

Doing Mission and Evangelism Ecumenically (DRAFT)

We Christians believe that we are called to fulfill God's mission to the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*). It is a mission that is holistic—feeding, clothing, housing, healing, comforting, forgiving, reconciling—addressing the various needs of people of every time and place. Part of this mission includes evangelism (or evangelization). The concern of evangelism is to bring persons to a new life in Jesus Christ. Authentic life in Christ compels us to call people into communion with God, with one another, and with creation. We followers of Christ are to proclaim by word and example the Gospel—the Good News—of Christ and of God's reign, bearing witness to his saving death and resurrection for all.

Many of us have been inspired by the World Missionary Conference that met at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. Also informative and encouraging are the subsequent gatherings through the years that focus on doing mission and evangelism ecumenically. We Christians represent a wide range of traditions. Thus, we are blessed by a rich diversity of expressions and approaches. But we remain united in our determination to be faithful to the mission and message of Christ our Lord.

There are different theological and Christological insights within the Christian community. Although divided as churches, we affirm our unity in Christ. Christians affirm that the death and resurrection of Jesus demonstrate that God is with us in every circumstance of life and redeems us into everlasting life.

However, we confess that individual Christians and their churches have not always proclaimed the Gospel in appropriate ways. Deception and coercive methods have been used, and the distinction between the acceptance of Jesus and a particular culture or churchly tradition has not always been made clear by some missionaries. Moreover, proselytism has occurred by which Christians and their churches try to convert fellow Christians. This we reject, while advocating appropriate and sensitive ways of giving witness to our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Evangelism remains an essential part of God's mission, but it needs to proceed with all humility. As Lesslie Newbigin said, "What changes people's minds and converts their wills is always a mysterious work of the sovereign Holy Spirit." No single understanding is superior to or eclipses any other. Saint Paul demonstrated flexibility, fidelity, and inclusivity in his strategy of outreach when he said: "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). We affirm that Jesus Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and our hope that all may come to Him. Recalling his high priestly prayer, we continue to affirm the vital connection between our unity and our mission: "that they may all be one. . .so that the world may believe. . . ." (John 17:21).

submitted on March 26, 2010 by the Southern California Ecumenical Council Faith and Order Commission: Mr. Kyle Bennett, Rev. Albert Cohen, Mr. Michael Eckman, Mr. Ray Gallie, Rev. John Huber, Dr. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Rev. Ray Kibler III, Mr. Hayk Madoyan, Mr. Denis McGrath, Mr. Tom Reed, Fr. Reese Riley, Rev. Fernando Santillana, Fr. Alexei Smith, Dr. Don Thorsen, Dr. Eve Tibbs