

Statement on Missional Theology

A Paper Presented by the CLBA Study Committee on Missional Theology

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Introduction to the paper:

The Task:

The purpose of this paper on missional theology is twofold: (1) to serve as an aid to our CLB church leadership and their congregations in better understanding and processing a theology that is gaining popularity in churches across North America and elsewhere regarding the mission of God and the role of the church; and (2) to serve as a guide for our churches in holding to a theology of mission and the church that is in harmony with our Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB) Statement of Faith and the historic Lutheran confessions that our church family subscribes to.

While the word “missional” appears frequently in literature about the church and mission, it takes on various meanings according to the people who use it, making it difficult to define in any standard or all inclusive way. For some, the word has profound theological and practical implications for their church, while others simply adopt it as a new word for talking about being “missions-minded.” The search for a definitive missional theology is further complicated by the fact that a wide range of theological perspectives have identified with some or all of its concepts, including representatives in both the historic mainline and evangelical camps. The task is still further complicated when some in similar movements, such as the Emergent Church, also identify themselves as missional. These will also include people on a wide theological spectrum. How does one critique such an eclectic movement? All of that being said, the word “missional” does have a specific history and a core meaning and body of literature that has come to us through the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), and it is chiefly, though not exclusively, out of this context that we will explore the missional discussion and assess its degree of compatibility with the Doctrinal Statement of Faith of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. The missional authors addressed in this paper include Craig Van Gelder, Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, Alan Roxburgh and others affiliated with the GOCN. Mention is also made of some who are writing missional theology from an evangelical perspective. Citations are periodically included for those who want to dig deeper.

Format:

The committee divided the paper under major headings that we deemed representative of topics of major importance in the discussion. Under these major headings, subheadings appear that aid the reader in examining specific details pertaining to the major headings or topics. Under each subheading we list *affirmations* and *denials* as guides for the reader in evaluating their own readings in missional theology literature in light of the Scriptures and our CLB Statement of Faith. In some cases these will appear in more than one place where deemed helpful and appropriate.

A Brief Synopsis of Missional Theology:

The church growth and church health movements¹ as well as the emerging church movements are driven by changes in our cultural environments and seek to respond to these changes by focusing on strategies, methods and programs or by attempting to return to early church practices. The missional discussion, while also recognizing these changes, calls us first to go back to the biblical narrative, to theologically and missiologically define the nature and essence of the church. A key point in missional theology is that understanding the *nature* of the church is foundational to clarifying the *purpose* for which the church exists. How does our understanding of the church’s nature impact our thinking in regards to the church’s purpose, structures and strategies for participating in God’s mission in the midst of ever-changing social environments? While valuing structure, programs and new methods of reaching the culture, these must follow the theological and missiological work of first understanding the church’s *nature* and *essence* as depicted in the biblical text. It is for this reason that certain authors and church ministries sometimes call themselves both emergent and missional—they incorporate concepts and practices from more than one stream of the conversation about the church and its calling.

The missional discussion in North America derives from the work of a group of theological educators, pastors, denominational administrators and local congregational leaders who formed an association called the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), which is an outgrowth of a conversation in England similarly known as Gospel and Our Culture (GOC). This earlier conversation in England arose around a question posed by a former missionary to India, Lesslie Newbigin: “What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call ‘modern Western Culture?’” As the British program gained broader recognition, a U.S. version of the GOC conversation also surfaced.

Missional theology has been attempting to address two primary concerns: *the first* involves the western church’s struggle to forge ahead in mission in a post-colonial world, *the second* is to address the need for a missionary ecclesiology (theology of the church) in a post-Christendom world (where the church no longer has power and privilege²). *Firstly*, the work of the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth in the colonial era was immensely successful. The 19th century was indeed the “Golden Age” of missions. The movement was shaped by western expansion, and often included the extension of western cultures to the developing and yet undeveloped sectors of the world. Western churches saw themselves as supporting missions work to largely non-Christian peoples in yet unreached parts of the world. In time, there came with that thinking a perception that there was no need for missions work in the already Christianized west, so missions largely became something that happened in faraway pagan places. There were certainly exceptions to this, of course, especially among churches connected with 19th century American revivalism. Our own CLB history, for

example, included active evangelization on a local level, along with consistently strong support of foreign missions. Nevertheless today, even in our own circles, “missions” still evokes an image of those trained and sent by the church to plant the church in faraway places. In consequence, there quite naturally comes a separation in the minds of people between “the church” and “mission.” While churches still support missions work elsewhere, the understanding that the members of a local congregation are a fundamental and integral part of God’s mission everywhere (locally as well as internationally) will be more difficult to attain. Missional theology seeks to offer a resolution by drawing from Scripture an understanding that the God of the Bible is a missionary God who created the church to be His missionary people both locally and to the entire world, bringing church and mission back together in an inseparable bond. In this venture, missional leaders ask a question posed back in the 1930s at the International Missionary Council (IMC) at Tambaram in India, “What is the essential nature of the church, and what is its obligation to the world?”³

This leads us into addressing the *second concern* mentioned above: according to a missional reading of Scripture, mission is not a segment of the church’s life; rather, the church exists in the world to participate in God’s mission of calling the world to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ (John 17:13-23). Its divine calling to take the gospel to the whole world shapes the whole church, and, as some missional writers put it, defines its very essence. The church, then, doesn’t have a mission; rather God’s mission has a church. As this paper will show, the discussion continued through the IMC for decades. Unfortunately, the IMC later was absorbed into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the 1960s, and the WCC pushed this thinking in a secularized direction, basically sidelining the church from any rightful place in God’s mission. Mission then became summed up in human programs of social action and liberation movements.

The GOCN exists in part to take back that earlier discussion of the IMC and move the discussion forward on its own terms, apart from the secularization influence of the WCC that once captured it, and to work out the structures of a missionary ecclesiology (theology of the church). It is also taking note of the fact that the church of today finds itself in a post-Christendom world, where the state church system of Europe no longer has the privileges and power of the Christendom era, and where the church in North America, though not a state church, also no longer holds the formative power in culture that it once had. In North America, while “Christendom” was present in only a functional rather than official sense, we spoke of “Christian culture” or “churched culture.” Instead, the church of today often finds itself marginalized and labeled irrelevant. Increasingly, says the missional theologian, our congregations are finding themselves having to take the position of missionary outposts to our own neighborhoods. Attractional and programmatic emphases that may have helped churches thrive in the past are increasingly less effective in reaching out to our communities, as the culture becomes more post-modern and more hostile to the traditional church and organized religion.

Missional theologians believe that two major problems have developed in the western church, largely because of its once privileged status in society: western individualism and accommodation to the culture. These problems have made it difficult for the church to be true to its missionary nature. To address this crisis, missional theologians call for the church to take a double posture within society: (1) as an alternative community within the culture, shaped by the Scriptures and the redemptive reign of God; and (2) as a critical factor within culture—critical of the status quo. Missional theologians see such a double posture as an antidote to a church that has largely accommodated to North American culture and has “lost its saltiness,” where its missionary nature has been eclipsed by its past established position in society.

In addition, these authors see the individualism of the western church as a major contributing factor to the individualist notion of mission, resulting in missions being defined in terms of the activities of individual Christians. They believe that a more communal church will be more effective in connecting society to the gospel, and will also aid the church in being a prophetic voice (critical factor) toward the destructive evils of society. At the risk of oversimplifying, one could summarize by saying that a strengthening of the communal and critical dimensions of the church (missional influence) are the missional theologians’ antidote to the established individualism and conformity of the church to culture (Christendom influence) that have hindered our effectiveness for the gospel as God’s missionary people.

As with any reforming movement in the church today, there are things here that deserve our attention. As D. A. Carson said in his preface to *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, “Whenever a Christian movement comes along that presents itself as reformist, it should not be summarily dismissed. Even if one ultimately decides that the movement embraces a number of worrying weaknesses, it may also have some important things to say that the rest of the Christian world needs to hear.”⁴

So it is with the task of this paper: while giving careful attention to what are important things to hear and receive, one does not want to uncritically import everything in a movement into one’s own theology and practice—missional theology also has its own “worrying weaknesses” which call for our critical examination in light of our CLB Statement of Faith.

The major headings of the paper will sort out the areas of missional theology that are both important to hear, and that contain points of concern that the committee wanted to investigate. Under the heading of Scripture, for example, what issues arise regarding how we know what we know (epistemology) and how we interpret what we know (hermeneutics) when one confronts what Craig Van Gelder calls the “hermeneutical turn” in our society (and indeed even in our churches)? Under the heading of Kingdom of God, how do missional theologians understand the Kingdom of God, and how does that measure up to the biblical picture of the Kingdom of God in both the Old and New Testaments? Missional theology is in many ways an ecclesiology (theology of the church)—how does this ecclesiology square with the Lutheran Confessions and the CLB Statement of Faith? What are the implications of this theology for the gospel, for evangelization, and for world-wide missions?

In recent decades many evangelical churches have rediscovered the social dimensions of the gospel, that is, the importance of helping the poor and loving our neighbor. This is important for a biblical practice for the witness of Christian community as salt and light in the world. The examples of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament epistles declare that compassion must always accompany proclamation. But a question that often arises when discussing the importance of tangibly loving one’s neighbor is what

happens to evangelization along the way? Do these concerns need to be in conflict? Can potential risks be minimized? Where does one look for guidance in becoming a biblically faithful, witnessing congregation in God's mission? These are very important questions for us as a church family to ponder. Part of the Lutheran Brethren heritage that we value is the importance of taking direction first of all from the Word of God, and thus it is our intent that this paper be exegetically grounded in the Bible. The Bible is our sure authority and norm for discovering what the church is and in determining our role in God's mission and it is with the topic of Scripture that this paper opens.

It is the hope and prayer of the CLB Study Committee on Missional Theology that this paper will serve our family of churches in hearing what is important in missional theology while recognizing its worrying weaknesses, and that we might remain true to the Bible, to our Lutheran confessions and to our Statement of Faith that hold us together as a particular family within the wider church in God's mission.

1. Scripture and Missional Theology

The role of Scripture is fundamental in shaping our understanding of the Mission of God/Mission of the Church.

