MISSION IS WHAT?

Personal Answers from the Mountains of Southwestern Virginia

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Companions for Mission Committee
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Mission is what Christians do.

But that simple fact bugs me. That simple fact confronts me with what a mess I make of mission with most of what I do. ‘THIS,’ I say, looking at what my calendar tells me I spend my time at, ‘IS MISSION? THAT’S ABSURD!’

Over the past century we have been coming to know that really mission is GOD’S MISSION, not the Church’s mission. We’ve learned that God can’t seem to BE God without reaching out, caring, healing, touching. That’s what God is all about. God being God MEANS reaching out and giving us Jesus, who suffers and dies because of the screwed-up mess we have made of this world.

Jesus tells us straight out that our JOB is to touch all that bad news with good news. People are in prison, are poor and hungry, are naked, are sick, are hurt, are tied up in sin and death-dealing relationships. It is THERE in the mess we made that God’s loving care touches, suffers with, and brings healing.

God invites us to participate in that mission. We stumble along and do what we can, when we quit belly-aching and whining about why those other people are doing so little. Let’s be honest – we are envious, maybe even covetously angry, at the people who are richer than we are who don’t give as generously as WE do, or work as hard and selflessly as WE do.

Maybe more damaging, we redefine mission entirely. “First we’ve got to build up the membership of the church. That’s our first mission. Reaching out will come later.” Or, “Well, we give 25% of the budget to ‘outreach’ now as opposed to 20% last year.”

Let me say it again.

Mission is what Christians do. If you have a problem, then maybe you’ll join me and a lot of Christians who have used a very simple prayer. I do it every night before I go to bed: “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” And when you get up tomorrow, look around for the bad news and get involved. We can join in. Some of us will get good at parts of it. All of us will mess up some of it. I hope you don’t get satisfied with how well or depressed with how poorly you do it. Just don’t quit.

Mission is what Christians do.

—Loren B. Mead
Founder, The Alban Institute
Critical Mass

Our mission is to bring on board sufficient repentant, baptized folk committed to following Jesus (or equivalent) to reach the critical mass. From there on it’s all downhill.

—Harmon Smith

The River of God is Full of Water
(Psalm 65)

Our mission is to join the life of God trusting that great river, knowing it is indeed full of water, to carry us forward. We have been given abundant life through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our mission is to live into the divine life, sharing God’s love with the rest of creation in creative and often surprising ways. May the Spirit lead us!

—Shelby Ochs Owen

Powell River, Wise County, Virginia
Ray Moore

New River, Montgomery County, Virginia
Wikipedia
Without Thought of Gain

Love is a verb, and as the Church does love—kindness without thought of gain or reward—it is mission. Then God can and will do the rest, whatever that may be.

—C. Conrad McNeer

It Begins from Jerusalem

Dr. Eben Alexander’s near-death experience, described in *Proof of Heaven*, is like a modern-day Pentecost. The eager, immediate zeal of his need to share the story with others was like that of the first Pentecost experience, as recorded by Luke in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

Gathered in Jerusalem from every known nation, in their respective languages they heard and understood the followers of Jesus in their joyous proclamation of the good news of God’s love. Some even thought they must be intoxicated, even though it was only nine in the morning! Most who received this incredible news were compelled to share it with one another and others—that God is love and loves them, too.

The followers of the risen Jesus and their new converts were known as the followers of the Way, which to me means the way into life, the way to journey on this earth into peace and joy. They were God’s now, and from then on understood themselves to be partners with God and partners with each other.

Is it not our mission to go into all nations to tell our story? I hope that we recognize that all people of the Spirit, whoever they are and wherever they are or come from, have their God-stories and God-experiences, too. Let us have the humility and the respect to allow them to sit and share with us as well. By doing so, we might allow ourselves mutually to benefit and to be enriched in our understanding of our common Creator. It is not a matter of thinking we are right, so much as a matter of recognizing that, as Jesus said, only God is right.

—B. Lloyd
Community is the basic building block for mission. To be in or on mission is to be responding to the invitation from God through Christ to “become one” as the Godhead is one.

When I was fairly young out of seminary I was engaged in the Civil Rights Movement. At about that time the Anglican Congress of 1963 was held and published the vision of Bishop Stephen Bayne, articulated as “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ”.

