

# CONCLUSION



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The understanding of the mission of the church has undergone significant paradigm shifts in the experience and praxes of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation. For the Fourth Assembly (Helsinki, 1963), mission was still defined in a narrow sense as aiming at conversion from unbelief to faith. From the Sixth Assembly (Dar es Salaam, 1977) onward, however, mission was understood

and practiced in a holistic way as encompassing proclamation, advocacy, and service to the whole person and to all people. More and more, advocacy for justice, peace, and integrity of creation was emphasized. At the LWF Global Consultation on Mission (Nairobi, 1998) transformation was considered an important dimension of mission, while joint ecumenical mission venture was seen as an important



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aspect of mission practice in the twenty-first century. Continuing in the same vein, this document highlights the vision of the *missional church*, for which mission belongs to its very being as the body of Christ. It also highlights the understanding of mission as participating in the in-breaking of God's reign in Christ, sharing in a common journey with people in their contexts, and focusing on transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment.

These mission foci – transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment – aptly describe mission as the church's participation in the mission of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. They also reflect the characteristics of mission as holistic and contextual; namely, a mission led by the Holy Spirit to walk in the "way of the Son," the way of incarnation, cross, and resurrection. Mission is the *raison d'être* of the church. It flows from the nature of the church as a witnessing community, a gift of God's gracious justification for and invitation to mission.

One purpose of this document is to serve as a tool to accompany Lutheran churches in their self-analysis and reaffirmation of mission in their respective contexts. For this document to be such a tool, the churches are called to animate the hermeneutical spiral in real mission praxis. In order to reaffirm their mission meaningfully, the churches need to undertake serious analysis of their mission contexts, practices, and theology.

The context needs constant scrutiny and naming. The church at every level is called to discern the needs for transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment. In conducting such analysis, the church will be called to stand with the victims of injustice and violence and thus expose and denounce evil powers and situations that distort and disrupt creation and dehumanize life in society.

The church needs to take a critical look at how mission is practiced. Is mission a real praxis of faith intentionally aimed at effecting transformation,

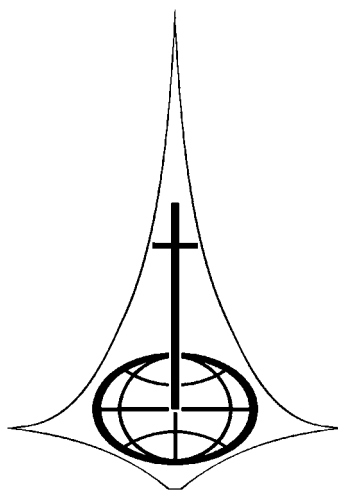
reconciliation, and empowerment in society, or is it simply practice? In light of this document, the church can examine how holistic and contextual its mission practices are. In fact, the church can conduct a mission practice assessment to determine, for instance, whether the whole church is engaged in the whole mission, or whether the different elements of mission (e.g., proclamation, service, advocacy, and care of creation) bring forth transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment. Whether resources are provided locally for the mission of the church can also be assessed. The church can thus identify new opportunities for mission and the resources and partnerships needed to address them effectively.

Finally, this document calls on the church to reaffirm its mission by reflecting ever anew on its mission theology. Theology should empower the church for mission, a mission that points to the reality of and participates in the in-breaking reign of God in Christ. Using the Emmaus road model of mission as being on a journey together, as accompaniment, this document invites Lutheran churches and other churches to engage in a theology that reflects on and draws from their contextual mission experience.

Only such a theology can empower churches to unfold their holistic mission as accompaniment to people in every place, in their ever-changing contexts – a transforming, reconciling, and empowering mission.

*"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."* Acts 1:8

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