

Vulnerability in Mission

Rich Carter

Abstract: This article explores personal vulnerability in eight facets of human and mission life: spiritual, intellectual, occupational, physical, financial, social-interpersonal, sexual, and emotional. Professional readings and a number of missionary stories illustrate vulnerability in these facets. Confidence for the exploration comes from Christ's Gospel vulnerability for us.

In the beginning of the first period of the course on Christian doctrine, I jumped up on a classroom table. Three cell phones whipped out to take a picture of the professor in an odd place. Pointing to myself, looking down at the students, with a commanding air and a passion hard to convey in printed word, I announced, "Three masters degrees and one and two-thirds doctorates! Who has all the answers here?! Who knows the territory? Are there any questions?" The humor of the moment—the picture taking—died down and sobriety set in. It was clear who was in control. "Unless, of course," I said, stepping down gently from the table, taking a seat on the floor in the midst of the students at their tables, looking up at them, "unless, of course, I am witnessing from my vulnerability."

I adapted that line from a textbook for the course. I continue to use it.¹ Here I apply it to mission endeavors. Not only in the classroom but also in mission, "we witness from our vulnerability." In this article, "mission" refers certainly to the common and useful concept, "overseas or at least cross-cultural sharing of the Gospel." Many of the comments and anecdotes to follow will relate to cross-cultural, overseas mission. But I have come to recognize that my parents engaged in mission in the San Francisco Peninsula sixty-five years ago. They opened our home for a Sunday School in a community without one.² "Mission" in this article refers broadly to God's work getting out God's Word—Himself—in Jesus' name, however we name the mission workers, whatever their geography.³

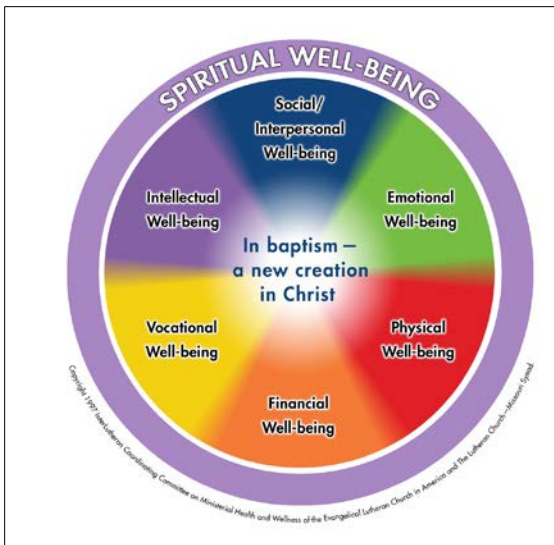
In this article, "vulnerability" refers to human weakness. Chinks in the armor. Gaps. Non-perfect places (there are lots of those) in our lives. Yes, *our* lives—human, Christian. This article on vulnerability in mission is part research, part observation, part personal engagement. I invite you to get (more deeply) acquainted

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with your vulnerabilities. Given that our Lord was vulnerable, even unto death, I invite you to recognize the permission to embrace your weaknesses, your vulnerabilities—and to anticipate the surprise of the resurrections God can provide.

A Wheel of Vulnerability

A frame of reference for looking at (personal) vulnerability in mission is the Wholeness Wheel prepared by the InterLutheran Commission on Ministerial Health:⁴ Not least for our death (vulnerability) and resurrection in Baptism at its center, and spiritual well-being surrounding all other forms of well-being, this diagram serves



well for personal planning and reflection. It is called a Wholeness Wheel but can help us see our holes. A weakness of the diagram is its use of “vocational.” A Lutheran understanding of vocation hears God calling in every sphere, every slice of this pie and its spiritual frame/crust. The designer could have served better by naming this segment “occupational.” A strength of the wheel, besides its center and circumference, is the interconnection of all the slices of the pie. The distinctions in six categories

are useful, but the categories cannot be separated one from the other any more than with a good apple pie you can neatly put the apple slices in one segment or another.

This diagram serves here as a catalog of categories of vulnerability. Comments or stories will explore some vulnerability in each slice of the pie. In each category, I offer a strong, healthy recognition of weakness, in some cases preceded by stories of a masquerade, that is, trying to hide weakness with strength or control rather than face it. Not least because our Lord comments that His strength will be evident in our weakness, and that He became weak for us, I invite you to taste the various slices.⁵

Spiritual Vulnerability

“Spiritual vulnerability? Excuse me? Christ is risen from the dead. Why speak of weakness among us victorious Christians?” Well, yes. The war is over, but there

are still battles to be won. If I understand correctly recent practice of mission by the Board and Office of International Mission of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), pastoral/spiritual care for (overseas, cross-cultural) LCMS missionaries is a significant priority. If we believe that God acts graciously by Word and Sacrament in the Office of Ministry (Augsburg Confession V), then such pastoral office attention to spiritual weakness is a wise and natural part of mission work. But there is more to consider of our spiritual weaknesses.

