

## Table of Contents

NEW FRONTIERS BY STEVEN SCHAVE.....	2
MISSION USA: AMERICA'S CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE BY LARRY VOGEL.....	4
REACHING THE LATINO <i>MISSION FIELD: USA</i> BY CARLOS HERNANDEZ .....	17
THE PRESENCE OF GOD BY TODD KOLLBAUM.....	19
SERVING JESUS AT CHURCH AND IN COMMUNITY BY ROOSEVELT GRAY .....	21
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF CITY AS MISSION FIELD BY JEFFREY PULSE .....	23
ENGAGING THE WORLD IN THE INCUBATOR OF IDEAS BY MARCUS T. ZILL .....	28
CHRISTIAN VOCATION AND THE MISSION OF GOD: A MISSING LINK? BY ANDREW PFEIFFER .....	30
REACHING OUT TO THE INNER CITY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR MISSION HERE AT HOME BY KLAUS DETLEV SCHULTZ .....	38
BOOK REVIEW: <i>HAS AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY FAILED?</i> BY WARREN GRAFF .....	48

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# REACHING OUT TO THE INNER CITY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR MISSION HERE AT HOME

by Klaus Detlev Schultz

How is the inner city one of the Synod's — and her congregations' — biggest missiological challenges?

## Personal Reflections on Inner Cities<sup>1</sup>

I HAVE TRAVELLED AROUND THE WORLD and seen cities of all sizes and under all kinds of conditions. I visited pastors and accompanied them in their work in the slums called favelas in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo, Brazil, the latter being the third largest city in the world, with over 17 million citizens. We have been alerted to these conditions through the recent Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. I was in Kibera, Africa's largest slum in the city of Nairobi, Kenya, housing about 250,000 people, predominantly in shacks. In total there are about 2.5 million slum dwellers spread throughout the city of Nairobi; that is, about 60 percent of the city's inhabitants. Most house as tenants on just 6 percent of the land. Basic amenities such as electricity, water, sewage, medical care, and clinics are missing or in dire need of improvement. And to exacerbate the conditions even more, many, especially the unemployed, indulge in the cheap home brew called Changaa and use drugs to spend their time. Abortions are common and so is criminality, and factions take place between tribes such as the Luo and the Kikuyu. All these factors do not contribute towards the quality of life for the people.

Then there is the opposite extreme. I was in New York's Times Square, downtown Chicago, Orange County, Los Angeles, Singapore, and Tokyo, inner city experiences of glitter and neon lights where the rich and the wealthy frequent.

<sup>1</sup> This is an updated and adapted version of a presentation given on June 11, 2011, at a conference of the Philadelphia Lutheran Ministries (PLM) on "Inner City Missions."

Fortunately, in many areas of our cities in the United States, revitalization is evident and there LCMS presence is more easily established than in the tougher areas of the city. But where this is not happening, inner cities bring their own challenges. Of all the cities I have visited, I have found that the United States tackles a particularly unique problem and that is the inner city abandonment and the struggle to keep many sections of it from decay. Other people have moved in and churches that were dealing with a former white commuting membership must now refocus and address the neighborhood in new innovative and resourceful ways, often across cultural divides of which we will talk later. But there are flickers of hope and signs of concerted efforts to make a difference.

The United States tackles a particularly unique problem and that is the inner city abandonment and the struggle to keep many sections of it from decay.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church in downtown Fort Wayne has invited the neighborhood community for Trunk or Treat and Block parties. The most enduring outreach has been for eight years to the public Washington Elementary School with assistance to its school children. This year, a grant from the LCMS called "Stand with Your Community" will help fund an afternoon program where the children can come to church and learn about Jesus. Fort Wayne's inner city African ministry called St. Augustine fell into a slump because no new African immigrants are coming to the city and their children have assimilated into American culture, so consequently, if they do attend worship, it would be at a "normal" LCMS congregation. For this reason, St. Augustine has been taken under the wings of Holy Cross Lutheran, a large church on the periphery of the struggling area. Yet, the inner city receives new people. Asians and Latinos still move in. The historic

LCMS congregation, St. Paul's Lutheran, is surrounded by over 10,000 Latinos. The pulling force is that rental housing is available. This could not happen in other cities around the world because there, downtown is considered prime property.

