Growing in a Theology of Mission for Today

In this module we offer some biblical and theological building blocks for constructing a theology of mission for today. There are many models of mission that the Church has used over the last 100 years. (See the presentation on the Models of Mission of the 20th Century Ecumenical Movement in Appendix C-1.) Each of these models is undergirded by certain biblical texts and theological concepts. For the work of Global Ministries in the 21st century, “partnership” and “critical presence” are two concepts that help define our theology of mission.

**Partnership**

Partnership is a key concept which describes the types of relationships in mission we are seeking to build. The concept of Partnership is rooted in the biblical term: koinonia. Koinonia has the following range of meaning in the New Testament:

- fellowship
- a close mutual relationship
- participation
- sharing in partnership
- contribution
- gift

Paul uses the concept of koinonia in his letter to the Philippians. This is a good place to turn when we are talking about relationships in mission because this letter is about the relationship Paul developed with the church in Philippi as he served as their pastor/missionary. In the introduction we find Paul’s first use of koinonia:

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. *Philippians 1:3-11*

Throughout the text, we see that partnership is a spiritual relationship rooted in the mutual sharing of the Good News of Jesus and God’s grace in the midst of life’s circumstances, and supported by a mutual commitment to prayer for one another. This spiritual commitment is what makes the relationships that we enjoy through Global Ministries different from the relationships that secular Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) may have. In the following text, we see that koinonia also has implications for our attitudes as we are developing relationships in mission:
If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the from of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross… Philippians 2:1-8

This excerpt of the letter to the Philippians helps us see that partnership is a Spirit-filled, Christ-like act which encourages mutuality, humility, oneness of purpose and common interests. The relationships we have in mission today through Global Ministries are based on equality, mutual respect and trust. The days of paternalism and colonialism are over. We know that we have just as much to learn from our partners as we have to give. They know best what their needs are and they invite us to walk with them in responding to those needs.

In the last use of koinonia in the letter to the Philippians, Paul talks about the financial implications of partnership:

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Philippians 4:15-16

Here we see that partnership is a mutual sharing of financial and human resources. It is a giving and receiving in mission. Through Global Ministries we are able to share a portion of the abundant financial resources that we have been given with our overseas partners. We also have the opportunity to receive the gifts of the global church through establishing relationships. Our partners are often extremely rich in faith and ministry and we have much to receive from them.

The concept of partnership sketched in this letter to the Philippians gives us some important elements for the type of relationships we are building through Global Ministries around the world.
Critical Presence

Critical presence is another key concept which describes the strategic approach we are seeking to apply to all phases of our mission through Global Ministries. The concept of critical presence is rooted in the way Jesus himself viewed his mission in the world and how he talked about our subsequent mission in his footsteps. One of the foundational texts in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ conception of mission is found in the Gospel of Luke:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

In this text, we can see that Jesus understood his mission was to be directed toward those who lived in precarious situations and who were in need of a liberating, life-giving, hope-instilling critical presence from God. As he walked the roads of Palestine from village to village, Jesus connected with the people he encountered at their point of deepest need and was, to each one, that critical presence they needed in their particular life circumstance.

Jesus described the mission of his disciples in different ways. In one notable parable, Jesus illustrated what the mission of critical presence could look like:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Matthew 25:34-40

In this parable, Jesus encourages us to focus our mission efforts on the “least of these” who are members of God’s family in need of critical presence and who are, in fact, Jesus to us. Through Global Ministries we seek to meet God’s people and creation at their point of deepest need. Needs might be spiritual, physical, emotional or economic. As we walk with partners we discern the needs of critical presence together.
**Digging Deeper**

These elements of a theology of mission in partnership and critical presence can be used to create a Bible study on mission today. If you are interested in digging deeper into the theology of mission you can turn to Appendix C-2 and find a presentation entitled, “The Origin of Theology in God’s Mission” by Bill Nottingham who served with Global Ministries from its inception and who now is President Emeritus of the Division of Overseas Ministries. Bill’s presentation shares seven standards that can help us define our theology of mission today. You will also find on the Global Ministries website a series of published papers under “College of Mission”. These papers are usually presentations made on an assigned topic at a board meeting. They contain a wealth of information to help us build our theology of mission.
MODELS OF MISSION IN THE 20TH CENTURY ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT
December 14, 2005

Goal – Give some context and background of missiology in ecumenical circles showing that we are part of a larger tradition

Image of beads on a pipe cleaner that can be bent and shaped in many patterns and directions is used as a hands-on visual aid to communicate that all of these models of mission continue to be operative and intersect with each other in different ways and with different emphases at various times and places in our understandings of mission.

United Church of Christ, Christian Church/Disciples of Christ, WCM/CGMB are part of these ecumenical theologies and missiologies at our very being. They have influenced us and we them.

These models are not exhaustive. There are many other ways to examine this context of ecumenical missiology – changing understandings of church, of geography, of partnership and participation from various parts of world, of communication, of colonialism, of globalization, of trinity, of diversity, of dialogue, of religion and religions, of diversity within religions,.....