Our diocese responded favorably and enthusiastically to the call. Several of us were invited to submit responses to the challenge of the document, which came to be known as “M.R.I.”.

I articulated my own reservations in the context of the times with an article: “Could M.R.I. be interpreted to mean ‘Mission Removed Indefinitely’?” I expanded this to question whether the document could lead us to focus on issues so far beyond our borders that we overlooked the work so desperately needed for reconciliation among the races in our own nation and neighborhoods.

Somehow I failed to see at that moment in history that both actions were needed and that both could be addressed. I found myself not far removed from the view of the first-century Christians in Jerusalem. Stephen Bayne was our contemporary St. Paul.

Later, in a parish where I was the rector there were two men: each was in his 80’s; each had significantly diminished eyesight; each was a loyal and devoted Church person. One was relatively stronger in his physical body. The other was in the later stages of Parkinson’s disease – barely able to maintain his equilibrium as he attempted to walk. Both were technically blind.

But they met each Wednesday at the entrance of the church building. One was brought by a member of his family. One came by cab. They waited for each other at the church door and proceeded into the chapel for the midweek Eucharist. The one with slightly better vision guided the way. The one with slightly more strength provided aid for the movement.

There they were:
Two retired men on their way to a vision –
Two hungry sinners on their way to the Eucharistic feast –
Two cripples on their way to salvation –
Two needy people offering each other the gifts they had to give –
Two men in community with each other moving toward incorporation into an even larger community.

Two men – Two nations – Two races – Two worlds.

No person or group is so strong as not to need the aid of others. No person or group is so weak as not to offer help to others.

In time, Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ became for me the motivating influence and theology of my ordained ministry.

From my own isolationism and myopia I later became the chairman of the Joint Standing Commission on World Mission of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

The drive for me in local expression of social engagement did not negate the necessity for work that proclaims that the principal action of the Church is thanksgiving, leading out into mission, toward a new and deeper community.

Community is Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ.

—A. Heath Light
MRI, it was said, simply restated the New Testament. If so, then, like the Scriptures, it was in part a creature of its time. It was written in the context of specific circumstances. Like the epistles, it responded to particular needs of the day. But because it addressed issues which had pressed themselves upon Anglicanism, and still do, it had — and has — a quality which is timeless. Like the New Testament, it proclaimed some truths about what it means to live within a Christian community as a member of the Body of Christ with gifts granted by the Spirit to offer as well as growing to be abetted by the gifts which God has bestowed on others.

Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence refers, then, not only to a wordy catch-phrase of a decade long past, nor to a worthy program swallowed up in controversy, nor to a valiant if only partially-successful effort to revitalize one denomination. It abides as a principle, drawn from the Scriptures, celebrated in Eucharist, practiced to varying degrees throughout Christian history. It remains a worthy goal, and a viable precept, a vision to fulfill.

—R. David Cox

1 “The Church’s mission is response to the living God Who in His Love creates, reveals, judges, redeems, fulfills,” moving through history to teach, save, and call to obedience and service. “Our unity in Christ, expressed in our full communion, is the most profound bond among us, in all our political and racial and cultural diversity.”

So, then, what now? “The time has fully come when this unity and interdependence must find a completely new level of expression and corporate obedience.” The need was not alone for greater generosity, but for a deepened understanding of “how God has led us … to see the gifts of freedom and communion in their great terms, and to live up to them…. Mission is not the kindness of the lucky to the unlucky; it is mutual, united obedience to the one God Whose mission it is.” This will require “that every church seek the way to receive as well as give” and “that every church seek to test and evaluate every activity in its life by the test of mission and of service in others, in our following after Christ…The Church exists to witness, to obey, and to serve. All our planning must be tested by this.”


The Mission of God is to bring all Creation into Communion. God the Holy Trinity exists as a perfect Communion of three Persons in one Being, and God calls the Creation into existence to be an expression and representation and partner in this threefold love. When Creation is complete, it will be a perfect self-portrait of God, a perfect proclamation of God’s Name.

In the meantime, on the way towards that completion, God calls and empowers creatures to participate in the making of Communion, the building-up of right relationships of mutual well-being in ever-expanding circles and ever-more-inclusive communities. On Earth, within all the complex relationships of species and ecosystems, human beings are called to live as co-creators with God of planetary flourishing. God came to human beings in Jesus to show what divine Communion in human life could look like, and God comes to us even now as Holy Spirit to guide and empower us in making Communion relationships in our lives.

