



Discussion

# PRODUCING A MISSION STATEMENT

## WHY BOTHER WITH A MISSION STATEMENT?

In the Great Commission passages, we have Jesus' "final instructions" given to his followers shortly before he ascended. They serve, in essence, as the Church's marching orders. Everything the Church does must have as its ultimate goal sharing the gospel with the lost (for the creation of faith) and with believers (for the sustenance and growth of faith). Those final instructions of Jesus are found in multiple places in Scripture.

So why bother writing a mission statement? Why not just point to the Bible and say, "We follow Christ's mission as laid out in the Bible"?

### **We have a mission statement to confess our active faith**

A congregation will have a mission statement for the same reason a church will have a confession of faith. Every church that calls itself Christian will claim, "We follow Christ's mission." Sadly, not all those churches actually carry out Christ's mission. Some push a social gospel rather than the saving gospel. Others are interested in building a business rather than Christ's Kingdom. It is possible for a congregation to say religious sounding things without believing all that the Bible teaches. Likewise, it is possible for a congregation to do religious looking things without carrying out Christ's mission.

Therefore, it is wise for us to go beyond saying, "We believe what the Bible teaches." We also confess what we believe the Bible teaches. Likewise, it is wise for us to go beyond saying, "We carry out Christ's mission." We confess what we believe that mission to be. They are related. A confession of faith will state the *content* of our faith, i.e. what we believe the Scripture says. A mission statement will state the *action* that true faith produces, i.e. what fruits the Holy Spirit produces in a congregation that has been touched by the gospel.

### **We have a mission statement to fight against our sinful nature**

Satan is crafty. He leads us to substitute a personal mission for Christ's mission. He gets us to confuse the two, thinking they are identical. So, at times, congregations will expend human and monetary resources on something that is cherished by members and yet does not serve either aspect of the Great Commission (nurture and outreach) well.

Moreover, mankind's sinful nature is entirely selfish. We care about our own needs more than the needs of others. In the congregation, this selfishness can manifest itself by creating abundant ministry to serve members while doing nothing in the way of evangelism. That inward focus is contrary to Jesus' instructions in the Great Commission, as well as to the entire spirit of the gospel.

A mission statement lays out an approach to ministry that will express the desire of the New Man—to zealously serve the faithful and to be just as zealous in reaching the lost.

# WHAT IS NEEDED IN A GOOD MISSION STATEMENT?

There are five key elements in good mission statement.

## 1. A good mission statement is Biblical.

This should go without saying. The Church's mission is the activity that God himself has entrusted to his people. A mission in the Biblical sense is *never* something that is self chosen. Since the way God speaks to us is through his Word, we could not possibly form a good mission statement unless it was drawn from the Bible.

## 2. A good mission statement is balanced.

A good mission statement will focus on both aspects of ministry Jesus mentioned in the Great Commission—"going" to the lost with the gospel (evangelism) and "teaching...everything" over a period of time (nurture). So, consider the following.

*Peace Lutheran Church's mission is to teach the Scripture so well that people hunger and thirst for righteousness.*

*Peace Lutheran Church's mission is to reach into our community to find the lost and show them their Savior.*

Both of those are Biblical. However, the first mission statement focuses only on teaching. There is a danger that this congregation will have people who know God's Word fairly well, but that blessing is enjoyed by a very few. A member of Peace might counter, "But as the people grow in their knowledge of God's Word, we hope people will then share their faith." The response would be, "Why do you 'hope' for that? Do you believe that is part of Christ's mission, that believers would share their faith? Then include that in your mission statement."

The second mission statement errs in the other direction. It stresses evangelism, but mentions nothing of nurturing believers in the faith. The danger in this congregation is that while they pull people into the church, those new members have faith like a tiny flame, easily snuffed about by the trouble of this world or temptations of the evil one. A member of Peace might argue, "But we believe that as people are pulled into the church and become regulars in worship and Bible class, their faith will grow." Indeed. And why do you want that to happen? If you want that to happen because you believe that is Christ's will for his Church, then why not include something about that in the mission statement?

## 3. A good mission statement is a brief.

The reason for this is simple. For a mission statement to have practical benefit, it needs to be memorable. Typically a mission statement should be fifty words or less. If it can be conveyed in one sentence, that is also ideal.

Remember, a mission statement *only* needs to lay out the congregation's reason for existence. It will include mention of the God-given tools needed to carry out the mission, but it does not need to explain what tasks and jobs will be used to carry out that mission. The mission statement gives *the functions* of the church, not *the forms* those functions take.

#### 4. A good mission statement is indeed a statement.

A statement is a formal declaration. As such, it does not use slang or jargon. Also, a statement typically contains three things:

1. A subject—someone who is doing the action
2. A verb—the action itself
3. An object—a direct or indirect recipient of the action

Those three things are arranged as a complete sentence. If one of those is omitted, you might have a slogan or catchphrase, but you do not have a mission statement.