Six Models:

1. Church-centered mission -- Church does mission and mission is for the sake of planting and building the church – carry over of Rufus Anderson’s theory of a three-self movement of self-governing, self-propagating, self-sustaining churches
   a. A focusing biblical text: Matt 28: 19-20
      “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
   b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis -- Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, 1910; Tambaram meeting of IMC, 1938
   c. Emphasis on making disciples, baptizing, teaching – debates about which should come first and HOW mission should best be accomplished

2. Missio Dei (God’s Mission) God is a missionary God, people therefore are missionary; church is sent by God
   a. A focusing biblical text: John 17: 20-21
      “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”
   b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis: Willingen meeting of IMC, 1952; and beyond
   c. Emphasis on God as a missionary God -- mission from the nature of God, attribute of God – trinity is a model of mission
   d. Emphasis on unity of the church – because it is God’s mission we all participate with God
   e. Illustrating quotations:
      i. 1966 Stephen Neill: “The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun”
      ii. Karl Barth 1952: “the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission”
3. The Church for Others -- 1966 study project of IMC called, “The missionary structure of the congregation” working groups in 1967 described the goal of mission: Shalom (European, Hoekendijk) humanization (N. American group)
   a. A biblical focus: Example: Old Testament -- Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church, OT in general is missionary – evangelization is “the presence of the people of God in the midst of humanity, the presence of God among his people”
   b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis: Mexico City meeting of IMC, 1963; Uppsala WCC Assembly, 1968
   c. emphasis on God’s work in the world – Church is only intermezzo between God and world -World is locus of continuing encounter between God and humanity
   d. Illustrating quotations:
      ii. Uppsala, 1968: not God-church-world but God-world-church; mission means to participate in secular programs for urban renewal, civil rights movement; humanization
   e. emphasis on new missionary frontier which runs around world, became line between belief and unbelief in every country new understanding of geography and of interfaith relations (dialogue explored)
   f. Illustrating quotations:
      i. Mexico City, 1963 article: Witness in 6 Continents: “every Christian congregation in all the world is called to show the love of God in Christ, in witness and service to the world at its doors”
      ii. Goal of mission, Mexico City: “It must be a common witness of the whole church, bringing the whole gospel to the whole world”

4. Kenosis (Self-Emptying) of Incarnation
   a. A focusing biblical text: Phil 2: 5-8
   “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”
   b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis: Willingen meeting of IMC, 1952; New Mexico meeting of IMC, 1963; Uppsala WCC Assembly, 1968
   d. Illustrating quotations:
      i. World Student Christian Federation emphasized presence, incarnation (Baasham, p. 72) – Identification of Christ with human situation – identification of Christians with people they wished to serve and witness to – personal encounter, open expectant attitude toward others ; dialogue
      ii. Example: worker-priest movement in France 1944-54 engage in life of people as co-workers in mines and industry
      iii. Example: Charles de Foucauld, French RC, Muslims in North Africa – approach other religions with deep sympathy instead of attack

5. Mission In the Concrete Realities of Life
   “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet
Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis: Bangkok meeting of CWME, 1973 (IMC merged with WCC in New Delhi WCC Assembly 1972 so World Mission and Evangelism became a department of WCC); Nairobi WCC assembly, 1975; Melbourne meeting of CWME, 1980; Vancouver WCC assembly, 1983

c. Emphasis – liberation: economic liberation theology, began in Central/South America (key term, solidarity, accompaniment); revolution

d. Illustrating quotations:
   i. Bangkok CWME, 1973: There is an interdependence between people and nations in the world community. We need to dialogue to work together to meet human necessities, relieve human suffering, establish social justice, share in the struggle for peace
   ii. Nairobi WCC Assembly, 1975: Development process (education, human rights, sexism, racism) – secular bodies have the main responsibility for this. Christians are “to assist in the definition, validation, and articulation of just political, economic and social objectives and in translating them into action.” The criterion for these objectives was a “sustainable global society”
   iii. Melbourne meeting of CWME, 1980 used phrase “God’s preferential option for the poor” that had been used in 1979 at the Puebla Conference of Latin American Catholic Bishops – referring to: solidarity with poor and oppressed as central priority in Christian mission – identification of Jesus with the poor, divine judgment on oppressors

e. Emphasis – liberation: cultural liberation theology, began in Africa and Asia (key terms, indigenization, inculturation, contextualization; local theologies)

f. Illustrating quotations:
   i. Local situation emphasized; Variety of local theologies – plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies
   ii. Incarnation is ongoing. Emphasis not on expanding the church, but in having the church born anew in each new context and culture
   iii. Vancouver WCC Assembly, 1983: There are aspects within each culture that deny life and oppress people – celebrate a plurality of cultures
   iv. Cultural pluralism is God’s intent:
      a. Emphasis – dialogue – the WCC sub-unit on dialogue helps bring document: “Dialogue with People of Living Faith” focuses on God’s movement toward people leading into wholeness and wider community. – Christians to discover God’s activity among people of other faiths.
         i. Dialogue with People of Living Faith: “Because they share common human aspirations and responsibility for others, Christians ought to engage in dialogue with those also concerned about ultimate questions”

