

Better Together  
*The Future  
of Presbyterian Mission*

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## Foreword

Over the past half century, the cutting edge of U.S.-based mission has shifted from large institutionalized mission agencies (both denominational mission boards and parachurch ministries) to the local congregation:

- Missiologist Robert Priest estimates that 2 million U.S. Christians travel abroad each year on short-term mission trips.<sup>1</sup>
- Much of the prayer focused on God’s mission in the world is stimulated and directed when people come together in their local congregation to engage in mission.
- A large and growing portion of the mission-funding decisions made by U.S. Christians occurs in local congregations.

Yet congregational mission leaders—who are often making major decisions on mission funding, prayer, and the sending of short- and long-term mission workers—have not always had the opportunity to “look before they leap” into the remarkably complex Spirit movement they are joining.

*Better Together* is a book for congregational mission leaders—the Presbyterians who lead mission trips, teach about mission, invite mission speakers, organize mission conferences, and advocate at session meetings for the inclusion of “mission beyond the congregation” in the annual budget. Long-time mission coworker, professor, and missiologist Sherron George offers a highly useful tool to these key mission leaders: a book of profound insight into the biblical theology of how God works in mission—and how *God’s missionary plan can shape our own*. George’s conclusion—that God created us to be in mission *together*—cuts across the grain of our cultural tendency to engage in “Lone Ranger mission.” She proposes a “missionary dialogue” between evangelism and social justice that will enable congregations to increase the effectiveness—and faithfulness—of their mission efforts.

While, in the popular imagination, mission is often portrayed as “remote” and “exotic,” George’s book reframes God’s mission as the overarching, loving work of God in the world in a way that reconnects the global and the local into a more biblical “mission without borders”. This reconnection can revitalize a congregation’s mission efforts as they begin to “connect the dots” that link what they are learning through their partnership with a Guatemalan Presbyterian congregation with the growing presence of Guatemalan migrant workers in their presbytery.

The PCUSA has long been known as a church that does mission in partnership with Christian partners around the world. Unfortunately, as our denomination’s mission efforts have decentralized and thousands of local congregations, rather than the General Assembly Council, have become the primary mission decision-makers, we have not taken partnership with each other very seriously. “Why is it easier for us to work with our global partners than with each other in our own ecclesial body?” she asks.

*Better Together* breaks important new ground in its reflections on the challenge of U.S. Presbyterians working together in a more coordinated and effective mission partnership. At a time when Presbyterian World Mission is rapidly reshaping its role to create a place for congregational and other mission leaders to coordinate their efforts ([www.missioncrossroads.ning.com](http://www.missioncrossroads.ning.com)) and to provide tools for congregations to engage more effectively in God’s mission, George has brought together a profound and sensitive study of biblical mission principles with a lifetime of mission practice and has given us a beautiful gift: the opportunity to be more faithful and effective in God’s grace-filled mission.

Hunter Farrell

## Preface

*H*ave you ever assembled a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle? When I was a child in North Carolina, my family loved to do puzzles together especially around Christmas. My dad usually worked on the edges. Each of us would choose a certain part of the picture—blue sky, water, green grass, colorful flowers, or an interesting building—and find all the pieces to construct that part. However, we all relentlessly looked at the “big picture” on the box to see how each assembled group fit into the whole. Only with the big picture of the puzzle could we fit the parts together.

As I reflect on four decades as a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission coworker, I now see that my journey has consisted of little parts of a big picture. As time goes by, the picture I envision grows bigger and bigger.

During the 1970s I worked in fourteen rural congregations in western Brazil. I spent hours driving on dusty roads, enjoying warm Brazilian hospitality and embraces, hearing stories, and leading services in churches and homes. However, absorption in one cozy corner of the world can lead to isolation from the larger religious, political, and economic picture. Like my rural parishioners, I was oblivious to the situation in Brazil’s cities under the military government.

When I moved to Manaus, the picture suddenly became urban but included the vast Amazon Basin, with its magnificent jungle and rivers. I encouraged my students to see all of it as their mission field. However, the churches in Manaus are very isolated from the rest of Brazil.

In 1986 the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil invited me to teach in their seminary in Londrina, and I became a participant observer of my students and colleagues as they stood in solidarity with the least, analyzed church and society, created Brazilian liturgy, and challenged me as a missionary from what they considered to be an imperialistic country and a dominating culture. My picture was undergoing a radical transformation.

I attentively followed Brazil's evening news and soap operas, passionately discussed Brazilian political and economic issues, and began to view world and U.S. actions and to do theology from the perspective of the Southern hemisphere.

Then in 1995 I sensed God calling me to return to the United States and enter the strange new burnt-orange world of Texas and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary as Professor of Evangelism and Mission. In this new location, I found myself bonding with our Hispanic and international students and learning to look at the world's needs, the global churches' gifts, and our culture through their eyes. During my time in Austin, I also lectured in Senegal, China, Cuba, and Lithuania. I had become a bicultural member of the global faith community, and my picture could never again be limited to one country or continent.

In 2001 no one was surprised when I returned to live in Brazil as a PC(USA) mission coworker, with the jobs of theological education consultant and regional liaison for South America. As liaison I seek to help bridge the distance between the national offices in Louisville (Ky.) and PC(USA) congregations and mission personnel and partner churches on the field.