Consider the following two examples.

*Peace Lutheran Church exists to serve all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.*

*Serving all people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ*

The first is a statement. It has a subject—Peace Lutheran Church. It has a verb—exists to serve.. with the Gospel. It has an object—all people, which would include both believers and the lost.

The second is more of a slogan. It would be something that could be put on the worship folder, in the newsletter, on a t-shirt, or even on a banner displayed prominently somewhere in the church. It recalls the congregation's mission in a concise way.

#### 5. A good mission statement is clear, especially to members.

If people aren't completely certain what your mission statement means, then it serves little value. Consider the following example.

*Peace Lutheran Church exists to proclaim God's Word to all in a way that is real and relevant and relational.*

In an effort to be catchy, the statement is not very clear. What is meant by proclaiming God's Word in a "real and relevant and relational" manner? Certainly, people need to see that God's Word is relevant to their lives. People need to understand that what is taught in Scripture is real, not myth or legend. Is that what is meant by "real and relevant"? Perhaps. The fact that it is not self-evident would suggest this mission statement is weak.

Clarity can be an issue even if your statement is entirely Biblical. For example, many congregational mission statements will talk about "making disciples," keying off the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 18. But ask yourself this. What is a disciple? Would everyone in your congregation define *disciple* the same? Is "disciple" synonymous with "Christian"? Does "disciple" stress knowledge, i.e. a disciple is someone growing in their knowledge of God's Word? Does "disciple" stress service, i.e. a disciple is someone who follows all that Jesus asks Christians to do? Does it stress both? How people understand that word will determine how they understand your mission statement.

It is probably impossible to have a mission statement that is entirely clear to those outside your congregation. For example, how many outsiders know what "gospel" means? But you want your mission statement to be something that is clear to your members.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

For confessional Lutheran congregations, mission statements will have much in common. The differences will come in how congregations answer the following questions. These questions deal with what we said were the three parts of a statement: subject, verb, and object.

### **Subject — How shall we identify ourselves?**

There are mission statements that simply name the congregation. E.g. “Peace Lutheran Church exists too..”

There are mission statements that go into more detail. WELS’ mission statement does this.

*As men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the gospel in Word and sacrament to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.*

The mission statement could have simply said, “The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists...” But it goes a step further, describing what WELS is—“men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God.” In other words, WELS members aren’t united by culture, geography, or race. What unites us is the Word of God, which gives us a like confession of faith, expressed among other ways by the fact we worship together.

When producing a mission statement, a congregation will need to consider how it wants to identify itself. Can it be kept brief, just stating the name of the congregation? Would it be helpful to go into more detail?

### **Verb — What is it that we are going to do?**

Here, there are three sub questions.

1. How are you going to describe the main function of the Church?
2. Are you going to list ways that function is carried out?
3. Will you list the tools God has given the Church to carry out its main function?

For an example, look again at WELS’ mission statement.

1. How does WELS describe the main function of the Church? “...to make disciples...”
2. What are the ways the WELS is going to carry out that function? It is going “...to win the lost... and to nurture believers”
3. What are the tools the WELS is going to rely on to accomplish this? “...the gospel in Word and sacrament...”

Here is another example of a mission statement we looked at earlier.

*Peace Lutheran Church exists to serve all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.*

So break that mission statement down.

1. How does Peace describe the main function of the Church? “...to serve all people...”
2. What are the ways that Peace is going to carry out that function? They have chosen to keep things very broad. Why might they have done that?

Perhaps Peace is a new mission church. Right now they want the members to focus on the fact that membership at Peace is about *servicing* more than being served.

Perhaps Peace is an old, established congregation. The members have fallen into the mindset that the church exists to make them happy. There is no thought of outsiders. So, the mission statement stresses a more humble, Christ-like attitude — that the mission of the Church calls for believers to serve.

The point is, Peace Lutheran will have a reason to describe their mission the way they do.

3. What are the tools Peace is going to rely on to accomplish this? They list a single tool, “*the gospel of Jesus Christ.*” They do not mention God’s Word and sacraments, because the gospel is the power behind both. They do, however, clarify that “*the gospel of Jesus Christ*” they are going to utilize in their service is the one “*revealed in the Holy Scriptures.*” Why? Perhaps Peace Lutheran is located in an area where they feel it would be beneficial to stress that the “real Jesus” is not something that is subjective, determined on what we want to be true. E.g. “*Jesus is love, and would therefore never send anyone to hell.*” The real Jesus is the one who reveals himself to us in Scripture.

As a congregation produces its mission statement, here is probably where most of the discussion will take place.