The Church is one particular community of communities, one particular crucible for forging Communion relationships. The practices of faith taught in the Church help us learn how to recognize Communion, and to recognize it as God’s Mission, so that we can go forth from the Church to see Communion in the world, to see God’s creating of Communion in neighborhoods and communities and ecologies and systems of all sorts and conditions, and to join with God in building up Communion in any way we can. The particular projects we engage are our several missions; but each individual mission project is a reflection and instance of the one Mission of God, the one great sweep of God’s love to bring all things into Communion.

—Paul S. Nancarrow
Mission is a Race

Racing the rain is a race I cannot win.

Sometimes when I go out bicycling, I end up racing with the weather. I can see a line of thunderstorms in the distance, and I wonder if I can go a certain distance and get back home before the rain starts to fall, and I get out there and pedal for all I’m worth. But almost always, it’s the rain that wins.

Rainstorms are bigger than I am; and the winds that push them at their altitudes are generally faster than my speed on the ground; and even if I have miles’ worth of lead and plenty of go in my legs, when it comes right down to it, unless it’s a very localized shower or unless my route turns suddenly way out of the storm’s path, the rain always gets me in the end.

But on a good bicycle ride, racing the rain is not about winning or losing. Racing the rain is about the adventure, it’s about not being quite sure how things will turn out, it’s about committing myself to doing my best in a situation I know I cannot control and then just seeing what happens next. And the fact that I almost always lose does nothing to diminish the joy of taking on the race.

St Paul compares the Christian life to a race (“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? … I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race…”). I’ve never cared for that metaphor much, because I’ve always thought it made faith too competitive, and grace too much like something that had to be won. God doesn’t make us winners and losers, I believe, and there’s no such thing as beating others to God’s love. But some races aren’t about winning or losing; some races are about throwing yourself wholeheartedly into a situation you know you can’t control, and doing your best, and being amazed at what happens, whatever happens. Some races are worth the exhilaration, even if things catch up with you in the end.

Joining God in God’s mission is that kind of a race. We don’t know exactly where we’re going, we don’t know all the conditions we’ll encounter on the way, we only know we are throwing ourselves into a situation that is bigger than we are and is well beyond our control, and however things turn out, it will almost always not be the way we’d envisioned when we started. Running the race of mission is one we will never win. But this race isn’t about winning. This race is about the adventure of running along with God, putting our whole hearts into going somewhere new and going there strong, discovering what God will do with us when we commit to do with God.

And the joy is in looking back and seeing how far we’ve come.

—Paul S. Nancarrow
“The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.” Decades ago, the Swiss theologian Emil Brunner expressed in those words how mission, far from being some side activity of the church, is so central to the very nature of the church that the church cannot exist without mission. It is what the church does. No mission, no church.

Not three months after I arrived at R. E. Lee Memorial Church in Lexington, Bishop Heath Light asked if we would consider hosting an exiled Ugandan bishop then languishing outside Atlantic City, with his family of no fewer than nine. A hefty challenge under any circumstances, the parish had bade farewell to a longtime rector, a hail and farewell to another, then a welcome to me all in around four years’ time. The congregation was, to say the least, a bit scattered.

Still, after some earnest prayer, we said “yes.” Miraculously enough in a fully-rented market, we found a house. It needed serious repair, it needed furniture, it needed stocking for the essentials of life. Suddenly, again miraculously, parishioners and those in the community who heard about the project poured forth with skills and gifts to fix the plumbing and electricity, paint the rooms, furnish the house, fill the pantry, decorate the rooms and have food on hand to greet the bishop, his wife, his sister, and their six children. All in one week.

It was the beginning of an amazingly blessed year that the Ogwals were with us. For looking outward drew people together inwardly too in new and healing ways. Parishioners learned of what God is doing in another country even while seeing what God was doing in their own midst.

It happened again. In 2006 I went, supposedly for a few months, to St. Luke’s, Hot Springs, which was still grieving the death of its rector and coping with controversies in the Episcopal Church. I invited a friend and former associate, a priest then in Sudan, to visit. She preached dynamically. Then after a parish lunch she challenged the congregation to support the theological college where she served what she thought dollar figure. On I asked her what if St. Luke’s request—for a story of mission, pledged what and soon gave amount.

