



Bible Study

# THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

## LEADER'S GUIDE

This leader's guide is designed to be printed on both sides of a piece of paper, three-hole punched, and then placed in a three-ring binder. In this format, the left-hand page is where you find the student lesson. **Answers for questions in the student lesson are provided in red.**

The right-hand page contains further explanations and illustrations. These are printed in black. The right-hand page also includes directions for the corresponding Power Point that includes explanations for each slide. **Power Point notes are printed in blue.**

You need not use the Power Point to teach this Bible study. If you do, it would be wise to familiarize yourself with it beforehand.



## Introduction

- Define and/or give characteristics of these three things: a task, a job, and a mission.

Task	Job	Mission
<p><i>“A piece of work.”</i></p> <p><i>We often think of tasks as being shorter or one-time activities, not ongoing. A task might be something that is assigned, or it might be something we choose to do.</i></p>	<p><i>“A collection of specific tasks that are done routinely, on an ongoing basis.”</i></p> <p><i>We tend to think of a job as something <u>you choose to do</u>. But once employed, they assign tasks.</i></p>	<p><i>“An important task or job that is <u>allotted, assigned or imposed.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>So a mission is greater in scope, more important than a job. It is also <u>something that is given to you by superiors.</u></i></p>

- Why is it important you keep those straight? What would happen if you thought of a task or a job as a mission? What would happen if you thought of a mission as a task?  
*If you don't keep them straight, you might not prioritize your efforts properly. If you think of a task as a mission, you will focus too much on something that in the grand scheme of things isn't that important. If you think of a mission as a task, you might not give it as much attention and time as it deserves.*

It is important that congregations are clear about their mission. A mission provides the *raison d'être*, the “reason for existence”.

An organization might have many important tasks and jobs. It might also not do all those tasks or jobs well. It might even let some of those important tasks and jobs slip through the cracks. While that is not good, the organization can still have a reason to exist. That is not the case if an organization fails to carry out its mission. If an organization does not carry out its mission, it could cease to exist and no one would be hurt.

So it is with congregations. There are many tasks and jobs in the Church. A congregation might not do them all well. While that is not good, the congregation that does not do all things well can still have a reason for existing. However, if a congregation does not carry out its mission, then there is no reason for that congregation to exist anymore. It could disappear without consequence.

In this Bible study, we will look at the Biblical concept of *mission*. We will examine key Bible passages that speak to the mission of the Church. Finally, we will see how that mission was fulfilled in the early Christian church.



Open with prayer.

Task	Job	Mission
A piece of work	A collection of tasks that are done routinely	An important task or job that is allotted or assigned
		

While these words are related, we see a progression in importance. We demonstrate we understand this progression in the way we use these words.

We might use the word “task” when we talk about things like a chore given to a child or an assignment given to a student or a quick errand run by a low-ranking employee.

When we speak of “job,” we are often talking about our vocation, i.e. our livelihood. It is something more important than a task. A job might consist of tasks, but it greater than a task. Tasks tend to be one-time events. A job is something we do each day.

We use the word “mission” typically to refer to extremely consequential things: a military action, a trip to a foreign land to share the gospel, etc. A mission will probably be comprised of various people with various jobs, but the mission is greater than any individual job.



A silly example. For Kentucky Fried Chicken to function well, there are various tasks and jobs that need to be done. The cooking supplies need to be stocked. You need people who are trained to manage the deep fryers. You need someone to keep the books. You need someone to keep the floors and bathrooms clean. If any of those tasks or jobs is not done well, it hurts the ability of that Kentucky Fried Chicken to function. The customer’s fried chicken experience will not be as delightful, but they will still be able to eat KFC chicken.

Now if Kentucky Fried Chicken starts deep-frying bat instead of chicken, they no longer are fulfilling their mission. A Kentucky Fried Chicken that sells fried bats might as well not exist. That is what *mission* is—“your reason to be.”

## PART 1 - THE CONCEPT OF "MISSION" IN SCRIPTURE

### A mission is given from above

*Joshua 22:3*

*For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you.*

*1 Samuel 15:17-18*

*Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.'"*

*Acts 12:25*

*When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

*Acts 20:24*

*Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."*

Scripture uses different words to capture the concept of *mission*.

In Joshua 22, Joshua is talking to warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. These tribes settled east of the Jordan River, but they had spent years helping their brother Israelite tribes capture land west of the river. Joshua tells them that they have now fulfilled their mission. The Hebrew word there is a form of *mishmereth*, which is translated a variety of ways: charge, duty, obligation.

