

**WE HAVE A COMMON MISSION:
To Make Disciples of Christ**

1. BY AUTHORITY OF A LOVING SAVIOR

- A. The God of heaven and earth
- B. Who lived among us, died, and rose for us
- C. Who ascended with a world-loving commission and promise

2. IN A WORLD THAT NEEDS TO KNOW HIS SAVING LOVE

- A. He sent us with a specific task to make other disciples, baptizing and teaching them
- B. Our motivation is Christ's love for us and our message is Christ's love for all
- C. We take our place among bold confessors of the faith

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"God's Word is our great heritage, and shall be ours forever." The hymn, from which the theme of this conference is taken, continues: "To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor." Almost 2000 years ago Jesus Christ banded together a group of twelve followers less than 2000 miles south of here. He sent his disciples out into the world with a commission to make disciples of all nations. Because of those first apostles and generations who were made disciples after them, you and I are in this place today. We have come together as believers confessing a Spirit-given unity in a common Christian faith. Whether we live thousands of miles north, east, south, or west, we share a common gospel message. We have a common concern to proclaim and preserve the precious treasure in Word and sacrament that has been entrusted to true disciples today. Our first essay explores the common mission we all have—no different from the early church—to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 is a very full passage of God's Word. In it are truths that teach infant baptism, the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and the importance of teaching every scriptural truth. In an earlier presentation at an ELS/WELS Forum in 1988, "Synods of Mission-minded Confessional Lutherans," this essayist evaluated the tensions in finding a proper balance between sound theology and creative missiology (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, V.86, No.2, p. 105). If anyplace there ought to be an intense interest in pure doctrine, it ought to be on the church's front line of gospel outreach. Without pure teaching, there eventually will be no saving message to proclaim. Ernst H. Wendland, veteran WELS missionary and seminary professor, emphasizes how the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions give us a theology of world mission which is clear, authoritative, and compelling. Yet, the same author also describes the opposite side of the tension: "The danger does seem to lie within Lutheran orthodoxy to become so concerned about 'purity of doctrine' that one loses sight of the responsibility to share it. One is almost afraid that in the sharing of it, it will somehow become contaminated" (WLQ, V. 82, No.3, p. 201).

We intend to concentrate on the main mission mandate of Matthew 28, "Go, and make disciples of all nations." Near the end of their Gospels, each of the four evangelists records the glorified Lord charging his disciples with the same task. "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the

Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:21). “He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48). “He said unto them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whosoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15,16). The common thread is being sent and going to those who have not yet heard and believed the good news of a Savior from sin. Preaching the gospel is the means by which the Holy Spirit makes disciples. We will see that this commission from our Lord written in Matthew 28 to us is exactly the same as it was in the first century. So also must be our response.

WE HAVE A COMMON MISSION: TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

1. BY AUTHORITY OF A LOVING SAVIOR

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshiped him: but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:16,17). The risen Savior summons all the authority that is rightfully his. Upon this mountain setting the glorified Christ speaks of his power in heaven and earth. The conquering hero holds dominion over Satan, sin, death, and hell. His mission on earth is accomplished, and his mission must be made known to all people. God has given his Son absolute authority to get the task done. What a God he is!

GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Mission work is not just incidental, a last minute thought of Jesus before he ascended. Mission work has its origin not in the church, nor in human minds, but in the very nature of God. The just and holy God has a mission heart. Perhaps it is best known as LOVE, and best expressed in that precious truth Jesus shared with Nicodemus in John 3:16, “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.” The message of God’s mission love for the world is woven throughout the Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. God’s love does not change. Already Adam and Eve experienced God’s love in the promised seed of the woman, when they chose in free will to disobey him. As a result of the fall into sin, imperfect human beings populated the earth, disregarded God’s call to repentance, and faced his wrath in destruction by the flood. But God spared Noah and his family in love. Again, after the confusion at Babel, the human race spread and resisted loving fellowship with God. God’s love for the nations, which he would bless, caused him to establish an everlasting covenant with Abraham. The spiritual children of Abraham today, believers, are partners in bringing that blessing of God’s redemptive love to all the earth.