A. The Authority of Scripture for Missional Theology

The Missional theology as represented by the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) sees it important to recognize the Scriptures as authoritative and normative. However, they do not generally speak of the nature of the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. They seek to be ecumenical and thus are inclusive of a broad stream of understandings of the nature of the Bible and how it is authoritative for the church and mission. In contrast we believe that the Bible is the verbally and plenary inspired, authoritative Word of God, the content of which is normative in guiding the Church in her participation in all aspects of the mission of the Triune God. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the only source and reference for faith and theology, for preaching and teaching and for all aspects of daily life. What one believes about the Bible affects what we can know from it and the authority that it has for the church.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that any pre-understandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.
We deny that Scripture should be required to fit alien pre-understandings, inconsistent with itself. (International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter ICBI). 2 Article XIX⁵)
2. **We affirm** that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives the Bible its canonical authority, and that the role of the Church was and is to recognize and affirm this authority and submit to it in all aspects of mission (II Tim. 3:16-17).
We deny that any other means of illumination or revelation is equal to or above the authority of the Bible (Gal. 1:7-9).
3. **We affirm** that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity. (ICBI.1 Article III⁶)
4. **We affirm** that Scripture speaks objective truth and that this truth is knowable and that it is the authoritative basis for what we are to believe, teach, and do as individuals and as the church.
We deny the view that it is not possible to assert an objectively formulated scriptural teaching.
5. **We affirm** that God who made humankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration. (ICBI.1 Article IV⁷)

B. The Interpretation of Scripture for Missional Theology

How one reads and interprets the Bible is significant for knowing what the Bible teaches. Missional theology literature is not uniform and thus employs a variety of interpretive methods. The missional theology represented by the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) accepts a diversity of interpretive methods and perceptions of reality. They assert that the use of one method is no longer viable given our present philosophical understanding and shift in human knowing, which they speak of as the hermeneutical turn (the recognition of a multi-perspectival view of knowing and interpreting truth). The interpretive process takes place in and by the Christian community of the congregation, resulting in a communally discerned will of God. In contrast the CLB affirms a *grammatico-historical* method of interpretation by which we can substantially know the *historical* objective truth and single meaning of Scripture given through its words (*grammar*). The way of reading and interpreting the Bible is to be in harmony with and consistent with its nature as stated in section I. We affirm that the final authority for faith and life lies in the biblical text and not in the community.⁸

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico - historical exegesis, which is aimed at discerning the meaning a biblical text would have had to its original author and reader, and takes into account its original context, its canonical context, its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.
We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship. (ICBI.1 Article XVIII⁹)
2. **We affirm** that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed.
We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application. (ICBI.2 Article VII¹⁰)
3. **We affirm** that the term hermeneutics, which historically signified the rules of exegesis, may properly be extended to cover all that is involved in the process of perceiving what the biblical revelation means and how it bears on our lives. **We deny** that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the "horizons" of the biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly "fuse" in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture. (ICBI.2 Article IX¹¹)
4. **We affirm** that one should use legitimate scholarly techniques in determining the authoritative biblical text and its intended meaning.
We deny the legitimacy of allowing any method of biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the biblical writer's expressed meaning, or of any other scriptural teaching. (See footnote for ICBI.2 Article XVI¹²)
5. **We affirm** that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message.
We deny that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to anyone anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.(ICBI. 2, Article IV¹³)

C. The Focus of Scripture for Missional Theology

The Scriptures declare the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of the God-Man Jesus Christ as the focus of God's revelation and plan to restore His eternal Kingdom rule over all people and creation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Word of God that creates faith in human hearts and opens the way of entrance to the Kingdom of God (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 1:16; Rom 10:17).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible. (Luke 24: 27, 44; John 5:39)
We deny that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct. (ICBI.2 Article III¹⁴)
2. **We affirm** that the Bible focuses the mission of the Triune God of the Old and New Testaments, in the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ and carried out by His Church, the worldwide community of those justified by faith in Christ (Gen. 3:15; John 3:16-17; John 20:21; Rev. 5:6-14).

We deny that there are ways into God’s Kingdom other than through faith in the person and redemptive work of God’s Son Jesus Christ (John 14:1).

3. **We affirm** that the same Word of God that gives the Church life also calls the Church into God’s redemptive mission and provides the saving message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. (Gen. 12:1-3; Ps. 96:3; Mt. 28:18-20, Mk 16:15; Acts 1:8).
We deny that mission is grounded and sourced in either the Church or the world.

D. The Application of Scripture for Missional Theology

All facets of our participation in God’s mission—our theology, plans, methods and activities—must align with God’s Word. The missional theology of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), due to the embracing of the hermeneutical turn, has shifted from an application of the objective truth known through the Scriptures to a more subjective view of truth which engages a variety of sources in addition to Scripture, such as tradition, experience and reason toward the development of a “theological imagination” as the method for determining God’s work in their midst. Mission seems to be more understood by way of the nature of the church and less by way of the Lord’s commissions given to His church, as found in Mt. 28:18-20 and Lk. 24:44-49. We affirm that the mission of the church is directed *both* by the missionary nature of God and the church, *and* the commissions He has given to the church. What has been stated in the previous sections concerning the Scriptures are presupposed and have implications for the application of the Bible. Thus, we confess that the Bible, as God’s final and complete written revelation, serves as the *basis* of mission, the *authority* for mission, and the *doing* of mission.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the Bible is the only authoritative corpus of material that provides the theological and theoretical base for informing, directing and evaluating the Church’s participation in the mission of God.
We deny that the Bible should accommodate to modern thought that has no place for the concepts of sin and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, or to post-modern thought that has no place for an absolute and authoritative Truth.
2. **We affirm** that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message.
We deny that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to anyone anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (ICBI.2 Article IV¹⁵)
3. **We affirm** that the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations.
We deny that the distinction between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative. (ICBI.2 Article VIII¹⁶)

2. The Kingdom of God and Missional Theology

A. An Old Testament Picture of the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God as revealed in the New Testament is rooted in and continuous with the Old Testament’s witness to the coming Messianic reign of God over all creation. Although there is no explicit use of the phrase “kingdom of God” in the Old Testament, the concepts of God’s kingly reign and a future Messianic kingdom are clear. David praised God in saying, “Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all” (I Chron. 29:11b). Moses and the Prophets identified the kingly reign of God as coming through a Messianic King who would claim both human and divine heritage (Gen. 3:15, 2 Sam. 7:16, Isa. 9:6-7). This Person would come through Israel and be for all nations (Gen 12:1-4; Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

The Old Testament speaks of this Messianic reign as characterized by peace, justice, and righteousness (Isa. 9:6-7, 11:4). This anticipated reign will be accomplished through the Messiah’s vicarious suffering which will establish these qualities between God and humanity (Isa. 53:4-11). A Biblical view of “kingdom” peace, justice and righteousness will see them sourced in the Messiah’s priestly sacrifice to establish harmony between God and humanity. Thus, the Messiah’s kingdom is established by His priestly

atonement (Zech. 6:11-13) and His work will produce a new covenant between God and humanity (Jer. 31:31-34 and Heb. 8:1-13).

At times the Old Testament expresses God's Messianic reign as affecting all of creation (Isa. 11:6-9 and Rom. 8:19-25). These passages speak of a Messianic reign of Christ that produces not only a transformation of the human relationship with God, but transformation that will ultimately change the whole creation. In the "age to come," God will fully manifest His kingly rule and will bring perfect restoration to all of His creation (Hab. 2:14).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the redemptive reign of God in the Old Testament, finds its glorious fulfillment in the Messiah King Jesus Christ, the God-Man, established by His priestly sacrifice for our sin on the cross.
We deny that there is little or no continuity between God's kingly reign in the Old Testament and the kingdom of God as taught in the New Testament.

B. The Kingdom of God in Jesus' Teaching

The kingdom of God was a central aspect in the teaching of Jesus, and so it must be in the teaching of the church. Jesus said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God...because that is why I was sent" (Lk. 4:43). He taught his disciples, "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (Matt. 10:7). Luke records Jesus' words, "When you enter a town...heal the sick and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'" (Lk. 10:8-9). As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out, in Jesus' mission there is both the presence of the kingdom and the proclamation of the kingdom. Jesus Himself *is* the presence of God's kingdom; but Jesus also *preaches* the kingdom.¹⁷ The early church proclaimed the redemptive reign of God as synonymous with Christ's saving work (Acts 8:12; 10:37-39; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Accordingly, to talk about the presence of the kingdom of God is to talk about the presence of Jesus and His saving work. The teachings of Jesus also exhibit a tension between the kingdom of God as a present Messianic rule over people's lives and a future eschatological fulfillment of His rule over all creation. Jesus taught that His spiritual rule over people's lives must be received in the simple trust of a child (Matt. 18:3, Mk. 10:15). Yet He also taught that the kingdom of God would be an eschatological order established in the future age to come, when His rule over all creation would be evident (Matt. 25:31-34, Mk. 8:11, Lk. 13:24-30).

Therefore, the kingdom of God is spiritual in nature, but it also has material manifestations and results here and now. The church, as a visible manifestation of the kingdom in the present, has been entrusted with the mission of proclaiming this eschatological aspect of the kingdom as well. Jesus foretold, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the kingdom of God is spiritual in nature and that Jesus is the presence of the kingdom of God.
We deny that God's kingdom is anything other than His soteriological, redemptive reign, revealed in Jesus Christ and presently with us, whose goal is the destruction of all powers of evil and ultimately death itself (I Cor. 15:23-28)
2. **We affirm** that while the kingdom of God is spiritual in nature, it also has material manifestations and results in this present age.
We deny that the church's physical/material manifestations of love to people can usher in or create the kingdom of God on earth.
3. **We affirm** that while the kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ, there is yet a future, eschatological consummation of the kingdom that is still to come when Christ evidences in fullness His redemptive reign over all creation.
We deny any identification of Christ's work of salvation with any utopian ideas of progress, development and social change.

C. The Kingdom of God and the Reign of God

The concept of the kingdom (reign) of God is foundational in much of missional literature. There is a need to clarify what missional writers mean by this term, the definition of which will largely depend upon the background of the missional author. Some missional theologians describe the missional vocation of the church as that of representing the redemptive reign of God. Words like "peace" (*shalom*) are used to describe the kingdom's (and therefore the church's) overarching vision of the future, including justice and all the physical and material blessings that come with being God's people living under his covenant rule.

