

⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 133.