Now my picture includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, plus seminaries in Costa Rica and Cuba. Because of my growing passion and interest in the whole continent, I loved the movie *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004). It portrays the journey of two young Argentines, Che Guevara and Alberto Granado, who left Buenos Aires in 1952 on motorcycles, with Venezuela as their destination. What an amazing journey through the pampas, Andes, Pacific coast, desert, rivers, and jungle! On the road, they perceived the suffering of the people and acquired a new social awareness and perspective that transformed their lives and aspirations.

Though I don't ride a motorcycle, my world has expanded. In addition to the Presbyterian parts of the picture, I am getting to know the Roman Catholic Church, a Lutheran seminary, and Pentecostals at ecumenical gatherings. For instance, in Buenos Aires I met a dynamic Quechua woman in lovely typical dress who is the Minister of Justice in Bolivia. This is a major step in a country where indigenous peoples have been exploited and marginalized for five centuries; yet now it has an elected indigenous president.

I am a global Christian, living and focusing on the South American part of the picture, which includes a vibrant passion for Brazilian soccer. All of the Americas are on my screen. While deepening my roots in South America and becoming increasingly ecumenical, I have a special concern for the PC(USA)'s participation in the many pieces of God's local-global mission. I am proud to be a part of our denominational agency, Presbyterian World Mission.

Presbyterians *do* mission! It's in our blood. But we can and must do it better. What are our cutting edges? For most of our history we have entrusted the national church to do mission in our name. Now local churches are getting their hands dirty and rediscovering the joys and pains of working with and for others who hurt. One-quarter of Presbyterian congregations sent out at least one work team to help with disaster relief in the United States in the last two years. Many have international presbytery partnerships. But is it *either* denominational agencies *or* local congregations doing mission? Why can't local churches, presbyteries, the national mission agency, and other mission agencies work together for the greater good? Do we need to split ourselves into opposing interest groups? Why don't the streams majoring in evangelism, compassion, and prophetic justice dialogue with one another? Who is helped when we compete and tear one another down? How can we learn from one another, support one another, and be united in our mission efforts? Can we learn to focus on the big picture of God's mission rather than on the small parts? How can we fit the pieces of this mission puzzle together into a whole? What would it look like to value those who are working on other parts? Where can we find guidance in the quest for new patterns?

The Epistle to the Ephesians presents some possible insights and answers to these questions. This letter invites us to expand our vision and to unite many diverse parts in the big picture of God's mission. The churches who received this letter faced a situation that has many similarities to ours today. Probably it was written after 70 CE, when the Roman Empire destroyed the nation of Israel and the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Christians found themselves in a new world with new references and a plurality of cultures. The church was going through its first major paradigm shift. The majority were no longer Palestinian Jews but were now in a Greco-Roman world, and they were Gentile or non-Jewish. Christians were divided and struggling to understand their identity. Rigid institutional structures in society were influencing the nascent church. And people were caught up in speculations about angels and demons.

What shall the church do with all these changes and cultural diversity? How do Christians break down the walls and barriers of hostility between ethnic groups? What is the nature and mission of the church in a world where evil is a reality? These were the issues in the Letter to the Ephesians.

Our situation today is similar. The global church is going through another major demographic shift. The majority church is now non-Western and no longer centered in the North Atlantic. The demographic center of the church is in the Southern hemisphere and is increasingly multicultural. Many ethnic, religious, and theological conflicts and tensions divide us in the world and in the church.

The first three chapters of the book will deal with our mission problems, practices, and contexts. Each chapter will begin with a case study. The book will ask some key questions that we all have about how the PC(USA) is doing mission in the world today. These questions will engage and compel us. The book might be called a missiology of questions. What is mission today? Who is engaged in mission? How are all the players connected? How do we maintain our integrity and work together rather than give in to competition? How do we relate local and global mission work in our globalized world? How do we integrate evangelism, compassion, and justice? Answering these questions will take years of study, reflection, experience, and dialogue together. We must be open to listen to one another. Together we can identify our cutting edges. In fact, by posing the questions, I think that we already are beginning to deal with some cutting edges.

After exploring these thorny issues related to our mission practice, we will turn to a more intentional biblical reflection in chapter 4. Some lessons from Ephesians will shed light on possible solutions and ways of doing mission better while doing it together as the body of Christ. There are many ways for each of us to be faithful in the parts of God's plan entrusted to us.

The outline for this book developed in a conversation with Hunter Farrell, the Director of Presbyterian World Mission, during the PC(USA) mission consultation in Dallas in January 2008. The final document of that consultation, "An Invitation to Expanding Partnership in God's Mission" (Appendix B), and the resulting movement confirm the need for this book. Following the consultation, I lectured on holistic mission at Shandon Presbyterian Church in Columbia (S.C.) and shared the book project with their mission pastor, Steve Earl, who has encouraged me in the project. Some months later Hunter invited several staff members of World Mission to present the proposal to David Maxwell, Executive Editor of Geneva Press. David offered valuable insights, the group brainstormed, and we came up with the idea of inviting some readers to accompany me and offer comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Hunter and to David for their support of this project. I also want to thank publicly my readers Michael Parker and Marian McClure Taylor, who carefully read the entire manuscript, engaged in missiological reflection with me, and offered extremely helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Art Beals and Tim Dobbins for their thoughtful comments and to my immediate supervisor Maria Arroyo for generously allowing me to dedicate much time to writing.

