

# **A Theological Statement of Mission**



**THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD**

Prepared by

**The Commission on Theology and Church Relations**

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# A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT OF MISSION

## Preface

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at its 1986 convention asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to “initiate, facilitate, and develop a theological Statement of Mission” which will “reflect the urgency, vitality, and joy of our historic confession of Christ’s forgiveness by grace alone through faith alone as taught in Scripture alone.” The time has come, said the Synod, “to support more fervently the Biblical mandate to proclaim the scriptural Gospel of Jesus Christ for the life and salvation of people everywhere” (1986 Resolution 3-02; cf. Ephesians 5:16).

The Synod stressed that in preparing “a theological Statement of Mission” the Commission be mindful of such a statement’s impact on and implications for Christ’s mission at every level of the Synod’s life and activity. This statement was not envisioned as an end in itself but as a tool that would be available for possible use by the various units of the Synod as they seek to develop their own individual mission statements.

Toward that end, A Theological Statement of Mission seeks to set forth the theological framework for understanding our place in God’s mission, including

- the *basis* of our participation, God’s saving work for us in Jesus Christ;
- the *nature* of our participation, as God’s agents empowered by the Holy Spirit;
- the *source* of our motivation, God’s love for us and the world.

This Statement consists of eight sections, each devoted to a key theological theme. At the end of the Statement, questions relating to each section are offered for reflection and discussion. These questions are intended to help congregations and organizations of the Synod develop individual mission statements as they apply the theological truths presented in the Statement to their own specific settings of mission and ministry. The hope is that through this process the members of the Synod will develop a clearer understanding of their personal involvement in God’s mission and be moved to participate in it with greater joy, fervor, and enthusiasm.

## Introduction

The word *missions* traditionally has been associated with the church's evangelistic outreach, both locally and perhaps primarily to foreign lands. The focus has been on bringing people to a true knowledge of their sin and of their Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. "Mission Festivals" once took place regularly in many congregations to highlight and support this vital work.

This is certainly part of what *missions* means. However, there has been a growing recognition that everything the church does to communicate and demonstrate Christ's love for the world is an expression of God's sending and seeking love. At the same time, the word *mission* has increasingly been used to refer to the concern of Christ and his church for the physical and social well-being of individuals and society. This use of the word *mission*, when understood in the context of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, has Scriptural validity and important implications for the church's ministry. Yet it raises the question of whether the definition of *mission* might become so all-encompassing that it ultimately means nothing.

Businesses and public agencies have also begun to make use of the term *mission*. Carefully drafted "mission statements" identify their purpose and target their markets. Automobile manufacturers and fast-food chains, for example, use such statements to promote their reasons for existence and their "high standards of service." This phenomenon has added an element of ambiguity and confusion to the contemporary use of the term *mission* and of mission statements.

The value of a mission statement is that it expresses an organization's purpose. It serves to focus the organization's efforts and to keep its objectives clearly in view as it strives to fulfill its goals. The risk in formulating and presenting a statement of mission in such a context is that the church may be perceived as carrying out its "business" in much the same way as does the world. A statement of mission can easily become a description of what "we" are striving to do and accomplish rather than a statement of what God has done and is doing for, in, and through his church. The Synod's request for "a theological Statement of Mission" manifests its desire to move forward resolutely and fervently in proclaiming the Gospel so that the lost may be found and God's people may be empowered for their witness and service.

A final word is in order regarding the CTCR's understanding of this assignment. After much discussion and deliberation, the CTCR decided to take quite literally the Synod's request for "a theological Statement of Mission." The Commission regarded this as a request for something not so lengthy as to discourage use, yet something more than a brief one-page mission statement. It understood this as a request to prepare something that would *concisely* and yet *comprehensively* delineate, clarify, and strengthen the Synod's understanding of the *theological* foundation on which our *mission*—our reason for being—is built.

May our gracious Lord use this resource to move us, as individuals and as a church, to carry out his mandate to make disciples of all nations.