In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel reminds King Saul that he had a mission to prevent Israel from falling under pagan influence. Samuel uses a form of the Hebrew word *derek*, which can be translated as "way" or "road" or "journey."

In Acts 12, we read that Barnabas and Saul (not yet renamed "Paul") were on a mission trip. The word used there for mission is a form of the Greek word *diakonia*, which means "service" or "ministry." It is the same word Paul uses in Acts 20, translated "task."

So, we find the concept of "mission" connected with a variety of activities: driving pagans out of a land through war, sharing the gospel in foreign lands, etc. We also see that different words are used to describe what we would call a mission. Sometimes that word stresses the sense of duty in a mission. Other times, the word stresses the adventure and journey that a mission can often be.

- However, what is the one constant we see in all those passages?

*The mission was given by God, not self-chosen.*

PART 1

**THE CONCEPT OF "MISSION" IN SCRIPTURE**

- ❖ A mission is given from above.

*It is never self-appointed.*

- ❖ A mission statement focuses on the heart of the matter.

*It does not focus on the tasks and jobs that might help carry out that mission.*

A mission is given from above.

For each of these, the instructor may want to provide a brief background, sharing the context of the passage. Then have a member of the class read the passage. If unfamiliar with the context, review the full story of these passages by reading the corresponding chapters in *The People's Bible*.

Same Greek word: *diakonia*

It is probably good to note that Scripture *does not* give us a working definition of "mission." As these passages illustrate, there are a number of different words that are rendered "mission" in some translations. Moreover, the flavor of the Biblical words translated "mission" is often quite different. However, while Scripture doesn't give us a simple, concise definition of "mission," we certainly see the concept! It is an *important* task that is given by God himself. In Scripture, a mission is not self-imposed. You do not get to decide your mission.

**Psalm 119:73**

*Your hands made me and formed me.*

**Matthew 16:18**

*Jesus said, "...On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."*

- Why does it make sense that a mission would come from God... not from the will of the individual... not from the will of the congregation?

*God made us. God always has a purpose when he makes something. The same is true of the Church. It is Christ's Church. He built it. He designed it. He had a purpose in mind when he did so.*

- Individuals often have strong feelings about what they think they their congregation should be doing. If others disagree, it can lead to strife. This is contrary to God's will. St. Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). How would having a clear and correct sense of the Church's mission help promote peace?

*It reminds us that what we do as a congregation is not wide open for debate. It is Christ's Church. Once we understand the mission he gave, fulfilling that mission will consume us. The methods we use to carry out that mission are open for debate. But the mission is not.*

## **A mission statement focuses on the heart of the matter**

- In 60 seconds, list as many miracles of Jesus as you can.

*Answers will vary.*

- Looking at that list, would you call any of those Jesus' mission?

*No. Miracles never saved anyone from their sin, which was Jesus' mission.*

**Luke 19:10**

*Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

**Mark 10:45**

*Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

- When Jesus states his mission, how does he describe it?

*To save the lost by making a payment with his life.*

- Jesus did not heal the sick or feed the 5,000 or cast out demons because those things were his mission. They were not. They served his mission. How?

*They proved that he was who he claimed to be, the Son of God, so that the payment of his life was valuable.*

- It is absolutely vital that a congregation distinguish between their God-given mission and good and noble tasks that may serve that mission. Why?

*There are many tasks which support the mission but do not fulfill the mission of the Church.*

PART 1

**THE CONCEPT OF "MISSION" IN SCRIPTURE**

- ❖ A mission is given from above.

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- ❖ A mission statement focuses on the heart of the matter.

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A mission statement focuses on the heart of the matter. It does not focus on tasks and jobs that might help carry out that mission.

Another way of saying this is that mission focuses on functions, not forms. For example, "evangelism" is a function. It can occur in many forms: door-to-door canvassing, spiritual conversations with unbelieving friends or neighbors, etc. A good mission statement will state the functions of the congregation's mission, without worrying about the forms just yet.

Many Christians and Christian churches often think that in his miracles, Jesus shows us the mission of the Church: helping the sick, showing mercy on the poor and needy, etc. This was not even the purpose of *Jesus own mission*, as

Psalm 49:7 tells us, "No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them." Human beings are equal in God's eyes. Therefore, even if it were possible for someone to keep themselves without sin, the most they could do would be to trade their life for *one* human being. Jesus is not an ordinary human being. He was the God-man. That puddle under the cross is *God's* blood. Therefore, when he died, it was a sacrifice great enough to pay for the sins of the world.