3
6. Mission as the Fullness of Life -- New Heaven and New Earth -- Whole of Creation in Scope
   a. A focusing biblical text: Revelation 21: 1, 5:
      “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had
      passed away, and the sea was no more….And the one who was seated on the throne said,
      ‘See, I am making all things new.’”
   b. Ecumenical meetings with this as a primary emphasis: Seoul, 1990, WCC meeting
      affirming Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC); Canberra WCC Assembly,
      1991; CWME meeting, Salvador, 1996; Harrare WCC Assembly, 1998; CWME
      meeting, 2005
   c. Emphasis on wholistic mission
   d. Illustrating quotations:
      i. Mission and Evangelism Document of WCC Central Committee, 1982,
         expresses the following ecumenical convictions for mission: : conversion;
         gospel to all realms of life; church and its unity in God’s mission; mission in
         Christ’s way; good news to the poor; mission in and to 6 continents; witness
         among people of living faiths
   e. Emphasis on whole creation
   f. Illustrating quotations:
      i. 1990 Seoul meeting on Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation: JPIC is the
         vision of all people living on earth and caring for creation as a family where
         each member has the same right to wholeness of life
   g. Emphasis on Reconciliation
   h. Illustrating quotations:
      i. Canberra WCC Assembly, 1991 had meeting theme of “Come, Holy Spirit –
         Renew the Whole Creation.” Concluding documents included: “through our
         acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation, we become a missionary people,
         not in that sense of dominating over peoples and nations which has all too
         often characterized mission work, but in the sense of sharing God’s own
         mission of bringing all humanity into communion with God through Christ in
         the power of the Spirit, sharing our faith and our resources with all people”
      ii. Letter from 2005 CWME meeting on reconciliation
   i. CGMB’s 5 Guiding Principles are influenced by and influence the articulation of the
      Fullness of Life missiology

**BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS IN THIS PRESENTATION**

Matt 28: 19-20
“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And
remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

John 17: 20-21
“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,
that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the
world may believe that you have sent me.”
Old Testament -- Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church, OT in general is missionary – evangelization is “the presence of the people of God in the midst of humanity, the presence of God among his people”

Luke 4: 16-21
“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Revelation 21: 1, 5:
“That I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more….And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.”

ILLUSTRATING QUOTATIONS IN THIS PRESENTATION

Missio Dei Section:
1966 Stephen Neill: “The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun”

Missio Dei Section:
Karl Barth 1952: “the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission”

Church for Others Section, God’s Work in the world:
Uppsala, 1968: “[humanity] cries passionately and articulately for a fully human life”

Church for Others Section, God’s Work in the world:
Uppsala, 1968: not God-church-world but God-world-church; mission means to participate in secular programs for urban renewal, civil rights movement; humanization

Church for Others Section, New Missionary Frontier:
Mexico City, 1963 article: Witness in 6 Continents: “every Christian congregation in all the world is called to show the love of God in Christ, in witness and service to the world at its doors”

Church for Others Section, New Missionary Frontier:
Goal of mission, Mexico City: “It must be a common witness of the whole church, bringing the whole gospel to the whole world”

Kenosis Section, Christian Presence:
World Student Christian Federation emphasized presence and incarnation which they interpreted as – Identification of Christ with human situation – identification of Christians with people they wished to serve and witness to – personal encounter, open expectant attitude toward others; dialogue
Mission in the Concrete Realities of Life, Liberation Theology (economic)
Bangkok CWME, 1973: There is an interdependence between people and nations in the world community. We need to dialogue to work together to meet human necessities, relieve human suffering, establish social justice, share in the struggle for peace
Mission in the Concrete Realities of Life, Liberation Theology (economic)
Nairobi WCC Assembly, 1975: Development process (education, human rights, sexism, racism) – secular bodies have the main responsibility for this. Christians are “to assist in the definition, validation, and articulation of just political, economic and social objectives and in translating them into action.” The criterion for these objectives was a “sustainable global society”

Mission in the Concrete Realities of Life, Liberation Theology (economic)
Melbourne meeting of CWME, 1980 used phrase “God’s preferential option for the poor” that had been used in 1979 at the Puebla Conference of Latin American Catholic Bishops – referring to: solidarity with poor and oppressed as central priority in Christian mission – identification of Jesus with the poor, divine judgment on oppressors

Mission in the Concrete Realities of Life, Liberation (cultural):
Vancouver WCC Assembly, 1983: There are aspects within each culture that deny life and oppress people – celebrate a plurality of cultures

Mission in the Concrete Realities of Life, Dialogue among people of different faiths:
Dialogue with People of Living Faith: “Because they share common human aspirations and responsibility for others, Christians ought to engage in dialogue with those also concerned about ultimate questions