*Better Together: The Future of Presbyterian Mission* can be a valuable tool for mission education and mobilization by helping us recognize and embrace the movement of God's Spirit in the world. The book honors the integrity of the gospel, of God's mission, and of the body of Christ. My fervent prayer is

that renewal and mission convergence will come as we discover new connections and fullness in God's mission, which includes many parts, participants, and places. I pray that we will be empowered to celebrate the breadth of what each of us does in the service of Christ's name. Let us give thanks for the connectedness of the vital structures that make up the whole body of Christ and make a profound commitment to togetherness in one mission. I wish you God's grace and courage as you enlarge your vision and participation in the big picture of mission that is always better together.

Sherron Kay George  
Curitiba, PR, Brazil  
Pentecost 2009

## What Is Mission Today?

### Many Parts, One Mission: Integrating Evangelism, Compassion, and Justice

The new pastor was encouraged by all of the activities of the urban 300-member congregation but sensed a certain fragmentation and isolation, maybe even rivalry among the many groups and committees. She decided to plan a retreat for the members to reflect and play together and was pleased at the number of folks who signed up to attend.

After a good time of worship and fellowship together, she gathered everyone for an open conversation in the morning session. The topic she chose was “mission.” She decided that it was best to see where the members were in their conceptions and practices, so she simply began with the question “What is mission today for you?” The first person to speak was the chair of the Mission Committee. “It is what the five mission workers we support in other countries do. We pledge to support them financially and pray for their mission work.” A young person responded, “The youth group goes on a mission trip to Mexico one year and another trip to help rebuild damaged houses in the U.S.A. the next year.” Giggling, the girl next to him replied, “I remember last year when one young Mexican asked us how youth do evangelism in the United States, and I responded in shock that we don’t.”

An outspoken member continued, “That is the problem with our church. We don’t know how to do evangelism anymore. It is the dirty e-word. So we don’t grow. Evangelism is the most important part of mission. We must fulfill the Great Commission.” Quickly a member of the Outreach Committee remarked, “Yes, we do, but we don’t call it evangelism. We receive new members.” Someone asked, “Is being a greeter on Sunday morning doing mission?” A new Peruvian member shyly added, “When I first arrived, I saw someone from this congregation deliver a loaf of bread to a doctor in my neighborhood who had visited worship, but I never received one.” Another person reflected, “I think receiving leaders from our partner churches to share their witness and to teach us is what some people call

mission-in-reverse.” Then someone shouted, “Social justice is the essence of mission. Look at the prophets and Jesus’ declaration in Luke 4 about liberating the oppressed.” He then shared that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship trains and sends volunteers to Colombia in a ministry of accompaniment, being with our partners who suffer in their struggle for human rights. Immediately another person said, “I have never heard of Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, but Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship supports groups in Central Asia who are planting new Christian communities.” Someone added, “Matthew 25 says we should feed the hungry and clothe the needy, and we do that together with other religious groups.” People then started mentioning local soup kitchens, Habitat for Humanity, disaster assistance, and other ministries of compassion.

At the end it was clear that everyone had a definition of mission and an emphatic preference for what they felt was important. However, many folks had no real understanding of or appreciation for the opinions and practices of others. The pastor closed by reading Ephesians 4:1–6 and asking, “Is the church an organization of individuals and special-interest groups who do mission their own way and ignore or judge those who do it other ways? Or could we all be members of one team who encourage, affirm, support, and need one another as we engage in the many parts of God’s one mission together? Might there be a way for us to renew our organizational structures and deepen our dialogue to promote more interaction and unity in mission?”

“Let’s start our session tomorrow morning with those questions. This afternoon our Brazilian fellowship will be coaching us in our soccer match to pass the ball as in a coordinated ballet. There will be other group and individual sports activities. Also several big jigsaw puzzles have been started in the dining room. Let’s have fun together.”



How many definitions do Presbyterians have for mission? How do folks who engage in mission in very different ways relate to each other in and beyond the PC(USA) and in the world? Could we do mission better together? Can we learn to work cooperatively and even become partners in mission?

### What Is Holistic Mission?

When I was growing up, I savored lots of fresh tomato sandwiches—on white bread, of course. Peanut butter and grape jelly sandwiches too—on white bread. It was only later that I discovered the nutritional value of whole-

grain bread and cereals. My niece recently told me that she was twelve years old before she ever had white bread! Now I know all about complex carbs and mostly eat whole-grain breads, rice, and cereals. And I know that a complete diet combines carbohydrates, proteins, and fruits and vegetables of all colors.

Diet and physical activities go together. In exercises, I have traveled a similar path. First, I included only walking or swimming: cardiovascular training. Then I discovered water aerobics with lots of fun accessories. My trainer convinced me that I also need weight training. And stretching certainly comes before and after all of the above. I try to complete my program by using a Pilates or yoga tape at least once a week. I have an exercise tape called "Total Body Workout." Once I took a class on holistic gymnastics. My goal now is to have a balanced diet and a complete exercise program.