You see that miracles supported Christ's mission, but were not the mission, in a number of ways. When Jesus feeds the 5,000, the people want to force him to become their king. Being an earthly king was not Jesus' mission; so, he withdraws from the crowds. Or, think of the many times Jesus would do a miracle and then tell the person who benefited *not* to tell anyone else. He knew people would begin to think of him as *just* a healer or a provider. Providing food and healing physical illness were *not* his mission. When miracles would get in the way of his mission, Jesus would stop doing them or tell others not to speak of them.

A simple example might be hospital work. The WELS could use congregational offerings to open WELS hospitals. Helping the sick and injured is a good and noble thing! Reflecting Christ's love in that way could help our mission. However, we don't have unlimited resources. So, while building a WELS hospital would be a noble thing, we would need to ask if that is our God-given reason for existence? Or at the very least, would funding for that that hospital hinder us from doing things that were more directly related to our God-given mission? It might be a good and noble thing, but if it hinders our mission, we shouldn't do it. So, what is that mission? That is Part 2 of this study.

## PART 2 - THE MISSION CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

If you read the gospels, you find that there are dozens of things Jesus encouraged believers to do. However, there are four places in Scripture that receive special attention because of *when* Jesus gives instructions to his followers—right before he ascended. In every instance, he is speaking to a group—his disciples—not an individual. Since he is speaking to his disciples, the leaders of the early church, and since the timing would seem to give his words special *gravitas*, these instructions are sometimes known as the Great Commission.

Let us look at the four Great Commission passages. As we do, complete the chart on page 5, noting:

1. what specifically Jesus asks his followers to do,
2. towards whom Jesus asks his followers to direct their mission efforts,
3. how Jesus tells his followers to carry out that mission, and
4. where Jesus' followers are to carry out their mission.

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

### **Mark 16:15-16**

*[Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

### **Luke 24:46-48**

*[Jesus] told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

### **Acts 1:8**

*Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

PART 2

**THE MISSION CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH**

The "Great Commission" passages:

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Mark 16:15-16
- Luke 24:46-48
- Acts 1:8



We pay especially attention to these because:

1. They were given to all Jesus' disciples, not just individuals.
2. They were spoken by Jesus very shortly before he ascended.

Sometimes, you will hear the argument, "Why do we focus on the Great Commission passages when talking about the mission of the Church? What makes them any greater than other things Jesus told his followers to do?"

There is some truth to this. We need to be careful of making these passages the be-all-end-all of God's will for his Church. However, the fact that they were spoken to the body of Jesus' followers and the fact that they were spoken so close to his ascension *do* give them significance that cannot be ignored. Ultimately, these passages drive at the importance of using God's Word to 1) reach the lost and 2) nurture the faithful. That covers everything else Jesus encouraged believers to do during his ministry.

**THE GREAT COMMISSION**

Scripture passage	What is the mission?	Who is the target of this mission?	How is this mission carried out?	Where is this mission carried out?
Matthew 28:18-20	<i>Go. Make disciples.</i>	<i>all nations</i>	<i>baptizing and teaching</i>	<i>in all nations</i>
Mark 16:15	<i>Go. Preach the good news.</i>	<i>all creation</i>	<i>gospel and baptism</i>	<i>all the world</i>
Luke 24:46-48	<i>Be witnesses.</i>	<i>all nations</i>	<i>preaching repentance and forgiveness</i>	<i>beginning at Jerusalem</i>
Acts 1:8	<i>Be my witnesses.</i>	<i>people in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth</i>	<i>with power</i>	<i>Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth</i>

Have people read each Scripture passage and go through the four columns: 1) What is the mission. 2) Who is the target of this mission? 3) How is this mission carried out? 4) Where is this mission carried out?

The Power Point fills in those boxes one by one.

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The Power Point fills in those boxes one by one.

- In five or six words, synthesize the mission as laid out in those four scriptures. What does Jesus say is the reason for the Church to exist?

*Answers will vary. Possible: Disciple everyone with the Gospel.*

- Obviously, the Great Commission passages put a heavy emphasis on reaching out to the lost with the gospel. However, the lost are not the only recipients of the Church's ministry. What are some words or phrases that demonstrate that the Great Commission calls us to minister to believers as well?