Mission as the Fullness of Life, Reconciliation:
Canberra WCC Assembly, 1991 had meeting theme of “Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation.” Concluding documents included: “through our acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation, we become a missionary people, not in that sense of dominating over peoples and nations which has all too often characterized mission work, but in the sense of sharing God’s own mission of bringing all humanity into communion with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, sharing our faith and our resources with all people”

LIST OF ECUMENICAL MEETINGS REFERENCED IN THIS PRESENTATION

World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910
International Missionary Conference, Jerusalem, 1928
International Missionary Conference, Tambaram, 1938
International Missionary Conference, Willigen, 1952
International Missionary Conference, Mexico City, 1963
WCC Assembly, Uppsala, 1968
WCC Assembly, New Delhi, 1972
Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), Bangkok, 1973
WCC Assembly, Nairobi, 1975
Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, 1980
WCC Assembly, Vancouver, 1983
WCC Assembly, Canberra, 1991
Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Salvador, 1996
WCC Assembly, Harrare, 1998
Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, 2005
The Origin of Theology in God’s Mission

Missio Dei and the Reorganizing of the Human Family

The proclamation of God’s saving grace to the whole world is why we are here, and it has been with the church from the beginning. It is seen in the sermons of Peter to people from all nations at Pentecost and later to Cornelius, by Stephen to Cyrenians, Egyptians and Asians which cost him his life, Paul to Gentile governors Felix and Festus and then all the way across what is now Turkey, Greece and Italy. Pentecost was the beginning of the apostolic mission and therefore the birth of the church. We sometimes get that backwards, but God’s mission in Christ by the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church to continue the work of the apostles throughout the known world, the oikoumene. Paul writes in Romans 15:23: “But now, with no further place for me in these regions (meaning Greece and Asia Minor), I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you in Rome when I go to Spain.” God’s global mission is why there are maps in the back of our study Bibles and in our Sunday School rooms. Geography is immensely important from Genesis to Revelation. And it should be very important to the church today.

The word “mission” has been co-opted by the military, but also by marketing and public relations. Every hotel has a mission statement on the wall, and every business seems to have one promising good service. But the word “mission” means “sent.” It comes from the Latin mittere used to translate the Greek apostelein. It gives us the word “apostle:” the ones who are sent. Even the word for the Catholic “mass” is derived from this. We find the idea of God’s sending as revelation and liberation in many texts. We read this both in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament: God sends light and truth in Ps. 43:3, angels in Genesis 18:2, God’s presence with Moses Ex. 33:34, Nehemiah 2:12 to rebuild Jerusalem, Isaiah 6:8 “Send me.” In Isaiah 19:20 “a Savior” will be sent, and Jeremiah in 1:7 is sent protesting he was just a boy. We find the word sent throughout the New Testament, but especially John 3:16-17 “sent his only begotten son”, and in John 17:3 before the Last Supper in the upper room: “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” The word occurs seven times in that chapter alone. And in John 20:21, the resurrected Christ says: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

I was asked to speak about the Theology of Mission, because we need to reflect on why we commit ourselves to service with Global Ministries. We need to think about that because the why of our work has implications for what we do and how we do it, the praxis of our being sent somewhere and being received by someone and all the relationships behind it. An example is response to authority. I remember a person working in France years ago whose theology did not prepare him for being expected to give a report on his work to an assembly of churches there. The head of the church wrote him: “Je vous demande de le faire,” and he replied, “No one demands me to do anything.” But the word demander in French is “ask” not “require,” and his theologically-challenged attitude was compounded by his misunderstanding of the language. Another example of the need for a theological assumption was when I was village pastor in France and had to sweep out
buckets full of flies that died on the windows of the church when cold weather came in October. I chopped the wood, built the fire Saturday to have the church a little bit warm on Sunday, and swabbed the tall windows to kill the flies and stop the loud buzzing. That was not part of my education for ministry, but I realized that it was part of my education for mission.

But more important than what we are assigned to do, theological reflection is necessary to sustain ourselves spiritually in a strange culture, in difficult circumstances, and hard knocks. I think of a person working in Hong Kong who was teased for being American whenever a colleague drank too much. She was miserable sometimes and tried to correct that situation, but she drew strength from the fact that she had been sent there as a sign of the solidarity of her church through the Division of Overseas Ministries to do work for human rights. Also, our theology of mission illuminates the positive and joyous moments as well, because our spiritual support gives perspective in the best times, when we praise God for feeling good and being glad to be there. The thing that I appreciate most about 35 years of cross-cultural mission work in Indianapolis and in Geneva before that are the great majority of young people and not so young that I have helped send overseas who were happy for that opportunity and felt successful about it. Even that requires a theological insight to avoid secular and selfish explanations of things turning out well and to praise God for the grace we experience.