The urban, inner city environment brings with it some personal familiarity. As a family, we moved to the south side of Fort Wayne to an area that had seen its prime well over fifty years ago. Its buildings still show some of its past splendor and it is, admittedly, a far cry from the abject conditions of real inner city settings we customarily think of. And yet here, too, conditions are not conducive for improvement. Income from property tax is much lower compared to the suburban part of the city, and schools are suffering because of it. The number of children who receive free and reduced lunch is far greater than in the suburban districts. The need among students of such schools is dire. In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* from 1952, the decision was reached that education may not support racial segregation. And yet beyond that, as the case of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) has shown, the issue remains unaddressed as to how schools in lower income areas with predominantly non-white children should be supported.

South Side Fort Wayne Community School serves as an example. It still offers an International Baccalaureate and has the reputation of having been one of the best schools in Fort Wayne. Now it is on probation, one reason being that 700 of the 1500 students have English as a second language. People from other culture groups have moved to this part of town, causing a reshuffling of those who live there, and the majority of them now have to learn English. Of course, all children will have to take the standardized exams and be part of the AYP (Academic Yearly Performance). South Side is struggling and it symbolizes the problems inner city schools face.

The LCMS representation was strong once upon a time here also. Close by, we have inner city Bethlehem Lutheran Church, which in the 1970s still had one of the LCMS's largest schools. Now the church is a mere shadow of its glorious past, and the school is non-existent because it has been closed. Redeemer Lutheran Church down the road had a school that also ceased to exist a long time ago.

However, efforts are still being made to get or keep a foot in the door and Bethlehem has partnered with the public John S. Irwin Elementary school to plant a communal garden. Yet the struggles remain real and the burden on congregations is enormous.

### Meeting the Challenge: Inner City Ministry

For all the reasons above, we consider the inner city a missiological challenge. Since people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures have moved in, the inner city is a mission field of its own special kind. Fortunately, as said before, many inner cities in the United States are gentrifying, but still not everywhere. It is true that revitalization is occurring somewhat in Fort Wayne too. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church is an inner city congregation and it has over the last decade or so managed to clean

up its neighborhood by partnering with the municipality and the neighboring Roman Catholic congregation. Vacant houses were bought and torn down and replaced with new housing. The Allen County Public library and the Urban League moved in. The city cooperated and built trails for walking and biking and a new YMCA has been built, but crime is still a challenge with a murder rate that is too high.

This so-called "renaissance project" was spearheaded by our former pastor who is now the LCMS president.

The renaissance project was a human care project in partnership with the neighborhood and focused on non-members. In such cases, acts of mercy offer greater latitude of interdenominational cooperation without violating the LCMS's confessional stance. Still membership is stagnant. It seems that some churches are once again thankful for their location having waited out the worst of times and reaping the benefits of gentrification. They withstood all the years of white urban flight to find a renewed interest of millennials who move to that very part of the city.

When we think of the word "city," many associations come to mind. Not only should we look at cities in ethnic and cultural terms, but also as rough patches dealing with a kind of spiritual warfare where good and evil forces are battling for their allegiance.

Our Lord Jesus Christ looked over the city of Jerusalem and cried:

The woes of Jesus were spoken over the city prior to His triumphant entry. Among the many elements that are unique to the city of Jerusalem, it also speaks for cities in general.

O Jerusalem! Oh, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (LUKE 13:34-35)

The woes of Jesus were spoken over the city prior to His triumphant entry. Among the many elements that are unique to the city of Jerusalem, it also speaks for cities in general. God sent messengers to that city, but the response was mixed to the message of God’s salvation in Christ. Does that deter God from continuing His mission to the city? Not in the least. Christ’s entry upholds grace: “Like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...” The city’s unfaithfulness is not countered by God’s unfaithfulness. God sends His own son. He enters riding on a donkey on His way to the cross and the empty tomb — all for those who live in the city.<sup>2</sup> The point is that the city has become and should become the Synod’s concern overall. It is our national mission field.

