

**Foundation and Mission**  
**Southern Illinois District Convention Essay, 2021**

[SLIDE 1:]

**PART TWO: Mission from the Foundation**

**OR Mission: How, Now?**

As mentioned yesterday, last year we observed the 500th anniversary of Luther's confession at the Diet of Worms. Some time ago, Dr. Donald Deffner published a sermon entitled, "'Here We Stand' or 'Here We Go?'" It said: "I'm sure you've heard sermons on [the] great blessings of the Reformation many times. But the question is: What are you and I doing with them?"<sup>1</sup>

St. Paul knew what was being done with the blessing of God's grace in his day. [SLIDE 2:] He wrote: "In accordance with the grace that God gave me, I laid a foundation as an expert master builder, and somebody else is continuing to build on it."<sup>2</sup> So, build. Build carefully, but build!

Having considered the foundation for mission, today's portion of the essay will make some practical points about mission from that foundation. [SLIDE 3:] After I ask "how?", then I will ask: now? – that is, during the time when we are all still very much reeling from a pandemic.

[SLIDE 4:]

**A. Mission, How?**

[SLIDE 5:]

**1. Planting Churches – Do We Want To?**

[SLIDE 6:] The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's last convention resolved "that congregations and circuits be encouraged and supported by their respective districts to investigate and identify new mission plants."<sup>3</sup> Note the wording: the Synod *encourages* churches and Circuits, but it *requires* Districts to offer support and encouragement in

identifying new church plants. In fact, as our Synod lists its seven mission priorities, the very first word in the first statement is “plant.” From indications like these, you would think that church planting is gathering more and more interest and support within the Synod.

I do not want to assume too much, though. Church planting is challenging, especially when growing numbers of people have no religious memory.<sup>4</sup> And in fact, church planting has slowed down in the Synod over the last 20 or so years. This should be sobering for us. Few things could be worse for a church planting effort than to launch it, encounter some rough sailing along the way, and only then discover that we were not all on board with the very idea of church planting in the first place.

With respect to spiritual conversations, Lutheran Hour Ministries has been pointing out that eager conversationalists *desire* spiritual conversations.<sup>5</sup> Right now, I am asking how much we desire church planting. Do we really *want* to plant new churches?

I can point out, as a matter of historical fact, that the apostle Paul was deeply involved in church planting. Remember, he wrote: “In accordance with the grace that God gave me, I laid a foundation as an expert master builder, and somebody else is continuing to build on it.” Clearly, Paul wanted to plant churches.

[SLIDE 7:] How about us?

I have been posing this question with groups of pastors, commissioned churchworkers, and laypeople in Central Illinois. For I think it prudent to start working one way with a church or a church worker who resists church planting and to take a different approach when someone else supports it. When I look at the responses I have gotten to my question, I find that they tend to hover in the middle. That is, in general people do not resist church planting. But they don’t favor it very much, either.

[SLIDE 8:] Does the Gospel pack more power at a new church than it does elsewhere? Will the newness of the group give the Holy Spirit some kind of an assist? No, and no. Yet there is still good reason to include church planting in a church body’s

evangelism and mission strategy. And, not so incidentally, I say this with the premise that Lutheran church plants ought to result in Lutheran churches.

[SLIDE 9:] So why engage in church planting?

- New congregations are usually quite attuned to bringing in unchurched people. Established congregations – and, as I can tell you from my own experience in the parish, also their pastors – often find it a challenge to think beyond the people they see right in front of them, to take into consideration others whom they do not see.
- Unchurched people often have their interest piqued by the prospect of involvement in a new church. New things tend to attract attention. Is this a shallow outlook? Of course it is! But let's not expect unchurched people to think with spiritual maturity.
- New churches can be instrumental in bringing the Word of Christ to inner cities. They can also be important in crossing ethnic lines with the Gospel.
- It helps for the church to be physically close to unchurched people.
- One more point: Starting new churches can help inspire existing churches toward evangelistic activity. St. Paul derived encouragement from the example of the Thessalonians as they held fast to Christ and held forth with His Good News.<sup>6</sup> So also today! As a friend of mine says, "Having babies keeps you young."

I have heard a church advertisement that goes something like this: so important is it for you to attend a faithful Lutheran church that, if none is close by, you should move to a place where you can join one. Now, that's commitment. Some people may do so. But how about this instead? If there is no faithful Lutheran church near you, do everything that is within your capability and your calling to start one!