## I. MISSION BEGINS IN THE HEART OF GOD

From God's "GO!" to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, to God's "GO!" dispatching Jonah to the city of Nineveh, from Christ's "GO!" to the seventy in Luke 10:3, to the great "GO THEREFORE" of Matthew 28:19, the Scriptures reveal a God always active in mission.

Mission begins in the heart of God and expresses his great love for the world. It is the Lord's gracious initiative and ongoing activity to save a world incapable of saving itself.

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

Scripture portrays this active, searching, enfolding love of God (Ezekiel 34, Luke 15) from the first promise of the Savior to Adam and Eve in the garden to the promise of Christ's second coming in the book of Revelation. From beginning to end the mission is God's, as he acts according to his eternal plan (Ephesians 1) to restore his fallen creation to himself. The Bible demonstrates clearly that God

. . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

God will bring his mission to completion on the day Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead and to gather all believers to himself. In loving patience our Lord delays the time of the end so that the Gospel might be preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14).

The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

God fervently desires that the day of judgment may be for all not a day of terror but one of unspeakable joy and thanksgiving, as every tongue joins in confessing

. . . that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

The mission will end as it began—in the heart of the Lord.

## II. GOD'S MISSION IS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF SIN

Without God's mission life would be dark and hopeless, since

. . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

When human beings, the crown of God's glorious creation, listened to the voice of the tempter and rebelled against their Creator, dread consequences followed.

Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned (Romans 5:12).

Sin is not a minor human frailty, but a deadly disease which has infected the entire human race.

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one (Romans 3:10-12).

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

“Since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature . . . are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God” (Augsburg Confession II, 1). Sinners are helpless to change or improve this condition by their own efforts, sincerity, or good works, since

. . . all men . . . are under the power of sin (Romans 3:9);

. . . no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law (Romans 3:20).

The harmony that originally characterized God's created order has also been disrupted by sin. We live in a fallen world where, instead of peace and love, sins like lust and greed, hatred and jealousy, domination and exploitation wound and destroy. All sins of thought, word, and deed bring pain and grief into human relationships, and also ruin the harmony between human beings and nature. The creation itself was “subjected to futility” so that it knows only a “bondage to decay” and is “groaning in travail” under the burden of sin (Romans 8:19-22).

Delighting in all of this is the devil, the ancient serpent, who works contrary to God's purposes by tempting people to sin and seducing them with his lies. He works desperately and continually to keep people from hearing and trusting the Good News of God's salvation in Christ.

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Most dreadful of all the consequences of sin is that it “condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again” through faith and the Holy Spirit (Augsburg Confession II, 2; John 3:18; Ephesians 2:3). As unpleasant and unpopular as they may be, these sobering realities of sin and God’s wrath must be faced and confessed in order for us to recognize the necessity and urgency of God’s rescue mission in Christ.

### III. GOD'S MISSION CENTERS IN JESUS CHRIST

Even before the foundation of the world, God had his plan to reconcile the world to himself through Jesus Christ,

. . . to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

Long before the coming of Christ, God was at work unfolding his eternal plan through people like Abraham and Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Rahab and Ruth, Samuel and David, Isaiah and Jeremiah. They served to point to the Christ by word and by deed. Through events such as the Passover and the Exodus God foreshadowed his mission of salvation. This mission would find its fulfillment in the promised Messiah. Through the Temple with its priesthood and sacrifices, God mediated the forgiveness that had its source in the blood of Christ, the perfect Sacrifice to come. He vowed:

I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus was “very God of very God” (Nicene Creed) yet at the same time truly human. By his life, he perfectly satisfied all the demands of God’s law. By his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus atoned for the sin of the world, suffered the wrath of God for all people, crushed the head of the devil, and opened wide heaven’s gates. By his resurrection from the dead, Christ sealed his victory over sin, death and the devil.