From the Hebrew Scriptures and especially from non-Western cultures, I have gleaned how to think about life holistically, not to separate body and soul, physical and spiritual. Reformed Christians from Africa have taught me about the importance of holistic or balanced living, in which nothing in life is underutilized and nothing is neglected. Fullness of life is important not only with food and exercise, but also in mission. Holism challenges the general imbalance in our lives and in our mission. My personal journey toward integration in God's holistic mission has been a process of learning from Latin Americans and others that the realm of God's kingdom covers every area of life. I came out of a very evangelical background that emphasized evangelism, one's vertical personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, and the spiritual aspects of mission. The first time I heard the term "holistic" in reference to mission as a "unitary, indivisible whole" was from Orlando Costas in Montreat, North Carolina. He said: "The true test of mission is not whether we proclaim, make disciples, or engage in social, economic, and political liberation, but whether we are capable of integrating all three in a comprehensive, dynamic, and *consistent* witness. We need to pray that the Lord will . . . liberate us *for* wholeness and integrity in mission."<sup>1</sup> Little did I realize that thirty years later I would still be thinking and writing about the ideas he planted in my mind.

While teaching at the seminary in Londrina, Brazil, in the late 1980s, I started learning about liberation theology. It was born in Latin America as a missionary theology that took seriously the socioeconomic context of poverty and injustice and insisted that evangelization could not occur in a vacuum. These theologians used political language to express the two complementary dimensions of mission: personal and social transformation. I was converted to the equal importance of this second dimension.

The person who epitomizes holistic mission for me is C. René Padilla. I remember when I went to the lovely Kairos Community outside Buenos Aires

to meet him and spend an afternoon talking about mission. Padilla insists that the fullness of mission includes evangelism and discipleship, partnership and unity, development and justice. It is “centered in a prophetic lifestyle” and points to “Jesus Christ as the Lord over the totality of life, to the universality of the church, and to the interdependence of human beings in the world.”<sup>2</sup> What most amazes me is the deep passion he has both for evangelism and for social justice. Frequently people in churches in the United States choose to emphasize one or the other. For Padilla, they are distinct, like two wings of a bird, but integrally connected. Our cutting edge is experiencing the connection, the interaction, the convergence, the wholeness, the fullness of mission.

In Buenos Aires I also encountered José Míguez Bonino. For him, mission begins with the Trinitarian dialogue between Father, Son, and Spirit, and we are included in God’s “missionary dialogue.” He encourages us to emphasize both the unity of God’s one mission and the distinctions of its dimensions. Consider all the ways we participate in the liberating and evangelizing task. For example, look at the case study at the beginning of this chapter. Notice the particularity of each task mentioned and the attitude of the speaker. Their kind of mission seems to be the best. Bonino helped me see that often we have “failed to participate in the fullness” of God’s mission. A better understanding of each part in the context of the “total ‘mission’ of God can guide us to correct our mistakes.”<sup>3</sup> We have an opportunity today to reintegrate the many pieces.

When I taught at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, I used South African David J. Bosch’s *Transforming Mission*, which speaks of a “comprehensive,” “integral,” or “total” view of salvation. Bosch admonishes us to “minister to people in their *total* need” and “involve individual as well as society, soul *and* body, present *and* future in our ministry of salvation.”<sup>4</sup> For him, like whole multigrain bread, “Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more.”<sup>5</sup> By connecting our dots in mission, we can eat healthy whole-grain mission.

My Roman Catholic colleagues Steve Bevans and Roger Schroeder propose “prophetic dialogue” as a model for this “single but complex reality.” I suggest “evangelistic and prophetic dialogue.” Recognizing the multidimensional nature of mission, they suggest six key components: (1) witness and proclamation; (2) liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; (3) justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; (4) interreligious dialogue; (5) inculturation;<sup>6</sup> and (6) reconciliation. The six elements are “all distinct from one another and yet intricately intertwined as well” because “there is *one* mission: the mission of God that is shared, by God’s grace, by the church.”<sup>7</sup>

A recent important book is *Mission in the Twenty-first Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Missions*, edited by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, with essays from voices in the majority world that “urge us, disturb us, encourage us, and challenge us.” The Five Marks “are neither a perfect nor a complete definition of mission, [but] they do form a good working basis for a holistic approach to mission.” The Five Marks call for Christians

1. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom.
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows I combine the first two marks into one part: evangelism and discipleship. I then treat the third mark under compassionate service. I combine the fourth and fifth marks because I see the ecological crisis as a social justice issue.

### Three Essential and Related Parts of God’s One Holistic Mission

Do you and people in your congregation or mission group truly believe that there is one mission—God’s holistic mission? When you are engaged in some particular aspect of mission, are you aware of the fact that you are part of a much bigger picture? Jesus demonstrated this awareness when talking about God’s reign. He defined his mission in Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord . . . has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Jesus’ mission included proclamation of the good news (evangelism), compassion, and justice. Do you affirm all three of these essential distinct inter-related parts of mission that are practiced in accord with different gifts and situations?

