



Joining Jesus in His Mission

The church does not have a mission, the mission has a church.

I ruminated long and hard before I agreed with that assertion. Now not only do I concur, it is something I press with others. David Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission*, puts it this way: “There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.” In other words, it isn’t our job to figure out some new mission. Our responsibility is to give ourselves to the mission God is *already* on. God did not create the church and then ask it to figure out its mission by some strategic planning process starting with newsprint brainstorming and ending with tightly refined bullet points and acronyms. No, God’s heart determined the mission and then established the church as an instrument in its accomplishment.

In these first columns, and leading up to our 125th anniversary celebration next month, I am building a compact description of our identity, character, and mission. We have seen we are missional Pietists (identity), in it together (character). Now we add mission. We are missional Pietists in it together *to see more disciples, among more populations, in a more caring and just world*. Those three dimensions reflect the tangibility and breadth of the message and mission of Jesus. It is mission cubed. We have carried them in our heart for our 125 years, however imperfectly lived out.

This month we look at “more disciples.” Jesus came to welcome back those who have wandered far from God. He calls us to join in that mission. The intimidating word for it is *evangelism*. But evangelism is not some scary confrontational exercise, it is simply recognizing that in addition to the searching heart of God there is a longing heart within every person yearning to know that there is more to life than what is going on around them, that they are loved unconditionally by the very God of the universe.

Greg Hawkins in the book *Reveal* reminds us that evangelism is simply sharing with people the three things that God wants to say to everyone, “I know you. I love you. You were meant for this relationship.”

I know you—I am your *creator* who knit you together in your mother’s womb. I love you—I am your *redeemer* who welcomes you back

with wide open arms. You were meant for this relationship—I am your *sustainer* throughout all the days of your life, whatever befalls.

We only have to look at the founding of the Evangelical Covenant Church to understand the important place evangelism has had in shaping our missional priorities. Today we have eleven geographic regions within the United States and Canada, led by superintendents. Originally they were called evangelists and their primary role was to itinerate throughout a region proclaiming the hope of Christ and establishing new churches. It is a commitment that endures. Thousands of people every year respond to the hope of Christ through the faithful ministry of our congregations, camps, youth ministries, and partnerships around the world.

Indeed, I am one whose life was changed forever because Covenant people care about this. I first heard that the very God of the universe loves even me through a brand-new church the ECC started in my community when I was in high school. I vividly remember the night I committed my life to following Christ. Others have a different story, maybe having grown up in a Christian home where the influence of Christ was always present.

Milton Engebretson was president of the ECC when I entered ministry. He reminded us often that if evangelism is not the first priority it will quickly become no priority at all—the press of other things in the life of a church (and our own lives) will always fill up our energies to the neglect of reaching beyond ourselves.

Notice this first dimension is not “more conversions,” it is “more disciples.” We have always stood for the new and ever-deepening life in Christ, desiring that people both know God’s love and grow in God’s love. “More disciples” can only be realized through the seamless continuum of evangelism and Christian formation.

Next month we will continue with “among more populations in a more caring and just world.” Here is our challenge for now: help those who are far from God hear from God, “I know you, I love you, you were meant for this relationship.” ■

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