When God gave his law, he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex. 34:6,7). Of himself he says, “I am the Lord your God . . . I am a jealous God . . . punishing . . . the sin . . . of those who hate me . . . but showing love to (those) who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:1-6). When even his chosen people continued in their rebellion against him, he raised up prophets to call them back into his fellowship. They were to be witnesses of his love to the world. Through Isaiah God told the people of Israel, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David” (55:3) and said that they would be “a light for the Gentiles” (42:6). He added, “All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God (52:10) and “nations will come to your light. . . .” (60:3).

The Psalms repeatedly speak of God’s “unfailing love” and echo the refrain: “He is good; his love endures forever.” The Psalmists also reveal the object of his love: “I will be exalted among the nations” (46:10). “May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations” (67:2). “All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call his name blessed” (72:17). “He has

remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (98:3). The object of his creative love is all people. But sinful humankind has a barrier separating it from its Creator. They could do nothing to change this status. God hates sin and must punish sinners. Yet the object of his redemptive love also is all people in all nations. The prophet Malachi reveals God’s mission heart of love: “‘My name will be great among the nations,’ says the Lord Almighty” (1:11). God’s love will not be frustrated. The just and holy God found a way to love us in the God-man, our atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ, the world’s loving Savior.

WHO LIVED AMONG US, DIED, AND ROSE FOR US

Not only does Jesus have all authority given to him in heaven and on earth as true God, but also as true man. These natures are inseparable. From all eternity Jesus was with God. He became flesh and lived among us (cf. John 1:1,14). “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law” (Gal. 4:4,5). For three years he taught his disciples. They had watched his enemies subject him to lying accusations and finally put him to death. There are ten recorded instances of Jesus appearing to his followers after miraculously rising from the grave on the third day.

Now he stands before his disciples, some still doubting, in his glorified body. What better explanation of Jesus’ loving mission is there than the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians: “Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:6-11). He, their Lord and Savior, standing before them at the mountain, is the almighty God with unlimited authority. “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). God’s mission heart had found a way to love sinful people. He is the authority behind his only-begotten Son, whom he loves, whom he sent, and who now is returning victorious.

WHO ASCENDED WITH A WORLD-LOVING COMMISSION AND PROMISE

Now we switch the scene to the disciples who had come through the trauma of their Lord’s betrayal and crucifixion. They had heard or seen the news of his triumphant resurrection. Some doubted, others were startled and frightened; one was ashamed. The loving Savior dealt with some of them individually. He offered the opportunity to touch his wounds to Thomas, who boldly confessed his Lord and his God. To Peter, who responded with love to Jesus’ searching love, came a renewed assignment to feed the Savior’s flock. They must have been worried about their ability to live up to their Lord’s expectations. The three years of training ended all too soon for them. Their anxiety increased as they became aware that he was soon to leave them. Their idea of his kingdom, like that of most of their Jewish companions, probably still included thoughts of Jesus’ permanent presence among them in Jerusalem. Prior to the Holy Spirit’s confirming appearance to the disciples at Pentecost, any idea of a worldwide mission was fearsome.

The words of Jesus, as he is about to ascend, not only direct their attention to his power and authority, but also include a comforting promise: “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” His leaving was not an absolute absence. Clearly he tells them that as they go out into the vast arena of the world of their day, he would accompany them. And the same assurance exists for disciples today and until the end of the age. He is really present with us in carrying out his work on earth, even though he has ascended into heaven.

We turn to the Scriptures for instruction. Paul explains in Ephesians 4:10: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe." He goes on to tell how the ascended Lord is the one who sends churchworkers among God's people to prepare them for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. The ascended Lord, as the head of this body, will rule all things in the interest of his church. We can count on that when we are carrying out his work. See again God's great love for the world in sending his Son from heaven. Jesus' credentials are amazing: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:15-20).

Is there any doubt about God's love, Jesus' authority in heaven and earth, or his promise to be with us always? Confidently we carry out our common mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ.

