

Mission Theology and Guidelines for Program

1989 Annual Conference Statement

The Christian mission is God's mission on earth. By definition, Christian mission means all God-motivated efforts to make Christ known, loved, and obeyed, so that the good news may result in discipleship in our personal and family lives, in the institutions of society, 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 term meaning sending, or sending forth. For Christian believers to be in mission is to be responsive to the mandate placed upon them by God.

The Biblical Imperative

Throughout the scriptures the people of God are called to venture to the ends of the earth to fulfill God's purposes for history. The call is an invitation to be partners with God in mission and is a promise of new life when the church is faithful. The Holy Spirit plays a primary role in each venture of mission. It is God's mission, not ours. The church that has accepted God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ must also accept the call of Jesus to be witnesses in his name to all people.

The biblical narrative lifts up a number of themes that help us to clarify our mandate.

Mission is bringing persons to a new awareness of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is the commitment of our lives within the Body of Christ to witness and service.

Mission is a calling to live for the sake of the world, not for our own sake alone. ". . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach out to the end of the earth: (Isa. 49:6) These words given to a community of Jewish exiles call God's people to a global vision of mission. God's yearning that all the peoples of the earth know and accept divine love instructs each of us to look beyond our own salvation, across cultures and languages, in the United States and abroad.

Christ calls us to be the church, which knows no human barriers. We are called to reach out and receive our neighbors beside us and beyond us. John 3:16 proclaims "God so loved the *world* . . ." Our love and ministry must embrace the total world which God loves.

Mission is going forth into the world, empowered by the Spirit who guides us. "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). We are called to move out into the world, always remembering that Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem and died on a cross outside Jerusalem. We are to be with people where they are, especially the poor and the oppressed. "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 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; and lo I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). We are sent into the world to invite people and nations to accept the true rule of God, which brings life and hope. We go, therefore, to baptize persons into communities of disciples who teach and practice the message of Jesus.

Mission is something we both practice and receive, a mutual enterprise on the part of all God's people. "As a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality" (2 Cor. 8:14). Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians refer to an offering which Gentile believers on one continent gave 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. 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 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 oneness.

Mission is striving for the victory of God's righteousness through peace and justice. It is God's righteousness that liberates the human family from injustice and oppression. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to preach the 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; see also Isa. 61:1,2). This is a recurring concern for justice and mercy in human relationships (Isa.42:1-4; Amos 5:14; Mic. 6:6-8). From this imperative 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 saw the sick, blind, prejudiced, racist, and sexist, and offered wholeness and healing.
- He saw unjust systems and challenged them.
- He saw persons whose understanding of God's ways was inadequate and opened their eyes.
- He saw people struggling under the burden of sin and offered them forgiveness and abundant life.

Through Jesus, the Word made flesh, God moved into history to bring shalom to all. The same God guides and directs the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit to bring shalom,

now and in the time to come.

Jesus' Mission, Our Mission

Through the biblical imperative to "go, make disciples, baptize, teach," Jesus' mission clearly becomes our mission. The church and each member of it is called to be "in mission," under the constraint of the Holy Spirit reaching out to all people by word and deed.

In the coming decade and beyond we are called:

- to reach out and receive as sisters and brothers all who are near and far, to proclaim the gospel, to bear witness to our faith in word and deed.
- to invite people to the Person and church of Jesus Christ.
- to embody the Word diligently and prayerfully.
- to bring healing and wholeness within our personal lives, our families, our communities, our society and beyond.
- to extend compassion and care to those in need.
- to become peacemakers in whatever capacity we can, renewing the ministry of reconciliation as Christ has reconciled us.
- to nurture a deep prayer life and openness to the Holy Spirit, and to receive the gifts of spiritual renewal that are offered to all those who love God and humanity.
- to live more fully according to the pattern of Christ's life with reverence for God and all creation.

As Jesus entered this world, we the church, the body of Christ in the world, enter into the world's pain and suffering to bring new life and hope.

Let us seek "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

The World Context in which the Church of the Brethren is Called to Mission

- Political divisions continue to foster distrust and fear. Nationalism and lingering resentments that originated in imperialistic times divide nation and peoples. Legal and political restrictions hinder travel for the sharing of the Christian faith.
- Worldwide urbanization is altering life in dramatic ways. Hundreds of millions of

people have moved from rural to urban areas. The consequences of the urbanization process are phenomenal; enormous unmanageable cities, appalling squalor in slum living, massive unemployment, rampant lawlessness and crime, millions of rootless, landless, homeless people.

- The world is experiencing a resurgence of religions competing with one another. The development of secular, scientific, humanistic and political ideologies, and the tremendous spiritual and moral needs of people present an awesome challenge to the church in mission.
- Militarism continues to expand in ways that threaten to destroy our world civilization. Nations spend billions of dollars for armaments, squandering resources that should be used to provide for basic life needs of the human family.
- Poverty, misery, and illness oppress a majority of the world's population. Hunger and starvation are widespread. Illiteracy, discrimination, and violation of fundamental human rights, often based upon unchecked racism continue to exploit large numbers of God's people.
- Spiritual hunger is widespread in affluent and technological cultures as well as in countries where poverty and oppression abound.
- The church is present in most nations of the world. Early missionaries made disciples and established congregations. In this we rejoice, knowing that Christ Jesus continues to be confessed and served. We are called to support and extend this witness.