In Fort Wayne we have an inner city church called Shepherd of the City. It was once a flourishing congregation. Yet the church, then called Concordia Lutheran, decided to relocate to another area in the 1970s. It left behind a beautiful building and a remnant few who are struggling to keep the church open. Unfortunately, in the forum of congregational autonomy, most other churches in the vicinity leave this church to tackle her woes by herself: a small membership, no money to pay a full salary for the pastor or for the upkeep of the building. These woes led to the tearing down of the former school with an old bowling alley in the basement (the demolition itself cost \$60,000). For a short time, an older pastor volunteered to serve the parish and he could do so without a salary because he had inherited some money.

Might this portend future ministry to the city? Most likely so. Struggling inner city churches will have to find individuals who are either retired but are still eager to

<sup>2</sup> Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 90–91.

serve or individuals who are willing to minister while being in a bi-vocational position. This in turn raises the question of the latter group’s preparation for pastoral ministry. Increasingly, the argument is made that such bi-vocational ministers need onsite training and not a lengthy extraction to go the seminary. Moreover, the price of education at the seminary seems unnecessarily high. To that end, in response to an LCMS convention resolution, both seminaries have inaugurated an educational track called the Specific Ministry Pastor program (SMP) that trains those individuals in congregations who may serve a church in a bi-vocational position and yet want the theological education. Once they enter the program they will be called vicars and then after 1½ years of on-line theological education, they are ordained and then required to study another 1½ years to become rostered pastors. This

is an education model that the Synod has endorsed, and it anticipates changing and struggling contexts such as the inner city where individuals are not able to remove themselves from their ministry for traditional theological education.

We also have started a practicum at Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) in Fort Wayne that requires, in addition to readings and assignments, an inner city summer vicarage sponsored through the Office of National Mission (ONM). Currently ten students have joined the practicum with an interest

in becoming the Synod’s first inner city church planters, modelling their ministry after the Network Supported Missionaries (NSM) deployed for overseas mission through the Office of International Mission (OIM).

But let’s go back to the inner city church in Fort Wayne, Shepherd of the City. The pastor who volunteered eventually left the church and once again it was left stranded. This time CTS picked up the situation and now a professor serves as its part-time pastor.<sup>3</sup> This professor has also been assigned a vicar, but this vicar needs to be paid. Who can do that? The district had offered some time ago to step in and offer half of that salary. The church is slowly but surely recovering from multiple setbacks.

The poor and the needy are a central concern of the church ... the active love and hope that accompany a true Christian living will appear in the daily life and work of all believers.

<sup>3</sup> On September 25, 2016, The Lutheran Foundation in partnership with Concordia Lutheran High School released a series of videos (2016 delegate meeting videos) depicting Lutheran life in and around Fort Wayne, including a video capturing the ministry to Shepherd of the City Lutheran Church.

The area is surrounded by poverty. With a matching grant from the Lutheran Foundation, a kitchen will be put into a new outreach center, Shepherd's Hand (the building was a former dance hall), adjacent to the church. But to raise the funds that then will be matched has been a struggle. One of the main purposes for that kitchen is to address prevalent obesity among those living in that area.

We have here a case study that shows that there is a need in the LCMS, as in other churches, to offer and share its resources to address the problems of a struggling congregation coupled with flexibility in action. We all are in this together as the body of Christ. We cannot leave individual pastors fighting out inner city ministry on their own — and that includes new church planting projects in the inner city. Church planting efforts have shown that joint support of an individual prevents them from becoming modern-day Jonahs who despair over their own isolation. In short, we can hear the cries of inner city missionaries and church workers coming at us from all angles, reflecting problems that are historical, contextual, relational, ecclesiological, and missiological.