2. IN A WORLD THAT NEEDS TO KNOW HIS SAVING LOVE

To track how God's love flows through his Son and through his believers to a world in need, it is valuable to hear portions of the prayer of Jesus just before he was arrested which John 17 records. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you have granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. . . . I will remain in the world no longer, but they (the disciples) are still in the world, and I am coming to you. . . . I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world anymore than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. . . . My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. . . . I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

HE SENT US WITH A SPECIFIC TASK: TO MAKE _OTHER DISCIPLES, BAPTIZING AND TEACHING THEM

It is not easy to think beyond our own culture, preferences, and prejudices. The most natural reaction for those first disciples was to limit their work to Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus had been preparing them already to think of nations beyond familiar Judea and Galilee, to become world witnesses. Seeing the exemplary faith of the powerful Gentile Centurion, Jesus comments: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11). Jesus' confrontation with the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4 opened the disciples' eyes to see without prejudice the rich harvest of souls among other cultures. In a conversation about the end times Jesus told his disciples, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me . . . 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" (Mt. 24:14). Small wonder his first followers were jittery when he sent them out with the commission that forms the heart of their task and ours: 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.

The Great Commission, so-called, is seen by some as primarily a marching order for professional missionaries. There have even been those who argued that it ceased with the original apostles. These familiar words of our Savior have been implanted in believers' hearts, and a thankful echo resounds from disciples who are the results of worldwide Christian mission work. The original Greek text has but one verb, "make disciples" (*matheteusate*). "Go" (*poreuthentes*), "baptizing" (*baptizontes*), and "teaching" (*didaskontes*), are all participles, which means that they do not stand alone, but derive their force from the verb. The reason for going anywhere, next door or across the world, is to make disciples. Nothing will happen unless believing disciples make contact with those who are not yet disciples. As this sentence is constructed, the participle "go" stands in a coordinate relationship with the verb, which gives it the force of an imperative. A literal translation would be, "Having gone, make disciples of all nations," and it is not incorrect to translate it, "go, and make disciples." A disciple is a learner, a person who follows a teacher, in this case a believer in Christ. All nations (*ethne*) include all the heathen, unbelievers who do not know Jesus Christ. What an awesome assignment! Make believers out of all unbelievers. As we study these words, we ever remember that the power to go and the promised results come only from a loving Savior and his Holy Spirit. The aim is to win the lost and to build them up in the faith, just as the searching love of our God in Christ Jesus found us sinners, implanted faith in our hearts and keeps us in his Word. What means does he use? The gospel in Word and sacraments. Baptism, the sacrament which imparts faith also to children, is mentioned here. In the case of older persons, teaching may be the primary means until convincing truth prepares an inquirer to desire baptism. Teaching also reminds us that all disciples of Christ, newly converted and seasoned veterans, will want to continue to learn and live by everything revealed in the Word of God.

Right here is where we part company with many other Christian denominations, notably those who see baptism as a mere symbol of initiation, who practice only adult believer's baptism, who separate water baptism and Spirit baptism. Other essays will concentrate on our common message and means, as well as our common foundation in the Word, teaching it thoroughly, and our unity in the Spirit. It might best serve our purposes and our time limits to discuss what motivates us to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching. And what methodology do we take along on our mission to the world?

OUR MOTIVATION IS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US, AND OUR MESSAGE IS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR ALL

Is a command enough to send us on our way to all nations? Frequently Christian writers speak of our going simply because the Sovereign Lord says, "Go!" Sinners by nature have no power to serve an offended God. Without his redeeming grace, neither loyal obedience nor high admiration can be found in us. A parent might similarly say to a child, "Do this or that because I said so!" It might get done, but often grudgingly. How much better if a person is motivated other than by fear, guilt, flattery, or even to get something in return.

The better motivation of which we again speak, of course, is love. As a disciple each of us has been brought by the Holy Spirit into a new relationship with Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. We love him only because he first loved us. "God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:8-11). Jesus restated the Great Commandment by which true disciples live: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind . . . (and) Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:37-39). Surely the most far-reaching love for our neighbor flows from the Great Commission.

It's not what we do for God, but his love for us, that compels us. We find pleasure being ambassadors who make a grand announcement that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them . . . and that God made him who had no sin to be sin

for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:19,21). Pastor T. N. Teigen, in an essay, "The Proclamation of Justification" (His Pardoning Grace, NPH, 1966, p. 70), tells of an old Norwegian farmer who met a zealous Reformed evangelist on the street. Taking the farmer by his coat lapels and looking him straight in the eye, the evangelist asked, "Brother, are you saved?" "Yes," came the calm reply. "When were you saved?" the evangelist questioned. "Oh, some 2000 years ago!" came the confident answer.