Six months later, “outreach com-included a long who had spent the county. She helping the Su-and proper; but what about needs nearby? Suddenly St. Luke’s adopted a second project, and became a substantial supporter of a local emergency relief effort. Becoming aware of the needs of the neighbor around the globe opened eyes to the needs of the neighbor around the corner. It wasn’t only for the sake of Christians in Jerusalem that Paul asked Christians in Corinth and Galatia to help them out.

Worship vs. service, inreach vs. outreach, support at home vs. support abroad: Some would make these contradictory. Not so. In the mission of God, they become complementary, mutually supportive, and, indeed, essential. For mission embraces all that we do.

—R. David Cox
Mission at its root is about a shared human experience in relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Along these lines, “missional” becomes about being sent into the world to learn from and listen to neighbors.

Our efforts become about revolving church around these relationships.

—Mark D. Furlow

Rooted

Two different women, by simple statements, made a profound impact on my concept of mission. One was a woman from India who spoke of mission as a “window on the world”.

The other was a woman from Africa. We were sitting in a mission workshop at General Convention some years ago. Representatives from all over the world were there. We all listened to the heartfelt, but very typical, words about mission from people from the United States. After a while the woman from Africa stood up and quietly asked, “When will you let my people be missionaries to you?” You could have heard a pin drop.

Years ago a group of young people and four adults from our Diocese went on a working mission trip to Ecuador, our Companion Diocese at that time. In the year prior to that trip, our young people took time to study the country to which we were going, but they also visited the coalfields of Southwestern Virginia, learning about the Appalachian region and the history of the people who settled here. They came to understand much about who we are, what gifts the people in the various parts of the Diocese have, and what problems are here. When we went to Ecuador we lived in homes, some modest, others in slum areas. The young people came to realize that you don’t have to have money or things to be happy. You can share who you are with people of another place, learn who they are, and accept each other as God’s children.

When some of the Ecuadorian young people later came here, they too visited all over the Diocese and learned that we are a very diverse people with many strengths and weaknesses.

Mission is the looking through the windows of our world to see the people on the other side, while they in turn look back at us. It is by opening that window, stepping through, and truly getting to know other people in their own places that we and they can discover the love of God we share in Christ Jesus.

—Charlotte Fischer
Inquiry and Faithful Response

My trek toward realizing the mission of God in the world has compelled me to offer myself to that mission in the ways that I am uniquely suited. Like most Christians in the pews, the vast majority of my own ministry—my specific role in the larger mission—takes place beyond ‘the Church.’ Although my ordained ministry is an integral part of who I am, to faithfully participate as a member of the living Body of Christ, I now exercise the greater part of my personal ministry ‘in the world.’

As a teacher, and especially as a teacher of natural science, I have a unique opportunity—and responsibility—to guide my students toward a deeper appreciation of creation and our place in it. The stunning beauty and functionality of the earth’s systems, its physical features, and living inhabitants inspire awe—but also should evoke feelings of gratitude, care, and concern.

An essential aspect of mission work is inquiry, a seeking to discern ‘what God is up to’ in the world, and an awareness of how we are responding to God’s mission. As the worldwide population exceeds seven billion human souls, the urgency to learn as a species to live sustainably and with compassion is paramount. Opening our eyes, hearts, and minds to the transformation that sustainability requires is a daunting charge—and one eminently worth praying for and working toward.

—Mark W. Frazier

Little Different from Augustine of Canterbury

Prior to ordination as a priest, I was made deacon-in-charge of a new start-up mission church meeting in an office building. The concern of getting the congregation to move from “maintenance to mission” was never a consideration. In the hardship of worshipping in an office, a store front, a gymnasium, and a multipurpose building, the congregation flourished because it did everything within the context of Gospel proclamation.

After eighteen years as a priest I was awarded a grant to follow the missionary journey of Augustine from Rome to Canterbury. The grant theme was inspired by the Prophet Isaiah, “Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.” As an Episcopal priest, I felt it important to make the connection to the church of origin, to touch the foundation upon which I was building.

Augustine’s mission was little different than mine.