“O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Through faith alone in Jesus Christ and his completed work, repentant sinners

- are credited with Christ’s own holiness (Galatians 3:27; 2 Corinthians 5:21) and receive full and free forgiveness for all their sins (Colossians 1:14);
- are restored to communion with their Creator and receive power to live a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17);
- are set free from the power of the devil and the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57);



- await the day of judgement confidently, knowing that they are among those who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14).

The church, according to God’s plan, joyfully proclaims Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8-10).

Amidst the bewildering array of false “gospels” being trumpeted in our world today, the church steadfastly confesses that there is salvation in no other name under heaven (Acts 4:12), and announces to everyone the sure and certain Good News that

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16 NKJV).

## **IV. GOD’S MISSION IS EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

So that the world might receive the benefits of Jesus’ completed work of salvation, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7). The third person of the Trinity, true God from eternity

- was active with the Father and the Son in the work of creation (Genesis 1:2);
- spoke by the prophets, revealing God’s promises of the Messiah (2 Peter 1:21);
- was manifested at Jesus’ baptism as he began his public ministry (Acts 10:38; John 1:32-33);
- empowered the church on the day of Pentecost to proclaim the message, “Repent, and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:33, 38; Luke 24:45-49);
- continues to enliven every believer in Christ to be active in the church’s mission (1 John 3:24; 4:13; Romans 8:5).

Jesus promised his disciples:

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (John 6:63).

The fulfillment of these promises is vividly portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. Again and again people are filled with the Spirit through Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel. God pours out this same promised Holy Spirit today through Word and sacrament, the means by which he creates and nourishes faith. “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (Augsburg Confession V, 1-2; Ephesians 4:11-13). Through the Gospel as revealed in Scripture, the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (Small Catechism, Apostles’ Creed).

The work of the Spirit, “the Lord and Giver of life” (Nicene Creed), is vital to God’s mission, for

. . . no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3);

. . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

The Holy Spirit first convicts people of their sin and unbelief, convincing them—through God’s law—of their need for forgiveness (John 16:8-11). He then draws them to Christ through the Gospel and enables them to trust his Word of forgiveness. The Spirit continues his work through Word and sacrament to activate, equip and empower all believers for participation in God’s mission.

Therefore we need not be overwhelmed or discouraged by the size of the task, the fierceness of the enemy, or the weakness of those who serve. The Spirit is with us—indeed, he dwells in us!—to empower us for our work in God’s mission (Acts 1:8; John 14:16).

## V. GOD'S MISSION IS TO AND FOR EVERYONE

Even as the Father sent his Son to lay down his life for the salvation of the whole world, so God now sends his sons and daughters to bring the message of salvation to men, women, and children of every nation and language (John 20:21). Both the mandate and the means of Christ's all-embracing mission are clearly given in his "Great Commission":

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

The church announces the good news that God cares for all people without making any distinction based on race, class, or any other earthly criteria. It proclaims the message of Christ's reconciling work to young and old, rich and poor, male and female, powerful and oppressed, healthy and sick, well-fed and hungry, friend and stranger, countryman and alien. The people of God strive to remove every human or sinful barrier that would keep others from hearing and taking seriously the Gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:3).

As they have received Christ's forgiveness and love, and looking to Christ's own example, God's people have a special concern to demonstrate compassion to those who are neglected, persecuted, or discriminated against by the world. The church endeavors to ensure that its proclamation of the Gospel is accompanied by deeds of love, mercy and justice which flow from the message it proclaims (1 John 3:16-18).

As it strives to bring Christ's love and forgiveness to everyone, the church is reminded constantly of its own need for that same love and forgiveness. God's mission is to and for *everyone*—including those who claim it as their own. Because they "daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment" (Small Catechism, The Lord's Prayer), God's people, daily living in their Baptism, need to look to Christ's cross for forgiveness to be renewed and invigorated for their God-given task.

Already now the church celebrates in the body and blood of Christ the feast that culminates on the day when Christ will come to gather his people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9), who will join "myriads of myriads" of angels in singing:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! . . . To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever! . . . Amen! (Revelation 5:12-14).

Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb! (Revelation 7:10).