I know DOM personnel that were not adequately prepared for a theological understanding of their appointment, and I will always regret that. They did their jobs well. They made good friends with co-workers. But they did not find spiritual strength in prayer or Scripture when they needed it or integrate with the local church. Their presence was theologically authentic, but that was a dimension they missed and could not interpret to others. After they returned home, they had no further connection with the church, no sense of stewardship, no communication of life in Christ from another culture.

Theology of mission is an expression of the whole of theology, what Simone Weil called “the Christian conception.” What are the themes of theology? The importance of Scripture and the revelation of God we find there, creation, covenant, law and the prophets for justice in all our ways, Incarnation in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and completion of Christ and the coming Kingdom of God which Jesus preached, Atonement, Eschatology, Liturgy of Confession and Pardon, Eucharist in the community, Holy Spirit, prayer and the holiness of life. A German theologian wrote: Mission ist Wort Gottes leben! - mission is living the Word of God.

A genuine theology of mission for our two churches begins with the origin of theology, itself. Theology as such is born of God’s Mission. Mission is the heart of sound theology. Emil Brunner once said: “The church exists by mission the way fire exists by burning.” This is why I never use the term “missiology,” because it makes mission a category alongside everything else, as an affair of specialists. I used to tell students at CTS, we don’t study a theology of mission but the mission of theology. Mission belongs in every class at the seminary, because it is the story of God’s dealing with the world. It is the heart of Scripture, church history, doctrine, preaching and worship, ethics, and counseling. Mission, locally and globally, should be the concern of every congregation and Christian, because the Holy Spirit is directed not only inwardly for the peace of our souls but outwardly towards the world and the making of history for the peace of human
beings. Still, our theology of mission must never overlook or minimize the presence of the Spirit in personal life for goodness, peace, consolation, hope and courage in the face of difficulty and death. A founder of the Disciples of Christ Alexander Campbell, president of a predecessor body to DOM and Global Ministries from 1849 to his death in 1866, used to sign his letters and photographs: “In the hope of immortality, A. Campbell.” Julia wrote in a first draft of Critical Presence: “How do we accompany our partners who are ministering to and living with the dying?”

So, that is why we look at the subject of theology for missionary service. Obviously, there are different theologies of mission, reflecting where one went to seminary, the church or para-church mission organization, and even personal faith and vocation. I put “mission organizations” on the search bar and had over six million sites available on the Internet. Names like Africa Inland Mission, Arab World Ministries, Greater Europe Mission, Mission to Unreached Peoples, World Gospel Mission, etc. This week I got a letter from Jehovah Faith Evangelical Ministries in India and one about a missions focus event at Abilene Christian University in Texas sponsored by the Halbert Institute of Missions. “Theology of Mission” is relative to a context.

The theology of mission operative in Global Ministries comes from the experience of nearly 200 years for the UCC (1810) and over 150 years for Disciples of Christ (1849). My article “Mission as Ecclesiology” in the 1997 book The Vision of Christian Unity, gives details of the Strategy of World Mission of 1958 and General Principles and Policies of 1981, which were officially authorized by the denomination for the theology of mission of the Disciples of Christ. The same documentation could be cited for the UCC. The Common Board has endorsed similar statements, such as the recent one on Critical Presence, which you have here. You also have the paper “Guiding Principles”: sharing life in Christ, sharing persons in mission, telling the Gospel story, healing God’s continuing creation, and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. There is nothing arbitrary about our basic theological contention for the ecumenical implementation of world ministries.

I propose seven standards that define our theology of mission:

I.

A first standard is Christian unity. It is represented to the world in the two churches’ bringing together their denominational global ministries of long standing into a Common Global Ministries Board. That unity was theological not utilitarian. It was met with enthusiasm by our respective partners and former mission relations around the world, many of whom are united churches. It is my opinion that with the demise of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, which was the spearhead of the North American crosscultural international network of interchurch relations, i.e. the missionary enterprise, the most important development at the end of the 20th century, pointing to the next century, is the Common Global Ministries Board. It was a gift to us from our partners. D.T. Niles, at an assembly of the East Asia Conference of Churches (now the Christian Conference of Asia) in Kuala Lumpur, challenged the two boards to unite their staff in view of their urging their former mission churches to organize the Church of North India and united churches in every other place where they had had mission work. Thanks to the response of Alfred Carleton and Virgil Sly, then T. J. Liggett and Robert A. Thomas, since 1967 there have been joint offices
serving both boards leading to the Common Board thirty years later. First was Southern Asia under Teller Mook and then Eric Gas, then Latin America and the Caribbean from 1968 to 1971 by myself and then after 1989 with David Vargas. Since January 1, 1994, with the simultaneous retirements of me and Scott Libbey, all area executive secretaries were shared, as well as the personnel officer, recruitment, deputation, etc. UCBWM and DOM did not have separate agendas. The motivation was the emphasis of the 1960’s on Joint Action for Mission and the strong ecumenical commitment of the two churches, related to the same partners in many places and wishing to put into practice signs of Christian unity in world mission and bring some reality to their professions of ecumenical commitment.