Commonly in the Western tradition, “spiritual” has to do with our sinfulness and sins. We know about those, that kind of vulnerability. Much of the world and our Christian sisters and brothers can teach elements of vulnerability to spirits quite new to Western ways of thinking. What might we learn of spiritual vulnerability from colleagues in mission?

Former U.S. missionary to Africa Paul Bruns tells this story from Nigeria among several stories of spiritual vulnerability (and God’s strength): **“Peter will die in two days.”** Peter, a typist from the beginning for the Bokyí translation project, got very sick in the closing weeks of the project. Called on by Peter’s Christian aunt Katherine, translator/missionary Bruns drove to the juju [spirit] priest’s compound to bring Peter home. The priest stepped in the way, objecting. Missionary Bruns continues:

I don’t remember the exact Bokyí words that I used, but I told him very sternly, “In Jesus’ name, get out of our way because Peter is coming with us!” He reacted like I had struck him with a *physical* blow! He jerked back and stepped aside; and we got in the car and drove away. (Obviously they were not merely my own words but had the authority of our Lord himself.)⁶

They brought Peter to Paul’s house, where the visit and spiritual warfare continued. In an animistic setting,

physical illness is viewed as merely a symptom of a *spiritual* illness; and it can only be cured by the medicine...of animistic sacrifices. . . . Since most of Peter’s family believed the priest when he told them that Peter would die in just two days, they sent two delegations to Paul’s house hoping to take Peter back to the priest, but Paul, of course, refused to yield. And then two groups of Christians surprised Paul by coming to support Peter with their prayers.⁷

Missionary Bruns concludes, “Peter stayed with us a few more days. . . . He slowly recovered and returned to work a few months later. Thank you, Jesus!”⁸

Paul tells this story of fellow missionary to Nigeria, John Fajen.

The Fajens had been living in Ukele about ten years. . . . One day his village Chief and some village elders came with a request. “Would you please come and (physically) destroy this *juju* [“idol”] for us? It’s killing too many

people and we're afraid to do it." John said, "Thank you very much! What makes you think that it won't kill me?!" They said, "Oh, we've tried *that* many times and it *never worked*." (And because it was they who requested him to do so, John went and destroyed it in Jesus' name)⁹

The good news, says Brunson, is that the longer we lived in the midst of Animism the wiser we became. Every day we saw a society that St. Paul describes perfectly in Galatians 5:19–21. And, of course, our daily devotions and prayers became much more important to us. How much [my wife] and I needed each other and the prayers of those who were supporting us!¹⁰

HMong Lutheran Pastor Kou Seying notes from Ephesians 6:12 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (NIV). He writes, "There is no denial that the biblical worldview and the worldview of the traditional HMong people . . . share the same reality, unlike the secularized minds that deny the real world of spiritual forces that are active on earth."

Seying notes further, "Since the line between physical and spiritual realm cannot be drawn, [all] afflictions are spiritual." He recounts the story of a HMong family moving into and out of Christian faith as they struggled with illness in the family. A turning point came when the long-ill daughter, attending the baptism of a granddaughter, found peace and comfort in the Christian worship service. Still he notes a challenge in the neighborhood of miracles,

The line between sacramental efficacy (a blessing from God) and magical efficacy (Satan's manipulation of power through the human acts) becomes quite blurred when the power encounter is not clearly defined. On the one hand, the Christian operates from the point of grace through faith that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work. On the other hand, the animist will operate from the manipulative realm of spiritual power that can only be understood under the category of magical efficacy. If not careful, the Christian can easily fall into the magical efficacy without even realizing it. This is a real danger in the mission context since the pressure is so great to "perform" a miraculous act by turning God's circumstantial will into His ultimate will.¹¹

Intellectual Vulnerability

As the LCMS practices mission internationally and nationally,¹² she sends out highly educated servants. That practice emphasizes the Office of Pastoral Ministry. Recently, the LCMS has opened wider the doors to pastoral ministry not requiring four years of residential seminary study. Churches around the world are served by

pastors with much less training; and the heritage of the LCMS includes men serving with much less preparation. Intellectual strength is valuable but may cover blind spots and weakness.