## VI. GOD'S MISSION IS OUR MISSION

When the Holy Spirit calls us to faith through the Gospel, he brings us into Christ's body, the church.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Faith in Christ is not merely a "personal" matter, a private relationship between "me and Jesus." In our individualistic age and culture, God's Word reminds us that each individual believer was born of the Spirit into a *family* of believers. We are all children of the same heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Therefore our Lord urges us, through the apostle, to

. . . stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

As members of the one body of Christ, the "one holy Christian and apostolic Church" (Nicene Creed), we work together in God's mission. We know that outside the church—that is, "where Christ is not preached" (Large Catechism II, 45)—there is no salvation.

Because God's mission confronts the enemy and invades his territory, it evokes his opposition and ridicule. The Lord equips us with "the whole armor of God" for this struggle (Ephesians 6:10-18) and binds us together as his people to support and strengthen each other for the task he has given us to do. He enables us to

- confess a common faith (1 Corinthians 1:10);
- encourage each other to persevere in the faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11);
- teach and admonish each other with his Word (Colossians 3:16);
- pray for and with each other (Acts 2:42);
- bring comfort to those in need (2 Corinthians 1:3-4);
- urge each other to be faithful in the various callings he has entrusted to us (Colossians 3:18-4:1);

- alert each other to opportunities for service and personal witness (Romans 12);
- use the various gifts he has given us to edify Christ's body, the church (1 Peter 4:10-11);
- forgive each other as Christ has forgiven us (Colossians 3:13);
- give of our time, treasure and talents cheerfully and sacrificially, out of love for our Lord and each other (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 John 4:19-20);
- show care and concern for all people and all creation (Galatians 6:10, Genesis 1:28);
- help each other to seek our neighbor's welfare throughout our society (Jeremiah 29:7).

United by our common confession of the Gospel, we reach beyond our own congregations to join hands with other congregations, to undertake tasks that require the cooperation of a larger group of Christians. We thank God for the unity of faith demonstrated in Circuit, District, and Synod, whereby we can

- train pastors, teachers and other workers for God's mission;
- develop programs and materials for congregations and schools;
- equip and send missionaries to other cultures and people;
- establish new congregations;
- carry out research to equip us better for our work;
- address critical issues that affect our church, nation and world.

The one Gospel of Jesus Christ leads us to rejoice in the oneness we share with all Christians in the body of Christ. For that very reason we lament the differences in doctrine that still exist among Christians. We seek to work together with other Christians when this can be done without compromising God's Word or the Gospel of Christ. When this cannot be done, faithfulness to God's truth compels us to refrain from false appearances of doctrinal unity, while at the same time we work to overcome the divisions in the church by bearing witness to the whole truth of the Gospel.

We are especially grateful to God for the fellowship we enjoy with church bodies that confess with us the same doctrine of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20) as it is faithfully confessed in the Creeds, the Catechisms, the Augsburg Confession, and the other documents of the Book of Concord. Here we stand together, praying "that we keep pure till life is spent Your holy Word and Sacrament" (*Lutheran Worship* 344:2). We

pray that such partnership in the Gospel may continually be strengthened and enhanced by our gracious Lord, and that it may be used by him to accomplish the great work of world evangelization.

The Lord has called the church into existence and he carries out his mission in and through the church despite its many imperfections. For this we humbly thank and praise him, continually claiming for ourselves the same Gospel that we proclaim to others.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

## VII. GOD'S MISSION IS MY MISSION

The mission God gives to the whole church he also gives to each individual member of the church. In Holy Baptism God adopted each of us by name into his family, and called us to be involved personally in the task of reaching out to all people with his saving Gospel. In the Lord's Supper Jesus delivers to us in a most personal way "all the treasure he brought from heaven for us" in his own body and blood (Large Catechism V, 66-68). In his call to discipleship, Christ's "Follow me!" has been spoken to each one of us, extending to us all the blessings of his cross and granting us the privilege of carrying our own cross for his sake and the Gospel's. Not to be involved in passing on to others what God has freely given us is to misunderstand and misrepresent both the gift and the Giver.

