

The Heart of Mission Work

This desire to go tell others about Jesus is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in each believer, and it is at the heart of the Church's mission.

The basis for Christian mission to the world, then, is the universal dimension of the Gospel. By that we mean the reality that the work of Christ was effective for all people, everywhere. This is seen most explicitly in the "Gospel in a nutshell," John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son...*" we believe that we can tell anyone, no matter how serious his or her fault or errors, that "Christ has died and risen for you."

The goal of mission from a Lutheran perspective is expressed in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), taught by Jesus Himself, who said one should pray, "*Thy kingdom come.*" When we pray that petition of the Lord's Prayer, we are asking that God's kingdom would come not only to us, but that the Gospel would be preached to all the world so that others who do not know of the depth of God's love for them may hear that news and trust in Christ.

The source of Christian mission, however, is to be found in God Himself; therefore, when we speak of missions, we often use the term *Missio Dei* because it points to the primary source of Christian mission: it is the mission of God. But God carries out His mission through the men and women who make up the Church. For example, God sent the reluctant disciple Ananias to Saul of Tarsus, informing him that Saul (later known as Paul) was going to be His (God's) "*chosen instrument*" whom He would send to carry His name "*before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*" (Acts 9:15).

"You Will Be My Witnesses"

A useful paradigm for how Lutherans understand mission today is the outline that Christ Himself gave to the disciples: "*You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). Like a ripple from a stone that is cast into a pond, the Gospel message travels outward in ever-expanding concentric circles. Today, this means that Lutherans recognise that mission begins locally, with individual Christians speaking the Gospel to those around them, especially their friends and neighbours. "*Judea and Samaria*" today means that Lutherans recognise that there are people who, while they may live nearby geographically, are still distant culturally or linguistically.

"To the end of the earth" is what happens when Lutherans become a part of

mission work around the world. Some larger Lutheran congregations even commission, send, and support missionaries to go to “*all nations*” (Matthew 28:19). Some of those missionaries are ordained ministers who proclaim the Gospel and help to establish worshipping communities. Their evangelistic work is often carried out together with others, such as doctors, dentists, and nurses who are involved in medical work; agronomists who work in agricultural development; and linguists who specialise in translating the Bible into one of the thousands of living languages that do not yet have the Word of God in their language.

Because they affirm, as the apostle Paul did, “*we also believe, and so we speak*” (2 Corinthians 4:13), Lutheran churches from around the world continue to send their emissaries to locations near and far to announce the Good News of God’s love to a world that is in need of hope and life, to establish new congregations, and to train clergy from the local membership.

While sending off missionaries to other countries may be beyond our ability, nevertheless, we can proclaim the Gospel in our own backyard. There are many in our country who are yet to hear the Good News that Christ has died and risen for them, or who let their faith cool.

Let us continue to be the missionaries God wishes us to be! Let us continue in our work of pointing people to Jesus who is the Saviour of the world!