GUIDELINES

For the Church of the Brethren, as part of the Body of Christ, that is actively present in the world and that desires to extend the gospel of Jesus Christ to others, these guidelines shall be followed:

We are called to plant the church and proclaim the full gospel, preaching, teaching, healing, baptizing, evangelizing wherever we are able to go. The Church of the Brethren has a message and ministry much needed in the world today. Our purpose is to establish new missions and new congregations, beginning "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We will continue to share the "cup of cold water" in Christ's name (Matt. 10:42). We will work for peace, justice, and equality at home and abroad. We will continue to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Christ has entrusted to us compassion for all who are oppressed and downtrodden (Luke 4:18, 19).

The gospel of Jesus Christ knows no boundaries. We will, however, ask to follow the legal and political guidelines of each country in open and honorable ways, careful always to respect the integrity and culture of other peoples. In all actions we will seek to be

guided by the will of God and the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

The principles of indigenization, mutuality, and interdependence will guide our efforts. We will cooperate with other Christians. We will be alert to possibilities for integration of personnel and other resources by offering and receiving persons with specialized gifts.

We will seek to maintain vital ties with churches abroad. The Church of the Brethren will seek to facilitate world meetings of like-minded Christian bodies (especially those that have resulted from Church of the Brethren mission efforts) as equal planners and participants.

It is precisely because of the world context in which we live that we believe the Church of the Brethren has a message that is critical for our world. The Church of the Brethren with ministries of evangelism, agriculture, education, disaster relief, medical and other services, is called to carry God's message of love to all the world.

The responsibility for aggressively exploring new programs in mission and ministry lies with our denomination's congregations and boards or councils and staff designated for that purpose. When a new congregation is established or another Christian group that wishes to associate with the Church of the Brethren is located within the United States or Puerto Rico, authority for defining and developing those future relationships lies with the districts. When a new congregation or church group is located outside of the United States or Puerto Rico, authority for defining relationships lies with Annual Conference.

The Call to Brethren

To live faithfully in mission, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ:

We call upon *all members* of the Church of the Brethren to understand that each member is a minister of Christ. Hands have been laid upon us at baptism, and we are called to be ambassadors, evangelists, and friends of Jesus expressing our faith in winsome ways with those we love, live next to, with whom we work or go to school or know even casually.

We call upon *each congregation* to see itself as "in mission." Every congregation in the Church of the Brethren is set in the midst of a mission field. In the communities where we live there are people who are lonely, lost, and in need of a Savior. We urge each congregation to take seriously the imperative to share the gospel with those close at hand and to actively support the planting of other congregations. Living as God's friends we will share hospitality and a Christian witness to overseas students in colleges and universities near our homes and churches.

We call upon every congregation to join in ministry with ethnic groups who are in sympathy with our basic theological positions, sharing facilities for meetings, encouraging leadership development, respecting each other's language and customs, participating in the life of each other's congregations at all points possible, and nurturing one another in the Church of the Brethren Anabaptist heritage.

We call upon each district to provide training for congregations and individuals for evangelism and other mission work within their districts. We urge the district executives and boards to identify opportunities for mission, to develop responses, and to become strong advocates of a congregational-based commitment to a strong mission program.

We call upon the denomination to develop study materials and to select and train persons for mission. Training for witnessing to the total gospel of Jesus Christ is extremely important whether witnesses serve abroad or at home.

We call upon Church of the Brethren educational institutions and the denomination's program staff to institute courses of intensive training in mission and church planting.

We call upon the leadership of the church to recruit persons from other cultural groups who may become leaders in the planting of the Church of the Brethren in the United States, in Puerto Rico, and in other nations.

To respond to the biblical imperative for mission, **we call upon** every member of the Church of the Brethren:

- to renew their dedication to Christ and the church
- to join in personal and corporate confession and repentance
- to continue to search the Scriptures
- to be open to the leading of God's Holy Spirit
- to be fervent in prayer, and
- to give sufficient financial resources that we might become all that Christ intends the Church to be in this age.

CONCLUSION

The Christian mission today is a word of hope to all people. The church exists primarily for others. We as the Church of the Brethren need to act in open response to God's will by supporting and being supported by individuals, congregations, and districts with our prayers, presence, and skills so that all might live toward God's shalom, experiencing power and redemption in an ever-widening covenant community, and serving as agents of the Holy Spirit, communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ for the blessing and salvation of the world.

Action of the 1989 Annual Conference: The report from the Annual Conference study committee for a REVIEW OF WORLD MISSION PHILOSOPHY AND PROGRAM STATEMENT was presented by Duane A. Ramsey, chair, with other members of the committee present. *The report was adopted with two amendments from the committee and six amendments by the delegate body, all of which have been incorporated in the wording of the preceding text.*