### Concerns Lead to Appropriate Action

It is important, however, that whatever reflections we make, whatever values we construct, and whatever theology we create for the city, we must correlate or complement our thinking with action. That action plan must reach down to the level of the streets and the people of the city or community. We cannot expect that an inner city commuting church is the answer. It's about the community and being established in it and above all recognizing the local particularities. We cannot operate with generalizations, but must pay attention to the deficiencies prevalent in the community, of which there could be many: illiteracy, visual deficit (rundown buildings), teenage pregnancies, high dropout rates, battered women, drugs, gun violence, alcoholism, and homelessness. If our concern is about community, then the church becomes directly involved in such challenges as a church in and for that community. And so a church serving its community must be open to variety in order to meet the challenges.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Charles Van Engen aptly describes the situation: "The church is not a social agency — but it is of social significance in the city. The church is not city government — but is called to announce and live out the kingdom of God in all its political significance. The church is not a

In an essay several years ago entitled, *Re-examining Our Vision for the Poor*,<sup>5</sup> Jeff Cook recognizes that in engaging the inner city community, social issues such as injustice and poverty become an integral part of the church's mission. It is not about the reality of poverty, since that is a given, but rather it is a question of how we go about helping the poor. Here are some considerations:

Our eagerness to help needs to be guided by the question, how can we assess what we do in the context and how does it affect the people who are on the receiving end? There are perhaps three levels of social need that can be suggested as one addresses the community and its people. The initial step, undoubtedly, is through relief, but then it moves to development and, finally, to help in making structural changes. In terms of the first step, we can establish the fact that it is natural for us to respond

in crisis first with emergency relief. As Cook points out:

Whether it is a local house fire that destroys a family home, a hurricane that sweeps across New Orleans, or an earthquake that devastates Haiti, the willingness of Christians to give immediately and sacrificially to those in desperate need has a positive and redemptive impact for Jesus. The Church excels in this kind of circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

The inner city outreach will have a huge worldwide impact when certain immigrants, non-Christian people, are reached.

However, in Cook's opinion, such open-handed, sacrificial giving is helpful only when it is relatively short-term. When continued too long, the very relief intended for good can foster long-term dependency and rob people of dignity as they become accustomed to being identified and treated as charity cases. It is possible to be sincere

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bank — but is an economic force in the city and is to seek the economic welfare of the city. The church is not a school — but is called to educate the people of the city concerning the Gospel of love, justice and social transformation. The church is not a family — but is the family of God, called to be a neighbor to all those whom God loves. The church is not a building — but needs buildings and owns buildings to carry out its ministry. The church is not exclusive, not unique — but is specially called by God to be different in the way it serves the city. The church is not an institution — but needs institutional structures to effect changes in the lives of people and society. The church is not a community-development organization — but the development of community is essential to the church's nature" (Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 93–94).

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Cook, "Re-examining Our Vision for the Poor," *Torch* (Fall-Winter 2010): 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

but sincerely wrong in one's actions. It is possible to show the right kind of motivation and yet land up with skewed results. We must evaluate the differences between needs that result from crisis and those that are chronic. Chronic challenges demand a different kind of response, Cook says.<sup>7</sup>

The second level of social need is development. Here “the church must adjust its responses to people who are trapped in cycles of poverty by empowering them to change their circumstances.”<sup>8</sup> This kind of social help can be more involved and time consuming since we develop a close relationship with the people and try to help them to develop themselves. Nevertheless, this type of assistance is important as it may contribute towards them escaping the cycle of poverty. For in Cook's estimate, “it prompts them to transition from perpetual dependence to self-sufficiency. This type of development might include, for example, providing education or skill training to enable people to conquer their own chronic problems and preserve their dignity.”<sup>9</sup>

If that is the case, what specific ministries help at the level of development? The list is long, yet not exhaustive, with the following forms of assistance:

- Parenting classes
- Student mentorship programs
- After-school tutoring
- Adult education (in the LCMS that includes pastoral ministry)
- Computer skills training
- Job interview coaching
- English as a Second Language (ESL) training
- High school completion classes
- Basic finance management training
- Home ownership classes
- Entrepreneurial development
- Job transportation
- Substance abuse and family counseling
- Emergency shelter
- Drug referral services
- Clothing outreach and feeding ministry
- Prison ministry
- Obesity awareness