Beyond this, missional authors point out the New Testament depiction of God's reign as arising from God's mission to reconcile the creation, accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). These authors speak of the manifestation of this kingdom rule as coming by way of Jesus Christ's cross and resurrection. This aspect of the kingdom is present with us now in Jesus' person and ministry (Mt. 12:28). In these events God has defeated the power of

sin and death that distorted His once good creation. The future rule of God manifested in these Christ events, having broken into world history ahead of time, now serves as the first fruits of the world's future when it will be fully and finally reconciled to God in the new heaven and the new earth (I Cor. 15:23-24).¹⁸

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that peace, justice and reconciliation accurately describe God's vision for the future under His rule.
We deny that these blessings of the kingdom of God are possible apart from the reconciling work of Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection.
2. **We affirm** that the consummation of God's reign, though already active among us in the person and ministry of Jesus, is still future, in the new heaven and new earth.
We deny that the church is called to usher in or build a new heaven and earth in this present age.

D. The Kingdom of God and God's Work of Salvation

Some missional writers speak of a couple of distortions regarding the kingdom of God in the thinking and practice of the church. The first is to make the kingdom so other-worldly that it has no connection to the realities of our world and the struggles of our history. This distortion reduces the kingdom of God to an individualized, inner experience of salvation, a private transaction between the person and God. This often comes at the expense of any reference to Christ's Lordship over all of life, and with little regard to the social dimensions of the kingdom in this present age.

A second distortion frequently mentioned by missional authors is a tendency of the church to reduce the kingdom of God to only one of its aspects: the visible manifestation of the kingdom in the church. This second distortion shifts the focus away from the Biblical picture of the kingdom of God coming through Christ's death and resurrection and toward a confidence in human reason, social dynamics, and pragmatic technique. Such a position reflects a presumption that the reign of God resides in and is exercised through the activities of the church; thus, any expansion or growth of the church is equivalent to "extending" or "building" the kingdom of God. Such thinking has arisen from a Christendom heritage of power and privilege and the modernist's confidence in reason and social progress. The kingdom of God, in essence, gets shifted and reduced to the life and activities of a social institution, albeit the church. This shift, however, goes against the Biblical picture of the reign of God as *His* activity – accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection, and offered by God as a gift to all who receive it in faith.¹⁹ Rather than the church possessing the kingdom of God and giving shape to its mission, the biblical picture sees God's kingdom as possessing the church, consisting of a people whose lives are shaped by His kingdom rule.

The biblical picture of the totality of the kingdom of God, His redemptive reign, will include both the individual and personal salvation aspect as well as Christ's Lordship over all of life, both individual and corporate (Eph. 4; Gal. 5). While we should not equate the church and the kingdom, neither should we separate them. The kingdom is indeed present in the Church, the community of believers, as Christ reigns over all of life and manifests the blessings of His reign through the witness of His people to a lost world (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5; I Cor. 6:9).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that since the church is a messianic community created by the gospel of the kingdom of God and led by His Spirit through the Word into that reign, we cannot separate the church from the kingdom of God.
We deny that we should equate the reign of God with the church.
2. **We affirm** that a biblical view of the kingdom of God does not separate personal salvation from God's work to restore all of creation (Rom. 8:21; Isa. 9:7; 11:9).
We deny that salvation should be reduced to only an individual and personal salvation.

E. The Kingdom (Messianic Reign) of God Touches All of Life

Many missional authors speak of the manifestation of the redemptive/salvific reign of God as having bearing on every dimension of life (Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-21). These authors see evangelization through proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection as an essential and specialized activity within the larger framework of mission and place an emphasis upon a firm commitment to evangelization. These authors also maintain that we are to take the message of the good news of Christ's death and resurrection to *everyone, everywhere* and that this message is ultimately about *everything*. (Similarly, the evangelical *Lausanne* Covenant (1974)

defined evangelization as “the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.”) This leads to an inclusion of the whole of life coming into interaction with the redemptive work of Christ as the church bears witness to and lives out the reign (kingdom) of God. Missional literature claims that the once held paradigm of evangelism *versus* social action collapses with this understanding.

This missional holistic emphasis regarding the impact of the message of Christ as touching all of life challenges the church to ask questions like: “Do we understand that the gospel impacts every area of our life?” “Do we preach in such a way that the Word of God brings conviction and redemption to the whole of life?” “Should communicating the redemptive message of Christ to the eternal state of people’s souls also lead to our concern over moral issues like poverty, war, racial/gender/economic inequality, human trafficking, reconciliation and so on?”

While missional theologians maintain that evangelization is an *essential* and *specialized* activity within God’s broader mission, we in the CLB must also be clear that in the life of Jesus and in the life of the church as depicted in the Book of Acts, it is not only essential, it is the *primary* activity. As one source points out, Jesus identified God’s mission as beginning with the announcement to the world of the forgiveness of sins.²⁰ We dare not only insist on a firm commitment to evangelization; we must be clear that since we are talking about the *redemptive* reign of God and not merely an earthly kind of redemption, it is indeed the eternal redemption of all things in Christ that Biblical mission is moving us toward (Col. 1:19-20). The eternal message of salvation in Jesus Christ is certainly to be taken to *everyone, everywhere*, and it is indeed about *everything* in the sense that there is to be no part of life that is exempt from the impact of the gospel. Any witness to the kingdom will be the natural result of the inner transformation wrought by the Spirit of God in each individual and in the community of the church as a whole. Rooted in the Scriptures and traditional orthodox teaching outlined in our Statement of Faith, our witness to the kingdom will be lived out in humble imitation of Christ’s own preaching and work, the evidence of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Jesus Himself—as Prophet, Priest and King—is the presence of the kingdom; nevertheless, we must always be mindful that He also *proclaimed* the kingdom: the good news of the forgiveness of sins and God’s reconciliation of the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Mark 1: 14-15).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that in the Church’s participation in God’s mission, evangelism is primary.
We deny that any part of life is exempt from the impact of the gospel.
2. **We affirm** that Jesus Christ Himself has established the proclamation of the Gospel as the primary mission of the church.
We deny that any good and right activities that the church might engage in can be allowed to take the place of the proclamation of the Gospel.
3. **We affirm** that the Holy Spirit is active in the proclaimed Gospel and through it brings people to faith in Jesus Christ, brings them into God’s kingdom, and makes them members of the Church.
We deny that any good and right activities that the church might engage in apart from the Gospel, even when labeled “kingdom activities,” can bring people into God’s kingdom and make them members of Church.

F. Maintaining a Balanced View of the Kingdom of God in Mission

“Do we understand that the gospel impacts every area of our life?” We must address such questions about the extent of the gospel’s impact in a way that is faithful to our interpretation of the Bible as reflected in the Lutheran confessions and our CLB Statement of Faith. We also wrestle with these questions out of a historical and cultural context: for example, the western church of the 1920s and 1930s expressed deep concerns over the role of Christianity in the culture and how the church should express that role. This concern led to an application of Christian ethics to social problems that accompanied industrialization, especially in terms of alienation, oppression and discrimination. Many positive reforms came out of this movement, but for some in the church, there also came a confusion of salvation with expressions of social concern. The church became valued only for what it could contribute to social and political reforms. This effort, which Lesslie Newbigin termed “a kingdom without Jesus”—had little emphasis on a call for repentance and forgiveness. Mission became a movement to “build the kingdom of God” as though it were a human program rather than God’s reign. Men and women were called to put their trust in things that ultimately cannot satisfy. The conservatives of the day in turn reacted through a rejection of the church’s involvement in social issues, for fear that any emphasis on such activity would eclipse the spiritual dimensions of the gospel. Instead, they directed their preaching of the kingdom to an inner experience of personal salvation. Newbigin termed this a preaching of “Jesus without the kingdom.” Both of the above approaches ultimately separated Jesus from the kingdom of God.²¹

The solution to this problem, however, will be more complex than simply getting some to preach more repentance and forgiveness, and for others to care more holistically for their neighbors. There needs to be an ongoing theological and missiological investigation into our understanding of the kingdom of God, the gospel and the church. This investigation will utilize sound biblical exegesis, consider the historical Christian faith over the centuries as well as the more recent history that shaped our own CLB Statement of Faith, examine our present-day cultural and social settings, and rely upon the presence and guidance of the Spirit as

He leads us into the future as a unified church body. Such study, while acknowledging that theology is a human undertaking, can establish objective and transcendent truth, even though conditioned by our various cultures and histories. All conclusions need to be held up to the light of God's perfect revelation in Scripture, which is our sole absolute and normative standard that is never culturally conditioned. What God has revealed in the Bible is absolutely true, and if we want to know His truth, we must operate from an attitude of submission to His biblical Word and a recognition of what human reason cannot accomplish apart from Him.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of every Christian's duty, since both express our doctrines of God and humanity, our love for our neighbor and our daily walk under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
We deny that evangelism and social concern are mutually exclusive.

G. The Kingdom of God and Lutheran Theology

Turning to our historic confessions, Luther's Catechism teaches us that the kingdom of God is the spiritual kingdom of grace in which God rules in the hearts and lives of believers. In the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." What does this mean? Luther answered, "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself, but we pray in this petition that it come also to us." How does the kingdom come to us? The Catechism continues, "The kingdom of God comes to us when the Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his Holy Word and live a godly life here on earth and in heaven forever."

At this point, one might ask the question, "So why should we do anything but simply preach the Word?" Luther gave us an answer when he taught about the "godly life" in his "Treatise on Christian Liberty," in *The Freedom of a Christian*, "A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything. A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all."²² He continued, "From faith there flows a love and joy in the Lord. From love there proceeds a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves the neighbor and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude. . . Nor we do we distinguish between friends or enemies. . . This is just as our Father does, who gives all things to all people richly and freely, making 'his sun to rise on the evil and on the good' (Matt. 5:45). As sons and daughters we will act in a similar way."²³ Similarly, Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Lk. 6:27, 28). Again, Luther affirmed, "The only reason we are living on earth is to help other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God choked us and let us die as soon as we were baptized and had begun to believe. But he allows us to live here so that we will bring other people to faith, just as he has done for us."²⁴ Thus the goal of evangelization, beyond simply making individual believers, is to persuade believers to live as responsible, maturing members of the church: the temporal and communal form of the kingdom of God on earth, sent to bear witness corporately and individually to Christ's present reign in power and glory.