I told the heads of denominational mission units of the mainline churches in January that their churches made the 19th century “the American Protestant missionary century” and the 20th century “the worldwide ecumenical century.” The first ecumenical meetings were missionary meetings like the Union Missionary Convention in New York in 1854, London in 1888 and New York in 1900. The missionary movement was the Mother of the quest for Christian unity, and the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910 which gave us the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches was its cradle. The theology of mission of Global Ministries was forged by the anti-colonial struggles and the autonomy of churches around the world, many of them united churches in which our former missions participated, like the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Congo, India, Jamaica, or post-denominational in China. We learned from Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Kagawa, Luthuli, Martin Luther King, Mandela, Tutu, Medardo Gomez. The ecumenical agenda became our agenda: justice for the poor, anti-racist, human rights, liberation of women and girls from violence and lack of opportunity, peace, and inter-religious living. It is inconceivable that our representatives not feel right at home in the Ninth General Assembly in Porto Alegre last month and endorse its vision of Christian unity out of their own self-understanding and history.

II.

A second standard is political in the best sense of that word. What we are talking about is by no means confined to denominational concerns or to the Christian religion, itself, but

wrestles with the ideologies, conflicts, mythologies, and illusions that are prevalent in the world today. The general theme of our time has different titles like the New World Order, Globalization, Ecological Sustainability, Multiculturalism, Imperial America, the Search for Common Values and Peace, etc. Brazilian artist Sebastiao Salgado calls it “the reorganizing of the human family.” Mission in its cultural form motivates the gifted playwrights, musicians, artists and novelists of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The Irish Rock Star Bono addressed the World Economic Forum in Doha, Qatar, last year calling for meeting the millennial goal of .07% of GNP for the Third World and canceling the external debt. The movement is called ONE – the Make Poverty History Project. For a theology that originates in God’s Mission, attention to literature and theater is important. The Oscars go to movies that are provocative with social and political themes like Crash, Syriana, Munich, Good Night and Good Luck, Rwanda, etc. Many new Broadway plays and movies deal with theological themes of sin, forgiveness, love, and redemption. (Thomas Mann said that everything Dostoevsky wrote was religious but dealt with damnation instead of salvation.) Mass demonstrations of young people protest for a meaningful existence and a good future. The
Enron scandal poses again the irony of cheating and greed in an economic system based by definition on fair business practices, and business leaders speak of the need again for a kind of capitalism with democratic conscience and means of a safety net, which is a minimal regard for justice.

When William Macklin, a Canadian, was sent by the Disciples of Christ as their first missionary to China in the 1880’s, he founded the Drum Tower Hospital in Nanjing. Today, even under Communist administration, there is a picture of him in the board room alongside Sun Yat Sen, modern China’s revolutionary founding father. The symbolism illustrates the little-known fact that Dr. Macklin personally financed a Chinese translation of socialist Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* and that, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Sun Yat Sen was influenced by reading Henry George!

Charles Garst, with his wife Laura Delany, the first missionaries of the Disciples of Christ in Japan, organized a study group in their home in Akita which became in the twentieth century the Socialist Party of Japan! Neva Nicholson, who served as a village evangelist in India for 35 years, lived “outside the wire” of Bilaspur, because she chose to identify with the poor women who lived in the railroad area. These men and women were classical evangelists and went across the world to preach the Gospel, but they had the whole social and political condition in their understanding of the biblical message.

III.

A third standard is religious pluralism and multiculturalism. Preman Niles calls it “God’s people in the midst of all of God’s peoples.” The concerns of a Theology of Mission are shared with all other religions, especially the great ancient traditions which have shaped civilizations up to the present. So inter-religious dialogue acquires new meaning. French theologian Maurice Pivot has said that the theology of mission in the Roman Catholic Church has been transformed since the pope’s first prayer convocation with representatives of other religions in 1986. The World Parliament of Religions issues declarations like “Towards a new global ethic.” There is an International Network of Engaged Buddhists dealing with issues of social justice.

In its analytical form, this subject faces the scientists, philosophers, sociologists, and economists working on problems critical to the future of humanity. Their studies and projections are basic responses. The theology of mission is part of the entire intellectual, ethical and aesthetic reality of life, expressed by the theological principle of the *Logos* which points both to the intelligible wholeness of the Creation, itself, and to the One in whose name mission is to be taken seriously.

IV.

A fourth standard is partnership with sister churches and people’s movements. The result of the history of mission theology that pertained to both of our churches is seen in the policies adopted long ago. The goal since a famous declaration in 1855 by Rufus Anderson, another ancestor of the Common Board, was described as “self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.”
China, this even became the Three Self Movement dedicated to an autonomous national church and supportive of the 1949 revolution. The Three Self Movement of the Church in China is still criticized by evangelical groups opposed to the China Christian Council, its leader K.H. Ting, and the churches openly worshiping and serving today. In 1925, this letter published by the Canton Missionary Council by Mr. S.C.Leung of Kwangtung, China, surfaced at the 1928 Jerusalem conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC):

It seems to me that the time has now come when the missions and missionaries might well consider the question of re-organizing themselves on a different basis so that the missions and the Chinese church will hereafter not appear as two parallel organizations, and that all activities initiated, maintained, and financed by the missions should be expressed only through the Chinese church....A second suggestion is that the Chinese church, through the highest church council, should be encouraged and given the privilege to deal with the mission boards in matters of mutual interest, so that a closer fellowship and a more direct relationship between the Chinese church and the churches in the West could be established.

