

World Mission Philosophy and Program 1981 Annual Conference Statement

Definition. By the term "world mission" we mean all God-motivated efforts to make Christ known, loved and obeyed, so that the good news may result in discipleship in personal lives, in institutions, and in the whole range of human relationships. The ultimate objective is to redeem, heal, and lift *all* of life.

The root word for mission is *missio*, a Latin word meaning a sending, or sending forth. For Christians to be in mission is to be responsive to the mandate placed upon them by God.

Our Biblical Mandate

We have a biblical mandate for mission! Throughout the Scriptures the people of God are called to venture out in partnership with God to fulfill God's purposes for history. The biblical story lifts up a number of themes which help us to clarify our mandate.

Mission is a calling to live for the sake of the world, not for our own sake alone. "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). These words to a community of Jewish exiles in Babylonia call God's people in every age to a global vision of the scope of mission. God's yearning that all the peoples of the earth know and accept the divine love stretches us to look beyond our own salvation and security.

Mission is a going forth into the world, empowered by the Spirit who guides us. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In certain parts of the Old Testament, the world finds God only as it comes to God's people (Isaiah 2:2-3). In the New Testament, however, the pattern is reversed. We are called to move out into the world, to be with people where they are: "So we are *ambassadors* for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Mission is inviting others to become disciples, to respond to the reign of God announced by Jesus. "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" (Matthew 28:19-20). We are sent into the world to challenge allegiances to false powers which bring death and destruction, to invite people and nations to accept the true rule of God which brings life and hope. We go, therefore, to baptize persons into the communities of disciples who teach and practice the message of Jesus in every way.

Mission is something we both practice and receive, a mutual enterprise on the part of all of God's people. "As a matter of equality you abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply you want, that there may be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:14). Paul is speaking in 2 Corinthians 8-9 of an offering

Gentile believers on one continent will give to minister to the needs of Jewish believers on another continent--Jewish believers through whom the Gentiles themselves received the gift of the gospel! Mission flows both ways, a process of mutual giving and receiving.

Mission is one throughout the world, for there is one gospel of salvation and one Lord and Savior who is the Light of the World. *I do not pray for these only, but also for those who are to believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, . . . so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me* (John 17:20, 21). After the intimate prayer for his disciples Jesus prays for the Church, the company of the faithful to be won from the world by their faithful witness, and for its unity under God. Mission is not divisive or fragmenting but upbuilding and unifying, proclaiming *one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all*. . . (Ephesians 4:5, 6).

Mission is striving for the victory of God's righteousness which liberates the human family from injustice and oppression. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). In this manifesto for his ministry, Jesus cites the words of the prophet in Isaiah 61:1-2, which catch up a recurring concern in the Old Testament for justice and mercy in human relationships (see Isaiah 42:1-4; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 6:6-8). From this mandate Jesus moved into his ministry.

- He saw people in poverty and despair and gave them good news.
- He saw people in bondage and oppression and called for their liberation.
- He met the sick, blind, prejudiced, racist, and sexist, giving physical sight and new insight to the spiritually blind.
- He saw unjust systems and challenged them--the Roman monarchy, legalism, and the priestly and sacrificial systems.
- He saw persons whose understanding of God was inadequate and opened their eyes.
- He saw people whose sins were weighing them down and offered forgiveness.

God's Summons to Us

Through the Great Commission to "go, make disciples, baptize, teach," Jesus' mission has become our mission. We are summoned to mission, beginning wherever we are and extending to the uttermost part of the earth. All Christians are called to a ministry of reconciliation, to bring estranged people to God and into a loving relationship with each other. Some are set apart by the church for specialized ministries: pastors, teachers, nurses, doctors, agriculturists, evangelists, technicians, etc. As God calls, some are sent to distant places. Others witness where they live and work. In today's world the terms "home" and "foreign" mission are no longer appropriate. Christians are to be in mission wherever they are. The field is the world. We are to witness to our next door neighbor, to

any of the 80-100 million non-Christians in the United States, or to persons elsewhere in the world where Christ is not known or obeyed.

The church is Christ's body in the world, called to enter into the world's pain and suffering and bring new life and hope.

A Changing World Affects Mission

Today a new world arena opens before us. New and sobering factors confront us as we plan for the future. We note some of them for they will radically influence the nature of our mission in the years ahead.

