

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 3

#### D. MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH

## Our church in mission

*Adopted by the General Synod, Lutheran Church of Australia. October 2003.*

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### A. THE BIBLE TEACHES US

1. Mission is the work of the triune God: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).
2. Mission is shaped by the cross. We are called to proclaim Christ, crucified for the sin of the world and our sins, and raised from the dead that all who live in him may be God's sons and daughters, the firstborn of God's new creation (1Cor 1:23; 15:3,4; John 1:29; Rom 4:25; 8:21; 1 Pet 1:3). We are also called to take up the cross, die to self, and follow Jesus' example of humble service (Matt 16:24, Phil 2:5–11).
3. We are in mission because our Lord Jesus Christ says to us, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21). Mission is not an option, but a divine sending.
4. We participate in the sending of Christ as we proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15) and baptize in the name of the triune God. This means that the message of reconciliation which we proclaim is for the healing of the whole of humanity and ultimately of the whole creation (Rom 8:19–23; Eph 1:5–10).
5. We witness to the world in word and deed that Christ is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6), and that there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).
6. We are in mission as we teach the Christian faith both before and after baptism (Matt 28:18–20, Eph 4:20–24; Col 2:6–7).
7. Christ has empowered us for mission through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), which we received in our baptism (Titus 3:5,6) and which is constantly being renewed in us.
8. The universality of Christian mission always has simultaneously a local and global dimension (Acts 1:8; Matt 28:19). The two dimensions are inseparable. In practice this means that we are always actively in mission at home and overseas.

9. Both locally and globally we have partnerships in the gospel with other members of the body of Christ, with whom we are together in mission (1 Cor 12:12–20).
10. As Christ's followers we recognise the urgency of the mission on which we are sent. The fields are ready for harvest, and harvest time is now (John 4:35), because we are in the end time.

## B. OUR MISSION IS LOCAL AND GLOBAL

1. All Christians are in mission. All pastors and all church members are missionaries. Every congregation is a congregation in mission. Mission is essential to the life of every congregation, because the Great Commission is directed to every follower of Christ (Matt 28:18–20). Through baptism all Christians are commissioned as missionaries and are placed in a mission congregation.
2. Mission is therefore both individual and corporate. Every level of the church is involved in mission and is responsible for mission: the individual, the congregation and parish, the zone, the district, the national church, and the LCA working as partner in mission with other churches. Since in essence the church is those who gather around word and sacrament, the primary agency of mission is the worshipping community, the local congregation.
3. The mission field of a congregation is all people who do not actively acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, whether that be in the local community, the wider community, or the world community. The mission of each congregation is therefore both local and global (cf Acts 1:8).

## C. LOCAL: OUR MISSION IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

1. Each congregation needs to discern its own gifts and abilities and its own context and setting so that it can develop and implement suitable strategies for outreach in the local community, in the wider community, and in the world community.
2. Commitment to mission means that every Christian and every Christian community is to strive in word and deed to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard it, or who have not heard it to the point of repentance and new life. The goal is conversion: that people may repent and be baptised, or be renewed in their faith.
3. Vital to mission is the nurturing of those who are newly converted, that they may grow in their faith and in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. There must be sound training in discipleship: teaching people the faith and what such faith means for daily living, nurturing them into the worship and life of the Christian community, and equipping them for mission.
4. From its beginnings the Lutheran Church in Australia has been conscious of its mission to make known the gospel of Christ to Indigenous Australians. Some of the first Lutheran pastors in this country came specifically as missionaries to serve among Aboriginal people. This ministry with its unique characteristics needs to be continued with and among the Indigenous people of Australia.
5. Lutherans in our countries for the most part belonged to ethnic minorities in the early years. While we now regard ourselves and are recognised as a mainstream church community, we are, because of our background, conscious of our mission and ministry to people from different ethnic backgrounds. This includes both those who come to us out of a Lutheran tradition, and those who have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## D. GLOBAL: OUR MISSION IN THE WORLD

1. Since in our time the gospel has to some extent reached to 'the ends of the earth', the mission is no longer a one way sending but an interdependent partnership in the gospel.
2. The global aspect of the LCA's commitment to world mission is appropriately pursued in consultation and cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation and its member churches and with the International Lutheran Council. Such links are vital if our world mission program is to continue to reflect our Lutheran theology and heritage.
3. We understand that our partnership in mission is always global, but in view of the LCA's geographical location the focus for our involvement in world mission is neighbouring Melanesia and South East Asia.
4. In Melanesia and South East Asia our way of working is in cooperation. We work hand in hand with and through local churches, their leaders and their ministries.
5. A fruitful way of expressing this partnership in the gospel in real terms is to have some missionaries serving in churches beyond our shores and some missionaries from overseas serving here in Australia and New Zealand. We can also give clear signals of our solidarity with partner churches, most of whom are in predominantly non-Christian countries, by having exchanges with them. These can be in the form of mutual visitations, pastoral exchanges, scholarship programs, and sponsorship of various projects like the translation of Lutheran confessional writings, the provision of theological books, the funding of programs set up by local churches to evangelize their people and so on.
6. Our support for partner churches in world mission will always attempt to keep a balance between teaching/preaching and works of love which we do in Christ's name (diakonia). This balance will be reflected in the support we give to various projects.

## CONCLUSION

The mission of the church is God's mission. Sent out by the command of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the people of God participate in God's 'plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ' (Eph 1:10).