The mission of the Church, local and global, is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The media for this message are as boundless as the human imagination. The church must always help the needy and pursue justice for the oppressed. However, to go to mission to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, free the oppressed, and shelter the homeless without the proclamation of the Gospel is to leave well fed, well dressed, well housed, well governed people living in despair of meaning or purpose for their life. Mission is Christ-centered or it is nothing.

—Roy G. Pollina
Mission is Relationship Building

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards. Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.” Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher and theologian, 1813-1855

In my pondering the meaning of “mission”, I realize that I am understanding it as I reflect backwards, and that I have since my childhood, embraced mission as a reality of relationships, to be experienced, not as a project, or a problem to be solved.

At the age of two, my family hosted a woman from Guatemala and her 9-year-old daughter, who left their homeland and family for a better life. Catalina and Carmen lived with us and Catalina worked as our housekeeper—I had my first multi-cultural experiences unbeknownst to me, for I understood it to be new relationships and bonds of affection. My Grandparents hosted many international students through the Rotary club and there was always a place at the table during the holidays for them. My awareness grew in understanding that friendships were global, not limited to my small circle of acquaintances. As a student at Hollins College, through my involvement in the Religious Life Association, Chapel worship services, and studying the Bible, I began to connect the story of God and God’s people, with my own life experiences and reflect on how I might live my life in a way that furthered the mission of God’s reign being made real here on earth. I took to heart a new understanding that God’s mission is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” (BCP pg 855), and that I, as a disciple of Christ, am part of making this mission a reality.

Mission for me is all about relationships: with God, with neighbors that I know and don’t know, honoring all the members of the Body of Christ, as the apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Corinthians.

In recent years, I have had the opportunity to meet the South Sudanese and Sudanese community of Roanoke, Virginia. As our relationship has grown, so has our mission and ministry, through weekly worship, Christian Education, community organizing, raising funds to assist with education and hygiene in South Sudan, supporting each other in joys and sorrows, and sharing how God is present in our lives. Often times I am asked, “What can we do to help the Sudanese?” My answer: “The Sudanese are not a project or a problem to be solved. Come worship with us, join in our conversations, and then you will know how we can mutually support each other in our lives in Christ.” As I intentionally build relationships that strengthen bonds of affection, and unite us as Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I seek to fulfill God’s mission and further God’s reign here on earth.

—Susan Emmons Bentley
Joining God’s Presence

My thoughts are generated from conversations among the Episcopal Evangelism Network, as well as from my own experience as a new priest in the Episcopal Church.

Mission is necessarily incarnational and communal. This statement encapsulates many ideas. For one, the Church must always look to Jesus Christ as her model and the Holy Spirit as the One who empowers us as the Body of Christ to do the ministry of Christ in the world. Mission is no different. If we are to be missional, we must join those we wish to serve in relationship, seeing in the Trinity a model of communion and in the incarnation of the Word a call to walk with, live with, and converse with those we wish to serve.

Mission means seeking God where God has not been named, and joining God there. We work together through prayer to discern God’s presence. Several of Paul’s letters also point to where love (1 Corinthians 13) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) point to God’s presence. If we are missional, we seek out God’s presence, name it, and join God where and with whom it is at work, asking God’s blessing upon it.

Being missional means following the most important commandment. “Jesus said: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). Being missional means being and doing what God has called the Church to be and do: witnesses to and for the Church of God’s holy, healing, reconciling, redeeming, and whole-making love for the whole world.

The Source and End of Our Reaching Out

Each of us views and interprets the world around us through the lens of our life’s experience in all its particularity.

My Christian faith is grounded in relationship and connection—relationship and connection with Jesus and with other Christians. Jesus calls his followers to go and make disciples of all nations. This call takes us outside our circles of comfort to engage with the world near and far, sharing the gospel story. That story is the good news found in the ongoing life of Jesus. Faith is at its core a relationship between the triune God and humanity.

When we go out to others in their contexts, we do so to build relationships, trusting God’s presence and encouragement. In those relationships we share the good news of our experience of the divine love. And in coming to know others in their particular contexts we learn to see the world through another’s eyes.

We build relationships as we share on many levels. We share how we have come to know the presence of Jesus in our lives. We share at meals when we break bread together. We share our skills with others in teaching, healing, and building. Through this sharing we learn from others. In relationship we make Christ known and in turn have Christ revealed to us, and we are changed.

God draws us into contact with the world, always expanding the circles of relationship and love.