As those who are citizens of God's kingdom, members of the church are called by her Lord to exhibit in this world the humility, service, and loving-kindness that characterize God's kingdom as it characterized Christ's ministry among people. Furthermore, since God's kingdom stands in opposition to the kingdom of the world, the church also, as part of that kingdom, embodies a distinctive, alternative, counter cultural community within the world. As a body of redeemed people who are citizens of God's kingdom, the church lives in anticipation of the final realization of God's kingdom.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the church is not identical with the kingdom of God, but it is the transitory, communal form of it in this age (I Pet. 2:9).
We deny that those who are citizens of God's kingdom and the church can be faithful to Jesus Christ while avoiding His call to manifest His love in physical/material ways to people.
2. **We affirm** that the church, as a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's kingdom, is called to witness to the gospel as an alternative community of God's spiritual and redemptive reign in the world.
We deny that God's kingdom is anything other than His soteriological, redemptive reign, revealed in Jesus Christ and presently with us, whose goal is the destruction of all powers of evil, and ultimately death itself (I Cor. 15:23-28).
3. **We affirm** that the church's anticipation of the final, eschatological realization of God's kingdom should motivate us, individually and corporately, to humbly manifest Christ's love in physical/material service to people.
We deny that the church's physical/material manifestations of love to people can usher in or create the kingdom of God on earth.

3. The Mission of God and Missional Theology

A. The Historical Background to the “Mission of God”

Missional theology roots itself in the *missio Dei* (mission of God), a term that appeared in the 16th century to speak of the Father sending the Son, and the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit. It eventually included reference to the Triune God sending the church. The concept returned to prominence again in the 20th century with the 1960 German publication of Lutheran theologian Georg F. Vicedom’s book, *Missio Dei*, (English version: *The Mission of God*).²⁵ His work followed a conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany in 1952, which affirmed, “the missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself.” The conference, and later Vicedom’s book, grounded and sourced mission in the Triune God, regarding mission not as a human enterprise or an entity in itself that is distinct from the church, but as the fruit of the missionary nature of God, carried out through His church. The conclusion of Willingen was that the church does not so much have a mission, as though the church existed prior to its purpose, but the mission of Christ has a church. Much of missional literature speaks of God’s mission as the essence of the Church, out of which structure, organization and programs surface in service to the mission. We are to understand the church not in terms of programs and activities—what churches *do*—but from the church’s missionary *essence or nature* which we have received from a missionary God.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that mission is rooted, grounded and sourced in the Triune God rather than in the church.
We deny that mission has its source in the church or in its activities designed to extend the church.
2. **We affirm** that mission is the fruit of the missionary nature of God carried out through His church.
We deny that mission is a human enterprise or entity in itself that is distinct from the church.

B. Divergent Definitions of “The Mission of God”

While the 20th century *missio Dei* thinking began around 1952 within the International Missionary Council (IMC), a serious problem developed when the IMC was later absorbed into the World Council of Churches (1961) and the *missio Dei* conversation took a fatal turn, resulting in the church being completely replaced by “Kingdom of God, shalom and service to the world.” Now the world, not the Bible, set the agenda for mission, and where before God’s mission had a church, in this new form the newly defined “mission of God” eclipsed the church entirely. By 1968 (WCC at Uppsala, Sweden) the kingdom of God was redefined as “humanization.” Mission in these terms became restricted to secularized programs for urban renewal, civil rights movements and struggles for dignity. While many of these things may be good activities in and of themselves, the earlier intent of Willingen (1952) to find the church’s place within God’s mission was clearly lost and the church was either sidelined in a redefined “mission” or was valued only for its service to a politicized mission. The missional conversation within the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) is an attempt to again pick up the task begun at Willingen and to affirm the essential role that the church has in mission and to assert that Scripture is normative and therefore authoritative for the Christian community. How one carries out the interpretive task regarding Scripture will vary with the theological background of the authors (See the earlier section on The Mission of God and Scripture).

Thus, it is critical for the CLB that any view of “missional” that we might hold derives from a biblically and historically orthodox view of Scripture, the church and mission. What would such a view consist of? For example, such a view of the church will be clear regarding the following: (1) God’s people are transformed through personal faith in the gospel, (2) that they live their lives in grateful devotion to all that Christ and the apostles taught according the inspired, inerrant Word of God, (3) that they love and serve His church as a caring community of faithful believing members, (4) that they are sent to be His witnesses into all the world as the chief agent of God’s mission of salvation and reconciliation. While the world is the primary location of God’s mission activity, the world must never define or set the agenda of mission; for this we must turn to God’s revelation in Scripture. Readings in missional theology should include missional works that prominently emphasize this perspective (e.g. Klaus Detlev Schulz, Timothy Tennent, Charles Van Engen, Craig Ott, Steven Strauss, Christopher Wright, Ed Stetzer et. al.).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the Bible, not the world, sets the agenda for mission and the church's participation in that mission.
We deny that mission is an ideological crusade or a social program of humanization.
2. **We affirm** that the church is essential to God's work of salvation and is called, gathered, grounded in the faith and sent by her Lord to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed.
We deny that the church is dispensable or even incidental to what God is doing.

C. Embracing a Biblical Understanding of the Mission of God

One of the positive fruits of the early *missio* (send) discussion that we can affirm is for the church to consider itself as not merely a *sending* body (sending missionaries to far away places), but also as a body of commissioned believers *sent* by God into the world: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21b). Every church lives in a mission field of lost people; God calls and sends us with the gospel message of salvation in Christ to be an active missionary presence within our own societies (Mt. 5:14; II Cor. 5:17-20). The church is essential to God's work of salvation as the spiritual children of Abraham are blessed to "be a blessing to the nations" (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:7).

We in the CLB can agree with missional teaching that mission is not an add-on or a separate program of the local church; God's mission impacts all that the church is and does out of its own missionary nature. Thus, for example, rather than simply determining how to spend the mission budget, one views the entire congregational budget as an exercise in mission. The church understands itself as a called out community, gathered and centered in Word and Sacrament and sent back into the world with the Word as God's missionary people. It is in this light that some missional theologians remind us that the crisis facing the church today is not one of method and technique, but instead is theological and spiritual.

A called out community is separate from the world not in terms of isolation from the world but in its difference from it. Such a congregation serves as a critical voice in speaking the Law of God toward the injustices and unrighteous acts in the surrounding culture, not in a judgmental or self-righteous way, but in a way that convicts of sin and advocates for those who are victims of such evils. A congregation that is biblically missional will serve as an alternative and contrast community, enlightened and built up in God's grace through Word and sacrament and mutual caring. Strengthened in such biblical fellowship, such a congregation is familiar with the entire biblical narrative of God's plan and acts of redemption from Genesis to Revelation, and understands that this is the purpose for which the church was created. As individuals and as an entire community, the local congregation sees its place in this narrative, and views its essence and place as a community set apart and sent into its community and all the world with the saving message of the Savior King who is coming again in power and righteousness to finish the work of establishing His redemptive reign for all eternity.

Jesus Christ calls the church to extend His Gospel call to sinners that they might enter into His kingdom through His sacrifice and His righteousness. And, since faith alone in the Person of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work provides entrance into God's kingdom and membership in the Church, and since this faith comes by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of the Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Savior and King is the center-piece of the church's mission in this world. "God the Father has revealed Himself as the Creator and preserver of the universe, to Whom the entire creation and all creatures are subject" (Doctrinal Statement of Faith CLB Art. II, B). It is in this hope that all creation waits for His appearing. "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that God's mission includes our own societies and local communities as well as distant people and cultures.
We deny that the urgency of mission to nominally Christian cultures is equal to that of distant cultures and people groups that have never heard the gospel.
2. **We affirm** that God's mission is a result of God's initiative and purpose as revealed in Scripture, and that His mission impacts all that the church is and does.
We deny that mission is essentially a separate activity or program of the church, or merely a subset of theology.
3. **We affirm** that the crisis facing the church today is theological and spiritual.
We deny that we can solve the crisis facing the church today by better methods and/or technique.
4. **We affirm** that Jesus Christ Himself has established the proclamation of the Gospel as the primary mission of the church.

We deny that any good and right activities that the church might engage in can be allowed to displace the proclamation of the Gospel.

5. **We affirm** that the Holy Spirit is active in the proclaimed Gospel and through it brings people to faith in Jesus Christ, brings them into God's kingdom, and makes them members of His Church.

We deny that any good and right activities that the church might engage in apart from the Gospel, even when labeled "kingdom activities," can bring people into God's kingdom and make them members of His Church.

D. The Mission of God as it Relates to the Calling of the Church

Missional theology says that God calls and sends the church as a witness, sign, foretaste and instrument of His redemptive reign on earth, centered in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:18-19; 14:16-18; Col. 1:13-20). Writing on the Lord's Prayer, Luther prayed in the Large Catechism, "Dear Father, we ask you first to give us your Word, so that the gospel may be properly preached throughout the world and then that it may also be received in faith and may work and dwell in us, so that your kingdom may pervade among us through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit and the devil's kingdom may be destroyed so that he may have no right or power over us until finally his kingdom is utterly eradicated and sin, death and hell wiped out, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness."²⁶

We can affirm the missional position that the calling of the church is *not* to build, extend, establish or bring about the Kingdom, as though it were a social project or ideological crusade constructed around human action. One author, for example, says the church has turned "peace and justice into idols, substitutes for the reign of God, rather than gifts of God."²⁷ Evangelicals will agree, since the kingdom, though not separate from the church, is distinguishable from the church. The church, local and universal, serves the King under His redemptive reign, and represents and announces the good news of this Kingdom to those within as well as those outside the church.

As a servant of the Kingdom, the church also has a responsibility in society to clearly and openly denounce through the Law of God the devil's work in the world: racism, sexism, classism and all forms of evil and injustice. "To rebuke the authorities," writes Luther "is certainly not a revolutionary act when it is done at the Divine command and in accordance with the Law of God, openly, fearlessly and honestly. It would, in fact, be much more dangerous to the public weal [well-being] if a preacher were not to rebuke authority for its injustices."²⁸ We must take care, however, that this role of witness into the realm of worldly powers (Law) never displaces the work of the church in the spiritual realm—ministry must always be carried out with eternity in view, in terms of the articulation of the evangelistic invitation and people coming to faith in Christ and growing in that faith (Gospel).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the church's missionary imperative is to proclaim and give living witness to God's will for the world as a, sign, foretaste and instrument of His redemptive reign on earth.