A world civilization is emerging. One world is in the making. An increasing number of nations are gaining power in world affairs. More than 150 countries have entered the United Nations. Interdependence of peoples increases. In a sense, we live in a global village; whatever occurs affects everyone.

Paradoxically, our world is divided, despite movements toward its becoming one community. There is a continuing and widening economic gap between the affluent western world and third world nations. There are ideological divisions between eastern and western bloc nations, and between these blocs and non-aligned nations. There is a resurgence of nationalistic loyalties in both developed and underdeveloped countries. These and other factors tend to fragment the human community.

Worldwide urbanization is altering life in dramatic ways. Unplanned mechanization of farming resulting in the loss of land, and other socio-economic and political changes have caused hundreds of millions of people throughout the world to move into urban areas. Consequences are phenomenal: enormous unmanageable cities, indescribable squalor in slum living, massive unemployment, lawlessness and crime, and millions of rootless, landless people. Although phenomena such as these are not inherent in urban life as such, they are part of the reality of urbanization as we know it.

Worldwide militarism threatens to destroy our planet. Led by the great powers, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union, the nations of the world engage in an armaments race costing 500 billion dollars a year. Not only does this preparation to kill, maim, and destroy pose a cataclysmic threat of annihilation. In addition, it squanders resources which could be used to meet basic life needs of the human family.

Poverty, misery, and oppression describe the life of the great masses of humanity. Economic systems which bring unbelievable affluence to many nations in the western world sometimes do so at the price of cruel exploitation of other peoples. Our losing battle against world hunger is an example. One-third of the world's peoples consume and waste approximately 87% of the world's resources, while hunger and starvation are mounting among the multitudes. Hunger is not caused by shortage of food alone; the major cause is poverty and inequity in the distribution of the world's resources.

Other aspects of the oppression under which hundreds of millions live in *many* countries under many political systems include illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, and the

persistent violation of the basic human rights, political, religious, and economic. In much of Latin American and Asia, the peasant people are largely under the yoke of exploitive dictators and landlords. Those who dissent are frequently labeled communists. When asked how we might best relate in a religious way to people in Latin America, a physician there replied sadly: "Get your CIA and multi-national corporations off our backs; they tend to support and enrich dictators but bleed and oppress the poor.

Many people have fled their homelands seeking relief from hunger, oppression and repression, swelling the number of refugees to an unprecedented 8 to 14 million.

Poor people are seeking and struggling actively for justice and liberation. From the beginning, mission workers showed compassion for the poor. They opened schools, hospitals and relief centers. The poor and oppressed heard the gospel and now they believe Christ included them in his inaugural statement (Luke 4:18). With a new sense of urgency millions of long-deprived people have come to believe that the earth holds sufficient resources to meet the needs of all if they are fairly used and distributed.

In principle the peasant peoples' efforts are nonviolent. They ask not political power or luxury, only a chance to work, some land to till, and a fair share of the resources god intends for all. Clearly this struggle of the poor affects our world mission profoundly. Many Christian leaders are already entering political and economic arenas on behalf of the poor. With their brothers and sisters in Christ, they are willing to risk imprisonment, "disappearance" and assassination by the death squads of dictators.

The grievous problems of the world at large beset the United States as well. Wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. Twenty percent of United States citizens are suffering from inadequate diet. High unemployment and escalating inflation are persistent. Medical care is beyond reach for millions of people. Pressing needs for health care and environmental protection are neglected while the military-industrial complex grows. Poverty, racism, and sexism persist despite highly publicized efforts to diminish them.

The crime rate rises. Capital punishment and fortress prisons are accepted ways of dealing with societal dissidents. Divorce and abortion are common. Drug abuse pervades almost every locality while violent crime and murder rates are among the highest in the world. Secrecy and slanted media interpretation of daily events influence the political scene. In the midst of this we are called to proclaim the gospel and be the church!

The world is a growing arena of faiths and ideologies, competing with one another for human loyalties. On the one hand we find a resurgence of other religious faiths, some like Islam with long traditions behind them, some more recent and frequently syncretistic in character. On the other hand we find a host of prevalent secular ideologies, scientific and humanistic, capitalist and communist, psychological and sociological. In relation to each of these systems of ordering life and thought the church must rethink the meaning of its own faith and calling.