—William J. Watson, III
Being missional means being humble. Philippians 2 provides a beautiful account of what it means to be missional. We must assume a humble posture to be missional. Missional work is about emptying ourselves as Christ emptied himself, of seeking not glory and selfish ambition but to serve, of obeying God and following God to places where we may be uncomfortable. We must realize that we need the people we seek to serve, and welcome them to join us in our space and lives too.

Being missional means being present and listening. We can do nothing good without God. Being missional means being humble enough to listen to God together, to discern where God is calling his faith community to be. As we listen to God, so we must practice listening to the people we have joined with to serve. What are their needs? What are their concerns? Before we act, we must be present and listen.

Being missional means using words. We are called by our baptismal covenant to proclaim the Good News in both word and action—being willing to articulate God’s vision for the world to others. Therefore, missional work must go hand in hand with evangelism, but not popular culture’s understanding of evangelism. Rather, an evangelism that by its nature reflects “the respect and dignity of all humans.” The Message is in the medium: content is indivisible from delivery. People are hungry for Good News and are hungry to have conversations about spirituality and faith. Rather than running from those conversations out of fear of being perceived as proselytizers, we must humbly meet the other where they are, listen to them, and respectfully respond.

Being missional is spiritual work. We are drawn in to the Trinity when we selflessly show our love to the other. Being missional means being open to being transformed by God through the people you encounter and the conversations you have with them. This can be enlightening work, but it can also be uncomfortable work.

Being missional out in the world parallels the work we do together in our parishes and dioceses. “Internal” and “external” spiritual work go hand-in-hand, and are opposite sides of the same coin. Healthy parishes grounded in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit are sent out into the world by the Holy Spirit, and receive blessings in return. Parishes that are divided or dysfunctional have more difficulty doing this work, because they are too busy fighting, complaining, or licking their wounds. Also, parishes lacking missional direction tend to fall into division.

—Hilary Camblos Streever
## Mission is Responding to God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Way</th>
<th>New Way</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God’s Church has a mission.</td>
<td>God’s mission has a church</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Church is an institution, and mission is something the Church does.</td>
<td>• The Church is a sent community of people gathered in mission. Mission is something the Church is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The mission of old and small churches is survival.</td>
<td>• Old churches can do new things. Small churches can do big things.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Diocese is the principal center of mission.</td>
<td>Parishes are the principal centers of mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The local parish church is where people come together for worship, fellowship, and pastoral care.</td>
<td>• The local parish church is where people come together for celebration and support of God’s mission in their neighborhood and beyond.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Local parishes give their money to the diocese so that the clergy and diocese can do the mission.</td>
<td>• Parishes share their gifts in “household of parishes” that can resource and connect all parishes in discerning and doing mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission is how the Church grows.</td>
<td>Mission is how God transforms the world.</td>
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<td>• The essence of mission is to make new church members, to grow the church.</td>
<td>• The essence of mission is to make disciples who make a difference in the world.</td>
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—Stephen R. Stanley

![Diagram of Bishop and Diocese, Shared Ministry of the Baptized, Members of the Congregation](image)
A Trip

Mission is a trip.

But a mission trip, or a mission strategy, may be only so much running in place, unless we ask, “And what is God up to just now?”

Once I was a know-it-all, an earnest petitioner for justice and for peace, living a secure and innocuous life. Until one hot summer’s day some beggars on an Italian roadside showed me that by clutching my wallet I was relying on an unreliable god. The God who called me that day to let go of money and to trust him has turned out to be not only reliable but profligate. He turns out to be the God who sent childless Abraham to demonstrate blessing in the sight of all nations. He turns out to be the Father who defeated humiliation and death through the death of his only Son. He empowers us as Defending Spirit and Guide.

So the question becomes, “Where is the Spirit taking us now?” Jesus’ mission was to do the will of his Father, so that life on earth should match the pattern of life in heaven. Ours is the same, except that the Father and the Son have now sent the Holy Spirit to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. They have sent the Spirit to confront evil for what it is, and through us to cherish every sprout of caring and service.

We participate in the unfinished work of God on earth when we go and tend Jesus’s sheep. His sheep are grazing where they can – inside the fence, and beyond the horizon. Clambering over fences for God into territory not our own, we are exposed to God.

