

Our Work Together

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Biblical Foundations

J. Hudson Taylor, a revered 19th century missionary to China is quoted as saying, “God’s work, done God’s way, will never lack God’s resources.” No better thoughts can be ours in shaping our work together as Mission Action Councils. Our beginning, then, must be to fix firmly the Biblical foundation (God’s way) upon which His mission will be worked through His people of the CNH District.

Our hearts’ desire is perfectly expressed in our corporate prayer every Sunday morning: “Thy Kingdom come.” Luther wrote regarding this petition of the Lord’s Prayer,

What is the kingdom of God? Answer: Simply what we learned in the Creed, namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil and to bring us to himself and rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to teach us this though his holy word and to enlighten and strengthen us in faith by his power (LC, Lord’s Prayer).

Here Luther teaches us three things that are essential for a correct understanding of work together in mission outreach:

(1) God’s Kingdom coming into the world is the work of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is why the work of missions is properly called the *Mission of God* rather than the mission of the church. It is first and foremost God’s work. The Church on earth is privileged to participate with God in His mission, but it may never forget that the work is His.

(2) The *Mission of God* centers in the work of our Lord Jesus. He is the Missionary of all missionaries, *sent* by His Father to be King or Lord of all things. It is by His death and resurrection that salvation and life come to all. Through Jesus, as a statement of His Lordship, the Father sends His Holy Spirit to work faith in all people and to empower them to proclaim His Kingdom to the nations.

(3) The focus upon the Lord’s rule is not so much *that* He rules, but *how* He rules. Following Hebrews 7:2, Luther called Him the King of righteousness. That is, the King who is righteous and bespeaks righteousness upon all. According to St. Paul, “The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18).

Thus, the *Mission of God* is this one thing: Gathering all the peoples of the world into the one Kingdom of God through the proclamation to them that they have been justified (declared right before God) by faith in the person and redeeming work of Jesus. As our King, Jesus has the last word on the subject of our lives. We thank God that His last word upon us is one of grace and eternal life. We pray that it will be so for the lives of all other people everywhere. To that end we accept God’s gracious invitation to participate with Him as family partners in His *Mission*.

We are guided in doing God's work His way by five basic missional principles each with a number of specific practical applications:

- The Kingdom and the mission of it coming into the world belong solely to God
- God entrusts the stewardship of His Kingdom to us, the crown of His creation.\
- God's people extend His Kingdom into the world through being His Church on earth--His servant community.
- God's Kingdom is constantly opposed by Satan, the world, and our flesh.
- God's Kingdom comes. This reality is the Church's (our) hope.

1. *The Kingdom and the mission of it coming into the world belong solely to God.*

God's Kingdom consists of His gracious rule over all. His grace is first seen in creation. It culminates in His re-creation, that is, His reconciling this creation to Himself through the work of His Son. This re-creating grace comes to us through His means of grace--His oral, written, incarnate, and sacramental Word.

- We remember that the mission work we do together is first and foremost God's work. He wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He told plainly that His work on earth is to seek and to save the lost. We keep that as our focus as well.
- God's Kingdom comes to people. God initiates; God takes action; God closes the gap between us and Himself. Sound mission planning does the same. We must be alert to designing strategies that take the Gospel to non-Christians not strategies that assume or hope that non-Christians will come to us.
- Many non-Christians may not respond to an invitation to come to church (if they even know what church is). Worship is a life value that belongs to those who are of the new creation, who know Christ. Non-Christians may respond to an invitation to an event that connects them to a life value of God's first creation—e.g. family ministry, marriage enrichment, educational assistance for their children, health needs, etc. Mission strategies take seriously a community's needs and see them as natural starting places for the Lord to touch the lives of people. These starting places often become the bridges over which the Gospel will travel into the hearts and lives of non-Christian people.
- No matter what the missional starting place, its end point is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. His reconciling death on the cross is the missional magnet. "When I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself." God's mission has but one message: Christ and Him crucified.
- God's mission is powered by this Word of Christ. Critical for mission strategy is to remember that the power of the Word does not rest in abilities or offices. It rests in the message itself.

2. *God entrusts the stewardship of His Kingdom to us, the crown of His creation.*

Adam and Eve were created and called by God to be His prime ministers, ruling over His creation. Adam's sin alienated himself and creation from God; however, the death of our Savior (the second Adam) reconciled all of creation to God. Despite our sinfulness, God entrusts the extension of His Kingdom to us, His people. He personally calls us to Himself, making us His dear children and His representatives (Royal Priests) in the world. Entrusting

us with His Gospel, The Lord has made us His human means for carrying His Divine Means of grace to the world.

