

Lutheran Mission Matters

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Editorial

New Doors Open for the Good News

Victor Raj

Lutherans engage the Church's ministry and mission today with some virtual discomfort if not excessive fear and trepidation, for fear that the contemporary missional church may not be keeping in step fully with the traditions the faithful from early on have embraced. Correspondingly, certain constituents of the institutional church assume that our generation already is post-missional, and all we need to do is preserve our respective traditions and conserve the values our fathers passed on to us. For the Church and for the Christian, mission and ministry are not two separate entities. In fact, mission is ministry and vice versa. The one without the other is unthinkable.

Ever-emerging spiritualities and constantly changing worldviews are overwhelming and in some ways intimidating to those who customarily hold onto the status quo of the institutional church. Traditional ways of expressing the faith, worship styles, and the ways in which Christians interpret the world cannot remain stationary in a fast-changing world. The Church and the faithful people of God need to identify innovative ways and means to adapt to the situations in people's lives, and bring a word of comfort and hope to an otherwise fractured and hopeless world. No culture forever remains monolithic, and neither can the Church.

Institutional churches are already experiencing a bewildering loss in terms of membership and a disheartening decline in weekly worship service attendance. Regular attenders notice that their Sunday experience does not necessarily resonate with the daily life they lead outside the church walls, in the workplace, and the marketplace. Apparently, certain traditions hold them captive to a culture that claims its moorings in sacred history, conventions, and customs, while causing them to disengage the secular world in which they live and work daily. A sheltered environment in the Church impels them to disregard the world they are in, where God has called them to interact regularly with family, friends, and neighbors who may not necessarily share a common faith or worldview. Furthermore, these Christians feel unprepared and unequipped to share as missionaries the love God has in Christ for all people across cultures and ethnicities for their salvation from sin, Satan, and death.

This issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* shows with examples that the Church's concern and apprehension over newer approaches to outreach and mission is literally out of place. The Church's mission actually is God's mission. God has delegated to His Church His mission for all people to believe, teach, and confess that Jesus is

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their Savior and Lord. The people of God are released through Baptism for God's mission in the world that He first created and on which He lavished His love in Christ.

The churches in the postmodern West grow primarily because they are making use of methods that have been effective and fruitful for bringing the Gospel of God to the traditionally non-Christian cultures in the majority world. Wherever Christianity has been a minority religion, ongoing mission encounters occur as God's people make house calls, meet others in the marketplace, hold small group meetings, and launch house churches, allowing people to know Jesus without plucking them away from their natural, cultural origins and environments. In the United States, today's congregations multiply as Christians reach out to the de-churched and unchurched, involving in large measure immigrants in the country for whom the Christian Gospel is brand new. People and communities that are new to the faith feel welcomed and accepted to the extent they are given opportunities to build interpersonal relationships with Christians. Whether at home or far away from home, the mission of God operates well initially when presented on a personal level, in small groups and in house church settings patterned after the services of the first-century evangelists and missionaries.

A missionary church is an outgoing church that invites into the household of God men, women, and children from all walks of life and keeps the faith active in love with an outward focus that reaches out to friends *and* neighbors for the sake of Christ.

Martin Luther proposed three worship styles for the local congregation for relating the Gospel to various people groups at their level. For traditional members and regular attenders who might be the elite and sophisticated, Luther recommended the Latin *Formula Missae*. For the ordinary unlearned lay folk of Germany, though, Luther recommended the German Mass in the vernacular.

Conversely, for those who may be new to the faith Luther proposed a third order of worship that he called the evangelical model, for beginners echoing perhaps what today's missiologists and church planters identify as the first-century model. Luther suggested that worship should be designed for "those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the Gospel with hand and mouth should . . . meet alone in a house or somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament and to do other Christian works."¹ Introducing the Luther texts, Stolle wrote that "every Divine Service is endowed with a missionary dimension."² Evangelists, church planters, and missional theologians of all time have Martin Luther's approval in all they do to reach out to the lost with the Gospel of God.

Inside this issue readers will find a cadre of essays and reflections relative to how God's mission extends throughout the world, at home and abroad across cultures. Solid Gospel witnessing, rooted in Scripture and the Confessions, is

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practical and relevant for all people in these postmodern times. Surveys, articles, and reflective essays here presented are by Lutherans serving as theological educators, leaders, and missionaries in various parts of the world. They do not in any way compromise their Lutheran identity and are forever cognizant of the changes and transitions that are occurring in their own neighborhoods that have local and worldwide implications. Lutherans are always bold and ready to confess Christ as a testimony for all people. New doors open for the Gospel to enter human hearts as never before. God's people live today in exciting times.

Endnotes

¹ Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus Detlev Schulz (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press/Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 44.

² Stolle, *Luther Texts on Mission*, 41.