Many factors hinder the possibility or effectiveness of sending North American mission personnel to other parts of the world. First our national image as an oppressor hinders

our welcome and witness in many countries. Second, even when asked to respond, inflation and devaluation of the dollar make it costly to maintain American workers abroad. A national bishop informed us that with the cost of supporting an American couple, he could support ten national workers. Third, national leaders are rightfully taking the places of leadership for which they have prepared. Fourth, the desire for self-determination in developing countries makes indigenous mission more viable than imported mission. Fifth, the resurgence of traditional faiths sometimes means open hostility to Christian activity, especially from outside.

The church is there! Early missionaries made disciples and established churches. God blessed those efforts and today we find the church in nearly all nations. In some areas the church is experiencing tremendous growth and development; most churches are desiring to express their own identity and independence. This does not rule out the need for churches throughout the world to strengthen Christian presence and witness in each other's countries through the mutual sharing of Christian workers. We will know and rejoice, however, that God's grace precedes us, that Christ is already confessed and served, and that we are co-partners in the one mission of God.

Witnessing in the Context of a Changing World

In light of our biblical mandate and the changing world, we are:

Called to repentance and new life. God, who summons us to participate in mission, extends forgiveness and restoration to all people who repent of their sin and disobedience. The prophets called Israel to repentance for their personal and corporate sins and promised healing for their wounds (Jeremiah 30:17). Jesus did also. Repentance and belief in the Gospel were essential for experiencing new life in the kingdom (Mark 1:15). The abundant life comes to all those who are reconciled to God through Christ. To such God also entrusts the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). In these days God calls us as persons, congregations, and institutions to confess our self-centeredness and receive wholeness. Therefore we extend to others Christ's call to repentance and new life through our programs of evangelism.

Called to discipleship and the formation of communities of faith. Following Jesus, learning from him, counting the cost of commitment, joining with other followers in learning of mission are included in Jesus' plan for discipleship. Through the formation of communities of faith, followers of Jesus are nurtured. Through the gathered congregation, the experience of salvation continues. Committed disciples are disciplined and are called into God's mission through the church, of whom Christ is the head. We must continue to offer to all peoples the call of Christ to become his disciples and be added to the church.

Called to do justice. In a world where injustice and inequities are the cause of so much suffering, misery and death, the church cannot be silent. The church, as Christ's body, must place itself clearly on the side of the poor and the oppressed. This should include both supportive position statements and appropriate action such as legal assistance, advocacy, negotiation with the oppressors, and partnership in self-help projects.

Called to be peacemakers. That is the heart of the gospel. Peacemaking is being peaceful. Peacemaking is evangelism, bringing estranged people to God. It is reconciliation, bringing estranged people together in confession, repentance, and love. Peacemaking is doing justice, rooting out the causes of war, greed, ill will, racism, sexism, repression, and the violation of human rights.

Called to partnership and witness in context. Christ's commission to "all nations" embraces people of widely varied life-style and culture. It is important that the gospel be presented in ways that its relevance can be seen by people in any situation. The gospel thus takes root and becomes indigenous, with forms of response that arise from the people's own insights and experiences. (Church leaders abroad call this witnessing in context.)

The central objective of world mission is to call disciples and establish churches which are "self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting," without denying that we are interrelated in Christ. Since World War II, and especially since the end of political colonialism, there have been increased efforts for the churches overseas to become indigenous, rooted more deeply in the life of the people and free to express their own selfhood. Capable national leaders take over many of the responsibilities formerly covered by missionaries. Property and institutions are transferred to church groups or holding trusts. This opens the way to a new relationship in mission where missionaries may serve as invited guests. The Church of the Brethren has made commendable progress in this regard.

As members of the world church we are inter-dependent. Mission should now be a two-way process. Issues like world hunger and oppression are not "out there." They are mutual problems to be solved by a shared ministry. Indeed, the future of humankind can best be guided toward the fulfillment of God's purpose if God's people, East, West, North, and South, will carry forward a unified ministry in the spirit of partnership and mutual caring.

Called to Unity in Christ. If the Church is to demonstrate the Gospel in its life as well as its preaching, it must manifest to the world the power of God to break down all barriers and to establish the Church's unity in Christ. Christ is not divided.
(International Missionary Council meeting, Willingen, 1952)

Our Lord calls us to ecumenical cooperation and to the unity of the Church itself. The Church of the Brethren has had a commendable history of cooperation in mission. It was one of our stated purposes in the 1955 mission policy. In the newer overseas churches the unity of believers has become most evident. We are called to reaffirm and increase this relationship of oneness of the Christian Church.