Our personal involvement in God's mission takes place wherever we are—wherever God has placed us. Each of us, in our "station" or "calling" in life, is called to serve God and bear witness to his grace—whether as child, parent, husband, wife, citizen, employee, employer, government official, soldier, police officer, teacher, construction worker. As we serve faithfully "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 6:7), opportunities will arise to testify by word and deed to the hope that is within us as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15). On our shrinking planet, God provides numerous opportunities for witness and service where we live and far beyond.

As individual members of the body of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we strive

- to live the new life, which God's Spirit enables us to live (Romans 6:1-4; 8:12-14);
- to share, at every opportunity, the message of God's unconditional love for sinners (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10);
- to be nurtured in our relationship with God through regular and diligent searching of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11);
- to pray continually for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done (Matthew 6:10);
- to make the most of every opportunity to "do good to all . . . and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10);
- to identify and encourage qualified individuals for professional service in God's church (Matthew 9:37-38), even as we ourselves eagerly respond to God's call, saying

Here am I! Send me (Isaiah 6:8).



Each of us has received from God's hand grace upon grace, all flowing from the sacrificial service of the One who laid down his life for us on the cross. We cannot, therefore, leave the work of God's mission to "the church" in general or to "others" who may appear more gifted for the task or to "the pastor." What an honor it is to follow in the footsteps of God's Servant-Son, and to share with others the love he has so freely and fully bestowed on us! Each of us is a personal letter from Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 3:2-3), telling all who will listen of his grace, mercy, and power.

## VIII. GOD'S MISSION IS URGENT

God's mission is urgent because the time is short.

For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37 NIV).

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20).

Like our Lord, we must work while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work (John 9:4). The hour of our deliverance is at hand; but deliverance for us who believe means judgment for those who do not believe. The love of Christ constrains us to intensify our missionary efforts as we see the end drawing nearer, and as we see more and more people living and dying without true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The mission is also urgent because the powers of darkness are constantly at work in these last days, warring against the children of light and the kingdom of light. The war grows more intense as the end approaches, making it imperative for Christ's followers to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" in order to stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-13). With this in mind, we strive to "keep alert with all perseverance," to "pray at all times in the Spirit," and to open our mouths boldly "to proclaim the mystery of the gospel" of Christ, the Savior of all (Ephesians 6:18-20).

As we strive to carry out faithfully the mission mandate of our Lord, we are comforted, refreshed and strengthened by the assurance that the mission is *the Lord's*. Although he has entrusted it to us, he continues to guide and direct it, sustains it with his presence and promises, and empowers it by providing the divine means through which the mission accomplishes its divine purposes.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Led by God's Spirit through Word and sacrament, therefore, the Christian lives in hope, confidently trusting in the completed work of Christ and eagerly longing for the consummation of Christ's mission at his second coming. While death, decay and disappointment are present everywhere, the church nevertheless presses on in the knowledge that the Lord's promise is sure:

Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

The vision of the heavenly Jerusalem and of creation restored spurs us on to share with renewed eagerness and joy the hope that is within us through faith in Christ.

At the heart of all that moves us to participate in God's mission is the heart of God himself—the gracious love of our kind, merciful and forgiving heavenly Father.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1).

This love “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). The heart of the missionary message, whether expressed in words or deeds, is that “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), and that “whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Enlivened by this love, the church takes up its mission confidently, joyfully and zealously, saying with St. Paul:

We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. . . . Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 5:20; 6:2).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### *Developing One's Own Mission Statement*

The purpose of these questions is threefold:

First, they are to help users of the Statement probe its content more deeply through reflection and group discussion for application to their specific situations.

Second, they are to help congregations that already have mission statements to critique them in light of this Statement, and to strengthen and sharpen such statements wherever possible.

Third, the questions are intended to help congregations that do not have mission statements to begin to work through this process. Questions (or portions of questions) that relate specifically to the formation of a mission statement are highlighted in bold print.