My cutting-edge proposal in this book is that a “missionary dialogue” between people involved in ministries of evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice that mutually feeds, complements, and corrects one another should guide the PC(USA). Unity and a common witness will bring renewal to all. However, to embrace the fullness of God’s holistic mission, we must understand and honor each distinct part (see fig. 1.1).<sup>9</sup>

**FINAL GOAL OF ALL MISSION IS GOD'S GLORY AND REALM OF LOVE, PEACE, AND JUSTICE  
GOD'S MISSION OF RESTORATION, SALVATION, LIBERATION, AND RECONCILIATION**

*is the foundation and source of the mission of the church.  
MISSION, therefore,*

*is the identity, reason, and purpose of the church;  
is the responsibility of every baptized Christian;*

*is done in partnership with God for God's glory in 6 continents by the church in 6 continents;  
is local-global and holistic (integral), without compartmentalization, polarization, or dichotomy.*

*Therefore, God's mission sends the church into the world with at least three roles and always includes and mixes three aspects:*

**EVANGELISM**

**(Church as messenger)**

with bold humility and respect by lifestyle, words, attitudes, and actions:

- Verbal Proclamation of "Good News"
- Faithful Witness and Dialogue
- Faith Commitment and Sharing
- Inviting/Calling
- Hospitality—Welcoming/Receiving
- Initiation/Belonging/Baptismal Calling
- Assimilating New Members and Gifts
- New Church Development

Intention: "Life in all its fullness"  
Conversion/Discipleship/Growth

Confessing Jesus as Lord  
Building Up the Body of Believers  
Developing Disciples, the Church

**COMPASSIONATE SERVICE**

**(Church as servant/*diakonia*)**

with mercy by actions, attitudes, dialogue, lifestyle, and sometimes words that explain why

- Emergency Crisis Assistance
- Care for Displaced Persons
- Human Needs: Dignity, Food, Shelter, Health, Education, Living Wage
- Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation
- Formation of Coalitions and Alliances

Intention: Meeting human needs  
Capacity-building/Empowerment  
Healing and Building Sustainable Communities

Showing what God's reign means for the whole world

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**(Church as prophet)**

by political actions, attitudes, dialogue, lifestyle, and sometimes words that explain why

- Reconciliation and Peace Building
- Human Rights
- Advocacy
- Solidarity with the Poor
- End to Violence, Terrorism, and War
- Economic Justice
- Just Distribution of Power and Systems
- Ecological Justice
- Public Policy
- Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation

Intention: Social Transformation

Showing what God's reign means for the whole world

**Fig. 1.1.** God's Holistic Mission

## Evangelism Is One Part

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Order* tells us that the church is a messenger “called to be Christ’s faithful evangelist going into the world [and across the street], making disciples.”<sup>10</sup> We must do this with bold humility and respect for the freedom and beliefs of those who hear our message. Our lifestyle, attitudes, and actions must be consistent with the gospel and prepare the way for our words. Evangelism is most often the verbal proclamation, communication, or sharing in word and deed of the good news of the love and saving grace of God. Jesus’ ministry clearly demonstrates that evangelization includes a gracious invitation (without pressure, imposition, or manipulation) and a call to decision and discipleship. Again, the *Book of Order* says, “The Church is called to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of him as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.”<sup>11</sup>

Through faithful witness and discerning dialogue, every baptized Christian and every local congregation has the responsibility of sharing our faith commitment with others. Some people are more gifted for verbal proclamation than others. We learn in 1 Corinthians 12 that we have different gifts, which come from the one Spirit. Wholeness is the complementary nature of those gifts within the church. In addition to a verbal proclamation, the evangelistic ministry of the church includes the practices of hospitality, inviting, welcoming, and receiving new persons into the faith community. We follow the example of Philip, who invited the cynical Nathanael, “Come and see” (John 1:46). Important questions to ask ourselves are these: Do new people “feel” welcomed in our midst? Are we a welcoming congregation?

In holistic evangelism, followers of Jesus Christ are assimilated and initiated into a community where they experience a sense of belonging, a baptismal calling to mission, and nurturing with the recognition and development of their gifts. When we understand evangelism from the perspective of God’s holistic mission, we earnestly desire “life in all its fullness” for all (John 10:10 NLT). Evangelism results in personal transformation or conversion, an intimate personal faith experience, discipleship, and a lifelong process of growth and service in a local faith community, which is part of the church universal.

Evangelism leads both to new church development and to church growth and maturity. The church today is worldwide, present in virtually every country in the world. But the evangelistic task is not complete. The church in every place has the primary responsibility for evangelism in that place. Where are the frontiers today? Wherever people have not heard or understood the gospel of Jesus as good news that gives meaning to their lives and brings healing to their brokenness. Wherever there is no indigenous church,

the message must be communicated with authenticity and relevance. In the Western context this often means reaching out to postmodern and secular people, who may be resistant to the institutional church yet seeking a spiritual experience. Jesus is building his church (Matt. 16:18), which is a living organism with institutional structures in need of continual reform to better equip it for transforming mission.

However, we must always remember that the church is only an instrument, witness, and sign of God's mission and reign. The goal of God's mission is captured in the words of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). Mission is for the glory of God and the establishment of God's reign on earth. By bearing faithful witness to Christ, the church glorifies God. The church, however, is not the end that we seek. Nor is proselytism the end. Mission activity and church growth are not the ends. A closed inward-focused group for fellowship is not the end. The church is composed of those whom God calls and gathers for worship, nurture, preparation, and fellowship in order to be scattered and sent back into the world to evangelize and engage in compassionate service and social justice. The church exists for mission to the glory of God.