Called to understanding of and dialogue with persons of non-Christian faiths. We recognize the resurgence of other religious faiths. We recall Amos' insistence that God had called not only Israel from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir (Amos 9:7). God has surely been at work through other faiths, most fruitfully in monotheistic faiths. We recognize the biblical heritage we share with Judaism and Islam. God moves in mysterious ways. It is evident that God is at work in

every area long before Christian witnesses arrive. We do wish to affirm our belief that the revelation in Jesus Christ is ultimate. For us, Jesus is Lord. He saves, he makes whole. Nevertheless, we believe that God has used those outside the Hebrew-Christian heritage to achieve worthy ends. Therefore, we ought to hear what those of other religions have to say, enter into dialogue with them, and seek closer relations with them. We have much to learn from them about devotion, commitment, simplicity, peace, relating faith to life, and the unity of all things. We have the good news to share with them--Jesus, the Christ.

In conclusion, in our mission theology and program let us turn toward a more biblical concept and strategy of the church. The church exists primarily for those outside. It exists for others, as Jesus was for others. Of course, the New Testament speaks of nurture, fellowship, and of burden-bearing within the body of Christ. But the thrust of the church's mission in the New Testament is primarily to the world. The church is a "go-body." Over and over Jesus says: "Go!" The church motivated by the mind of Christ goes to the world. It does not expect the world to come to the church. Coming to the church should be the result of its going to the world. The heart of evangelism is going, witnessing, being--being present with the lost, lonely, and anguished. The church is sent.

The New Testament urges Christians to assemble themselves together for worship and nurture, but it says nothing about coming to church as if it were a place or building. Our churches are essentially "come" structures and self-preservation is primary. Churches tend to be overly concerned with personal comforts. Church budgets involve pennies for outreach (going out), and dollars for maintaining structures that say "come." A crucial test for a church is not how many *come* to church, but how many go to the world as witnesses. Our mandate is to go . . . make disciples . . . teach.

GUIDELINES

To assist the church in its world-mission program, we submit the following:

Witnessing to God's love should be our central objective. We are called to proclaim the good news of God's love with greater fervor and joy. We will seek to make disciples of those to whom we witness, inviting them to share the blessings and responsibilities of life in the community of believers.

At the same time, we should broaden our understanding and program of evangelism. God's love encompasses all facets of life, and so should our witness. Holding together word and deed, proclamation and service, our evangelistic mission should include:

- a. Preaching, teaching, and one-to-one sharing.
- b. Christ-like *being*, being at the right place at the right time as salt and light.
- c. Ministry to physical needs, and liberating people to help supply their own needs.
- d. Changing institutions and systems--whether churches, schools, industry, recreation, the media, corporations, or governments.
- e. Support for the poor people's efforts to achieve justice and human dignity, and the liberation of all peoples from the bondage of plaguing sin and guilt, sexism, racism, possession-obsession, fear, crippling inferiorities, and despair.

The United States should be considered a prime area for evangelism.

- a. Each congregation should develop its own plan for witnessing and relating to the unchurched people of the community. In some instances this could lead to the opening of new congregations or fellowships. We must also be concerned with the millions in the church who have no deep commitment to Christ.
- b. Congregations should call into question attitudes or life style that impede proclamation or witnessing to all, especially the poor and those of different race or culture.
- c. Congregations should examine their local church budgets to determine the proper portion to be spent on their own nurture and comfort and the proper portion to be spent for evangelism and assistance to the needy.
- d. Congregations should urgently consider engaging the membership in learning the ways of peacemaking and sharing the peace witness in their communities.

New areas for missions should be sought throughout the world. We will search constantly for new areas where the Church of the Brethren can serve. New geographic areas should be places where our workers will be received by the host country. We will not enter any country under false pretense.

High priority should be given to special programs such as:

- a. Bringing persons to a new awareness of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and a commitment of our lives to Christian service.
- b. A relief and welfare ministry that gives special attention to the causes of poverty and hunger, using strategies that avoid paternalism or self-righteousness.
- c. Enlarged and improved work with minority groups: Hispanic, black, Native American, and others. We call special attention to the increasing number of Hispanics in the United States.
- d. Church development and the problem of diminishing membership: opening new churches, beginning new fellowship groups, calling strong pastors to new churches, and assessing the causal factors for declining church membership. Static churches in unresponsive communities might consider new strategies or move to more needy and responsive areas.
- e. Programs that work toward the development of an economic system that serves humanity and avoids exploitation and domination.