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The only possible way for a local congregation to jump into such services is to conduct her own assessment. To that end, Cook suggests:

Churches can begin the pursuit of development ministry by determining how God has positioned and equipped them by assessing their strengths and limitations, finding out what the real needs of the community are, building relationships with people in the community, discovering other ministry models, and evaluating what they do.<sup>10</sup>

The third level of inner city ministry is to seek out structural change. What exactly does this mean? The fact is that there are environmental or systemic problems that keep people trapped in the cycle of poverty. Developments might

thus not go deep enough to overcome injustices and obstacles. Here one may point to sin and that sin not only takes hold of people but also these sinful yet powerful people act in certain structures of society, favoring more the powerful at the expense of the poor and weak. This has already happened among the Jewish people of the Old Testament, and the

The church will offer the gospel as a credible alternative way of life to that of the culture.

prophets Isaiah (ISA 5: VINEYARD SONG) and Amos (AMOS 5) addressed it. Isaiah 5:23 reads, “Woe to those who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.”

And the prophet in Amos 5:12 says, “For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.”

It could very well be that certain structures are in place, but unless they change, improvement might elude many of the people living there. Cook identifies inadequate structures such as “poor educational systems, predatory lending (where cash advance businesses charge exorbitant interest rates on loans), injustice in zoning laws, and disinvestment in communities by financial institutions.” These are all problems, he says, faced by urban poor, “which collectively become monumental hurdles to overcome.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, in such a situation where structural changes are needed, the local congregation might have to partner with organizations “that are experienced in engaging systemic issues in the society, thereby blending their presence and influence with others to confront unjust power.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## From Unintentional to Intentional Service

We read in James 2:1–9 that the apostle James points out that caring for the poor — helping the widows and the orphans — is an expression of true faith, active through loving works that reflects God’s own impartiality. The question here is whether inner city work can be left to the mere good will and voluntary intentions of a few members of the church or whether it should become a deliberate and intentional service on the part of the church at large (i.e., the Synod)? We can provide some arguments that point to the latter. In other words, there are indicators that speak in favor of a corporate concern for the synod’s involvement:

We are aware of Luther’s strong emphasis on “brotherly love” and biblically the demonstration of love for the neighbor is underscored in Galatians 6:5 where we are to have a “faith active through love.”<sup>13</sup> In his famous preface to the epistle of St. Paul to Romans, Luther circumscribes this faith:

O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them... For through faith a man becomes free from sin and comes to take pleasure in God’s commandments.<sup>14</sup>

Melanchthon, too, sees this sanctified faith as always active, “not an idle thought,” but “a new light, life, and force in the heart as to renew our heart, mind and spirit, makes new men of us and new creatures” and “as long as it is present, produces good fruits”(Ap IV, 64 [Kolb-Wengert, 131]).<sup>15</sup> Since this faith is living (*fides viva*), “active” (Ap IV, 248 [Kolb-Wengert, 158]), and “firm,” witness and confession are never far from it (Ap IV, 384 [Tappert, 165]).<sup>16</sup> Paul Althaus thus concludes:

I cannot believe in redemption only for myself. I receive divine love as “the man,” as “Adam” who is part of all others. If I do not believe in salvation for all, then I won’t believe for myself either ... Laxity

in missions is always a sign of an individualistically reduced and thereby disfigured faith.<sup>17</sup>

In Matt 25:31-46 we are also alerted to the fact that helping the neighbor in need is a reflection of our faith. When the Son of Man comes, he will say:

Come blessed of 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 drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. (MATT 25:34-36)

But it cautions us not to harbor any meritorious interest in serving the poor and hurting, and the Lord alone recognizes the faith behind what is being done:

Lord when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee? (MATT 25:37-39)

Luther provides us with the christological underpinning of such a concern for one’s neighbor:

I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ ... Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one’s neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. For a man does not serve that he may put men under obligations. He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that our existence as humans can and is only one of co-humanity. We exist in relationships and these relationships matter in terms of showing concern for his

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 257.