### Compassionate Service Is One Part

In addition to proclaiming the good news, Jesus engaged in mission by feeding the hungry and by "curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:35–36). He practiced ministries of healing, wholeness, and compassionate service, ministering to the total needs of the whole person, and said that when we feed the hungry, welcome strangers, offer clothing, care for the sick, and visit prisoners, we do it to Jesus himself (Matt. 25:35–36).

The church is not only a messenger; it must also be a servant active in the ministry of *diakonia* (serving others in need). In a world of brokenness and suffering, the church reaches out with mercy and compassion, responding to the needs around us in concrete actions accompanied by coherent attitudes and lifestyles and sometimes by words that explain why we take these actions.

Because of our common humanity with all of God's creatures, we must reach out in compassion wherever there is human need for welcome, dignity, self-respect, food, clothing, shelter, safety, health, education, or a living wage. Mission begins at home in our own land, where people suffer from domestic violence, sexual abuse, abandonment, loneliness, depression, and chemical dependencies. A vital part of the church's mission is emergency

crisis assistance near and far away. We must be sensitive and open to the needs and calamities of the multitudes of displaced persons, survivors, refugees, and immigrants in our nation and world. We cannot ignore the global food crisis and the AIDS crisis in Africa, as well as the conditions that cause deaths from malaria and tuberculosis.

There are denominational and ecumenical agencies that help coordinate and channel our aid in these ministries. To minister effectively to the many human needs around us, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation are necessary. This leads to the formation of coalitions, networks, and alliances with religious people and others of good will in governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

Through compassionate service we commit to meeting human need, capacity building, personal empowerment of individuals and groups, protection, and building sustainable communities. Our desire is for the healing and wholeness of all God's creatures and the well-being of all creation. As Donal Dorr explains, the ministries of "people involved in the provision of health services, education, social services, community development, ecology work, empowerment of women and of the poor or marginalized groups, and those involved in education for human rights, democracy and civic responsibility" are concerned primarily with promoting the values of God's reign, which brings fullness of life. Their work complements those whose primary concern is building up the church.<sup>12</sup> In turn, the church is built up in order to go out and serve the world in the name of Christ.

### Social Justice Is One Part

Contemplate reflectively the words of Stephen Knisely, a Christian theologian: "As we engage in compassionate service, it becomes apparent that the basic problem of human suffering may not lie in the individual but in the structures of society. . . . Justice is the Christian's response to the systemic problem of society."<sup>13</sup>

Many Presbyterian congregations in the United States do a notable local or global mission work as social service or assistance. However, they have not yet addressed the root causes and sought cures through political action for social justice. The church is not only a messenger and a servant; it is also called to be a prophet, "engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice."<sup>14</sup> We have read about the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures and the biblical concept of Jubilee (Lev. 25:23–34). Surely we have seen the commitment of Jesus to social and economic justice and

the total liberation of those suffering from economic, political, and spiritual oppression, especially in Luke's Gospel. We see Zacchaeus in Luke 19, part of the empire's system of unjust tax collectors, and his act of restorative justice toward all he has defrauded when he has a personal encounter with Jesus.

The civil rights and anticolonialist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the liberation theologies in the 1970s, and more recently the antiapartheid movement and the antiglobalization movements have helped us recognize political action as a part of God's holistic mission. Today alternative proposals for a fair globalization seek the just distribution of opportunities and power and the reformation of economic structures and systems for the sake of all participants. Around the world are movements against toxic wastes, which affect many vulnerable groups. It is easy to affirm justice, but prophetic dialogue must lead to political action for structural change and social transformation that begins in our own land and extends around the planet.

As in the ministries of evangelism and compassionate service, there are many practices included in mission as social justice. Mission not only reduces welfare rolls but also reforms welfare and health-care systems and enables the self-development and empowerment of the poor. It leads Christians to deal honestly with all forms of institutional racism and discrimination. Participation in God's holistic mission leads us to seek an end to all forms of violence (e.g., domestic violence, terrorism, and wars) through multilateral dialogues and joint efforts. In response to the pleas of those who hear our groaning creation, which suffers from global warming and pollution, we join in God's mission, which promotes the integrity of creation and ecological justice. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) surveyed evangelical leaders, and "creation care" was one of the top five issues of concern.<sup>15</sup> The present economic crisis can teach us in the United States the importance of simpler lifestyles, which challenge the greed, waste, and unrestrained consumerism that characterize our culture. Mission means reeducation and change in our food and energy consumption. The global food crisis and demands for alternative sources of energy require a response that begins with our habits, but also recognizes the root causes and seeks food security for all.

Reconciliation and peace building are among the most important needs in the world. This is urgent in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Israel/Palestine/West Bank. The Presbyterian Church of Egypt has a strategic role in building peace both in Africa and in the Middle East today, as it has historically. The Presbyterian Church in Colombia helps us understand the cost and importance of mission as defending human rights and as advocacy. These are major objectives of the PC(USA) congregations that network with Presbyterians in Israel/Palestine and Colombia.