We deny that the calling of the church is to build, extend, establish or bring about the Kingdom, as though it were a social project or ideological crusade constructed around human action.

E. The Mission of God as it Relates to the Actions of the Church

In addition to the church's role as a critical voice in society, there is also a positive side to the church's engagement of the world, which brings up the subject of the relationship of mercy ministries to God's mission through the church. While wanting to avoid the errors of equating the gospel with all social action, we must also recognize that Scripture does include works of compassion toward the neighbor as an integral part of Christian living and witness. Moreover, such works are not optional for the Christian. In addition to loving fellow believers (I Pet. 2:15), we are also to show hospitality to the stranger, visit those who are in prison or are mistreated (Heb 13:1) and we are to do good to *all* people (Gal. 6:9-10).

While peace, justice and mercy are not the sum total of mission, neither are they the enemies of mission: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9). While Jesus gave priority to preaching the gospel, His works of love were more than merely incidental to His ministry. Jesus did nothing by mere chance; His works of compassion were done with a view to His ministry of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, as is evident in His healing of the paralytic (Mk. 2:10-11). This was done in the service of His mission as the Son of God and Savior of the world, and was repeated in the actions of the early church (Acts 3:1-

23; 4:9-10). When Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, let us not ask, “But who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:25-37). Christ’s followers must not join the priest and the Levite in passing by the needy, but will, like the Good Samaritan, provide Christ-like compassion and tangible expressions of love. (See the document, *Faith Active in Love: Human Care in the Church’s Life*.²⁹)

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that as Jesus Christ entered the world and manifested His goodness and mercy in physical ways to people, so He calls His church to manifest His love in physical/material ways to people.
We deny that any good and right activities that the church might engage in should ever substitute for the evangelistic proclamation of the Gospel.
2. **We affirm** that the church’s anticipation of the final realization of God’s kingdom should motivate us to manifest Christ’s love in physical/material ways to people.
We deny that the church’s physical/material manifestations of love to people can usher in or create the kingdom of God on earth.

F. The Mission of God as it Relates to the Evangelical Church

Turning to another issue for consideration, a criticism of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany in 1952 (see Section 3, A) that sometimes surfaces in discussion about the missional church today is that Willingen affirmed the concept of partnership in obedience to the call to mission, but interpreted it in such a way that at times the fostering of unity among the churches appeared to receive more emphasis than that of reaching a sinful and lost world. Missional literature coming out of mainline/conciliar circles continues to intentionally define mission in broad terms out of a concern to be inclusive of all who call themselves the church, and mission occasionally ends up being little more than a servant of ecumenism. This is not found, however, in missional literature written from an evangelical perspective. With missional evangelicals, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren recognizes that rather than a call to organizational unity, Jesus Christ calls His church to extend His gospel call to lost sinners that they might enter into His kingdom through His sacrifice and His righteousness.

Moreover, since faith alone in the Person of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work provides membership in the church and entrance into God’s kingdom and since this faith comes by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of the gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Savior and King is the indispensable center-piece of the church’s mission in this world. The proclamation of God’s Word, both Law and Gospel, presented in word and deeds, should lead everywhere to the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ among everyone, that exhibits a new, defined reality as salt and light in its social environment (See the Frankfurt Declaration, 1970).³⁰

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that Jesus Christ calls His church to proclaim His gospel to lost sinners that they might enter into His kingdom through His sacrifice and His righteousness.
We deny that the mission of God is to serve as a tool for structural unity of the church in the name of ecumenism.

4. The Church and Missional Theology

A. The State of the Church in God’s Mission Today

Missional theology frequently highlights two observations about the church in North America: (1) the church has been demoted from its position of privilege and importance in society, and (2) the church has become too accommodated to the culture to be spiritually effective.³¹ These are, of course, rather sweeping generalizations, since we know that along with the decline of certain sectors of the church there are also numerous instances today where even traditionally orthodox churches are making inroads into the culture and are experiencing notable growth, even among young post-moderns. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that, in general, one can no longer assume that the established, privileged place long held by the church is still intact; and it is also true that both mainline and evangelical churches have accommodated the culture around us on a level that seriously compromises the message of the gospel. Compounding the problem, there is an increasing lack of clarity in many of our churches across the denominational spectrum on what defines the gospel and what defines the church.

In past decades, churches have frequently turned to the social sciences for principles in scientific management, method and technique to overcome the challenges that face us. Missional theologians maintain that doing the same things harder or turning to new models, methods and techniques to make the church successful one more time is neither biblical nor sufficient for today’s mission.

However, rather than despairing about this situation, missional observers see this as an opportune moment for the church, when one can ask if our presuppositions and organizational structures for the church are no longer properly rooted in the gospel.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the church no longer holds a status in society that it once had, and that the church has often overly accommodated itself to the surrounding culture.
We deny that the solution to the crisis facing today's church can be found in sociological models, methods and techniques.

B. The Faithful and Relevant Church

To share the gospel effectively, our churches must be both faithful to the Bible and relevant to the culture. Emphasis on relevancy without faithfulness to the Scriptures results in dangerous accommodations that sever us from our biblical identity and purpose. Then again, adhering too strictly to what we might perceive to be a biblical pattern for expressing our faith can lead to a proclamation of the gospel that is in harmony with the Bible, but is unintelligible to those we want to reach. The struggle to be both faithful and relevant is always a challenge for the church in every generation.

The solution most often proposed by missional theologians is a theological one: to wed missiology with ecclesiology (theology of the church). Ecclesiology cannot be properly understood apart from God's mission. To this end, missional theologians have sought to define the church's essence in terms of God's mission and His redemptive reign in Christ. According to this view, church and mission are not two distinct and separate entities; instead, they are interrelated and complementary. The church is a community of believers, gathered around the teaching of the 12 apostles, with the calling to take the good news of the kingdom to all the world. The church is empowered by the Spirit to do greater things than Jesus did in His public ministry (Jn. 14:12). The church is taught by the Spirit through the Word to discern God's leading and His working (Jn. 14:26). The church is led by the Spirit into the world and empowered to fully participate in God's mission—beginning with the announcement of the forgiveness of sins (Jn. 20:21-23).³² Where we will need to be diligent is in ensuring that our perceived Spiritual guidance aligns with what He has revealed in His Word, and that the proclamation of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins is primary. We must also keep in mind that the gospel itself is *always* relevant, although we might frequently have to evaluate whether we are communicating the gospel in terms that our audience can understand. Are we making the gospel truly accessible to those who need to hear it?

The presence and leading of the Spirit gives birth to a church that is missionary by nature; thus, to do less than to participate fully in God's mission would be contrary to her nature, purpose and ministry calling. Mission, consequently, is not summed up in the activities which the church takes on in obedience or as its responsibility in the world. Rather, like other aspects of the life of the church—such as worship, discipleship and fellowship—its missionary activities flow out of its missionary DNA—out of its very nature and essence—created and gifted to us by God for participation in His mission. A church without mission and a mission without the church are both contradictions. As the Lutheran theologian Georg Vicedom put it, both church and mission have their source in the loving will of God, thus they cannot be separated. “There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world.”³³

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the church is a community of God's missionary people.
We deny that mission is summed up in the activities or programs of the church.

C. The Church as a Community of Missionary People

Along with a missional emphasis on the church being God's missionary people, missional theology emphasizes converting members into ministers of the gospel. In the process, there is a call to overcome dependence upon charismatic leaders and a perceived overly-clerical model of ministry. In an overly-clerical model, church members have less opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts in community and are more inclined to become individual consumers of “religious goods and services.” Missional church leaders encourage their members to dwell in the Word of God in community and to take ownership of the congregation's administration and ministry, giving priority to the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers ministering together in community. In the same way, church is not “a place where things happen,” but a believing community among whom and through whom God ministers His means of grace. Missional theology calls for a different style of leadership that calls the church community into biblically informed reflection and discernment of what God is doing in the world and what He wants to do.

While granting the value of community and spiritual discernment, however, these are areas where the core missional literature that flows out of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) has come under critique. For example, while there is great stress on the

communal dimension of the church discerning and participating in God's mission to the world, there is as of yet insufficient discussion or guidance on the calling and equipping of individual Christians for mission in the world.³⁴ This is also a place where missional literature and Lesslie Newbigin (an early pioneer in the missional discussion) have some divergence. Newbigin's position will sound quite similar to that of Luther on this subject. For example, Newbigin wrote, "I do not believe that the role of the Church in a secular society is primarily exercised in the corporate action of the churches as organized bodies in the political or cultural fields... On the contrary, I believe that it is [exercised] through the action of Christian lay people, playing their roles as citizens, workers, managers, legislators."³⁵ Individual believers, as well as the corporate community, are called by the Word of God to proclaim in word and deed His redemptive reign in every area of life, even through our occupations. These words find harmony with Luther's stress on the vocation of the Christian as a means of participating in God's mission in the world. This is an arena that lends itself to much deeper consideration and practice in our CLB congregations.

Secondly, our knowledge of what God is doing and wants to do in our world will be determined first of all through the biblical text of what God has done in the past, and what God has given and called the church to do, considering together what this might look like in our own times and situations. God will use us today in much the same way as He has used His people in past times (Luke 24:44-49).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the church expresses its identity in the priesthood of all believers following God in His mission through Word, sacrament and Christian community.
We deny that the ministries of the church should be limited to those in ordained ministry to the exclusion of the laity.
2. **We affirm** that the offices of church leadership are "to prepare God's people for works of service" for the maturing of the church "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-23).
We deny that only certain gifts have value in building up the Body of Christ for participation in God's mission.
3. **We affirm** that the biblical pattern for the church's involvement in God's mission includes both a congregational/communal expression and an individual Christian expression that is lived out in every area of life.
We deny that the primary form of the church's involvement in God's mission is communal, important as that is.