## *I. MISSION BEGINS IN THE HEART OF GOD*

1. If “mission begins in the heart of God,” how might one’s mission statement begin? What is lacking in a mission statement that begins: “It is the mission of St. John’s Lutheran Church to do \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_”?
2. Mission is defined in Section I as “the Lord’s gracious initiative and ongoing activity to save a world incapable of saving itself.” From the vantage point of your involvement in God’s mission, what are some of the ways in which the world today tries to “save itself” (e.g., education, legislation, social action, etc.)? **How might the futility of these efforts to “save” the world be reflected in your mission statement?**
3. Who sets the agenda for the church’s mission: the world or God’s Word? How is this reflected in Section I of this Statement? **How might it be reflected in your mission statement?** What role, if any, does the world play in helping the church define and determine its mission?
4. If “mission begins in the heart of God,” where does it *not* begin?

## *II. GOD'S MISSION IS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF SIN*

1. "Nobody's perfect!" and "At least I'm not as bad as so-and-so" are common contemporary attitudes toward "sin." Contrast these with God's attitude toward sin. **How can your mission statement communicate God's attitude toward sin in view of this context?**
2. Section II emphasizes sin not only as a state of separation from God, but also as a disabling and enslaving "power," which holds sway over people's lives and fills them with "evil lust and inclinations." List some of the specific sins that are most powerful and destructive in the lives and families of people where you live and work. **How might this list affect the way sin is discussed in your statement?**
3. As people have ceased believing in the Biblical teaching regarding sin, many have also ceased believing in the Biblical realities of hell and the devil. **Should your mission statement specifically mention these realities?**
4. Who needs the Gospel most? Rank the following in order of "need": a pagan idol-worshiper in Africa; an unchurched and elderly neighbor; your pastor; a mass murderer; a newborn baby; an alcoholic; an active member of your congregation; a member of a racial minority in your community; a prostitute with AIDS; a militant atheist; you yourself.

### *III. GOD'S MISSION CENTERS IN JESUS CHRIST*

1. What is there about Jesus that uniquely qualifies him to be the center of God's mission? **How can this be made clear in your mission statement?**
2. What are the implications of the truth expressed in Section III that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven? Which Bible passages teach this truth? **Is it necessary to state this in your mission statement? If so, why? How might this be done?**
3. Section III refers to a "bewildering array of false 'gospels' being trumpeted in our world today." What are some of these false "gospels"? (e.g., humanism, universalism, new-age "pantheism," etc.). Which of these false "gospels" are being "trumpeted" most loudly in your setting of ministry? **How might this affect the way the Gospel is presented in your mission statement?** In light of A Theological Statement of Mission, can you articulate on what basis these "gospels" are actually no gospels at all?
4. **If God's mission truly centers in Jesus Christ, what (or whom) should be at the heart and center of your mission statement? How might this serve as a "test" for evaluating the "Gospel-centeredness" of your statement?**

#### *IV. GOD'S MISSION IS EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT*

1. Many churches and Christian organizations promote the idea that a person becomes and/or remains a Christian by his or her own efforts, actions or obedience. How must such teachings be evaluated in light of Section IV on the work of the Holy Spirit (as well as Section II on sin)? According to Scripture, how *does* a person become and remain a Christian? **How can this truth be spelled out in your mission statement?**
2. In light of Section IV and the Scripture references included there, discuss the relationship between the Holy Spirit and “the means of grace” (the Gospel, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, absolution). **Is it important to mention the “means of grace” in your mission statement? Why? How?**
3. How do you know you are empowered by the Holy Spirit? How can you be sure that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?
4. Discuss the role of “feelings” in the life of a Christian. What two extremes should we seek to avoid in evaluating their place in the Christian life?
5. There is a strong emphasis in churches today on “numbers” and “numerical growth.” In light of Section IV, is there anything wrong with this emphasis? Is there anything right about it? **Consider how this might apply to the whole matter of preparing and using mission statements, as well as to the content of the statement itself.**