[SLIDE 10:] 2. Expanding while contracting

Our Synod faces a paradox. This conundrum comes into view especially when the subject of church planting comes up. Paradoxically, we are talking about church planting that will expand the number of congregations just when this number also figures to be noticeably contracting. Some churches are consolidating, others are outright closing, and still others keep hanging on by their fingernails. So one side of the paradox can bleed over and affect the other. Someone might say, “Why plant new churches when the existing ones seem far from full?”

Now, I don’t think that anyone would expect every single new church start to be successful – if we define “success” as: resulting in new congregations that eventually get on their feet and join the Synod. Sometimes the Lord has other plans. In those cases we go to work elsewhere. Nor should we think, especially in light of church history, that all the congregations which exist today will necessarily live on into the future.<sup>7</sup> Today we are experiencing the same phenomenon that every generation of Christians has faced: expansion in some places and contraction in others.

[SLIDE 11:] Under these circumstances, we need to exercise the best possible stewardship of mission resources. It is one thing, say, in a community where there are five Missouri Synod churches, for three of them to combine or for one or two of them to close. It is another thing when the only Missouri Synod church in an entire county closes. In the second case, we end up losing a foothold in that county. We pray that the members transfer to others among our churches, but the facilities will quite likely be lost to us. I make no bones about it: I would like to see us preserve mission infrastructure wherever we can. Once it is gone, it is hard to get back.

It is not out of place to note here that another of the Synod’s mission priorities is congregational revitalization. The Synod offers a growing number of resources under the heading “*re:Vitality*,” starting with a self-assessment survey that is available to each of our congregations on a no-cost, no-obligation basis. This is the first of several tools to support congregations who find themselves in need of encouragement and help.

Thinking about the stewardship of resources, it is true that the polity of our Synod can make coordination difficult. For the Synod cannot order a congregation to close, or to consolidate with some other. I, for one, thank God that it can’t! Yet there is a forum for cooperation between churches. I mean literally the often under-utilized

Circuit Forum, also Circuit Convocations. Circuit-level awareness and assistance might prove helpful and even necessary in providing struggling congregations with resources they sorely need. Circuit-level coordination and cooperation can also be quite useful to congregations that are considering consolidation.<sup>8</sup>

For years now, Circuit Forums have been able to consider and recommend new work, and even adopt joint plans for mission outreach.<sup>9</sup> A lot of church planting efforts in the foreseeable future will probably take place in cities of at least some size, and these efforts will likely be carried out at the Circuit level, if not the congregational level. Synodwide, some Circuits have formed Mission Councils for just this kind of support and activity. [SLIDE 12:] So let me talk for a moment about both support and activity.

In the Central Illinois District, we are getting set at our District convention later this year to begin our implementation of the Synod's mandate for the so-called 1.1.1 mission funding model: \$1 per member per week in addition to regular offerings. We are praying that such funding will enable the District to provide support for mission work on the part of Circuits and congregations within Circuits.

As to the activity in new church plants, identifying available personnel could prove to be a challenge. If specialists in church planting seem to be in short supply or if they cannot be adequately funded financially, this work will end up falling largely to people already on the scene in a Circuit: pastors of existing churches, assisted by others. Who should take the lead? The pastor closest to the location of the new start? Not necessarily. Not everyone is equally well cut-out to do church planting. In any event, fellow pastors and others in a Circuit can ask themselves how to help and support those who are carrying the heaviest load for the new work. For example, maybe neighboring pastor "B" can teach a Thursday morning Bible class for pastor "A" while pastor "A" is working on the new church start. Laypeople can help in many ways too.

There is something for everyone to do to support church planting, directly or indirectly. Even as some churches are consolidating or closing, church planting stands out as a significant domestic mission challenge for our Synod.

[SLIDE 13:] 3. Reaching out in a politically and culturally divided nation

Here lies another mission challenge. In fact, the entire essay could be devoted to it. This challenge concerns the care with which the church must speak, so as to keep her witness to God's Good News in Christ both strong and intact amid political and cultural divisions.