*"Teaching them to obey everything." - Obviously, you cannot teach someone everything in Scripture with one or two evangelism calls! Plus, the verbs "make disciples" and "preach" are present tense, denoting an ongoing action. Jesus also says, "I will be with you always, until the end of time." Those first disciples were not going to be carrying out this mission until the end of time. So Jesus intended that promise to be applied to us today as well.*

- Look closely at the "how" column. That column calls for us to baptize and teach God's Word. It also says we are to make disciples with power. How are those concepts related? (See Romans 1:16 if you need help.)

*The gospel is the power of God for salvation. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel. So, if we are sharing the gospel, our ministry is being done with power.*

- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to have beautiful worship with good sermons and hymns." Respond.

*This might serve our mission, but technically is not the mission itself.*

- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to offer Christian education for youth so that they might grow closer to Jesus." Respond.

*This might serve our mission, but technically is not the mission itself.*

- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to care for the poor and the sick, reflecting Christ's love." Respond.

*This might serve our mission, but technically is not the mission itself.*

- Scripture says our mission should take place "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." List some things that might mean for an individual congregation.

*A Christian congregation is never content to let the gospel be static—just proclaimed "here." Christians want the gospel to advance—for it to also be proclaimed "there." So, Christian churches are always looking for ways to expand gospel ministry. That could be done by daughtering another congregation in the area. It can be done by supporting the synod generously, so that walking together WELS can send missionaries to the ends of the earth.*

Here is an example of what we were talking about before. People might point to passages which call for us to worship and ask, "Why are those less important than the Great Commission passages?" They aren't! But worship is done in service of the mission of the Church. Yes, we worship to give God the glory he deserves. But a confessional Lutheran understands that more important than the upward dimension of worship (i.e. we serve God with praise and offerings) is the downward dimension (i.e. God comes to serve us in Word and Sacrament). So, we worship because it serves the mission of the Church. Through the Means of Grace, disciples are made. Worship *serves* the mission.

This is not semantics, but a vital distinction. Say a Christian woman thinks that the mission of the Church is to sing hymns and listen to sermons. Now, imagine she is sitting with her next-door neighbor, consoling that neighbor whose husband was just diagnosed with cancer. There is a *mission* opportunity before that Christian woman that has nothing to do with singing hymns or listening to a sermon. One of the ways that Christian woman will carry out her God-given mission is by witnessing personally to her neighbor, explaining how Easter means we need not fear death. One of the ways that Christian woman will carry out her God-given mission is to invite that neighbor and her husband to come with that Christian woman to her church for worship. Why? Because being in worship could serve to make disciples of that neighbor and her husband. Worship *serves* the mission of the Church.

(NOTE: Worship is a unique activity in the Christian life. Some theologians have noted that worship is really the *purpose* of the Church. A *mission* tends to be a temporary activity. E.g. a military mission does not go on forever hopefully. Worship is not a temporary activity. There was worship in Eden and there will be worship after Judgment Day. Mankind's purpose is to ever and always "ascribe worth to" his loving Creator God. Evangelism and discipleship are more accurately described as *mission*, as they are something we can only do now, here on earth. After Judgment Day, there will be no more need for evangelism. Our faith will be made perfect, so we won't "grow" in discipleship the same way we do now.)

It depends on how one understands this question. Jesus said we are to "teach [people] to obey everything he has commanded." Catechism class, adult Bible information class, Sunday morning Bible study—these are all "Christian education."

However, when people hear "Christian education" they often think of a Lutheran elementary school. It is not optional for a Lutheran congregation to teach God's Word to children. However, God's Word does not place the responsibility of teaching reading, writing, math, or science upon congregations. Even the responsibility of making sure children view subjects from a Christian perspective (e.g. understanding the difference between Creation and evolution) is not placed upon the congregation, but upon Christian parents.

A Lutheran school can certainly *serve* the mission of the Church. However, it should not be confused with the mission of the church. If the amount of human and financial resources that go into the school are so great that the congregation does not have the manpower or money to do evangelism or to engage in other types of discipleship activities, the congregation is focusing on *tasks*, not *mission*. That is inappropriate. Christ's mission asks us to do both evangelism and nurture.

A congregation that is committed to the mission of the Church will look for ways to do *as much as possible* with the gospel... to serve *as many as possible* with the gospel.

You see a common theme developing with these questions! Mercy ministry can indeed build bridges into the community. It can create opportunities to talk with people. It certainly reflects the love of Christ. That compassion and kindness in itself can serve as a type of witness—not a witness that saves, but a witness that makes people curious why we would be so kind. We can witness about the one who has been infinitely kinder to us.