D. The Church and the Leading of the Spirit in Mission

One additional aspect that is important to note in regards to the church is missional theology's emphasis on the church being a discerning community around God's Word. While the paper addresses this issue in part under the heading of the role of the Scriptures, it bears repeating here in terms of the theology of the church. Some missional authors, reacting against a perceived overly-clerical leadership of the church, place emphasis on the community "imagining" what God is doing and wanting to do among us and in the world. We recognize here the potential of this becoming an "anything goes" and overly subjective approach to biblical interpretation. While missional authors do caution against an "anything goes" approach to Scripture, and point out that this is to be a biblical and theological "imagining," more needs to be said about why the Bible is authoritative and how one rightly handles Scriptural authority within congregations (2 Tim. 3:16). Some missional authors prefer the word "discernment" over "imagination," since discernment is a more biblical way and a less confusing way of talking about the process of exploring the leading of the Spirit among us (Philippians 1:9-11). While this change to biblical wording is an improvement, it still does not alleviate the problems that surround the fundamental differences that arise between the mainline/Conciliar view of the inspiration of Scripture and our view as outlined in our CLB Statement of Faith. The differences in what we believe about the nature and authority of Scripture will impact how Scripture is used in our congregations.

According to missional literature, the process of discerning what God is doing and what He wants to do incorporates two components. The first is that of leading the congregation in learning to dwell in the Scriptures. Certain select passages may be considered over weeks or months as the congregation listens for the guidance of the Spirit (e.g. Lk 10:1-12; Jn. 20:19-23). The second component is the voices of the community in which the church is located. One gets to know one's neighbors and talks with them about their life in the community. The art of listening is to be cultivated and employed. These two components are then brought together as the congregation considers what God might be saying to them about what He is doing and how they can join Him in mission to their neighbors.

This process can appear rather mystifying and one wonders, can one ever really know for sure what God is doing among us, or what He wants us to do in our particular community? There certainly is real value in dwelling in the Scriptures in order to know the heart and will of the God of the Bible and what it means to be His church sent. There is also great value for the members of the church to be out in their communities, listening to their neighbors. The manner in which such a venture is carried out will be of great importance—such a process of contemplating and listening must be done under the Bible's authority using sound exegetical

and hermeneutical practice, leading God's people through interpretive principles that do not veer off into a subjective exercise in determining God's leading. We must also remember that while getting out and listening to the people of communities is a vital practice as we seek to communicate the gospel in terms they will understand, we must never allow the world the role of shaping the mission of God. The Bible must always determine the message and set the agenda of mission.

To demystify the process of determining the Spirit's leading in mission and to guard against over-reliance upon feelings and subjectivity, we might reframe the questions, "What is God doing?" and "What does God want to do?" in more concrete terms. We can examine the Scriptures and specifically look for what God did in Scripture in carrying out His mission. What do the words and activities of God in the Bible tell us about His purposes and activities for today? How does the Bible define the church in terms of His mission, and how does God draw His people into the work of His mission? What has God called and given the church to proclaim and do? From that vantage point, one can then study the community of people that surrounds the church and match the gifts, talents and resources of the church as to how best to be God's missionary people in that particular context. When we take our biblically informed understanding of how God has worked through His people in the past to draw all people to Himself, we can then individually and collectively prayerfully act out our faith by loving our neighbor in accord with what we see in the Bible. We will listen to our neighbors' concerns and views and apply the life transforming gospel to those situations. The church will be an alternative, contrast community where our neighbor can meet Jesus through the proclamation of the gospel and active love and care expressed through His followers. When we do that, it will become increasingly clear to us how God is acting out His mission in us and through us today.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the Bible has been given by God to the whole church and that its interpretation and use is the primary means by which God communicates His will to the church as individuals and as a spiritual community.
We deny that the leading of the Spirit ever contradicts the plain sense of God's truth in Scripture.
2. **We affirm** that the Bible is God's special revelation that is God's absolute truth which is confirmed and expressed in the historic orthodox confessions and teachings of the church.
We deny that the meaning of Scripture is relative in nature and subject to the imaginations or preferences of individuals apart from historic orthodox beliefs of the church about its meanings.
3. **We affirm** that God has gifted the church with His Word and with spiritual gifts of preaching, teaching and knowledge. The Bible guards God's people from error and guides God's people in how to discern its truths and message.
We deny that the Bible should be interpreted without embracing the spiritual leadership that God has gifted to the church.
4. **We affirm** that each church community exists in particular cultural environments and time periods that affect our theologies.
We deny that the Bible is culturally conditioned and is thus relative to cultures and times.
5. **We affirm** that the Bible judges cultures and societies.
We deny that the cultures and societies judge the Bible.

E. The Church as a Sign, Foretaste and Instrument of the Kingdom of God

When considering a missional ecclesiology according to Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) literature, one difficulty that surfaces is in its portrayal of the church community's identity as a sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom of God, without offering much clarity on what the Bible has to say about what the kingdom of God is or how it comes to us. For contemporary missional writers to effectively counter the social activist approach to the gospel in the 1920s and 1930s, as they claim to do, there needs to be more discussion of the spiritually salvific nature of the kingdom, and how the community of the saved serves as a portal to that realm. When that topic does arise, it tends to take the form of criticism toward a too narrowly defined individual and personalized view of salvation.

While some missional authors stress the importance of keeping evangelization central, a clear explanation of what evangelization is and what it means to proclaim the gospel often gives way to a broader, more this-worldly and social expression of redemption. At the same time, we must be careful that we do not limit the impact of the gospel to a narrowly defined personal salvation aspect that does not impact this life in the fullness that God intends. We should not give way to fear that loving action for the sake of our neighbor and community will reduce our passion for biblical evangelization. True love for our neighbors will heighten our concern for their eternal salvation. Mission activity must always have a view to evangelization that leads to our neighbor's salvation and entry into the reign of Christ in all of its aspects.

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that the identity of the church is closely tied to the redemptive reign of God in Christ, the kingdom of God, and that evangelization is the primary activity of the kingdom.
We deny that biblical evangelization is merely a subset of mission.

F. The Church's Expressions of Its Missionary Nature

In discussing the missionary nature of the church, the missional literature puts great emphasis on outward engagement with the surrounding culture. Although it we will admit that the church is oftentimes inwardly focused at the expense of outwardly directed activity in mission, missional correctives now and then sound as though the church is missional *only* when it is directed outward. On some occasions, missional authors depict the church in mission in terms of community improvement and/or interfaith dialogue even in preference to biblical evangelization. Indeed, some go as far as to question the appropriateness of evangelization at all. A workable missional ecclesiology needs to give comprehensive attention to how the inner life of the church serves its outwardly directed ministry.

Missional authors will agree that all aspects of church life are necessary for living as God's sent missionary people. The church expresses these as acts of worship directed to God, in mutually edifying fellowship and in outwardly directed proclamation in words and deeds of the good news of salvation in our Savior King. The former two aspects (worship and fellowship) are not missing from missional literature, to be sure, but they do not receive adequate treatment by many missional authors. More work needs to be done to clarify how all three work in harmony in serving God's mission or we could risk losing the very aspects that make gospel-centered witness possible. To minimize this risk one needs also to incorporate literature that gives more attention to the missional value of regular worship and discipleship through Word and Sacrament in our fellowship communities. Such an emphasis should include equipping and training for a proclamation of the gospel in word and deed that leads to ongoing conversion both inside and outside the church.

Indeed one prominent spokesperson for the missional church has expressed personal dismay over the lack of understanding among missional theologians that the Christian journey, from our being called to being sent, is a continuous spiritual journey that requires a person to be "well centered in Jesus Christ." Missional literature frequently speaks of our being "called, gathered and sent," but this one author in particular adds the word "centered" in his writing to communicate the need for solid spiritual grounding in God's mercy and His justice in Jesus alone by grace alone through faith alone. Time and time again, congregations forsake this essential kind of "centering" in their hurry, either to call or send.³⁶ The inner nurturing and teaching life of the church is missional as well as the outer life: the two are inseparable in God's plan. Spiritual gifts such as teaching, hospitality, helps and others are all utilized to the building up of the well-rounded church in worship, service and outreach in faithfulness to God's mission (Eph. 3:14-21).

Affirmations and Denials

1. **We affirm** that all aspects of church life and all the spiritual gifts given to believers are central to God's design for His church, and have high value for spiritual grounding and for equipping the church for His mission.
We deny that solid spiritual grounding around the fellowship of Word and Sacrament in Christian community is incidental to God's mission.
2. **We affirm** that mission (outward engagement of the surrounding culture) is integral to the plan of God for His church and is an expression of the church's union with Christ as nurtured through Word and Sacrament- best understood in light of Jesus' teaching in John 15:1-17 on the relationship between "abiding" and "bearing fruit". What we "do" (mission) is an expression of "who we are" (identity) in Christ.
We deny that the Christian life can be biblically reduced to the "doing" language prevalent in some popular expressions of missional theology, where the "abiding" gifts of worship and body life are at risk of being diminished to the extent that vital union with Christ by faith is threatened.

Conclusion

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has had a growing sense that we need to be more effective in our outreach to a multi-cultural world that is increasingly becoming post-modern, pluralist and confused. We want to take seriously Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all people (Mt. 28:18-20). Missional theology has come to our attention as a potential source of help and direction in accomplishing that. Therefore, this study committee was assigned the task of making a determination concerning the compatibility of

the teachings of missional theology (especially regarding: the kingdom of God, the Word of God, and the Church) with our doctrinal statement of faith and the historical confessions of the Lutheran church. The topics addressed under the major headings of the paper represent the areas of missional theology that are important to hear and that contain points of concern that the committee thought it important to investigate and assess. While the committee finds much in missional theology as expressed through the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) that we in the CLB need to listen to, we have some serious concerns regarding their views on the interpretation and use of Scripture, their understanding of the kingdom of God and the place of evangelization in mission. Therefore, to use the literature of missional theology in developing our churches' ministry plans calls for a critical reading and understanding, as should be the case with any literature or material that we use in our churches.

Under the heading of Scripture we affirmed missional theology's emphasis on the normative authority of Scripture and the need to hear God's voice in our deliberations about the ground and source of mission and the church's role in that mission. We also pointed out, however, that missional literature out of the GOCN does not speak of the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The ecumenical nature of missional theology is inclusive of a wide range of understandings on the nature of Scripture, but we need to know why this "special revelation," the Bible, is "special," and what sets it apart from all other writings.

Some missional writings of the GOCN also speak to the "hermeneutical turn" in our day, when the important question is not how we know what we know, but rather how we interpret what we know. How does one lead the church forward in mission in a time when multiple perspectives on how to view and interpret truth confront us, or worse, when we are told that truth is not even knowable? In times like these, we must not abandon questions of how we know what we know (epistemology) in favor of what is the best way to interpret what we know (hermeneutics). Instead, more than ever we must equip our church members to operate in both of these realms effectively in order to rightly interpret and proclaim the eternal and absolute truth of the Bible to everyone "so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10: 33; 2 Tim. 2:15). Our traditions, experiences or even a communal sense of discernment must always submit to the plain sense of God's inspired and inerrant Word.