During the mid-1990s I occasionally watched a television program called *Picket Fences*, which was set in a small town in Wisconsin. In most episodes, whatever trouble arose that week ended up being addressed in the town's municipal court. Whether the problem was basically legal in nature or not, it got solved in a climactic courtroom scene. From a dramatic point of view, the courtroom provided the show's writers with opportunities to state various pros and cons, even rights and wrongs, through speeches made by the lawyers and the judge. In a healthy community, though, some things cannot and/or should not be solved by court cases. [SLIDE 14:] It is important to remember this especially today, as civil law itself has become politicized.

The law is not alone. With the field of shared cultural values shrinking more and more, virtually everything public has become politicized in America, including entertainment and sports. Many people look to politics and to the state to provide the cornerstone and the configuration for the solidarity of society. Yet our political process is not basically built to offer content. It is more like a referee sorting out various contenders. If the church is not careful, she can be swept up into the melee as just one more contestant. [SLIDE 15:] When politics becomes the church's dominant witness, Christ's true mission is compromised.<sup>10</sup>

Now, the church should insist, to all and sundry, that same-sex marriage is not really marriage, that abortion is murder, and that homosexual acts are sinful. God's Word is clear about all these matters. And the church takes a legitimate interest in the protection of religious freedom under the laws of our country. Yet none of these points themselves say anything about the Christ Who died for sinners and rose again. None of them will save anyone eternally. Asserting them can even appear self-serving.

[SLIDE 16:] When Christianity faced a virulent threat from atheistic Communism during the Cold War, the theologian Helmut Thielicke urged God's people not to forget serving their neighbors in love. A Christian who strenuously defended his Christian view yet lacked love might actually give an opponent a reason to think, "For this man

Christianity is only a Christian ideology which he opposes to my Bolshevistic ideology. This Christian is not concerned about me and my soul . . . he's only interested in asserting himself as a Christian." Thielicke cautioned against failing one's neighbor in this way.<sup>11</sup> His warning remains.

[SLIDE 17:] One of the ways we can serve our neighbors is to remind them, by our very habits and patterns of speech, that we acknowledge ourselves to be God's creations, and as such we recognize our total dependence on Him. People these days wonder whether freedom of speech and freedom of religion will be legally curtailed in this country. I do not intend to say that these are far-fetched prospects, for they are not. Yet even if freedom of speech and of religion remain in place legally, the majority in America does tend to set boundaries for what is generally recognized as accepted and acceptable speech. If someone says something that falls outside those boundaries, generally it is dismissed out of hand. Alexis de Tocqueville could see this happening already almost 200 years ago.<sup>12</sup> Therefore it becomes more important than ever for us to pepper our conversations with expressions like, "the Lord granted me" this new day, or "the Lord blessed us" with children or grandchildren, or "I pray God" to keep you safe. My old boss Al Barry used to tell pastors, "Don't be afraid to be spiritual with your people." We could broaden this advice to include all Christians and say, "Don't be afraid to be spiritual with your friends, family, and neighbors." This advice is not new, of course; almost 500 years ago, the Large Catechism said that Christians should always have God's name on our lips.<sup>13</sup> But now, in our present climate and within what is sometimes called the kingdom of the left, spiritually oriented speech can help to keep the boundaries of accepted speech in society from contracting. It would be terrible if these boundaries would shrink to the point where they might end up completely excluding Christianity, or even God. And within the so-called kingdom of the right, such spiritual expression can help to open a door some day for Gospel witness.

Another point, perhaps a surprising one: As 21<sup>st</sup> century Missouri Synod Lutherans in America we have a plus going for us regarding outreach to various sectors of society, including many people who have been victims of racism. [SLIDE 18:] Our forefathers in the faith did not get swept up into any number of popular and political causes that would have compromised their witness. And what kept them from being so swept up? Careful adherence to Lutheran theology, that's what! Dr. Gregory Seltz of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty observed in his doctoral dissertation: [SLIDE 19:]

“Notions of white supremacy and America’s millenarian, manifest destiny were aberrations of God’s salvific work in Christ, often clothing modernist notions of progressive humanity in Christian garb. The LCMS rejection of modernism and secular humanism was an affirmation of biblical anthropology and the uniqueness of salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> We always have the best foundation for mission when we keep to our theology, for it is drawn from the Scriptures and centers on Christ.

Let’s not give up on that! Instead, we should re-double our efforts to teach the distinction between God’s two forms of governance – which is sometimes rather inaptly called the “two kingdoms.” For this distinction is rooted in the massively important distinction between Law and Gospel.