So mercy ministry can *serve* the mission of the Church, but it is not the mission of the Church.

For further study on this specific topic, see Pastor Thomas Nass's excellent paper, *The Church and Its Ministry*. You can find it here: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/NassChurch.pdf>

For resources to help your congregation establish appropriate compassion ministries, contact WELS Commission on Special Ministries.

## PART 3 - CHRIST'S MISSION CARRIED OUT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

### Acts 2:42-47

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- Where in those passages do you see explicit mention of the early church following the “how” part of the Great Commission passages?  
*They devoted themselves to the study of God's Word. It is something they did daily. "The breaking of bread" may be a reference to the Lord's Supper.*
- What were some of the results of the early church carrying out the Great Commission?  
*It knit the Christians together into a tight community, a family that took care of each other. It led to joy and gladness. The mission efforts were blessed by God with daily numeric growth.*
- Someone says, “Clearly, Acts 2:43 teaches us that doing signs and wonders is part of the mission of the true Church!” Respond.  
*Just like Jesus miracles served his mission, these confirmatory gifts of the early church served the mission for a time. But doing miracles was not the mission.*
- Living in a loving community was a fruit of the early church's focus on their mission. As believers grew in their knowledge of the apostles' teaching and the sacrifice Christ had made for them, it moved them to make radical sacrifices for others. Historians have noted that opponents of the early church attributed much of the church's growth to the profound love that Christians demonstrated for each other and even for strangers. Emperor Julian ruled from 361AD to 363AD. He was known as “Julian, the Apostate” for his opposition to Christianity. He once wrote, “Atheism [i.e. what he called the Christian faith!] has been specially advanced through the loving services rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew [i.e. a Christian convert] who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.” What, if anything, does this say about our effort to carry our Christ's mission?  
*People look not just at what a church says. They look at what a church does. They want to see that the gospel the congregation shares has a tangible effect already here on earth: greater joy, peace, love, and generosity.*

Immediately after his ascension, Jesus' followers begin to carry out the Great Commission. They proclaimed the Gospel to anyone who would listen. They nurtured their faith with regular contact with God's Word and apostolic teaching. They used the sacraments.

The part of the Great Commission that wasn't being carried out yet was the “where.” Up to this point, the mission is only being fulfilled in Jerusalem. But a persecution broke out, which God used to advance his mission.

PART 3

CHRIST'S MISSION CARRIED OUT IN THE EARLY CHURCH



In some Christian circles, there is the misconception that miracles are commonplace. A careful study of Scripture demonstrates that when you add up the years where God allowed his servants to perform miracles, you are looking at a century-and-a-half at most, a small portion of the earth's existence.

Moreover, you see that these miracles served as *confirmatory* gifts. "Signs and wonders" served to authenticate a "new" revelation, not yet well known among God's people.

We see miracles at the time of Moses, when God is now turning his focus to the chosen nation of Israel.

We see miracles at the time of Elijah and Elisha, when God is narrowing that focus to the remnant, the 7,000 who had not bowed down to Baal.

And we see miracles at the time of the apostles, when God now turns his focus back to the entire world, Jew and Gentile.

Other than that, we do not hear much about God's servants performing signs and wonders. (There are a few exceptions, such as Sampson. But he really didn't perform wonders; he *was* a wonder.)

Scripture says there will be no new revelations, no new mysteries expounded. Scripture is complete. Thus, the need for confirmatory gifts would seem to be past. God certainly continues to give spiritual gifts, all of which serve his mission. However, it would seem that God has decided confirmatory gifts are no longer necessary.

**Acts 8:1,4**

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

- The early church is scattered. What happens? What does this tell you about Jesus' mission for the Church?

*Christ's mission advances according to plan. The gospel is now proclaimed in areas outside of Jerusalem. This demonstrates that Christ's mission will be carried out, even when the Church faces opposition and oppression. We can trust that because Jesus promised it! Look at the "You will be..." parts of those Great Commission passages. When it seems like the Church is facing some huge obstacle or challenge, we have the comfort of knowing Jesus will work through those things to accomplish his mission.*

**2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5 is a beautiful summary of the respective missions of Christ and his church. What is Christ's mission?

*To reconcile the world by dying for all, taking our sin and giving us his righteousness, and thereby transforming us from people who live for ourselves to people who live only for him.*

- What is our mission?