—Richard J. Jones

Bringing Blessing

A Christian theology of mission is grounded in Scripture. As Christians we are part of the Abrahamic covenant from Genesis 12:2, “Be blest, to be a blessing to all peoples”. Through Abraham and Jesus Christ we are to be about bringing God’s blessing to all peoples.

Jesus our Lord gave us the Great Commission as a missional charge: “Make disciples of all nations, baptize in the name of the Trinity, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19) We are to communicate the Gospel of Christ in all forms to the peoples of the earth, but especially in making disciples and Christian formation in and from our parishes.

Jesus in Matthew 25 bids the members of his family to feed the hungry, etc. Sometimes we feed people first with physical food, and then with the food of the Gospel, and sometimes the other way around. Either way the commandment to love our neighbor bids us to meet people’s physical needs and their spiritual needs whenever possible.

I see two levels for the Church’s mission: the local community where the local parish church seeks to carry on God’s mission; and the national and international level, where partnerships between churches, dioceses, and agencies minister God’s love where people are in need. It is the task of the local parish, mission committee, and Christians to discern where and how God is calling them into greater mission and continuing service to people nearby and people far away.

In the Christian Church we are connected to the Body of Christ throughout the world, and are called to bring peace to those who are near and to those far away too (Ephesians 2:17). Mission is local AND mission is global.

—Kent W. Tarpley
Departing from Juba on Tuesday, December 3, 2013, I had no clue that in less than two weeks an outbreak of hostilities would explode in a soldiers’ barracks, ripping apart the newest nation on earth—South Sudan. The 194th member nation of the United Nations, joyfully independent since 2011, is still at war one year later.

How could this be?

My heart, tuned for mission, had been guiding me since early childhood in Charleston, South Carolina, where I grew up in the racially segregated ‘50’s and ‘60’s. Now, by the grace of God, I had a way to share across a racial frontier the education and experience I had received. Following in the footsteps of the missionary Marc Nikkel, I found my way to Bishop Gwynne College, where Marc had taught in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s.

In 2012 and 2013 I came to know future leaders of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan by teaching students at Bishop Gwynne College, now relocated to Juba. The subjects we explored—the New Testament, an introduction to sociology, and the history of mission and outreach—were important and challenging for all involved. Yet an even greater learning was offered—the building of relationships of respect in the worldwide community of Christ.

I saw students from across South Sudan forming friendships with each other in Juba that potentially will stay with them for years into the future. By the grace of God, those relationships will bridge the gaps caused by tribal disputes and geographic divides. I saw friendships forming between people who came from around the world seeking to help the brave people of South Sudan find their way as a new country. I came to respect my fellow teachers, including the Reverend Samuel Galuak Marial in the field of African Traditional Religions. And then war started. Again.

Back in the United States, we desperately sought ways to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. The idea of sponsoring a Peace Institute was put on the table. Could we presume to teach people who had experienced decades of civil war? Could we attempt, with any hope of success, to contribute to changing the culture of violence to a culture of peace? Honestly, we did not know, but we knew we had to try. Standing by and doing nothing was not an acceptable alternative. Even with the doubts and skepticism that accompany such a project, my knowing and trusting the College’s new Principal, Samuel Galuak Marial, gave me the confidence to move forward.

Mission is a leap of faith and a landing, hopefully, on common ground.

—Ellen J. Hanckel

“Sudanese Nativity”

MARC NIKKEL
Sailing

Deranje nou, Seyè, lè nou nan labondans sa nou possede nou bleye-ou ki sous Lavi non

Souke-nou Gran-mèt, pou nou
ka pran risk paske nou konnen
Lè tanpèt ou la,
Lè nou pa we, zetwal ou klere nou

Nou mande ou ban nou plus espwa
pou nou vanse ak fòs, kourag, espwa, ak renmen
Nou priye nan non Kapitèn nou an, Jezi Kri. Amèn.