<sup>14</sup> “Preface to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” *LW* 35:370–71.

<sup>15</sup> The Solid Declaration IV, 12 (Kolb-Wengert, 576) compares the inextricable connection of faith and works as to heat and light.

<sup>16</sup> “No faith is firm that does not show itself in confession.”

<sup>17</sup> Paul Althaus, “Um die Reinheit der Mission,” *Mission und Theologie* (Göttingen: Heinz Reise, 1953), 51.

<sup>18</sup> *LW* 31:367.

or her welfare, both spiritually and bodily. To deny oneself of these relationships is to fall outside of one's true humanity in Jesus Christ. Sin, as Luther would say, leads to a life of incurvature that denies itself selfishly of human relationships, and above all with God.<sup>19</sup>

If God should not test us by tribulation, it would be impossible for any man to be saved. The reason is that our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself (*tam profunda est in seipsam incurva*) because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them (as is evident in the case of legalists and hypocrites), indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, in one of our Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) documents dated February 1999, we read of a service in faith that is ready and without pretense:

The focus here is how those who are truly right with God by grace through faith serve others without any further thought of how it may serve them. So it is that one of the church's post communion prayers asks that God would strengthen us "in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another."<sup>21</sup>

The poor and the needy are a central concern of the church, and we would agree that the active love and hope that accompany a true Christian living will appear in the daily life and work of all believers and is impressed on them in worship through corporate prayers. In this way "Lutherans are well taught by their tradition to recognize that this is the primary way the church reaches out with the love of God for a suffering world."<sup>22</sup>

To express such love all Christians are placed in the context of their family and neighbor and in occupational situations. According to the CTCR statement, some speak of this crucial daily work of believers in their various callings as "indirect and unintentional influence" and

"indirect and intentional influence" that the church might have on society through the daily work of individual Christians. We could say that when the church is engaged in its central task of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments, faith is engendered in the members and love follows — often without explicit instruction. In many cases the spontaneous — indirect and unintended — result is active love in the daily life of the believers. Thus,

[T]he terms "indirect and unintended" indicate that love flows from faith in the Gospel apart from any specific or organized plan or "intention" on the church's part, while at the same time suggesting that the church serves society "indirectly" by helping individuals who are in need.<sup>23</sup>

However, the church also proclaims and encourages in its sermons intentionally about this indirect care and concern for others. Therefore we may call it still indirect, yet intentional in influence and focus, just as the preacher becomes explicit in reminding his members that good works are necessary in their everyday lives and that God's law in its third use provides a helpful reminder.<sup>24</sup>

However, can we go beyond this realm of vocational service and ask the question of whether the church should also engage in a communal, intentional, and direct way of addressing its love? We have examples of such communal concerns in Acts 6:1–7 where the apostles select deacons to relieve them from the task of helping the Hellenist widows so that they could devote themselves to their main task of preaching. The point is that the church can become a social organization to help those in need. In 2 Corinthians 8 we see that there was not just a readiness but an actual display of such love among the churches of Macedonia.

Some may posit that the church should do so communally by addressing foremost the needs of its members. But would there also be communal obligation to those outside of the church? Some would argue that this should be done only rarely and left under ordinary circumstance

<sup>19</sup> Matt Jenson, *Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther, and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 2–4.