This paper also recognizes that in recent decades many evangelical churches have rediscovered the social dimensions of the gospel and the importance of expressing Christ's love through helping the poor and loving our neighbor. This aspect cannot be divorced from the witness of Christian community as salt and light in the world. Jesus never separated compassion from proclamation and neither should we. We do not see evidence in the Bible that these concerns need to be in conflict, in fact, they are inseparable. Nevertheless, there are safeguards that need to be utilized so that social action does not substitute for or displace biblical evangelization. Part of the Lutheran Brethren heritage that we value is the importance of taking direction first of all from the Word of God, and the Bible must always determine the message and agenda of mission for the church.

While pointing out the pitfalls, the committee also acknowledges that missional theology raises issues that we in the CLB would do well to consider. Things like their emphasis on every believer being sent as a missionary to the lost in our world; that our churches ought to be communities of people who follow Scripture rather than conform to the culture and world around us; that we see mission and outreach not merely as one program among many but that God's mission is central to our identity and ministry; and that we understand the change going on in North America which means that the church no longer holds a position of honor and respect in our culture and that we need to learn how to engage people who come from backgrounds and thinking very much different from many of us. All of these are important points for our churches to ponder.

And yet while acknowledging the positive contributions of missional theology, we do so with an increased commitment to the proclamation of the gospel: clearly distinguishing law and gospel so that people might see their sin and come to believe in Jesus. Scripture tells us that God's Word will not return without accomplishing its purpose and that if Jesus is lifted up all people will be drawn to Him. We need to reaffirm our trust in God's Word and the Person of Jesus Christ, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. It is also imperative that we rediscover the importance, as Martin Luther taught, of each Christian engaging in daily acts of love and service toward their neighbor. A study of Luther's *Treatise on Christian Liberty*³⁷ would be an important and helpful exercise for all of our churches. Finally, in our day we dare not retreat from preaching and teaching biblical theology and truth. Today more than ever there is a need for solid Biblical teaching and preaching, and consideration for how and where this teaching and preaching is brought to the gathered Church, to those who are wandering, and to those never reached by the Church. Moreover, we not only need to clearly, boldly and effectively teach our theology we also need to practice what we believe in our daily lives, since faith without works is dead. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

In service to God's mission, we the Church of the Lutheran Brethren want to commit ourselves afresh to see Christ's commission to the church as gift and assurance as well as command, and to be careful to embrace all aspects of the ministry we are called to join Him in, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Study Committee on Missional Theology, composed of Dr. Eugene Boe, Rev Dale Hanson, Rev. Paul Larson, Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen (chair), Rev. Matthew Rogness, Dr. Jeff Seaver and Rev. Brad Soenksen, prepared this paper. The Annual Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren authorized the committee.

Endnotes

- 1 The “church growth” movement dates back to the mid-1960s with the publication of Donald McGavran’s book, “The Bridges of God,” and his founding of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965. The church growth movement, while initially strongly rooted in missiology, later focused its resources upon the investigation of sociological factors in receptivity to the gospel, popularized by other writers like C. Peter Wagner and Win Arn. The church growth movement waned in the ‘90s, and church leaders turned from professors to successful pastors for advice about “church health,” represented by the work of Christian Schwartz in his book *Natural Church Development*, Churchsmart Resources; 7th - 2006 edition (September 1, 1996). Pastors like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels popularized these ideas. While the church health movement has criticized the church growth movement, both of these streams are examples of responding to changes in our society by focusing on principles, methods, strategies and techniques. See an online article by a self-professed missional evangelical, Ed Stetzer, for a brief history of the relation of these movements and their relationship to missional theology: http://lci.typepad.com/leaders_resourcing_leader/files/EvolutionOfChurchGrowthHealthMissional.pdf (Accessed May 5, 2010.)
- 2 In missional theology, the term “Christendom” refers to the European system of state-church partnership and cultural power and authority, where the church was the protected, privileged, established and institutional form of religion in society. In North America, although we have not had a “state church,” the legacy of European Christendom has exercised itself more in functional terms rather than through legally established status. See Darrel Guder, “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent,” In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 6.
- 3 Tom Stransky, “missio Dei.” In *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Nicholas Losskey et. al. eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) pp. 687-689.
- 4 D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) p. 10.
- 5 The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, 1978, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, ICBI). http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0..PTID307086_CHID750054_CIID2094584.00.html (accessed 4/27/2010). See the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals: “What is ICBI? ICBI, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, is a coalition of individuals who represent many works and denominations but who are together taking a united stand on God’s Inerrant Word. What is ICBI’s Purpose? Our purpose is to take a united stand in elucidating, vindicating, and applying the truth of biblical inerrancy as an integral element in the authority of Scripture. This will be done in both academic theology and practical Christian instruction.” http://www.alliancenet.org/CC_Content_Page/0..PTID307086_CHID750054_CIID.00.html
- 6 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978, ICBI.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See Craig Van Gelder’s two articles: “Method in Light of Scripture and in Relation to Hermeneutics,”<http://arl-jrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder04a.pdf> and “The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission”<http://arl-jrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder04b.pdf>. Much of this debate turns on the philosophy of language and grammar. A helpful discussion of this topic is found in D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), pp. 95-102; Timothy R. Phillips, and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals & Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 7-44; and *Reclaiming the Center*, edited by Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004). See especially chapters 3-5. Although the latter book is a response to post-conservative positions, while the GOCN writers are actually more in line with what has been called post-liberalism (dealt with in *The Nature of Confession*), nevertheless, the philosophy of language enters into the debate with both of these streams.
- 9 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978, ICBI
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, ICBI.
- 12 “We affirm that legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning. We deny the legitimacy of allowing any method of biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the writer’s expressed meaning, or of any other scriptural teaching.” Cited from ICBI.2, Article XVI.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: A Gift, a Command, an Assurance*. (NY: Friendship Press, 1987.), p. 10. Also available free online at:http://www.newbigin.net/searches/online_texts.cfm?offset=126

18 George Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.) p. 91.

19 George Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.) p. 91. See also the footnote reference to Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus*, (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2001), pp. 62-63.

20 Craig Van Gelder, "For the Sake of the World," In *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, eds. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005) p. 55. Most of the material in this section is from this chapter.

21 Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, pp. 6-10.

22 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) p. 50.

23 Ibid., p. 83.

24 Martin Luther, *Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter* (1522), LW, Vol. 30: 11.

25 Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965)

26 Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., Large Catechism, #54, in *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 447

27 Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*, (Eagle, ID: Allelon Pub., 2006). p. 134.

28 Anders Nygren, "Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, Vol. 2 Issue 8, August 2002. <http://archive.elca.org/jle/article.asp?k=366> (accessed 4/28/2010).

29 Copies of *Faith Active in Love: Human Care in the Church's Life*, a report on theology and church relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, February 1999 is available online at:<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/faith.pdf> (Accessed May 3, 2010)

30 *The Frankfurt Declaration of the Fundamental Crisis in Christian Mission*, 1970 is a declaration by the "Theological Convention," a regular meeting of theologians who want to be faithful to the Scriptures and confession. The document was drafted by Peter P.J. Beyerhaus, a missiologist at Tübingen University in Germany for many years who served as a strong European voice for biblical mission and was an outspoken voice against anti-Christian currents inside and outside the church. Beyerhaus was one of the keynote speakers at the evangelical congress on world mission at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. <http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/fd.pdf> (Accessed May 3, 2010)

31 George Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.) p. 78

32 Craig Van Gelder, "For the Sake of the World," In *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, eds. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005) p. 55.

33 Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p.6.

34 Michael Goheen, "The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America," In *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 4, October 2002, p. 487.

35 Ibid.

36 Patrick Kiefert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*, (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), p. 37.

37 Martin Luther. *The Freedom of a Christian*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

APPENDIX

Resources for Church of the Lutheran Brethren Churches on Missional Theology

The Study Committee on Missional Theology has worked with an extensive list of materials, out of which we were requested to make a shorter list available to our churches for the purpose of equipping churches with a basis for understanding missional theology and for carefully processing this theology and examining the implications of its teachings for faith and life. The intent of this list is not to specifically endorse any of these works, but rather to offer suggestions for primary texts that have formed a foundation for the missional church conversation, as well as some other works by which the reader might critique these works. Much of the missional material produced so far has come out of mainline/conciliar churches, particularly those from a Reformed theological tradition, however, evangelicals have also produced works related to the missional debate, and some of these are also included here.

Foundational Works on Missional Theology

These works are generally representative of the Gospel and Our Culture Network perspective, which is assessed in the study committee paper.

Barret, Lois Y., ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. Eerdmans, 2004.

Case studies of nine churches with missional characteristics.

Bliese, Richard H. and Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. Augsburg Fortress Press. 2005. This book interprets missional theology and evangelization from an ELCA Lutheran perspective. Important chapters are 1, 2, and 3. Also included is an Epilogue containing 12 commitments of a Lutheran evangelizing church.

Guder, Darrell L., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998. This book arose out of a study and research project inaugurated by the Gospel and Our Culture Network. Many consider this collection of essays to be a foundational piece to which many other books respond or build upon. Chapters 1, 4, 6, 8 and 9 are especially helpful in gaining an introduction to the topic.

Kiefert, Pat, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*, Allelon Publishing.

Kiefert is a professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary. This book is the result of church consulting work that Kiefert has done from a missional perspective.

Rouse, Rick & Craig Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, Augsburg, 2008.

A book for missional lay leaders. Rick Rouse is Senior Pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona, serves as a church consultant and teaches at Luther Seminary.

Roxburgh, Alan and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006. A Leadership Network publication, this book arose as response from readers of the above material for information on how to develop a different kind of leadership for the missional church.

Van Gelder, Craig, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Baker Books, 2000.

Van Gelder is a familiar name in the missional conversation, and in this book he presents an ecclesiological argument that the church is missionary by nature.

Van Gelder, Craig, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Baker Books, 2007.

This is Van Gelder's version of Roxburgh's *The Missional Leader*.

Van Gelder, Craig, ed. *The Missional Church in Context*. Eerdmans, 2007.