In 1981 orientation to missionary service on behalf of the LCMS, Rev. John Fajen taught intellectual vulnerability. A major theme of his presentations was this: Where you are going, whose country and culture is it? Who knows the territory? Who knows how to get things done? We were invited, virtually ordered, to a position of intellectual vulnerability.

In spite of Fajen's teaching, I carried my weakness and blindness with me overseas. What did it look like? Two stories. At a time when I with my family was alone (in the midst of half a million Nigerians in our city!), with no nearby American missionary competence, our manual water pump would not work. I fussed for how many days? When I asked for help from my Nigerian neighbor, he fixed it in five minutes. Also, at the time of a major community gathering in our area, I was walking ahead of two Nigerians engaged in animated English conversation about the loss of local culture and tradition, not least traditional knowledge of spirits. Knowing that the one who had just spoken was a professor holding an earned doctorate, I thought and felt to myself, "How can anyone who is so intelligent as to hold a doctorate actually believe in spirits?!" My intellectual "strength" had cut me off from perspectives and realities better known by friends and neighbors around the globe, schooled or not.

Most recently I saw intellectual strength and weakness in a story told by Rev. Nathan Esala, overseas missionary for Lutheran Bible Translators in Ghana: "Foxes and Rabbits."¹³ Esala is intellectually strong enough to be earning a doctorate, but it was the local Ghanaian pastor with limited formal education who taught Esala a significant theological point. In the pastor's preaching, he made a point about the local language and culture that Esala had missed and simultaneously preached to him a deeper view of a Luke passage and the Gospel of Jesus' suffering for us.

Against Western, English, and LCMS intellectual strength, Esala noted that "further research into the Palestinian world at the time of Jesus suggests that 'fox' was not even the animal being referenced there. Instead it was more like a jackal, a pack animal, and it was not necessarily known for its craftiness or wisdom even in the Bible. This could easily have been an insult that Jesus was giving to Herod. We are not even the best scholars it turns out."¹⁴

Occupational (Vocational) Vulnerability

You may have heard this comment about occupational responsibilities in overseas mission: On the surface, it appears that the guy—the pastor—has the challenge and the spouse has things easy. Things at the house are normal, cooking

and laundry. The occupation is hard, in a different language and culture, perhaps in a different time orientation, etc. The overseas missionary (pastor) has a tough row to hoe while the spouse just covers the home front. Below the surface the reverse is true. The missionary still heads off to work, even if that means walking the streets of a village rather than heading to the office at church, while the spouse has to figure out whole new ways to cook and wash clothes. Identity as one who manages household tasks is much more at risk than identity as one whose profession is going out to be helpful to people.

But there is risk also on the “job” front. I watched a pastor, fresh from seminary and all those years of professional schooling, stumble, fall, and head back to the U.S. The assumption was a failure of the pastor and his family’s adapting: They couldn’t cope overseas, cross-culturally. A reasonable assumption, but perhaps the pastor had ever before had to work, actually, in any setting. What he took to be failure in the overseas cross-cultural context may well have been failure in the hard knocks of getting and holding one’s first, serious job.

A personal and/or professional mission statement is a tool for acknowledging and responding to occupational vulnerability. Having taken time to develop and review my mission statement, I can more freely acknowledge detours and wrong turns in the attempt to serve in mission. I once walked out of a classroom at the end of an hour having completely missed my objectives for that hour. But my overriding mission in teaching is “to engage these participants with this material.” Clearly we had engaged. I could find strength in the midst of my weakness, in the midst of the apparent failure. The same could be said, e.g., of language learning. SMART objective for the day: ten new words correctly pronounced in the local language. A failure—well, OK, a “D”—if at day’s end I am pronouncing only six correctly. I am still, with my weakness, making progress in the larger mission goal. I grew professionally when my language helper chided me one afternoon. I was trying to pronounce words exactly right in the local language with its tonal variations. I was putting my all into it, and not getting it. (The difference between what in English is “lord” and “mosquito” was the slightest change of emphasis on one syllable in the local language—two entirely different sermons if you don’t get that right!) “Don’t worry,” he said to this white American in a Black African context. “They never will mistake you for a native.” There was success in the missionary occupational goal even in the midst of objective failure.