Let’s not grow discouraged, either. [SLIDE 20:] Even from a secular point of view, it has been observed that “especially in eras dominated by individualism, it is precisely the moral and religious institutions that hold firm to orthodoxy that have proven most attractive – thanks in no small part to their countercultural character. . . . [SLIDE 21:] Without dominant institutions of mass conformity and uniformity, we are more than ever in need of institutions of interpersonal moral formation, and these will inevitably be institutions that address us at the level of an eye-to-eye community.”<sup>15</sup> Of course, even if orthodoxy does not seem attractive to people, the church can still go about her life and mission “as if not,” like we noted yesterday.

[SLIDE 22:] One more thing in this subpart: the attractiveness of the church as a countercultural group will depend largely on its members embodying lives of Christ-like love. The Lord said that people would know His disciples by their love for one another.<sup>16</sup> Christian conduct matters. It matters in mission. But what happens when conduct fails to be loving, as it inevitably does in a sinful world? What happens when people need forgiveness for their sins, as we always will?

Martin Chemnitz – Lutheranism’s so-called “Second Martin,” without whom the first Martin (Luther) would not have stood – made an acute observation about the ancient church fathers. He noted that they were not always very careful in their teaching of good works. Many of them “bent the article of justification in the direction of works and merits,” Chemnitz wrote, thus “burying Christ and his benefits” because they were trying to fight false spiritual security and urge a burning zeal for good works.

Chemnitz also reported how some people in his own day said that “in the great carnal security of this world, our minds seem to be more readily stimulated to zeal for good works if they [the good works] are taught as necessary to salvation.” But Chemnitz cautioned against taking that bait.<sup>17</sup>

These days, we too would like to see outcomes similar to the ones desired by the ancient fathers. It would certainly be good to play up good works and put down spiritual security today. However, we have the blessing of living as Christians on this side of the Reformation. Let’s not ignore what the Reformation teaches. Specifically, we do well to remember what the Lutheran Confessions tell us as true expositions of God’s Word. Don’t forget the prominence they give to the promise, as we observed yesterday.

[SLIDE 23:]

## **B. Mission, Now?**

In this second and final subpart today, I’d like to suggest some things to do practically to reach the unchurched now, in the wake of COVID-19.

[SLIDE 24:] 1. Recognize the Fact of Death, and Highlight the Resurrection<sup>18</sup>

Coronavirus brought death to the doorstep for a lot of people. Of course, many have died. Death came very close for a lot of others.

We need to talk turkey about death. There is nothing new about this need, yet in some ways it stands out as acute right now. Nightly mortality statistics in the news have, at least in part, punctured the shell of denial about death within which our society usually hides.

For some time our culture has glorified youth, including being obsessed with sexual activity. More recently have come the latest advancements in anti-aging, from physical exercise to cosmetic surgery. It’s as if we as a people are trying to live under an illusion that we need not face certain unavoidable physical facts.

Our society is coming increasingly unglued from physical and natural facts. A case in point is the de-coupling of gender from biological sex, so your physical body need not get in the way of your own deeply-felt identity. Who *you are* becomes determined, decisively, by who you *want to be*. And that can change. Recently, as I was about to donate blood, a representative of the Red Cross asked me what my gender identity was *that day*. People can act as if the biological fact of being male or female amounts to an imposition. Flying in the face of facts to assert yourself can be one way of trying to prove that you are boss over reality.

Just try to win an argument with death, though.

Death provides an opportunity for Gospel witness. Now, this comes as no surprise. For centuries Christians have known that, say, when their neighbor's spouse died, this was a good time for them to tell the Good News about Jesus. No one needed Church Growth analysts to tell us that.

Yet the fact of death also raises the opportunity for witness in principle, as it were. Having death on the horizon will always cause people to wonder about the meaning of life. Has the Gospel lost its relevance? Not as long as people are dying!

Death amounts to more than an unwanted imposition, the Bible says. It intrudes. It interrupts, as we noted yesterday.

Death is an enemy. Jesus did not forget this. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew that He was about to bring Lazarus back.

Death remains an enemy. We Christians grieve over loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. However, we do not grieve as those who have no hope.