The principles of indigenization and mutuality should guide our efforts. By this we mean:

- a. Exploring possibilities for integration of personnel by offering and receiving persons with specialized gifts of ministry that would strengthen the church. We desire to maintain vital ties of fellowship with overseas churches in a spirit of mutual endeavor.
- b. Transferring property and responsibility to colleague churches in a deliberate manner without undue haste or tarrying, taking into account the wishes of all concerned.
- c. Assisting other churches with funds and personnel to present the gospel and carry out its ministries. Such support should be by mutual agreement.
- d. Working where possible with other Christian groups or councils, making arrangements that avoid duplication and competition.

More attention should be given to selection and training for mission. Training for witnessing is extremely important, whether witnesses serve abroad or at home. God calls

us all into ministry. We strongly urge local churches to institute courses of intensive training in witnessing to better equip all members for their ministry. Such courses should deal with biblical bases, meanings, and methods of evangelism and other ways of witnessing. They should also include skills in communicating with groups and on a one-to-one basis, listening skills, and effective use of the media.

Pastors, district personnel, and General Office personnel should be carefully chosen, having skills to lead, challenge, and represent the mind of Christ as interpreted by the Church of the Brethren.

Those going into different cultural settings should be selected and prepared appropriately. In addition to the above skills, they should be trained in language. Careful attention should be given to their attitudes toward other cultures, races, and religions. Such preparation should include readiness to serve in subordinate positions in relation to person in the host area and willingness to live among the people and, as far as possible, on their standard of living.

Persons entering Brethren Volunteer Service should be selected and trained for witnessing to God's love through their acts of service.

In addition to younger volunteers whose services and enthusiasm are deeply appreciated and urgently needed, effort also should be made to recruit and place more post-30 volunteers with time-tested skills for crucial needs like housing development, land stewardship (reform), leadership with small churches, the ministry to farm workers, and the peoples' nonviolent struggle for human rights.

The General Board Staff should facilitate inquiries concerning service by:

- a. Providing prompt and adequate responses to inquiries about service opportunities.
- b. Making every effort to use all properly qualified and trained people of the church who wish to serve, insofar as our church's policies, theology of mission, and budget allow, whether in Brethren-sponsored programs or in Brethren-approved programs with other churches, ecumenical groups, or evangelical agencies and groups.
- c. Providing frequent communication with those on assignment: listening to felt needs, developing opportunities for fellowship, providing for spiritual renewal and opportunities for dialogue.
- d. Encouraging individuals and congregations to communicate with persons in service.

Peacemaking efforts should be increased on national and district levels. The Church of the Brethren has an urgent task to call the church of Jesus Christ back to the original vision gained from the Prince of Peace. We should also be supportive of those in government office who are working toward such peace initiatives as a Peace Secretary on the President's Cabinet, the World Peace Tax Fund, and National Academy of Peace. We must continue our struggle against the militarism that pervades our lives, institutions, and foreign policy.

Mission education should be emphasized by:

- a. Increased use of returned missionaries for interpretation.
- b. Visits to churches and district conferences by General Board members, staff, and

others.

- c. Encouraging regular schools of mission in all congregations.
- d. *Messenger* articles and news stories which lift up the mission program.
- e. Developing a strong course in world mission in our theological seminary.
- f. Encouraging pastors to attend denominational seminars on mission interpretation and share information with their congregations.
- g. Informing people in churches and colleges of mission opportunities and the training required.
- h. Making available attractive printed and audiovisual materials.
- i. Establishing periodic schools of mission on district levels to study the Church of the Brethren theology of mission, provide intercultural experiences, and train leaders for witnessing.

More financial support should be given to our world mission. In view of the increased program recommended, we urge congregations to respond by increasing their giving. Brethren giving for mission beyond the local church should be channeled through the General Board Fund.

While the query behind this paper came from one district, we believe it reflects readiness of the entire Church of the Brethren to move forward in more faithful response to God's call to mission. We have a rich potential of dedication, personnel, and funds. With renewed commitment may we all move forward in proclaiming and applying the gospel of Christ, working toward a world community where the Prince of Peace is known and his teaching honored.

Action of 1981 Annual Conference: The report was presented by Curtis W. Dubble, with other members of the committee present. *The paper was adopted with three amendments* which are incorporated in the preceding wording of the paper.