If Christ died for all, no one ought to be excluded from my love either. If he declares all justified in Christ, I can offer no conditional salvation. When he says, "Go and make disciples of all nations," I can find no valid excuses. When he adds, "baptizing" all nations in the name of the Triune God, I will make no other qualifications. Baptism and the Word are the powerful means by which the Holy Spirit transforms unbelievers into disciples.

And when he includes "teaching them to obey" (Greek: *terein*—"hold firmly to") everything he has commanded, I will not be satisfied with less than a thorough training in the inspired, infallible, and unchanging word. The gospel is proclaimed in the Word and offered in the sacraments to people whom God will reach with his forgiving, saving, and eternal love. From the Great Commission, then, the church receives its charter not just for making disciples of all nations of the earth, but also for nurturing those who have been made disciples as they are taught everything that Christ commanded.

In the United States it is popular for businesses and other organizations to spell out briefly what the purpose of their group is. Our synod carefully chose words to identify its God-given twin task in this way:

As men, women and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the gospel to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

What variation exists among people on planet earth: achievements, climate, color, language, location, race, traits. Yet all are sinners, all are souls for whom Christ died, and all need to know God's saving love. Into such a world those first believers went, boldly speaking the truth in love.

WE TAKE OUR PLACE AMONG BOLD CONFESSORS OF THE FAITH

It was a rather ordinary band of believers to whom Jesus entrusted this world mission. They had not been wise in the world's wisdom. Nor had they been theologians of the church. Their backgrounds and educations had not qualified them for such a task. However, the eleven apostles were humble, God-fearing men who had learned divine wisdom from their Master. Matthias later joined with them, and the Lord himself added the mighty Paul. The Book of Acts recounts some of their early mission activity. Think of the breaking of language barriers at Pentecost and Peter's bold sermon. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (2:41). Before the Sanhedrin officers in Jerusalem they spoke boldly, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20). Later the apostles announced, "We must obey God rather than men!" when they were given strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus, and "left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (5:28,29,41,42).

When a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and "preached the word wherever they went" (Ac. 8:4). At Cornelius' home Peter learned anew "that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation" (10:34,35). Shortly after the conversion of the Apostle, Paul began the numerous missionary journeys to other parts of the Mediterranean world. In Antioch the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (13:2,3). Thus began the grand

foreign mission enterprise, a privilege in which Christian churches still participate today. When the mission explorers returned to Antioch after the first expedition, "they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). Even imprisonment did not stop Paul from writing the theology of the church in his many Epistles to early Christian congregations. Nor was his zeal diminished, for the last verse of Acts (28:31) summarizes: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus."

The Roman Christians were asked: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (10:14,15). In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:1,2). In his second letter he penned: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (4:5,7). And with the Colossians he could share this wonderful result: "All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth" (1:6).

These first gatherings of saints in the New Testament church were not ideal. They were troubled with all sorts of imperfections and blemishes. Segregation and religious bigotry had to be overcome. Yet they were true children of God, repentant, believing and eager to share their faith. They were missionary churches in the finest sense of the term. They have set an example for all time.

But what about obstacles, of which there are many? The Lord has not promised that the task of proclaiming the gospel to the nations will be easy. We are up "against rulers, . . . authorities, . . . powers of this dark world, . . . and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). Human institutions, societies' power structures, schools, businesses, and even church organizations, can be used as Satan's tools. The devil never rests from cunningly trying to destroy the work of Christ by slanders, deceit, rebellions, betrayals, intimidation, and even inflicting torture. That might be enough to scare anyone off from "making disciples of all nations." Paul overrides this with confident assurance in Romans: "If God be for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" (8:31,35,37-39).

It is that motivating love of God in Christ that has made confessors bold down through the ages. In your mind's eye imagine the difficulties faced by those first European missionaries to the Huns and Goths, the Celts and Vikings near where we are meeting these days. How was the gospel message first received? How many generations did it take for our distant ancestors to repent at the foot of the cross? How many lives were lost in the mission process? How different the world became when emperors and states forced Christianity on a people. Constantinople became "Christian," and later the church split into eastern and western branches. Vladimir chose eastern orthodoxy for Russia in the 12th century. "*Cuius regio, eius religio*" (He who rules determines his subjects' religion) has had a dreadful effect on true faith. What are the effects in our world today from whole countries being declared Christian without repentance and faith of individual citizens?