[SLIDE 25:] "I am the Resurrection and the Life," said Christ. "He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." In the Gospel according to John, Jesus asked Martha: "Do you believe this?" Really, not only the book of John but the whole Bible was written [SLIDE 26:] "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."<sup>19</sup>

This is our message. It is life from the dead, no less, [SLIDE 27:] in the Christ Who “took on flesh and blood,” as the book of Hebrews says, “so that by His death He might take away all the power of him who had the power of death (that is, the devil), and thus He might free those who were subjected to slavery all their lives by their fear of death.”<sup>20</sup>

What could be more important for our churches to tell people who are terrified about arguing with death and losing? Jesus has won, and He shares His victory! For those who are in Him, [SLIDE 28:] “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”<sup>21</sup> Let others ride whatever hobbyhorses they want. Our hallmark remains that we tell the Good News about Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life.

## [SLIDE 29:] 2. Practice Hospitality in your Locality

A recent book on *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil* recognizes that “Personal relationships have always been an important bridge between the church and the world, but in post-Christian contexts they are indispensable.”<sup>22</sup> The Barna organization’s recent *Better Together* research shows how groups that organize around some particular cause tend to attract a variety of participants. So these community groups can become settings where Christians are able to serve alongside of others and get to know them, even though they and their new friends might make their homes in communities that are homogeneous and despite the fact that they all live in an increasingly polarized culture.<sup>23</sup>

Also, *within* many communities and neighborhoods, a sense of local responsibility is growing more pronounced. [SLIDE 30:] Here is a quote from the Barna study, which is applicable to churches: “. . . you have a neighborhood, and place *matters*.”<sup>24</sup> The pandemic underscored this point. Christians and others took the opportunity to get to know their neighbors all over again and to help them – including the elderly couple across the alley, the single mother down the street who works as a nurse, and the grocery store clerk who lives around the block. Some congregations have undertaken projects of mercy to show love and concern to neighbors who live in the immediate vicinity of the church building.

Missiologists of various stripes agree on the importance of practicing hospitality. One suggests that some churches encourage their members to try to converse with neighbors at least once a week and to share a meal with one at least once a month.<sup>25</sup> A previous Barna study done in cooperation with the Lutheran Laymen's League reported on spiritually vibrant households. It found that one trait of such households is that they tend to be welcoming and hospitable to others.<sup>26</sup>

It is biblical for Christians to act in such ways. [SLIDE 31:] "Do not forget to show hospitality," the letter to the Hebrews urges, "for this is how some entertained angels without even knowing it."<sup>27</sup> [SLIDE 32:] More generally, Peter wrote: "I urge you, as aliens and strangers . . . Have good conduct among the Gentiles, in order that just when they are speaking against you as evildoers, as a result of observing your good works they may glorify God in the day of visitation."<sup>28</sup> Your physical neighbors can observe you best when you go out of your way to relate to them. And then, as Peter went on a bit later, [SLIDE 33:] "Always be ready to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have, but be gentle and respectful."<sup>29</sup>

I have heard it said, particularly in the wake of COVID, that "A place-based missiology is developing."<sup>30</sup> While some may look upon it that way, for much of this I suggest a more modest description. Let me explain by way of a little story: Dad asked Billy what he was doing. Billy answered: "I'm drawing a picture of God." "But Billy," Dad said, "no one knows what God looks like." Billy shrugged, "They will now."

People want to make outsized claims for their actions. One way to do this is to refer to our ordinary activities with high-blown terminology. You know, garbage collectors become "sanitation engineers"! Christians too are prone to resort to the lingo of respectable churchiness, if not the trappings of theological theory. In my story, Billy couldn't be drawing simply because it was fun. He was showing God to the world. Just ask him.

This tendency can arise over the very kind of thing we have just been talking about. A Christian family, or extended family, may help others who live nearby by running errands or purchasing food. In the process, they might say, "Jesus loves you, and I do too." Some might want to start referring to them as a "missional community,"

practicing a “place-based missiology.” But these people are really being good neighbors as Christians.

God’s royal priests take Him seriously. Again with an eye on 1 Peter, they offer spiritual sacrifices and declare His wonderful deeds.<sup>31</sup> Have even we in the church become so secular-minded these days that we can only conceive of people talking about Jesus at church, or in a quasi-churchly setting? Must we reach for new, high-falutin’ titles to draw attention to such acts? No.

