

GOD'S MISSION HERE: FOR PASTORS, DEACONESSSES, AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE

Christ came for the life of the world. "[Jesus said] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).

By Dan Galchutt

This recurring theme spans the entire Gospel of John, from John 1:4, where we read, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men," to John 20:31: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

People need Jesus. This was true when Jesus walked the earth 2000 years ago. It was true in the days of Martin Luther. It was also true when CTSFW began its first academic year on the current campus in 1976. And it is still true today.

Our need, the Church's need, the world's need for Jesus will never change. It is precisely because of this need that we must continually consider what pastors, deaconesses, and all God's people need in order to be ready and able to share the Good News of Jesus Christ for the life of the world today. That world has changed in significant ways.

When I graduated from seminary twenty years ago, we faced many of the same challenges we face today, but they were less pronounced. In 2004, we were living in the

information age, but the smartphone wasn't invented, and social media was pretty insignificant (Myspace anyone?). Today, these tools can be helpful for ministry, but they are also very distracting. The information age has now become the over-information age, a challenging reality for undershepherds trying to get their people to hear the life-giving Word of Christ.

When I was first a pastor, the "bump" in attendance for Christmas and Easter was more significant than it is today, a sign of a culture more influenced by Christians and Christianity than it is now. Statistics bear this out. According to 2023 Gallup polling, just 45% of Americans belong to a formal house of worship. That's significantly down from 1999, when that figure was 70%.¹

These dramatic changes in the world mean that pastors and church workers need to go out to the community and engage the people God has located nearby. It's unlikely people will come to them.

This is a dramatic shift from the days when I grew up in suburban Minnesota. Years ago you might have focused on following up with visitors, and that would



The Rev. Dan Galchutt, Executive Director of the LCMS Office of National Mission, speaks at the District Staff Gathering on Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2023, at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis.

have kept you occupied. It's still important to follow up with visitors, but not as many people will be visiting your church. You'll have to go to them and be involved in the mission field in front of you.

Jesus makes this clear in John 4, in the account of the Samaritan woman. Jesus' disciples had gotten Jesus some food and were urging Him to eat, but Jesus was considering something else, looking at the people who were ripe to hear His Word. To help His disciples see this, Jesus said, "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35). Jesus taught His disciples, and He teaches us, that God's mission is right before us.

Pastors, and future pastors and deaconesses, and all of God's people need to see the ripe mission field before us. This means that pastors need to train and encourage their people to share the Gospel with others. We should love and cherish the Gospel not only so that we understand it, but that we also share it with others.

Equipping God's people to boldly and clearly proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ is essential in

a world where people aren't coming to the doors of the church like they used to. It's the people of God who are going into the world every day as they live and work, who have opportunities to interact with people in a community. Sure, a pastor will have some opportunity, but it will be a fraction of what the members of a congregation have in a given week.

Seminary students need to be prepared to serve wherever the Lord calls them. I never imagined that I would end up in small-town Kansas after growing up in the suburbs of Minneapolis. It's important that pastors are well prepared to get to know their congregation and their community. This will take some time. Pastors will have to spend time with their people and visit them at their workplace, at various community events, and in homes.

In addition to visiting people, it will be important to

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have ways to “exegete” your community. LCEF’s Mission Insite reports² are a helpful starting point for learning about community demographics, but there is so much more to learn. Who are the leaders of the community? What can they tell you about the community and its needs? How might the congregation you’re called to connect with and serve the people of that community?

Acknowledging the changes in our world is vital to serving the Lord and His Church well. This is not to say that our beliefs change. Seminary students in today’s world need to be well grounded in the truth of God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions. But the Word of God and our confession of faith does something to us. It moves us forward into this world to proclaim the Christ who came for the life of the world. That’s why He was born of Mary. That’s why He lived and suffered and died on the cross, so that in His resurrection God’s people might be given life, and in that new life, go forward with the message of Jesus Christ.

As Luther eloquently illustrates in his Ascension sermon of 1522,

With this message or preaching, it is just as if one throws a stone into the water. It makes waves and circles or wheels around itself, and the waves roll

always farther outward. One drives the other until they reach the shore. Although it is still in the middle, the waves do not rest; instead, the waves continue forward. So it is with the preaching. It is started through the apostles and always proceeds and is driven farther through the preacher to and fro in the world.³

This is the mission to which Christ calls His Church. All Christians give witness to this. Congregations today need pastors and deaconesses who will make the good confession so God’s people would give that same confession and witness to those around them of the One who died on the cross and rose again for the life of the world. ▲

- 1 “How Religious Are Americans?” March 29, 2024. Gallup News, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx>.
- 2 MissionInsite, available to all LCMS congregations, is an online tool that provides demographic information about specific communities. Check with your LCMS district office to learn more about how to access this helpful resource.
- 3 Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, trans. Klaus Detlev Schulz (Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 24.



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