## V. GOD'S MISSION IS TO AND FOR EVERYONE

1. What are some of the ways that your congregation (organization, etc.) might be unintentionally excluding people from its mission? Who in your community might feel excluded, and why? How could this be corrected? **What role can a mission statement play in this area?**
2. If faith in Christ alone saves, what role do “deeds of love, mercy and justice” play in the church’s mission? **Should this aspect of the church’s mission be reflected in a congregation’s mission statement? How?**
3. Find and list as many Bible passages as you can that stress the *universality* of God’s grace. What is the difference between this truth and the false teaching of “universalism”?
4. In what sense is God’s mission also for the church? What can happen if the church forgets this? **How might the awareness of *the church’s* need for God’s mission be reflected in your mission statement?**
5. How do the passages from Revelation cited in this section relate to the theme “God’s Mission Is to and for Everyone”?

## VI. GOD'S MISSION IS OUR MISSION

1. In light of Section VI, what is good about “individuality” in the church, and what is not good about it?
2. Discuss the theme of “unity” in light of Section VI. What do we mean when we confess “*one* holy Christian and apostolic Church”? How can we express the unity we have with all believers in Christ? In what sense does unity *not* exist in the church? **What implications does this have for our mission and ministry? For the formulation of a mission statement?**
3. Review the list of “ministry activities” on pages 13 & 14. How is your congregation/organization active in each of these areas? **How might this be reflected in your mission statement? Which areas need particular work and attention in your setting of ministry?**
4. The list on pages 13 & 14 includes showing “care and concern for . . . all creation.” The role of “creation” in God’s plan of salvation is emphasized throughout the document. In what sense is caring for God’s creation a part of God’s mission? Contrast this with secular ideologies which appear to “worship” the creation instead of the Creator.
5. Make a list of the activities in which your congregation is involved. Do each of these activities relate to God’s mission? In what way?
6. In what specific ways does your congregation/organization contribute to God’s mission through support of our Synod’s colleges and seminaries? Through support of specific missionaries or overseas mission activities?
7. What role do the Synod and the District play in your carrying out of God’s mission? **Should this be reflected in your mission statement?**

## *VII. GOD'S MISSION IS MY MISSION*

1. What ways does your congregation/organization have of helping each individual to examine and evaluate his or her contribution to God's mission?
2. Allow the members of your group to share an experience in which God enabled them to be a "personal letter" from Christ to another person. Similarly, encourage group members to tell of a time when someone else served as a "personal letter" from Christ to them.
3. Which individuals in your life has God used in a special way to convey the Gospel to you in word and in deed?
4. **How can your mission statement communicate both the "our" and the "my" of God's mission without distorting or undermining either?**

## VIII. GOD'S MISSION IS URGENT

1. How much time do *you* have left to participate in God's mission? How does this question influence your attitude toward your participation in God's mission?
2. The Christian life involves a continual tension between the "now" of God's grace and presence and the "not yet" of his blessings still to come. **How might this tension be reflected in your mission statement?**
3. Are most people in your community expecting and waiting for the second coming of Christ? **Should this event be mentioned in your mission statement?** Is the second coming "law" or "Gospel"? Discuss.
4. In light of Section VIII, discuss the question: "Whose mission is it—God's or ours?" What might result from the view that the mission is *exclusively* God's? Exclusively ours? **How can your mission statement reflect the Scriptural perspective in this area?**
5. According to Section VIII, it is **God's love** that moves us to participate in God's mission. Why is this such a vital truth? Why must the reality of God's grace permeate everything the church says and does? What happens (in our worship, service, Christian giving, evangelism) when this is not the case? **How can the centrality of this truth be communicated in your mission statement?**
6. In view of the previous question, is guilt or fear a proper motivation for participation in God's mission? Discuss.
7. **Evaluate your mission statement in light of Section VIII's emphasis on the urgency of God's mission. How well does your mission statement convey this sense of urgency? How might it be strengthened in this respect?**