After the separations following the Reformation, a variety of new denominations sprang up in Christianity, and rulers often determined again whether people would be Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or some sort of forced ecumenical mixture. Sometimes these matters were settled by wars. Thousands from Europe also fled and migrated to other countries because of religious persecution or because of a desire for religious freedom. North America imported the European

religious scene and added quite a variety of homegrown denominations with a tie to Christianity. The United States laid down an early unique path for separation of church and state, which still influences the independence with which its churches operate. While other countries have modified versions of the same freedom of religion principle, many do not want to import the denominational chaos they perceive in "free" America. That attitude affects the welcome our missionaries receive as representatives of an orthodox, confessional, Lutheran church denomination.

During this same period of history, sporadic efforts were being made to reach Africa, China, and the Pacific islands, and revisit the Mediterranean regions with the gospel. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism held sway over many people as they do today. Pluralistic societies often believe that all roads lead to God and thus consider Christianity, with its exclusive claims, to be altogether too rigid. Roman Catholic orders, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, and Dutch Reformed have established many mission churches in other countries. Scandinavian and German Lutheran Christians, confronted with much suspicion within their official churches, also found ways to take the gospel overseas. It is no secret that the state Lutheran churches, for various reasons, spent little time and effort in spreading the gospel beyond their own lands. With all their faults, Pietists, reacting with a perception that orthodoxism and formalism stifled outreach, were largely responsible for the mission societies that arose within the Lutheran Church. Their efforts were felt worldwide, especially in Africa, Australia, India, North America, and South America. The church body to which this writer belongs, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, traces its origins to the efforts of German mission societies. Our world missionaries often report contacts with people whose faith stems from the Word brought by emissaries of European Lutheran mission societies.

Who will bring the message of the saving gospel to the nations in our day? Who will be the voice of biblical, historic, confessional, orthodox Lutheran Christianity if not we who are assembled here and the churches we serve? Even among those who call themselves Lutheran there is little agreement on the basic foundation of the Word of God and the absolute necessity of the gospel proclamation. When the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word, the Bible, are questioned, there can be no certain message. Quickly churches substitute charitable, agrarian, medical, or educational efforts for gospel proclamation. Such social ministries easily turn churches into humanitarian organizations, which may serve vital human needs. It is reported that 70 percent of overseas Christian mission work today primarily provides for peoples' physical well-being rather than their spiritual welfare.

Our role is not to bemoan what others are not doing, nor to hole up in our fortresses and polish our scriptural treasures. We have the right theology for the right kind of gospel mission work that is most needed by the unconverted people in nations everywhere. It is universal. It is unconditional. It is urgent. It is not our responsibility to convince anyone of the truth. That is the Spirit's work. But we can tell of Jesus' love—mission work—right at home as we build bridges for the gospel within our own family, among our relatives, neighbors, and friends. Persons will be more naturally drawn to us in a relationship of concern or friendship. They, in turn, will reach out to a large group through their network of friends. Thus the church will multiply across town and across cultures. Half the people on earth have not had a clear presentation of the gospel, and will not, unless someone crosses the boundaries of their culture and language, identifies with them, and builds a bridge of LOVE.

That love started in the heart of God. Our lives have been permanently imprinted with God's love in Christ Jesus and have been given spiritual and eternal meaning. Through us God seeks those who are lost in sin and wandering in unbelief. Gathering these lost in every nation is the desired and essential end result of our mission work. They may be people in the home across the street from your church, seated next to you on an airplane, or living in a distant land where the name of Jesus has never been heard. To all of these, without exception, we are to go. Boldly we confess, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Ac. 4:12).

As we scan our international scene and compare it to the time of Jesus, it is every bit as overwhelming as that faced by the first disciples. With a six billion population, there are 20 times more people alive on planet earth. We may more easily be able to travel over vast distances and to communicate by electronic impulses in a matter of moments. A loving God has graciously placed in our hands resources unknown to previous generations. But souls are still best won and nurtured by person-to-person communication rather than by electronic mass media or remote-controlled organizational programs. We have a common mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ, by whose authority and with whose presence we go into a world that needs to know his saving love. We are his followers who go where we can. Where we can't go, we send, support, and pray for missionaries who take our place. True mission work is an act of love begun in eternity within the heart of God. This love flows through his Son and his redeemed people. It culminates in eternity where there will be with us "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).