Christians are “little Christs,” as Luther put it. What greater honor might we expect? No inflated claims need be made. Then love becomes free to go its humble and un-ostentatious way.

[SLIDE 34:] 3. Follow up on electronic contacts

Having just talked about hospitality toward the nearby neighbors of churches and church members, I do not want to ignore those who might be getting in touch with the church electronically. Substantial numbers of people got in touch with the church electronically due to coronavirus. [SLIDE 35:] A survey taken in this country during the last week of March, 2020, showed that nearly half of the respondents were regarding the global pandemic and the resulting economic woes as a “wake-up call” to turn to God. About a quarter of self-identified secular people questioned in this survey chimed in they too saw the pandemic as a wake-up call. Nearly a quarter of the non-Christians surveyed reported they were now reading the Bible and listening to Christian material online because of the crisis. Over a third of Jewish Americans surveyed said that they were listening to such things as Christian sermons on the internet.<sup>32</sup>

Those numbers are probably not so high today, almost two years later. Still, you might be surprised at who is checking you out online. And who knows? New spikes in coronavirus cases or something similar could drive a great many unchurched people back to the internet for Christian content.

[SLIDE 36:] If you are putting your church services online, I have two suggestions. First, don’t stop. I know there is some concern that church members may let the online service take the place of attending in person. You can mitigate this problem somewhat

by not posting the online service until Sunday afternoon or evening, maybe even waiting until Monday.

Second, if your online service consists of video as well as audio, let it *look* like a church service. Not only would this enable your homebound members to see their church, but it also affords unchurched people a non-threatening opportunity to see what a Lutheran church service looks like.<sup>33</sup>

Bear in mind, preachers: you will no longer be speaking only to the familiar faces right in front of you. Your audience will include others too. Don't let this paralyze you, though. Take it as an opportunity to model evangelistic conversation. During a sermon, you can state a question or objection that an unchurched person might raise, and then respond. Church members can learn from this.

[SLIDE 37:] Now, here is a point I urge us not to miss: Gather contact information on those who view your online service. Folks who are present in your building can sign a guestbook or a "rite of friendship" pad. How might you provide something like that for online viewers?

If people are watching on Facebook live or a similar platform, you can see their names. Someone can monitor those who look in, even perhaps carry on a little live chat with them.

But what if you load your service onto YouTube, or your church website? Then you will have to entice viewers to contact you, say, via e-mail, so that you can follow up on them later. How do you do this? With a little ingenuity and effort, you can invite viewers to:

- ask for a "give-away" that you are offering, something you can send them via mail or e-mail. It could be as simple as the PDF of a "What about" pamphlet or some other tract. Or you might spend a bit of money on other items to give away.
- ask questions that you will answer after an upcoming church service, on the video.

- pick one of two questions that you suggest. You offer to answer the “winning” question the next week. These questions could be, but need not be, about church services, paraments, the church year, and so on.
- give their own “multiple choice” answer to some less serious questions that you may pose.<sup>34</sup>

[SLIDE 38:] Unquestionably, it takes work to put your church service online, to ask for response, and then to follow up. This work is best done by a team, people with various respective assignments. Some of them may be congregation members for whom this is their first contribution to an effort at church, or perhaps their first in a while.

Overall, consider this: often our most frustrating evangelistic challenge is getting people to listen in the first place. When people *are* listening, seeking out our media, the question arises: how can we serve them further with the Word?

Like others, I am also concerned about the prospect that electronic access to God’s Word may end up competing with in-person hearing at church. We have our work cut out for us as we try to use electronic tools not to lead people away from pulpit and altar, but rather to draw them toward being gathered with members of the body of Christ around Word and Sacrament. But, I submit, there is no way around this work. We need to engage it.

## Conclusion

Yesterday I quoted Wilhelm Loehe to the effect that mission is really God’s one church in motion. [SLIDE 39:] He continued: “Mission is the life of the catholic church. Where it stops, blood and breath stop; where it dies, the love which unites heaven and earth also dies. The catholic church and mission – these two no one can separate without killing both, and that is impossible.”<sup>35</sup>

Have you ever thought of it that way? Mission will be in this world as long as the church is in this world, and we have our Lord’s own promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. No wonder Germans characterize the church as *Gabe und Aufgabe*: gift and task.