Physical Vulnerability

One of the origins of this article is the vulnerability of a friend intentionally in mission in a country I can’t name. Email addresses and their content need to be neutral. If I and others who care for him miswrite him, he would be at least at risk of physical removal from the country where he serves, if not at risk of imprisonment or

immediate harm. You may well know people in comparable or worse situations. I have read recently of the remaining local Christians in Mosul, Iraq, and the tragedy of their being forced from or choosing to leave their homes in the context not just of war but of intentional removal by Islamic civil war leadership in their area. Their mission, along with their daily lives, is physically at risk.

Other physical vulnerabilities also affect serving in (overseas, cross-cultural) mission. Ivan Rasch grew up as a missionary kid (MK) in Nigeria; his father was an MK who grew up in India. His older brother Michael was diagnosed in 1972 with Duchene Muscular Dystrophy; that physical vulnerability did not settle the family back in the U.S. The physical vulnerability that settled them in the U.S. was the father's death. Enough siblings and friends supported Ivan's mom and brother, however, that Ivan, his wife, and children went on to serve for more than a decade in Nigeria. In July 2013, as the physical stress on the home front with Michael increased, Ivan asked his mission agency for permission to be based in Texas. He would support stateside orientation for and then actually host overseas mission teams to West Africa. The request was denied; the physical vulnerability of the extended family brought the missionary home.

Ivan's wife, Jennifer, ran into her own physical vulnerability while the family served in West Africa. Jennifer served overseas for more than a decade, teaching music in Hillcrest School in Nigeria through 2012. The sudden onset of seizures in 2010 upended her normal work routine, but high school students and parents helped her deal with the seizures and fear of seizures. The physical—and occupational—vulnerability appeared with full force in 2012. Her mission agency pulled her and her family from Nigeria for what they viewed as the physical risk of mission families remaining in that country.

Physical vulnerability for Jack Carlos appeared in West Africa some years back in the form of Atypical Parkinson's Disease. He notes,

I was in a health situation that I could no longer manage myself on the field. I was a risk to not only myself but also my wife because of my declining physical health. I was at risk because of my balance which caused falling, [and] blood pressure drops which would cause me to pass out. . . . Because of the situation everyone had been put into risk because they are trying to take care of me. . . .

The focus of God's mission was lost because instead of sharing the gospel, people became focused on my health situation. My health situation will not improve so it is not an option to return [to West Africa].¹⁵

"God will continue God's mission," Jack notes confidently, but Jack's physical vulnerability has rearranged how that will happen.¹⁶

Financial Vulnerability

Mission sending agencies may insist on financial strength with good reason. “We will not allow you to leave for your (cross-cultural, overseas) mission assignment until X% of your annual costs is committed in pledges/in the bank/etc.” That is one way to address financial vulnerability, to meet it with financial strength. As I understand this kind of choice in the practice of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, it relates to the loss, some years back, of many in (cross-cultural, overseas) service when the “bank” in St. Louis pretty much ran dry. The Synod’s financial weakness in mission brought missionaries back to the U.S. Behind the strength of an apparent sturdy church body loomed serious weakness which eventually handicapped the mission.¹⁷

A contrast involves accepting rather than defending against financial vulnerability. In the current practice of the World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), home office staff and those serving outside the U.S. share a common “pay” (stipend) scale, adjusted for the number in the family. There is a common pot to sustain those whose individual donations for a month might not reach the stipend level, but if that pot is only 85% full, then for those individuals, support for the month is 85% of the stipend. Accepting financial vulnerability shows up most clearly this way in WMPL: its commitment and practice that those connected with it do no fund-raising. The League understands itself not as a mission sending agency, which could include fund-raising, but as a mission prayer agency, trusting God to provide finances as He sees fit in response to praying, in the context of His Gospel.¹⁸

Social-Interpersonal Vulnerability

Kurtis Smith, an LCMS Director of Christian Outreach, notes the value of social, shared vulnerability from his experience in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

It was not my desire to call FEMA at 2:00 a.m., but it needed to be done. Like thousands of others, our house in Slidell, Louisiana, was damaged by the storm. . . . When the word came that the best time to call FEMA was in the middle of the night, I cussed under my breath and made the call—despite my desire to be in bed.