- Mission work is a divine partnership between God and His people. Much contemporary motivation for our involvement in mission work seems to be based on obligation: “Since God did such and such for us, we should do such and such for Him.” Such thinking can turn the Great Commission into a legalistic demand rather than a Gospel privilege. God’s Word teaches us that our participation in God’s mission is simply part of belonging to the Royal Family. God’s mission of seeking and saving the lost is the Family’s business. Indeed, family members have specific obligations related to the business, none are exempt. Motivation for doing our job comes from the fact that we are co-owners of the business. Through our belonging to the Lord Jesus (our baptism reality) we also belong to His business in the world. We go about “our” (the Lord’s and our) mission work from the reality that we are co-owners and co-heirs with Him of all creation. We, like Him, commit ourselves to the Family’s business plan of “to unite *all* things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth” Ephesians 1:10.
 - Mission work is the work of all of the baptized. The missional Spirit of Christ was poured out on all believers on the day of Pentecost and is the “Promise” given to all people--“you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him”--in their baptism Acts 2:38-39. Our mission strategy must anticipate that the Lord will raise up pious lay men and women, young and old, along with pastors, teachers, and other rostered workers as answer to our prayer for laborers in the harvest (Matthew 9:38).
 - Mission work depends heavily upon the multiplication of well trained lay men and women who serve in partnership with local congregations and missionary overseers. Our mission strategies must incorporate the equipping of such leaders.
 - “Don’t make me your project! Much well intentioned mission work in the past has treated the non-Christians as projects—to receive the Gospel-- rather than intended partners in that Gospel ministry. Critical to our mission outreach is that we approach the non-Christian community as intended partners in the mission (anticipating that they will come to faith through the Gospel) and anticipate the Lord working in new and different ways through them.
3. *God extends His Kingdom into the world through His Church--His servant community.* God gave the Keys of His Kingdom (His Word and Sacrament) to His Church; He gave the Keys of His Kingdom for the world. God's Kingdom extends into the world through His Church and gathers the nations into the Church. The Church proceeds into the world under the Cross of Christ. God’s Kingdom is revealed in ordinary, even humble means—God’s Word in the human flesh of His Son; God’s Word spoken (to be heard), written (to be read), and sacramentally present (to be seen, tasted, felt, etc.). His Kingdom resides in the ordinary—you and me, the visible church. The Church is not above Her Master. What the world did to her Master, it also does to her. The Church lives and serves under the death and resurrection of her Lord recognizing the reality of her own death and resurrection in Him.
- God’s Kingdom comes to people through His means of grace, His Word and Sacraments. Mission work, therefore, must center in sharing His Word with the unchurched. There

can be many good deeds churches can do in and for their communities. However, to be missional, they have the built in intention of bringing the saving Word to them.

- Local congregations, not districts or synods, are God’s created instruments of His mission. They are gathered by and around His Word and Sacrament and He entrusts the ministry of His Word and Sacraments to them. Ownership of mission work, therefore, must be local. No other congregation or church agency can do a congregation’s mission work for it or dictate how it must be done.
- The local church is the oral and living witness of God’s Kingdom in that community. It reveals the character of the Kingdom in its love, forgiveness, and sacrificial service to others outside its fellowship. Mission is not about how we make our churches grow, but rather, how we love our neighbor for Christ’s sake. Our mission strategies must ask questions like these ones: Whom does Jesus want to serve in this community? How would He serve them? Who are the harassed and helpless in this community?
- All of our CNH churches have been called by the Lord into His mission. He does not take a neutral position regarding His Kingdom coming to all people and His people’s (each church’s) participation in that endeavor. The seriousness of His mind on this matter is demonstrated by His cleansing of the Temple. The Lord’s anger was roused by the fact that His people chose to keep the “Good News” to and for themselves and not also share it with the rest of the world. In truth, God’s people were robbing the rest of the world of their rightful inheritance: Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?” But you have made it a den of robbers (Mark 11:17). God’s mission is not focused on the self-survival of congregations or ministries.
- Mission work creates faith communities. As the Gospel reaches people it gathers them into faith communities. These are the nets (how God draws people to His Word) and the nests (where God’s Spirit grows and protects them by His Word). Individual witnessing of the Gospel to individual non-Christians is basic to mission outreach. However, if these individual “hearers” are left on their own that Word may grow dim and die. Faith communities are as large as an incorporated LCMS congregation and as small as “two or three are gathered together in [His] Name.” Sound mission strategy includes the formation of faith communities.
- Mission work calls for personal investment and sacrifice. Investment reflects value. We invest in those things or people we deem valuable. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . .” (John 3:16). Valuing every unreached person as our Lord values them and valuing that God’s Kingdom of grace comes to every one of them moves us to invest our time, energy and talents, and our treasure in that enterprise. Think again of the idea of the Royal Family’s Business and our personal investment in it. When resources seem insufficient for investing in everything that we value we prioritize and choose some things over others. Sacrifice reflects ultimate value. We sacrifice investing in certain things that we value in order to invest in or attain what we value the most. How individual Christians and congregations organize (budget) their time and treasure reflects what and who they value most. God’s Kingdom coming to all people is God’s greatest value. He calls us as His Family members, to make it ours too: But seek first His kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Matthew 6:33).

4. *God’s Kingdom is constantly opposed by Satan, the world, and our flesh.*

As citizens and co-owners with Christ of His Kingdom the church is a suffering community in this world. Likewise it is a repenting and renewed (forgiven) community in this world.

- We should not expect or depend upon the blessings, recognition, and appreciation of the non-Christian world in order to do our work. Nor can we adjust God's message of Law and Gospel to accommodate to the world's wisdom and wants or to garner its support.
- St. Paul reminds us that in our mission work we are not "contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore we need to be about two things
 - Being armed head to toe in the armor of God's Gospel
 - Being vigilant in our prayers for all Christians, for missionaries, and for those not yet in the Kingdom

Mission strategies clearly incorporate both of these essentials.

- God entrusted the work of His mission to sinful people who with regularity find themselves doing what they do not want to do and failing to do what they would. As St. Paul writes, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Romans 7:18). It is not an excuse, it is a reality. We proceed in the missional task from the posture of forgiven sinners showing other sinners the One Who by His death forgives their sins and offers them new life.

5. *God's Kingdom comes. This reality is the our (the Church's) hope.*

The Lord keeps all of His promises. Here are some that are key for our work together:

- All flesh will see the salvation of our God. (Luke 3:6)
- But 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
- The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. Mark 4:26-29
- Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18
- But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. (2 Timothy 1:12)