*To tell others about the reconciliation between God and man that was accomplished in Christ's death.*

- Paul says, "[Christ] has committed us to the message of reconciliation." What does that word "committed" imply to you? In what ways are we "committed"?

*Commitment implies an idea of strong engagement or involvement. If you are committed, you are more than somewhat interested in the matter at hand. It occupies your mind and lays on your heart. We are committed to the mission of the Church because God "reconciled himself to us." So, we are profoundly grateful. We are committed because God honors us by giving us something important to do. An "ambassador" is a very important job. We are committed because Christ reconciled the world. Christ died for everyone. We therefore want everyone to come to faith and receive the benefits of his work.*

### “committed”

- ❖ We are committed to the mission of the Church because we were reconciled to God and are eternally grateful.
- ❖ We are committed to the mission of the Church because Christ honors us greatly by asking us to be his ambassadors.
- ❖ We are committed to the mission of the Church because Christ died to redeem all people, and so we want all to receive the benefits of his work.

This text lays out those three reasons we would be committed to the mission of the Church. The “commitment” is not presented in terms we often use the word in the world. A *commitment* is an *obligation*. While it is true that as creatures of the Creator, we are obligated to do what he asks, that is not what drives us. We don’t carry out the mission of the Church for the reason that a slave obeys his master, or the reason you church your speedometer when you see a police officer up ahead. We are not committed by fear or guilt. “Christ’s love compels us”!

## For further discussion

- a) Someone says, “There is no need for a congregation to have a mission statement. Scripture tells us what our mission is, so there is no need for us to restate it.” Do you agree or disagree? Give the reason for your answer.

*Answers will vary*

- b) How might a mission statement help with planning and decision making within a congregation?

*Answers will vary*

- c) List some things that would *have* to be part of a congregational mission statement for it to be of value.

*Answers will vary*

- d) List some things that you probably would *not* want to put in a congregational mission statement.

*Answers will vary*

Following this logic we could also say, "We need not have a Creed or confession of faith. We simply teach what the Bible teaches." Well, every church claims they teach what the Bible teaches. We know that is not true. So, we want congregations to confess what they believe about God's Word.

Likewise, every Christian church is going to say, "We carry out Christ's mission." Yet, we know that not all do. So, it is helpful for a church to define what they believe the mission of the Church to be.

There is also the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Loosely translated that means, "the law of praying is the law of believing." In other words, saying something repeatedly reinforces it in our mind and heart. A congregational mission statement, when held before the eyes of the congregation, can help them to focus on their reason for existence.

Ultimately, perhaps what is more beneficial than having a congregational mission statement is going through the process of producing one. Finally, we are all sinful human beings who dread picking up our crosses. There are certain aspects of the mission of the Church that are crosses for many Christians, making them uncomfortable (e.g. witnessing, visiting delinquents). The process of producing a mission statement allows us to focus on Christ's love for us anew. It lets us see that *he* had a mission, one that required him to carry the biggest cross of them all. Read the gospels. Jesus was not afraid to state his mission. He did so repeatedly. Seeing Christ serve us in the most difficult of ways empowers us to serve in Christ's church in every way, even those that make us uncomfortable.

It help us define sift through all the ideas about what the congregation can and should be doing, distinguishing between a *noble* task and a *necessary* one. They are lots of ideas that people have that are indeed noble. But if an idea would tax the congregation's resources—human resources, money, etc.—to the degree that the congregation could not carry out its mission statement as well as it did before, then though the idea is noble, it should be set aside.

A congregational mission statement would want to state in a clear way: 1) who is undertaking the mission, 2) what the mission is, 3) how that mission is carried out, and 4) who is served by the mission.

Here is just one example. "Peace Lutheran exists to serve all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

- *Who is undertaking the mission?* Peace Lutheran.
- *What is the mission?* To serve.
- *How is that mission carried out?* By proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The statement specifies that the good news about Christ is defined in Holy Scripture. The members of Peace don't get to make up what they believe the "good news" is. Their mission is to share the good news found in God's Word.
- *Who is served by the mission?* All people. Peace wants to serve anyone who will let them.

Thus, Peace's mission statement is actually a statement—not a catch phrase or motto. It has a subject, verb, and object.

A congregational mission statement would *not* want to get into strategy or methodology, delineating all the various ways it will use the Means of Grace. That can be done in other planning documents. A mission statement is just a concise summary of the reason for which the congregation exists.