<sup>20</sup> LW 25:291

<sup>21</sup> CTCR, "Faith Active in Love: Human Care and the Church's Life," (February 1999): 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ap IV, 189 (Kolb-Wengert, 150): "Good works are to be done because God requires them; ... ought to follow faith as thanksgiving ... and is shown to others, in order that others may be invited to godliness by our confession;" FC Ep IV, 18 (Kolb-Wengert, 499): "It is necessary to exhort people to Christian discipline and good works, and to remind them how necessary it is that they exercise themselves in good works as an evidence of their faith and their gratitude toward God, as it is to warn against mingling good works in the article of justification."



to the vocational, unintentional deeds of individual believers. Thus, as often as emergencies occur, such as Hurricane Katrina or earthquakes, the church corporately steps to the plate. In such cases where the church steps corporately into places of need, it competes with many other secular, private, or public agencies. But in contrast, churches take man for who he is, holistically providing both food for his soul and his body and her mercy extended underscores the gospel and love of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

There is of course the theological and ecclesiological argument that the synod as such assumes corporately the task of missions given the fact that the Lord's mandate to do so is given to the church after the death of the apostles. The consequence and implications of that is reflected by the founding father of the synod himself, C. F. W. Walther:

*As certain as the church is first gathered outwardly by baptism, thus swearing allegiance to the banner of Christ, and placing herself in his service — as certain as the church has the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the priesthood for the whole world — as certain as she is the spiritual mother of all believers, the leaven of the world and God's wheat seed — as certain, finally, as the church is a fellowship of love whose true members have ever born the responsibility for the conversion of the lost world, so certain it is that the Christian church itself is the true mission society, instituted by God Himself.<sup>26</sup>*

On behalf of its congregations, the Synod takes on the missionary task corporately for the conversion of the lost world. Though that task has customarily been thought of as international, there is no logical argument that it should not also oblige the church to do so nationally in the lost world of our inner cities. At this point, of course, it would require a reappraisal and restructuring of the current mission paradigm where short-term volunteers of local congregations prefer to engage in overseas projects rather than the mission field here at home. Adjustments made here would bode well for the situation in the United States.

While the overall goal for mission to the city is in Walther's words "the conversion of the lost world," there

<sup>25</sup> Though much is said about helping those in need, Robert Lupton, in his book *Toxic Charity*, does not promote evangelistic activity or any connection of such work to the church. Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> C.F.W. Walther, "The Mission society established by God," Mission sermon on Isaiah 43:21, in *The Word of His Grace: Occasional and Festival Sermons* (Lake Mills: Graphic Publishing, 1978), 23.

is no single way of describing the tasks leading towards the goal, especially the human care side that would assist the proclamatory and sacramental character of our mission. The CTCR from February 1999 seeks to differentiate the tasks of mercy depending on the particular, local challenges:

*There is no single way in which the church must organize to assist its members in showing human care. Accordingly, there is no prescribed manner in which the church must organize today. The structures employed for the work of human care thus differ from the office of the pastoral ministry ...<sup>27</sup>*

Examples of such work differentiated from the pastoral work can be manifold:

1. A parish nurse program that keeps tabs on the members' health care needs.
2. A day care center program for preschool children.
3. A food pantry for people unable to secure their own or family meals or that have only limited resources to do so.
4. A low-income housing project.
5. Serving God at the (local) homeless shelter.
6. Allocating the congregational budget for LCMS mercy work.

And yet, all the above tasks have in common that the faith of the church becomes active in love, extending the love of Christ to others outside of the word and sacrament worshipping community.

### **The Florescence of the Church**

The Synod's obligation to address the inner city situation comes from its own logo. It represents the classical acts of *diakonia*, (*leitourgia*), *martyria* and *koinonia*, which to me suggests a corporate commitment to these activities as they take root at the local level through or near a congregation. Thus, the Synod together with all its congregations wants a congregation to become

1. An active service of mercy to others — *diakonia*.
2. A worshipping sanctuary that offers word and sacrament as God's life-giving word — *leitourgia*. People gather to sing and pray and break God's bread as once the first congregation in Jerusalem did (*Acts 2:40-42*).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

3. A fellowship that cares for one another and carries each other's burdens (GAL 6:10) — *koinonia*.
4. A congregation that is evangelistic — *martyria* — and carries the life-changing message to this world.