Do you want to describe both aspects of the Great Commission—reaching the lost and nurturing believers—like the WELS mission statement does? Do you want to combine both into one activity—serving people with the gospel—as Peace Lutheran’s mission statement does?

Does it serve you well enough simply to list “the Gospel” as the tool God has given you to carry out your mission? Do you live in an area where it might be beneficial to specify that the Gospel comes to us in the Word itself and also at times when the Word is connected to an earthly element (the sacraments)? What seems best to you? Why?

Do you want to stick closely with words from the Great Commission sections of the Bible, using phrases like “make disciples” or “be witnesses”? Are there other words or phrases that might be more clear to members or outsiders, e.g. “to establish,” “to help,” “to empower,” “to proclaim,” “to provide,” etc.?

## Object — Who are we trying to reach with our mission?

Again, there are many ways to approach this. In Matthew 28, Jesus tells the disciples they are to try and reach “all nations” with the gospel. His instructions to “make disciples” by “baptizing” and “teaching... to obey everything” demonstrated that the mission was not just to reach the lost, but also to build believers up in the Word.

In Acts 1, Jesus explains that “who” will be reached by the mission will be people located in growing concentric circles—starting in Jerusalem, then reaching into Judea and Samaria, and finally going throughout the world.

In the WELS’ mission statement, two specific groups of people are named. The WELS wants to reach both “the lost” and “believers” as part of their mission.

In Peace Lutheran’s mission statement, those two groups are lumped together. Peace is going to “serve all people with the gospel.”

There are even mission statements that break down those two groups—the lost and believers—into subgroups. Such a statement might read something like this.

*Peace Lutheran exists to serve all people with the gospel by sharing the message of salvation with the lost, by encouraging the unchurched and dischurched and straying to have regular contact with Word and sacrament, and by teaching and training believers to become more mature in their faith.*

This mission statement acknowledges that there might be individuals who are not “lost” in the sense that they are unbelievers. Rather, they are not in regular contact with the means of grace. That broadens Peace’s mission. In their outreach and evangelism efforts, they are not just trying to reach unbelievers. They are trying to uncover and pull in believers without a church home.

Congregations have to decide if they want to group who they are trying to serve together (e.g. “all people”) or categorize them into smaller sub-groups. They also need to decide if they want to put geographical limitations on their mission... to have “in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria” type statements.

Placing no geographical limitations in your mission statement might be helpful in promoting the efforts we carry out as a synod. For example, when Peace Lutheran says it exists to “serve all people with the gospel of Christ,” it could serve as an encouragement to support WELS mission efforts generously. For “all people” would include people in countries and on continents that the members of Peace Lutheran cannot reach by themselves. Supporting WELS mission efforts lets them fulfill their mission statement.

Placing geographical limitations in your mission statement might be helpful if it provides focus to a congregations vision of how it might serve God in the future. For example, say that Peace Lutheran has a vision of daughtering off multiple congregations that then work together in gospel ministry. Where can those daughters exist? If one of Peace’s families moves three states away, could they start a Peace daughter? Is there a practical way for those congregations to work together? Or would it be better for that family to work with WELS Board for Home Missions in starting a new congregation, entirely separate from Peace? Peace would want to think about that. They might decide to limit where their mission would be carried out. E.g. “*Peace Lutheran Church exists to serve all people in the tri-country area with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.*”

## IN CONCLUSION

It has been said that the process of developing a mission statement is just as important as the finished product. Working through a Bible study on mission... discussing the questions that must be answered to determine exactly what the mission statement would say... these are helpful in providing clarity to a congregation's thought process. It is typically recommended that a congregation go through this process every three to five years. Even if no changes are made to the current mission statement, just working through the process will be of spiritual and practical benefit.

Once written, a mission statement should be looked at regularly.

- It reaffirms in minds and hearts what God's will is for his Church in your context.
- It enables us to evaluate our congregational actions, activities, and organizations.
- It helps us as we plan for the future, making sure our ministry is balanced.



## For further discussion

- a) If our congregation has a mission statement, write it here.

How well does it meet the five criteria of a good mission statement?

1. Is it Biblical?
2. Is it balanced, allowing for an emphasis both on outreach and on nurture?
3. Is it brief (50 words or less)?
4. Is it an actual statement (as opposed to a slogan or catchphrase)?
5. Is it clear, at least to members?

- b) Go online and search “congregational mission statements.” Cut and paste them into a document so you can compare them. List your two favorites here, noting what you like about them.
- c) Take a shot at writing a congregational mission statement for your church. Explain to the group you presented the subject (who is carrying out the mission), the verb (what is being done), and the object (who you are trying to reach) as you did. When everyone has shared, have the group identify its top two.
- d) When your congregation settles on a written mission statement, what are some ways you could promote it among the members? What might be the benefits of doing so?