A compilation of papers from the first Consultation on the Missional Church at Luther Seminary, 2005. Since 2007, one new book

has been added to the series each year following the annual Consultation on the Missional Church.

Van Gelder has published two important articles that speak to the “hermeneutical turn”: “Method in Light of Scripture and in Relation to Hermeneutics,” <http://arl-jrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder04a.pdf> and “The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission” <http://arl-jrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder04b.pdf>.

Other Important Works Relevant to the Paper

- Beyerhaus, Peter P.J.** *God’s Kingdom & the Utopian Error: Discerning the Biblical Kingdom of God from Its Political Counterparts*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992. This collection of articles and presentations by Beyerhaus addresses the issues around which mainline and evangelical churches disagree regarding a biblical concept of the kingdom of God. Beyerhaus maintains that the problem is deeper than a pragmatic solution: simply bringing both sides together in social action and evangelism. A solution must be sought in the theological foundations, in our understanding of God’s redemption.
- Beyerhaus, Peter.** *Shaken Foundations: Theological Foundations for Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972. This work is in response to one of the great departures from a biblical view of mission which took place at the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1968, where it was declared that “humanization” was the meaning of mission, and that mission must be guided by the agenda of the world. *The Frankfurt Declaration on the Fundamental Crisis in Christian Mission* <http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/fd.pdf>, drafted at the Theological Convention at Frankfurt in 1970 addressed those distortions. Beyerhaus was a leading evangelical voice in that debate, and continues that debate in this work. (See also the earlier *Wheaton Declaration* of 1966 at <http://www.wheaton.edu.bgc/archives/docs/wd66/b01.html> and the *Lausanne Covenant* of 1974 <http://www.lausanne.org.covenant>.)
- Henry, Carl F. H.** *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003. Originally published in 1947, this book has since served as a trusted guide for evangelical Christians who are serious about bringing the fundamentals into active Christian engagement with the contemporary world. Henry’s work calls for a church-wide passion for souls expressed through means that meaningfully address the social and intellectual needs of the world. (See also the *Christianity Today* article by Richard Mouw that appears below under Online Resources.)
- Lesslie Newbigin’s** work is still highly influential in missional thought, and includes *Foolishness to the Greeks; The Open Secret*; and his newer *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. The paper also refers to a 40 page publication offered for free at: http://www.newbigin.net/searches/online_texts.cfm?offset=126. Scroll down and click on the title “Mission in Christ’s Way: Bible Studies.” (Accessed May 7, 2010.)
- Luther, Martin.** *The Freedom of a Christian*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).
- Schulz, Klaus Detlev.** *Mission From the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. Schulz is a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in the department of Pastoral Ministry and Missions. This book is a Trinitarian and Lutheran theology of mission that discusses mission from the perspective of the Book of Concord and argues that the Lutheran Confessions carry one into evangelistic engagement with the world.
- Tennent, Timothy C.** *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010. This book presents a Trinitarian view of mission utilizing the *missio Dei* concept, and also incorporates a historical and exegetical base. It treats a number of twenty-first century realities that are important for missiologically-based ministry today.
- Van Engen, Charles.** *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995. This book proposes an ecclesiology that helps evangelical local congregations identify more strongly with the church universal, with a view to becoming God’s missionary people, sent into the world on Christ’s mission.
- Vicedom, Georg.** *The Mission of God*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965. The 20th century conversation around the “*missio Dei*” concept got its start in large part through a book by this Lutheran theologian in Germany back in the 1950s. Concordia Publishing House later released the book in English in 1965 under the title “The Mission of God.” Missional authors still reference this work today.

Online Resources

Coming from an evangelical Southern Baptist perspective, Ed Stetzer had done a fair amount of writing and teaching on the missional church concept, and is considered by some to be a major evangelical voice on the subject. His blog has a series of five articles on the meaning of missional. The second installment in the series is especially helpful in identifying why some Evangelicals have problems with the “missional” emphasis. It is important also to scroll down and read the comments that follow these pieces. The blog is helpful in directing you to other more Evangelical sources on the topic as well. (Accessed May 7, 2010.) <http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/the-meanings-of-missional.html>. See this article by Ed Stetzer for a brief history of the relation of the church growth and church health movements and their relationship to missional theology: http://lci.typepad.com/leaders_resourcing_leader/files/EvolutionOfChurchGrowthHealthMissional.pdf (Accessed May 5, 2010.)

Richard Mouw talks about what he learned from **Carl F.H. Henry** about church involvement in social justice issues.” The link is: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/january/25.20.html> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

An article on the **Kingdom of God** by **John Schaller**. The article appeared in German in 1918; Professor Schaller served as president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1908 to 1920. The article is available here in either pdf or rtf format. <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1636> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

The Lausanne movement mobilizes evangelical leaders from around the world to collaborate for world mission. See **Peter Beyerhaus**’ paper concerning the Kingdom of God delivered at the 1974 Lausanne Congress: <http://www.lausanne.org/documents/lau1docs/0296.pdf> (Accessed May 7, 2010.) Also, see **Samuel Escobar**’s paper on evangelism and justice issues. <http://www.lausanne.org/documents/lau1docs/0309.pdf> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

A video piece on YouTube where Pastor **Tim Keller** gives his view of “missional church” can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFF1Sb-Zsc8&eurl=http://vodpod.com/watch/61996-tim-keller-on-a-missional-church> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

There is a 6-part series called “**A Conversation: Tim Keller, John Piper, D.A. Carson**” on You Tube regarding the tensions surrounding doing evangelism and mercy ministries. This comes out of The Gospel Coalition 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzbS1Qovq-0> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978. http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0..PTID307086_CHID750054_CIID2094584.00.html (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, 1983. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago2.html> (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

Chicago Statement on Biblical Application, 1986. http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0..PTID307086_CHID750054_CIID2094584.00.html (Accessed May 7, 2010.)

Periodicals

Christianity Today October 2009 has an article by **Christopher J. H. Wright**, “Whole Gospel, Whole Church, Whole World.” Wright is international director of what we know as John Stott Ministries in the U.S., and is chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, and is author of the influential work, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*. See also **Mark Galli**’s article, “In the Beginning, Grace.”

Leadership journal dedicated most of their Winter 2007 issue to the topic of the missional church. These article are a bit uneven in quality, but helpful for gaining a popular perspective on missional theology’s influence among evangelicals.

Recommended Works Ministering the Word, Knowing Truth, and the Christian Life in General

Horton, Michael, *Christless Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008. Analyses the state of the accommodations of the American Church to culture and issues a call to Christ centeredness.

Horton, Michael, *The Gospel Driven Life*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009. While the above title points out the problems, this book offers Horton’s solutions in the gospel and the kind of community that the gospel generates.

Preus, Daniel, *Why I Am A Lutheran*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004. Helpful chapter on the office of the ministry (Chapter 8); a clear explanation of the Christian faith from a Lutheran perspective with an emphasis on Jesus as the center.

These issues of the theological journal *Modern Reformation* were suggested for inclusion regarding various aspects of ministry in the church and the challenges of postmodernism and pluralism.

1. The Imitation of Christ - Vol. 18; No. 2 - March/April, 2009
 - * Following Jesus - Do we need “spiritual directors” or rather pastors who feed us, elders who guide us, and deacons who care for us? What does it mean to become more like Jesus?
 - * Incarnational Ministry and the Unique, Incarnate Christ - When we couple the term “incarnational” with “ministry”, what is the relationship between the One Incarnation and the activity and ministry of the church?
 - * Imitating Jesus - Can we “imitate Jesus”?
 - * A Catechetical Imitation of Christ - Does responsibility for spiritual growth belong to the individual? A Lutheran pastor considers what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

2. Jesus Among other Christs - Vol. 18, No. 3 - May/June, 2009
 - * Nathan the Naive - In a postmodern culture of religious relativism and subjectivism, can the gospel be true if it’s not true for all of us?
 - * The Real Christ Has Stood Up - Can a confessing, evangelical Christian affirm both Trinitarian Christianity and popular religious pluralism?
 - * Jesus, Muslim, and the Gospel - What do Muslims know about Jesus? Using the *Injil* (the four gospels), the author shows how we can witness to them through their own texts and through the true Gospel writers.
 - * Athanasius Again - A hot Sunday morning in a Unitarian Universalist church impresses upon the author the continual need for doctrine.

3. Zion - Vol. 18. No. 7 - November/December, 2009
 - * Kingdom Worship on Kingly Terms - To recover a biblical theology of worship, it is important we grasp the relationship between worship and the Kingdom of God.
 - * Illusion, Confusion, and Solution - How do Christians make a truth-claim to a postmodern culture that is skeptical that objective truth exists and can be known.

4. Recovering Scripture - Vol. 19, No. 1 - Jan/Feb, 2010
 - * The Problem of Evangelical Illiteracy - With rampant biblical illiteracy on the rise, is it any wonder youth today default to pop-cultural platitudes in their attempt to make sense of their faith? A New Testament professor suggests a way to produce readers of the grand story of God.
 - * Without the Word - Are we in a culture where the church no longer bases its teachings on the Bible or where Christians are completely ignorant of God’s Word. Without the Word, aren’t we sitting ducks for all sorts of trouble?
 - * The Authority of the Bible: “It Ain’t/ Is Necessarily So!” - How does the Bible still speak authoritatively to a world that does not recognize its authority? Moreover, how can the Bible be an authority for Christians if we don’t recognize it as such?
 - * Recovering Vox Dei - While godly authors are a benefit to us, do we allow their writings to be a substitute for our own pursuit of God’s voice? How can we recover the supremacy of the personal pursuit of God’s Word?
 - * To Have and To Hold - A look at the importance of Scripture
 - * Hearing Is Believing: Sound Advice - Can preaching be replaced with media better suited to our current culture? Or is there something intrinsic to the preached Word essential to the ministry and mission of the church.

5. Inspiration and Inerrancy - Vol. 19, No 2 - March/April, 2010
 - * God’s Word in Human Words - Like the gospel, a proper understanding of the inspiration of Scripture is never something we can take for granted.
 - * Getting Inspiration from Inspiration - Christians can renew their personal commitment to studying the Bible from the very doctrine of biblical inspiration.
 - * The Truthfulness of Scripture - As with inspiration, it is vital for us to understand why Scripture is inerrant.
 - * The Self-Attestation of Scripture - Scripture’s capacity to testify to itself is at the center of the Christian faith.

