

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I. Introduction and Welcome

You are about to become a part of something wonderful! You are about to be sent. You are about to be sent to a place just down the street, across the country, on the other side of the globe. You are being sent to people called “poor”, to children called “orphans”, to people in need. But you are not just being sent to comfort them and to reassure them in their plight, you are being sent to proclaim to them that they in fact are neither poor nor orphans. You are being sent to teach them of the great love of the heavenly Father, a love so great that He sent His only Son to pay for their sins and to reconcile them to Himself, and through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, they are His children and are given possession of the greatest treasures of heaven! This is to take place within the context of what is commonly called “mission.” In this case, it takes place within the specific confines of the *Youth In Missions (YIM)* program of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hartland, Michigan.

II. Understanding “Mission”

Jesus Christ is the Center

Most often, when the term “Mission” is employed, it conjures thoughts of missionaries sent overseas to preach and teach the Word of God in the jungles and deserts of exotic lands. Certainly this does happen, but the reality of mission has a more specific definition which does not limit our mindset in such a way. The Church is called to mission, even if that mission opportunity resides in the home of the neighbor next door.

Jesus Christ is the sure foundation and vine of the Church. The saving Gospel given through Word and Sacrament is the means by which the Church is built and sustained. The believer in Christ, by virtue of Holy Baptism, is connected to the vine. Because the believer in Christ also finds himself alive in this world, he is therefore living in the field of “mission” each and every day. All mission – be it an organized mission such as *Youth In Missions* or unorganized and spontaneous mission in the daily life of the Christian – is *Vocatio* (vocation) in Jesus.

Vocation

Vocation means different things to different people. For the Christian, vocation is seated in the proclamation of the Gospel. We are called as baptized children of God to particular stations in life (husband, wife, son, daughter, worker, student, etc.) and in these stations we are to serve faithfully as God has placed us (1 Corinthians 7:17-20). “Mission” is therefore born as a natural consequence of vocation when the Lord proclaims to His people: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:13-16.) We have been recreated in the waters of Holy Baptism and now as we stand living and breathing, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we reflect the light of Christ to a world in darkness and need. It is a fruit of faith to take hold of the opportunities available in our daily vocation to season our speech with the salt of the Gospel and to pray for and support those who have been called to specific missional duties in other places (Colossians 4:2-6).

Are we not then better Christians because we seek to serve in such a way? It should be noted that any attempt to differentiate between vocations or works of Christian service as though one were more honorable or deserving of adoration than another is to fall short of a Lutheran, namely Christian, understanding. Before God, faith alone in Christ alone is what saves. The Christian recognizes that according to the Law, we stand before God bare and alone, without works of vocation. However, in repentance and faith, the Christian recognizes that on earth, we stand as children of God declared righteous for the sake of Christ (Justification) and as His holy people, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Sanctification) we are slaves to Christ and bound by the Gospel freedom to serve God and our neighbor (Matthew 20:20-28; Romans 6:15-23; First and Second Tables of the Law).

Mission

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9

Luther says the following with regard to this text:

We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us and let us die as soon as we are baptized and had begun to believe. For this reason, however, he lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as he has done for us.¹

With these words, Luther helps to take us from Vocation into Mission.

When we speak of “Mission” we begin with God and not self. We speak of the saving work of God to reconcile man to Himself by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ being carried out by the Holy Spirit into the world through the Means of Grace. The Church, therefore, is called by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit as God’s instrument to go forth into the world with the Word of the Gospel and His holy Sacraments. God makes Christians. We cannot convince anyone to faith. We can neither see nor judge the heart of another. We are called only to be faithful. And so it is that we become aware of the opportunities to faithfully speak the hope that is within us, both in our daily lives and in specific, organized missional opportunities such as *YIM*.

But why spend the time and financial resources to go out of state or overseas to serve in mission when there are so many opportunities here at home? From an emotional perspective, this is a difficult question to answer because you may only realize the significance of the work when you are surrounded by orphan children in the middle of teaching a lesson. Also, when you return home and begin to tell others of the experience, your words will undoubtedly fail to relay the dynamics of the event in a meaningful way. The limited vernacular of emotional “man” simply cannot describe the experience. In the end, you just have to be there.

Aside from the emotional experience of being involved, the real answer always rests in the Word of God. The real answer to this question is seated in the very words of Jesus in Matthew 28. When Jesus calls the eleven disciples to the mountain just before His ascension, He sends them with the words: “Go and make disciples of all nations...” The word from the original Greek, ἔθνος (ethnos) is an all inclusive word that when used in a general sense simply means “all people.” But even more so does the word speak specifically in the first century to non-Jews, foreigners, or people from other nations rather than from a particular home nation. The Gospel is for all people. Jesus does speak to the point that the Gospel is to be taken to those who live beyond your borders.

Now the word ἔθνος alone does not answer the proposed question. Instead, it helps us to understand the broader scope of God’s work for the Church. As has been already discussed, our Lord desires that we speak to those around us, but we also have the joy of knowing this is not limited to our countrymen. If the Lord opens the doors to overseas mission by providing willing and faithful Christians, appropriate resources, etc., then we do well to seize the opportunity as a gift from the Lord. The harvest is indeed plentiful. *Youth in Missions* seeks to lay hold of such

¹ Volker Stolle, tr. Klaus Detlev Schulz, *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Missions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 20.

opportunities and to encourage young people in order that the workers aren't so few (Matthew 9:37).

In addition, as Christians it is good to be mindful that the above is not necessarily mutually exclusive from the human care issues in our world which draw the Christian community into service. There are countries that need human care (Russia, Kenya, America, etc.) and Christians have the inclination in faith to respond with help (Matthew 25:34-40). So it is that we go forth with the urgency of delivering the Gospel to the world and in so doing we often find ourselves refurbishing facilities, building a home, offering the additional embrace necessary for the widow, the fatherless, the prisoner, and the lame.

The Centrifugal and Centripetal Dimensions of Mission

Mission is both centrifugal and centripetal in nature. To say "centrifugal" is to say "outward-moving." To say "centripetal" is to say "inward moving." Centrifugal describes the active outreach of God's people to the world around them. You need only to read the following texts from Holy Scripture to see the centrifugal dimension in mission: Matthew 24:14; 28:16-20; Mark 13:10; 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:19-23; Romans 10:14-17; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 3:15. But as you read these texts, you most certainly will recognize the centripetal dimension in that people are called to be within the midst of God and to come to His holy house to receive His gifts among the community of believers. And with this, we see that in our service to the world, we desire to help establish a location, a place where they too are in fellowship with other Christians, not for the sake of fellowship and/or community, but for the sake of Jesus who is the head of the body of believers, for the Church and the order He desires for the faithful administration of His gifts through the service of pastors. There really is no such thing as a churchless Christian.

In summary, we say that the Holy Spirit moves the people of God to go out in order that He may use them as faithful instruments to administer those means that actually build the Church and bring the world in.