Disturb us Lord, when we are too well-pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little; when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore. Disturb us Lord, when with the abundance of the things we possess we have lost our thirst for the water of life. Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery, where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes and to push us into the future in strength and courage and hope, but mostly in love. We pray in the name of our captain, who is Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Attributed to Sir Francis Drake,
Hatian Creole translation by Ogé Beauvoir,
courtesy of P. Roger Bowen

According to Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa was visiting New York City once, and was guided downtown to The Bowery. As she walked along the street, followed by children and reporters, TV crews, a crowd, she noticed a homeless man, an old guy, sitting on a curb, near the gutter. She paused by him and, placing wrinkled hands on his head, blessed him, and then moved on. Of course, the news people swooped on the poor man and, thrusting microphones and camera lenses in his face, notebooks poised, they asked him: “What was that like!? You were blessed by a living saint! What did that feel like?!?” The old fellow looked up into the cameras, tears in his eyes, and said, “That was the first time anyone in New York has ever touched me.”

Later, reporters asked Mother Teresa: “How do you do this work all the time? How can you be with these people and serve the outcasts like this?!”

And she smiled her Mother Teresa smile and said:
“I serve the Christ I see in them… the Christ in me serves them.”

No separations. No lines.

—P. Roger Bowen
In my daily work, mission is my intentional response to God’s grace minute by minute every day of my life. Recognizing God’s presence each day, living with an awareness of God’s blessings, is what compels me to “Go ye into all the world and proclaim the Gospel,” [1] and if necessary use words. [2] Passing on to other people a portion of what has been given me is the only response I can make as one who proclaims to follow Jesus Christ. Mission is the fruit of the seed planted in my heart at my baptism—“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?” [3]

As the rector of a congregation, it is my hope to empower, equip, encourage, and inspire those in the congregation I serve to go and do likewise.

As a congregation, the experience of God’s presence and the recognition of our blessings are multiplied hundredfold, but our response is the same—to reach out with our time, resources, money, talents, and influence to give to other people a portion of what has been given to us by God.

And in the places of the world, for the needs of the world, and to the peoples of the world, that I cannot reach alone, we pool the resources of our congregation, diocese, denomination, and faith, and go forth together.

Mostly succinctly said, mission is almost anything and everything done intentionally in response to The Baptismal Covenant to honor God and love our neighbor.

—John H. Heck

[1] From the inscription above the stained glass window in the former Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary quoting Matthew 28.19.


Let me be clear that I do not advocate slamming your friends’ hands in doors. But I believe that the door-slamming led me into an enlightenment that might not have happened any other way.

Darla’s lack of sight does not make her pitiful. She needs her guide dog and some extra time to get in a cab, as all of us need help maneuvering through this chaotic world. But she is tough, and she laughed at my obsessive mothering over her after the door slam happened. At the same time, she does not sit on a pedestal because of her lack of sight. She sits up there because of the knowledge she imparts in the classroom, the books and articles she writes, the son she mothers, her sense of humor.

As we move forward in ministering to our members with disabilities, I pray that we all slam into relationship with each other. With all our blindnesses, our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, may we laugh, occasionally take Advil for the swelling, and move on to speak to the world with eloquence and power.

—Martha Johnson Bourlakas

How does Jesus send out his followers? “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals . . . Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide.”

If we pay attention to Jesus’ teaching as he sends his followers out on a mission of proclamation and healing, we will find the map for our journey in this new apostolic era. What Jesus is coaching here with his travel instructions are the tools we will need to cultivate in order to be the missional church that we must now become. Jesus does not want those he is sending out to be totally self-reliant. Instead he wants them to be neighbor-reliant, even stranger-reliant.

In order to be the missional Church that the Holy Spirit is calling us to be, we need to go further and comprehend the Gospel truth that we need our neighbors. We need to be open to what they have to teach and offer us. Jesus is teaching us a reversed hospitality.

The way Jesus sends out his disciples forces them into a posture of real humility. They will not be in charge.

The Church doesn’t have a mission. God’s mission has a Church. God’s mission needs committed and courageous apostles. There are unexplored mission fields around all of our congregations. The fields are brimming with people who are thirsty for belonging and community. Many, like us, are hungry for meaning and hope.

The mission fields we are called into in the 21st century have changed rapidly and dramatically. The tides of cultural change have rushed in around the feet of our churches almost overnight. These are challenging times for the Church. But the situation was not all that much different in the second generation of the church when Luke wrote his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Those small, faithful communities of Christians found themselves struggling to advance their mission among a culture that either did not know or was indifferent to the life-giving story of Jesus.
Our missional journey will not be an overnight trip. Instead, we must prepare for longer sojourns among our neighbors in order to learn what they and God have to teach us about true Gospel hospitality.

—Mark Allen Bourlakas