

A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

The vision, purpose and activities of this “network” rest on the Biblical foundation of God’s mission to reconcile the entire world to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather than playing an adjunct role in our theology and practice, God’s Mission (*Missio Dei*) stands at the heart of who we are as Christians and as Lutherans, confessing God’s true message to the world. The *Missio Dei* rightly serves, then, as the primary lens through which we read the Scriptures and apply its message to ourselves and our world. In short, the *Missio Dei* determines our being and purpose as a Synod and our biblical confession in the world.

God’s mission is summarized in our Lord’s testimony as recorded by St. John, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17). While much can be deduced from our Lord’s words here, three specific emphases especially inform our work together.

1) God’s Mission (the Missio Dei) centers in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ,

From start to finish, the *Missio Dei* belongs to God and His love for the world. His unconditional and unmerited love defines all that God is and does (1 John 4). God’s love consists in this: *that he gave his only begotten son . . .*” Our Lord states in Matthew 9 and 28 that He has been given divine authority to carry out His Father’s mission to save the world. As the Father’s divine emissary Jesus has all authority (in heaven and earth) to administer God’s forgiveness of sins to the whole world.

God’s mission, then, centers in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross by which He draws all people to Himself (John 12:32). His mission consists of three actions as the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms foretold (Luke 24:47-48): His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His proclamation of the Gospel to all nations. As St. Paul witnessed before King Agrippa: “. . . the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”” (Acts 26:23).

Thus we confess that the *Missio Dei* is Christ’s mission first, foremost, and forever. Participation in God’s Mission, individually as Christians and corporately as the Church, takes place only in and through Him.

2) God accomplishes His Mission by sending His Word (Gospel message) throughout the world.

Our Lord regularly refers to Himself in John’s Gospel as the “one sent (*apostello*) by His Father” to save the world (John 3:17; 5:36; 17:3) including the well-known statement to His disciples in chapter 20, “As the Father has sent (*apostello*) me, even so I am sending (*pempo*). you.” We recognize the necessity of God’s sending His Son into the world because

the world has no desire or capacity to come to Him (Romans 3:10, AC 2). We cannot build our ministry in the 21st century on the false hope that the unsaved will somehow find their way to church in order to hear the Gospel. Rather, the Lord tells us by word and example that the Gospel must be sent to the unsaved in order for them to hear and be saved (Romans 10:14-17).

This divine sending, while centered in our Lord Jesus Christ, includes His church—all those baptized into Him—individually and collectively. As God’s people receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39), whom the Lord Jesus first sent to His apostles (Luke 24:49), they are empowered and sent into their everyday world to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus says to us, “As you are going, therefore, 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.” (Matthew 28:19-20) The Lord’s mission is accomplished as the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world by the baptized as they go about their everyday lives.

3) *The focus of God’s love and, therefore, His mission is the whole world.*

Our Lord “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Rather than the church seeing herself as the primary focus of His saving grace, the Lord intends that she, His Body, fix her attention on the “fields white onto harvest” (John 4:35). We must ask ourselves: Are we focused primarily on Christ’s ministry to the church or are we focused primarily on His ministry to the world with the church sharing in His missionary vocation?

Our Lord’s desires not only that all peoples hear the Gospel and believe but also that all of the peoples of the earth join Him in His ongoing ministry of proclaiming the Gospel. The centuries- old mission paradigm of the “West Reaches the Rest” has exploded into a vast global missionary enterprise in which no national church may claim the primary role in God’s mission to the world. Rather the Lord continues to call His church from the nations around the world to work mutually in sending and receiving “laborers for the harvest.” until that day when our Lord’s mission is complete and the new creation has fully arrived.

Note:

The informal missional “network” which adopted this missiological statement on November 21, 2019 was comprised of current and former district presidents, other Synodical and district missional leaders, parish pastors and laity.