The Colombia Accompaniment Program, now in its fifth year, arose from a request by the Presbyterian Church of Colombia. Their country has suffered four decades of violent internal conflict, which has been exacerbated over time by an illicit drug trade. In the midst of this violence, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia speaks out against human rights abuses—and for this it faces continued harassment. The program is a ministry of presence with the churches and with the displaced communities and human rights leaders with whom they work. Accompaniers stand in solidarity and spiritual support with the churches and the displaced communities, while providing “international eyes” to what is going on and any threats received by the church or those it serves. Many accompaniers come away with an invigorated sense of what it means to be church. The primary goal is to be a presence of solidarity, to see and be seen, with the benefit of increasing awareness for accompaniers and, through them, our U.S. churches and the broader society. Witness for Peace delegations also provide opportunities to visit and learn about Colombia. One delegation took participants into Colombia’s rain forest to meet with peace communities whose traditional small-scale farming is being threatened by agribusiness.

We partner with others as advocates for changes that address the root causes of needs. Reverend Dora Arce, from the Presbyterian and Reformed Church in Cuba, suggests that a vital missional activity of Presbyterians in the United States on behalf of our partner churches is advocacy in the halls of our U.S. government in favor of changes in public policy. The PC(USA) Cuba network has pressured U.S. authorities to end the trade embargo and to pass a Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act that includes all Americans. For the majority church in the Global South, solidarity with the poor is spontaneous. To be Christian companions by standing in solidarity with others for structural and personal justice and change is a cutting-edge issue for us in the North. In our efforts to show what God’s reign of peace and justice means for the whole world, we often find support from unlikely people and groups.

If the intention of evangelism is personal transformation, the intention of justice is social transformation. All realms of life are transformed by God. The gospel addresses the totality of life. This is why mission includes evangelism, compassion, and justice. Sadly, we all too often struggle to fully understand, affirm, appreciate, and support people who engage in one of these essential parts that is different from the one to which we are committed. Our typical attitude to other parts of God’s mission is indifference. We compartmentalize too much. Why can’t we see the interconnections between the pieces of the puzzle? Can we become partners with folks very different from us? Is mission convergence possible?

## Integration and Convergence in God's Holistic Mission

One problem we have is that we don't really know one another. I heard a woman involved in social justice say, "I have only met around five evangelicals in my life." For this reason, Presbyterians often fail to see the wholeness of God's mission. My sense is that convergence can be very liberating and empowering for all of us. For this reason I encourage an ongoing missionary dialogue between those who practice evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice. This dialogue will take courage and a willingness to get to know people with whom we may disagree, but this is necessary if we are to overcome our polarizations.

To facilitate this missionary dialogue, the words of John Stott are helpful: "As partners [social action and evangelism] belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love."<sup>16</sup> René Padilla states that "evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable" and that as long as both "are regarded as essential to mission, we need no rule of thumb to tell us which comes first and when."<sup>17</sup> I invite you to become dialogue partners with others in mission. Begin by focusing together on the fullness of God's one mission.

Mission is the totality of God's work in the whole creation, at the service of the fullness of God's realm. Salvation addresses the whole person and seeks fullness for all areas of human life: spiritual, existential, psychological, physical, material, social, economic, and political. We cannot ignore the personal, social, or cosmic and ecological dimensions or the historical context of mission. By our one baptism all Christians are called to a common witness to the realm of God. All forms of witness are equal. All mission activities are indispensable parts of the whole. However, all are partial and incomplete. When we engage in a missionary dialogue, integrate our efforts, and partner with others, our participation in God's mission and the manifestation of God's realm both become fuller and more complete. Persons, churches, and mission organizations engaging in this dialogue can overcome reductionisms, divisive priorities, dichotomies, fragmentation, and competition in mission.

The rich diversity of gifts in the body of Christ and the challenging complexity of situations and needs in the world lead baptized Christians, congregations, and mission agencies to engage in the overlapping ministries of evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice at different places and moments in times. These aspects of holistic mission are not competitive or mutually exclusive. We need all three. Each must honor and be accompanied

by the others. Practitioners, Vera White says, must “walk hand in hand, complementing and reinforcing each other.”<sup>18</sup> We need each other. Christians who constantly practice personal evangelism and those who habitually send letters to their representatives in Congress in advocacy of human rights need each other. Our missionary dialogue can lead to mutual support and mutual correction, as we celebrate our different ministries.

One of the most vivid examples of the delightful harmony of missionary dialogue is the imaginative portrayal of the Trinity in *The Shack*, by William P. Young. The joyful and loving relationship of the large black woman called Elousia or Papa, the Hebrew carpenter Jesus, and the small ever-present Asian woman called Sarayu are especially evident in their meals together. Relationships of love and respect among them and with human beings and creation are the basis of everything. The division of labor of the three persons of the Trinity as they carry out the mission of restoration, reconciliation, and healing in the life of Mackenzie demonstrates the unity in diversity of God’s mission action.<sup>19</sup>

In an increasingly divided and polarized church, we must open ourselves to find points of convergence that bring us closer to persons, congregations, mission groups, and denominational agencies understanding and practicing mission in ways different from ours. Let me share five reasons for integration.