Several months later, [when I was] serving as a disaster relief coordinator, my story about calling FEMA at 2:00 a.m. and other such personal recovery experiences allowed me to connect with other victims in ways that most disaster responders were not able. I made immediate local connections and was easily able to build relationships of trust with those in need. I was one of them. We shared frustrations. We shared stories about the challenges of raising our young kids in a horrific scenario. We shared tears. Victims could

find hope in the fact that our family had gone through their same struggles, “come out on the other side,” and I was now able to now help them.¹⁹

Kurtis continues:

I do not wish disaster, calamity, or any struggles upon others. Nobody in their right mind enjoys suffering. Personally, I questioned God and had to release control of my entire life at the point when all seemed lost: our money wasn't accessible, our telephones didn't work, I didn't have a job, our house was damaged, our neighborhood was inaccessible, our government was absent, we couldn't even find our pastor or other church members and questioned if some of our friends were dead. However, I must admit that God used my own family's Hurricane Katrina experience, our vulnerability, our pain, and our tears in order to open doors for outreach and share Jesus' love to others over the course of our next five years of disaster relief. It wasn't my plan but it was His mission. To God be the glory.²⁰

Social-interpersonal vulnerability in the context of mission overseas may be connected with culture shock. We in the U.S. are perhaps far enough down the road that most missio-sending agencies provide orientation to culture shock, even to reverse culture shock and to care for TCKs (Third-culture kids) when they return home. TCKs live not quite in this country or that one but in a blended, challenging and invigorating land. A young friend Timmy tells his story this way:

I lived in Nigeria for 12 years. It was my home. LCMS ripped me from my home with only two days' notice because they viewed Nigeria as a war zone. What they didn't realize was that they were pulling me out of paradise and putting me in a war zone called American Public High School. I have spent the past two years of my life trying to figure out this foreign planet that is supposed to be my home and have had little to no success until this summer when I attended an MK reentry seminar. If not for that, I would still be feeling lost and hopeless.²¹

Sexual Vulnerability

Nowhere in the circle, but likely spread through many of the pieces of the pie, would be sexual vulnerability. This point, not least in a hyper-sexualized American culture, could be both skipped over—can we get on with the rest of life, please?—and seriously tended to.²² How do we address in Christian context the reality of our sexual selves and sexuality? Our sexuality was created good by God in Eden. It has been so trashed since, but comes with us into the new creation. We can choose to find appropriate conversations and relationships in which to address our vulnerability and celebrate the gifts.

Emotional Vulnerability

In part I write this entire article attending to the various slices of the pie of mission vulnerability because of this category: emotional life. In my life, at least, it has been too easily neglected.

Such neglect is a premise for the book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. The author proposes that acknowledging emotional weakness—embracing it—is a mark of health; denying or not seeing our emotional weakness is a choice that can kill ministry and mission. I am quoting him here at length for your consideration.

Emotional health is concerned with such things as:

- naming, recognizing, and managing our own feelings. . .
- being aware of how our past impacts our present
- developing the capacity to express our thoughts and feelings clearly, both verbally and nonverbally; . . .
- learning the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others; . . . and
- grieving well.²³

. . . The sinister voices of the surrounding world and our pasts are powerful. They repeat the deeply held negative beliefs we may have learned in our families and cultures growing up:

I am a burden. . . .

I am not allowed to make mistakes.

I must be approved of by certain people to feel okay. . . .

I don't have the right to assert myself and say what I think and feel. . . .

I am valued based on my intelligence, wealth, and what I do, not for who I am.²⁴

Getting off our thrones and joining the rest of humanity is a must for growing up. A part of us hates limits. We won't accept them. This is part of the reason why grieving loss biblically is such an indispensable part of spiritual maturity. It humbles us like little else.²⁵

. . . We [can] quit pretending to be something we are not. We admit our weaknesses and limitations to a friend, spouse, parents, or someone else who cares about our development. [unless we choose not to develop].²⁶

But remember, resurrection only comes out of death—real death. Our losses are real. And so is our God, the living God.²⁷

There are many rich fruits that blossom in our lives as a result of embracing our losses. The greatest, however, concerns our relationship to God. We move from a “Give me, give me, give me” prayer life to an intimate, loving

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prayer life characterized by loving union with God. When we grieve God's way, we are changed forever.²⁸

Jesus himself said, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of what falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."²⁹

Christ's Vulnerability³⁰

To this point, this article focuses on vulnerability in the practice of mission, whether that mission is overseas or in the house where I grew up. Each slice of the pie matters, as does the crust, the surrounding frame of spiritual wellness and vulnerability. This article invites the reader and everyone in mission to get acquainted with, respect, and handle with care their various vulnerabilities. That invitation can be extended because of the context of the Christian Gospel—because of the baptismal center of the Wholeness Wheel. To be in Christian mission is to be in the context of the God who made Himself vulnerable, vulnerable even unto death.