After World War II, wars of independence against colonialism, and the inauguration of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the Willingen Conference of the IMC was a definitive turning-point in 1952. From that time on, missionary societies and boards became mission units of the churches, and leadership of autonomous churches cooperated with each other in a new way. I mentioned earlier the Strategy of World Mission that came out of that meeting in 1958 recognizing autonomous churches, the end of “foreign missions,” and the plans for partnership in decision making. This was what most career missionaries had been working towards for years, but hard for some to accept or understand.

Building on this policy statement, under the leadership of the late Robert A. Thomas and after more than four years' study and discussion in the DOM board of directors, General Principles and Policies was approved at the Anaheim General Assembly in 1981. It said, "The time for western domination of the church's life and witness around the world is past. Partnership and mutuality, servanthood and sharing are the words descriptive of world mission today." Along with sections on transferring all overseas properties to legal entities of the partner churches and institutions, commitment was made to "a dialogical style" with people of other faiths and ideologies, since "God has never in any time or place been without witness." The increase in joint funding of overseas personnel with other denominations and communion with united churches was affirmed. The document speaks of multinational economics, because partnership calls for that kind of advocacy for the Third World. It maintained that from the point of view of churches in the Third World, the management of the earth and its resources is exploitative and oppressive and calls for "solidarity with the poor in their struggle for liberation and justice."

Partnership led to the exchange of persons in mission who are responsible to national church authorities, being invited by partner churches to share in Christ’s mission as they see it, and having appointments for given periods rather than expecting lifetime service to a mission board. Some partners like the United Church of Christ in the Philippines drew up detailed manuals on how persons were to be recommended and selected, who was responsible for financial oversight, personal conduct, and employment agreements. The partnership policy was implemented by the
Common Board by having a voting member from each of the six regions. This is important and valuable but imperfect, because it is not certain how the church represented experiences and shares fully in the actions of the Common Board. This can be perceived in observations by the partner board members and concerns that North Americans still think about mission in a unilateral and possessive way. The fault, in my opinion is the inevitable nature of North American denominationalism.

A model of partnership that I fear is unattainable but instructive nonetheless is the mutation of the Paris Missionary Society into Cevaa in 1971, the London Missionary Society into the Council for World Mission (CWM) in 1977, and the Wuppertal Mission to United Evangelical Mission (VEM) sometime in the 1990’s. Forty-some member churches make up “a community of churches in mission” in the biannual General Assembly of Cevaa. Over thirty compose CWM and about as many in VEM. African, South Pacific, Caribbean and Asian churches predominate. The process is based on mutuality, interdependence, communication and a structure for common planning and decision making on an equal basis. Since these were previously interdenominational mission organizations of a national and linguistic character, they could structure themselves in a way not possible in North America, especially after Joint Action for Mission of the 1960’s gave way to economic stringencies and denominational interests.

Cevaa’s Exchange of Persons Guidelines shows the mutuality of relations among churches in a community of equality in mission. They explain: “To fulfill their mission, the churches of Cevaa decide to put certain of their members at the disposition of each other or to send them singly or in teams to other places and situations.” The purpose of sending and receiving persons is stated simply and theologically: a- to help each other in the announcing of the Gospel in their ministry of building up the church and its members in Jesus Christ; b- to contribute as partners in the same community so that humans might live as responsible beings in liberty, justice, and peace; c- to share needs and wealth in humans, in ideas, in money and in every other resource, in accordance with the imperatives of the Gospel.

There is an important proviso: Cevaa does not exchange or send personnel, member churches do. The objective is that there be among all the churches of the Community a true exchange by means of persons, human beings who go and who come, discover, seek to understand a culture and to translate what is essential in their own. The theological reflection is: “A way to speak the Gospel today in our world consists of breaking barriers and opening ways of understanding.”

The practical terms of agreement for hosting and assigning ministry to the envoyés or envoyées are spelled out in detail for the sending church, the receiving church and the office of coordination and administration in Montpellier. The word missionary appears in “missionary church” and “missionary programs” but not of the “sendees” or personnel. Specific policies used by the churches today for ecumenical missionary service are very similar to one another.

V.