St. Paul did not know German, but he wrote the Corinthians, [SLIDE 40:] “In accordance with the grace that God gave me, I laid a foundation as an expert master builder, and somebody else is continuing to build on it.” Yes, by the grace of God someone IS continuing to build: you.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Deffner, “‘Here We Stand’ or ‘Here We Go’?”, *Sermons for Church Year Festivals* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:10, NET.

<sup>3</sup> 2019 LCMS Res. 1-02.

<sup>4</sup> Dhati Lewis, in a Send Institute webinar, “Churches Planting Churches as Normative,” June 25, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> As, by the way, St. Paul did in Colossians 4:2-6, not only for himself (vv. 2-4) but also for his addressees (vv. 5-6).

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 1:2-8.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus promised that the forces of hell would not overpower His church (Matthew 16:18), but He did not say that every single congregation will continue to exist until He comes again.

<sup>8</sup> See the Kansas District LCMS website for helpful information on congregational partnerships. Many such partnerships will be forged within Circuits. <https://kslcms.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Partnership-Doc-7.2.20.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Synod Bylaw 5.31. See especially b.2.

<sup>10</sup> See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 102-106, 173.

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Thielicke, “The Freedom of Man and the Autonomy of Historical Process,” in *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 203.

<sup>12</sup> Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: The Library of America, 2004), 292-295. This is a portion of volume I, part ii, chapter 7 of deTocqueville’s famous work.

<sup>13</sup> LC I 70 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory P. Seltz, “LCMS Identify and Mission in the American Urban Context: Engaging Conian Black Theology through Strategic Lutheran Missiology” (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2017), 203-204. I have my doubts about some of Dr. Seltz’s historical interpretations, but this is an excellent point.

<sup>15</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America’s Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 179.

<sup>16</sup> John 13:35. See Leopoldo A. Sanchez M., “Beyond Facebook Love: Luther’s Two Kinds of Love and the Immigrant Other,” *Let the Gospel Lead: Essays & Sermons in Honor of Dale A. Meyer*, ed. Travis J. Scholl (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2020), 83-101.

<sup>17</sup> In response, Chemnitz observed that the “fathers often used long exhortations in praise of good works. But as a result of this the purity of the article of justification was lost. If a person says that the world is indifferent to these exhortations, this problem should be commended to God, but we should not for this reason depart from the form of sound speaking” (Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989], 470, 591).

<sup>18</sup> This section is indebted to Carl Trueman, “The Final Enemy,” *First Things* 304 (June/July, 2020):37-42. See also chapter 11 in John T. Pless and Jacob A. Corzine, *Faith in the Shadow of a Pandemic* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020), 73-84.

<sup>19</sup> John 11:25-26; 20:31.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 2:14-15, NET.

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 1:21, NET.

<sup>22</sup> James, 227.

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<sup>23</sup> See *Better Together: How Christians Can be a Welcome Influence in their Neighborhoods* (N.p.: Barna Group, 2020), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Donnell Woodson, quoted in *Better Together*, 25, italics original.

<sup>25</sup> James, 188-89.

<sup>26</sup> As noted by Jason Broge of the Lutheran Laymen's League staff at the Central Illinois District Pastors' Conference on October 7, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 13:2, NET.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Peter 2:11-12.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Peter 3:15, NET.

<sup>30</sup> Linda Bergquist, in a Send Institute webinar, "Gospel and Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," June 24, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> See 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

<sup>32</sup> The national survey of 1,000 likely American voters was conducted by McLaughlin & Associates, March 23-26, 2020, with a reported margin of error of about plus or minus 3%. See Joel C. Rosenberg, "Millions of Americans say coronavirus a 'wake-up call' from God," *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 April 2020.

<sup>33</sup> "Church websites and social media presence ought to serve as 'front porches' for the church, creating digital narthexes that allow guests to explore at their own discretion, allowing outsiders to explore the community and its practices without requiring them to enter an environment they fear will be coercive (i.e., worship)" (James, 229).

<sup>34</sup> See "Gathering Contact Information" at <http://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-witness-ministry.html>

<sup>35</sup> Loehe, 59.

<sup>36</sup> The author thanks The Rev. President Mark Miller, The Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Robinson, and Mr. Lewis "Trip" Rodgers, all of whom read drafts of this essay and offered comments. However, any errors remain the responsibility of the author.