While it is monstrosly tempting to count ourselves as strong and successful in mission—we can, after all, pluck the fruit off the tree—counting ourselves as limited, weak, and vulnerable is closer to the truth and the Truth. The person "deserves to be called a theologian [and missionary] who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."³¹ "Christian theology must address itself to the experiences and realities that mark the fallen character of human existence, since the Christian kerygma itself is a message of God's response to human need and thus is the answer to those experienced realities."³²

God's response? A recent sermon put it this way: "Instead of identifying with Christ as ever faithful, loving servants of all people, we could better identify with those whom Christ served, the weak and the needy."³³

Climb down from the table. Look up at those in whose midst you are in mission. Thank God that He was first in your place, in Christ.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 16.

² The Sunday School grew into a congregation. If I have understood the story correctly (I was four at the time), when the gathered Sunday School families tried to organize as a congregation of the LCMS, they were at first rebuffed by the mission leaders of the district. I wonder what strengths and weaknesses were at work.

³ Richard Carter, "What Do Simple Folk Do: A Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as Mission Work," *Missio Apostolica* 14, no. 1 (May 2006).

⁴ The fine print on the wheel tells you that it is copyright 1997 by the InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, available at <http://www.wheatridge.org/wholenesswheel>. David Muench, Director of Ministerial Care for Concordia Plans, has shared a slightly modified version of the wheel at <http://www.concordiaplans.org/DetailPage.aspx?ID=462>, and writes that “if you go to www.ministrycare.net you will find the Concordia Plans version in an interactive format, as it is used to organize various resources for ministerial care. (Personal communication, July 28, 2014)

⁵ My thanks to the many people who in the preparation of this article have shared their experience with vulnerability. My thanks to all of them for their strength and their willingness to contribute to an article about weakness.

⁶ Personal communication, July 29, 2014 and Oct. 1, 2014, about his recently published memoirs, *How Gracious of God!* (St. Louis, Lutheran Society for Missiology, 2014).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Personal communication, July 30, 2014.

¹² The LCMS structures mission under two boards, one for international and one for national mission. An Evangelical Lutheran Church in America leader commented to me two decades ago that the LCMS was a pioneer in recognizing the U.S. as a mission field.

¹³ See “Foxes and Rabbits” at <http://esalas.org/building-the-walls-video/>.

¹⁴ Personal communication, July 25, 2014.

¹⁵ Personal communication, July 30, 2014.

¹⁶ Personal communication, July 30, 2014.

¹⁷ Financial vulnerability as an intentional choice as part of the practice of contextualization appears in this link <http://www.vulnerablemission.org/>, which notes also language and culture learning struggles touched on here under other topics.

¹⁸ My thanks to Jeff Dahl of the World Mission Prayer League staff for updating and clarifying the financial operations of the League.

¹⁹ Personal communication, August 1, 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Personal communication, August 1, 2014.

²² In one particular missionary orientation/training program, this was the only vulnerability to get its own session. Good that it was mentioned; but what about weakness and sin in other areas of our lives?

²³ Peter Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 45.

²⁴ Ibid., 53.

²⁵ Ibid., 149.

²⁶ Ibid., 150.

²⁷ Ibid., 152.

²⁸ Ibid., 152.

²⁹ Ibid., 152.

³⁰ If the emphasis on Christ seems limited in quantity in this article, be assured that that does not mean a limit in quality. Pastor Jim Bender (at that time at St. Stephanus in St. Paul, MN)

preached some years back on the Gospel reading about the man born blind. “Who sinned?” was the question, “this man or his parents?” Pastor Bender spent about eleven minutes and thirty seconds on “law,” on the reality of parental “damage” to children, its impact in families, and the importance of our caring for those whose families have given them a problematic upbringing. “Of course, that kind of upbringing has happened to all of us. It’s called sin. That’s why Jesus died for us. Amen.” The proportions of time were way out of balance in favor of law, of things for us to do. The impact was way out of proportion in favor of Gospel. May you find this article at least a little similar in its proposal that we are all vulnerable and that, in Christ, that’s OK.

³¹ Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” as cited in *Luther’s Works*, Volume 31, *Career of the Reformer: I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 40.

³² Matthew Becker, “Werner Elert (1885–1954),” in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, Mark C. Mattes, ed. (Goettingen/Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

³³ Vicar Peter Vang, speaking at St. Stephanus Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN, July 27, 2014.