A fifth standard is awareness of the signs of the times. A current book list shows the concern of intellectuals for the future of democratic society, the need for community, the gap between rich and
poor, and standards of justice and truth. Amy Chua’s *World On Fire* is an example, or Herman Daly and John Cobb’s *For the Common Good*. A contrast is Robert D. Kaplan’s *The Coming Anarchy* or John Gray’s *False Dawn: the Delusions of Global Capitalism*. We could cite Ann Coulter on one side and Michael Moore on the other. Thomas Friedman writes about the world being flat. Theology of mission deals with what is everyone’s concern but from the standpoint of the Gospel. Seminars are held regularly on the crisis of the environment, human rights, and the globalization of information and production. This spiritual challenge addresses heads of states and government representatives in its political and social form. September 11 raises anxious discussions of “Why they hate us,” justifying the virtues of western culture on one hand or on the other describing the ways in which others feel humiliated by the West. The industrialized world is called a minority at risk, “a prosperous ghetto.”

The Church has a responsibility to worship and follow the living God who is mysteriously present in the world, both hidden and revealed, and at the same time the Church must be aware of what is going on in the world, today, moving us towards an unknown future. Theology of Mission is our attempt to discern and to participate in the Mission of God, embracing all people, and giving meaning and purpose to human history, in fact to the discovery and perception of the universe. To all people, the moral nature of life and the structures of society are central to the joy, hope, justice and peace of a new generation.

VI.

A sixth standard is what Dorothy Sölle calls “trying to live out of the Truth of Christ.” (*Aus der Wahrheit Christi leben.*) This is why Theology of Mission is closely related to worship, to the chapel as much as to the library. It calls for intercessory prayer - radical dependence on God - and must be sustained by meditation of God's Word in Scripture and God's Spirit in human experience, as much as by theological reflection. It is awareness of the sacred will of God. We do not speak of the *Missio Dei* in the third person, because God is the subject of mission in a global context. Our attention is on the living God and God’s gracious will for the world.

Because the spiritual and intellectual challenge is essential to our times, the Bible is central in a special way, not only because it is the book of the Church, but because it makes its own claim to our response in repentance, faith and fulfillment: "that they might have life and have it abundantly."

It is the Bible that conveys the theological basis of mission: not just the great texts of the New Testament that we rely on, as important as they are, but the global project of God, the *basileia*, Kingdom or Reign of God preached and promised by Jesus. This is the core of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, running all through it: Ps. 96, Ps. 24:1-2, Genesis 9:12-17 also 12:1-3, Isaiah 32:17-18; 51:4; 65:17-25 (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1-2). Only after we have understood what God wills for the world can we talk about the Christian mission in the world. Only then can we turn to the mission texts of the New Testament: Matt 28:19 (with Matt. 25:31), Mark 16:15 (with Mark 9:2), Luke 24:47 (with Luke 6:20), John 20:21 (with John 13:5), Acts 1:4-8 (Acts 2:44), Phil. 2:10 (with 2:3), etc. The Great Commission texts must never be taken by themselves but always with the sense of the whole Scripture behind them. The mission Jesus
gave his disciples is not an abstraction but is seen in all of his life and teaching, especially his stand for the poor.

VII.

A seventh standard is theological imagination. When I was teaching “Mission in a Global Context,” one of our texts was Clark Williamson’s book *Way of Blessing, Way of Life* (1999), because our theology of mission is embedded in the best systematic theology we can find. An example is on page 158, where we read: “The thesis of this post-Shoah theology is simple: All these strangers are our neighbors on planet Earth, neighbors whom God has given us to love, whose well-being is given to us to guard and protect, those toward whom we are to see that justice is done.” Our theology of mission leads us to try to see that in the perspective of the human cost of economic globalization, international relations affecting war and peace, Christian unity across cultural lines, and service to those in need on a world scale.

I did a translation last week by e-mail for the French Protestant Federation in Paris. The title was: “Protestant Churches in the Face of Secularization.” It reminds me that we must always ask how our theology addresses the society around us, because that is its mission. The president of the French Reformed Church Marcel Manoël said: “the mission of the Church in the society which displays itself to us is always that of preaching the liberator Gospel, a gospel which is summoned today, I believe, to unmask and denounce the individualist idolatry, this adoration of oneself and the sacralization of one’s own desire, with what that signifies of turning inward, of shortening time to the individual level and no longer to that of history or of hope, of fear for the future and of powerlessness for political action, and ultimately of the deadening necessity to justify oneself unceasingly, most often against others. It is there that we find the message of justification by faith, that message which is at the heart of our Protestant identity, which we are once again called to preach and to put into practice in a new way.”


The mission is to educate the church about the true situation of U.S. citizenship in an empire of enormous power and huge ambitions, to disabuse the citizenry of any “innocence” on the part of U.S. hegemony. This would include a sustained critical analysis of the ideology, propaganda, and euphemisms that give a human face to empire. …The mission of the church in the United States includes strong, intentional connections with the ecumenical church in other parts of the world, especially in those societies that are target for abuse and exploitation by U.S. imperialism – to the end that church solidarity will provide a context for alternative political-economic policies by empire.

Your appointment is significant to the whole church because you bring the global reality to those who send you out and to those who send you back and who try to live by the truth of Christ. God bless you.

Bill Nottingham
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