These four classical activities do not tell everything of a church, but they do highlight her existence in view of our co-humanity and how she can shape it in her life.<sup>28</sup>

Today, *martyria* in particular needs an intentional focus and a fine tuning at that. In the words of Lesslie Newbigin, a former missionary and bishop to India, *martyria* would have to seek an intentional missionary encounter with the prevailing culture and nothing less. That missionary encounter embraces three fundamental convictions: First, the church's beliefs are shared with the cultural community, challenging the reigning idolatrous assumptions of the world. Hermeneutically, the prevalent culture must be understood and encountered in light of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to be absorbed into the formative religious assumptions of the culture. Only in this way will our message challenge prevalent views at their roots.

Second, the church will offer the gospel as a credible alternative way of life to that of the culture. For that to happen, the church must also embody a life as God's children. And it should be made unmistakably clear that God has come in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. It is about the gospel and the center of it is the cross. The death of Christ is a universal event, valid for all people, non-discriminatory, and non-racial. Thus, the missionary encounter, if genuine, will embrace people of all backgrounds and societal standing.

Finally, there will be a call for radical conversion, an invitation to understand and live in the world in light of the gospel. The witness of the church through word and sacrament and the witness of its members call all inhabitants of the dominant culture to conversion to the different way of life in the church that the gospel offers. In Newbigin's mind, the church has too often learned to coexist peacefully with the culture around it.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, the Synod's mission is all about the gospel. To sharpen the focus and edge on others, I recall Reporter (June 2011) once stating provocatively that it is not only about the "unchurched" but the "unsaved."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Schulz, *Mission*, 236–237.

<sup>29</sup> Michael W. Cohen, "Liberating the Gospel from Its Modern Cage: An Interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's Gospel and Modern Culture Project," *Missionalia* 30, no. 3 (2002): 360–375.

<sup>30</sup> LCMS Reporter (June 2011), 2.

## The Global Impact of Inner City Mission

We have to take one final dimension of inner city mission into account which could almost qualify as a welcome by-product. The inner city outreach will have a huge worldwide impact when certain immigrants, non-Christian people, are reached. The author of a recent journal article entitled, "Reaching the Nations through Our Cities" envisions a global dimension with the inner city mission work in the United States. He describes the situation as follows:

Most church and mission organization paradigms in America have not adjusted to the reality that the frontier of reaching unreached peoples is not necessarily geographically distant but is sometimes available through relational networks in their own homeland through influential immigrants...With the world becoming deeply urban and connected, the pioneer missionary of the twenty-first century will look much different from previous centuries. They will focus on reaching busy, hidden, influential unreached peoples who have migrated to cities and will spread the gospel through these migrants' networks throughout the world.<sup>31</sup>

The work among immigrant people groups in the inner city will create diaspora groups who will continue to have ties with their ethnic group back home. That then has value for missions overseas. Unfortunately, church members are largely still willing to spend billions of dollars for their own short-term trips to foreign lands, forgetting that in our inner cities potential missionaries are living right here at their doorsteps. To reach such people we need to raise our own cross-cultural missionaries. As said, these missionaries will often feel isolated from their own church or organization which seems indifferent to their work in inner cities or is critical of it because they still imagine missionaries to be engaged in overseas mission work:

As a result, if laborers are going to increase among the unreached in America, structures and platforms within mission organizations and churches need to support and facilitate the work among the unreached.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Chris Clayman, "Reaching the Nations through our cities," *Great Commission Research Journal*, 6, no. 1 (Summer 2016), 6–21. Therein page 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

## Conclusion

Most LCMS congregations and their members have an honest desire to help a hurting world, and yet Cook is correct when it comes to stepping to the plate:

[I]t can become confusing and intimidating when we are challenged to make a difference in the face of such overwhelming needs. Just as a doctor first determines a patient's problem in order to prescribe a helpful course of treatment, the Church must also learn to diagnose social needs to determine the appropriate response.<sup>33</sup>

We are certain and convinced that the spiritual needs are common for all humans equally, and yet the challenge to address those spiritual needs through an appropriate ministry and worship life for a particular context, especially the inner city, is a persistent one. To that end, may the Lord grant His church insight and fortitude, and may He guide and bless her in that service.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.