1. *Evangelism is a meaningful part of God’s mission in and of itself, but it can be reduced to “pie in the sky by and by” when not accompanied by a concern for human suffering.* If a church is only interested in growing numerically or attracting new members, it can become an ingrown social club alienated from the homeless people on the streets and the poor in its city, folks without adequate jobs or housing. People all around us and around the world are suffering. We simply cannot ignore the material and social needs of people. We can only evangelize those who are hungry or in deep pain by first offering medical care and proper nourishment and hygienic living conditions. Yes, evangelism is essential, but we cannot do it like a horse with blinders.

The sermon I heard Orlando Costas, the Puerto Rican pastor, preach nearly thirty years ago was entitled “Eternal Life before Death.” He encouraged us to begin living the life that Jesus offers now while we are alive. It was not many years before he succumbed to cancer at the age of forty-five. He insisted that the language we use in sharing the good news cannot only be “spiritual” and in reference solely to “heaven.” Salvation is not just an idea, but especially a living experience of faith. It is not simply a future promise, but especially a present dynamic reality, Costas taught us, as he combated a terrible disease.

Orlando Costas died prematurely, but not before he began to live eternal life on earth. His former students at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in Costa

Rica said that he was creative in the classroom and powerful in the pulpit, but that he also participated with them in sports, games, serenades, excursions, and telling jokes. He taught them and us that the good news must be relevant in our day-to-day lives and in our concrete historical context, with all its problems and suffering. Costas challenges us to keep the two-thirds of humankind who are deprived of the essentials of life always before us. We cannot be oblivious to the pain in the world and in the lives of those we want to evangelize.

2. *Compassionate service is a meaningful part of God's mission in and of itself, but it can be reduced to temporary Band-Aids when not accompanied by social transformation.* We must refrain from “charity” that might harm people by causing dependency. I think of the woman I see Sunday after Sunday, sitting on the church’s steps and nursing her child, who now is old enough to extend his hand. The coins given cause the little one to grow up with no human dignity or self-respect. We are truly compassionate when we look beyond the immediate needs or requests of individuals and impact the structures of society that can provide long-term solutions. People need housing, jobs, education, and professional help. Many youth participate in house-building projects. Artisans need opportunities to sell their goods directly. A PC(USA) mission worker empowers Peruvian artisans in a fair-trade program. Small businesses need start-up loans. Summer mission trips to join the struggle of migrant farm workers near to home can open our eyes to their situation and long-term needs.

In the human response to complex emergencies, those who engage in compassionate service through relief and development often take additional steps toward addressing root causes and accompanying people who seek just and sustainable community development and transformation. Have there been structural changes in New Orleans to empower the survivors and prevent another Katrina? Are mission groups taking practical steps to provide adequate sanitation systems and safe drinking water for people suffering from preventable diseases in the Southern hemisphere?

Roberto Zwetsch, my friend and colleague in the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), published a book entitled *Missão como com-paixão*.<sup>20</sup> In Portuguese compassion literally means “with passion.” The IECLB has very strong diaconal service ministries. Roberto is supportive of them, but he never sees them without the component of social transformation. He teaches us to minister to human needs while asking questions about the root causes. What changes need to be made in order for more jobs to be available? What can be done so that small farmers are not squeezed out by large landowners? Roberto and his students have developed relationships with a camp of landless Brazilians in an effort to provide adequate education for their children and to speed up the government’s program of land reform.

3. *Social justice is a meaningful part of God's mission in and of itself, but it can be reduced to problem solving when not accompanied by the invitation to follow Jesus Christ.* Every coin has two sides. This does not mean that every social action is accompanied by an altar call or even an altar! There is no one-to-one correspondence. It means that our social actions are part of the big picture of holistic mission, which includes sharing the call to follow Jesus. Everything comes at the appropriate moment.

Compassionate service and social justice should be done for their own sake because of the dignity of human beings and *not* as instruments or means of evangelization. We give without expecting or demanding anything in return. Therefore, Christians often participate in soup kitchens or advocacy on behalf of victims of domestic violence, and feel no need to give a verbal witness to their faith. However, when people ask why we do it, or when we discern that the situation is appropriate, we share our personal testimony or invite others to “come and see.” We do not have to hide our faith commitment. We seek opportunities to invite others to visit our church if they do not have one and feel a need. In this witness there must be no manipulation or pressure.

Clinton Marsh, the first African American moderator of the PC(USA), wrote a book titled *Evangelism Is. . .* In his chapter “Faith in Action,” he speaks of an evangelistic ministry to prisoners and offers wisdom: “The hand and word of friendship must not be manipulative. To capitalize on misery, distress, and fear in order to maneuver someone into ‘accepting Christ’ is unchristian and may trigger a reactive rejection, not only of the ‘decision,’ but [also] of the church itself. Again, the key is to offer love and the truth and the opportunity to let Christ correct their lives in the most sensitive, nondirective manner. Jesus would claim their souls.”<sup>21</sup>

Another example: although we may be committed to the cause of fair wages for all, we also belong to a community of faith, hope, and love. Our sense of justice begins with the salaries we pay all members of the church staff. We do not view people merely as wage earners or employees, but especially as human beings with material and existential needs.

Mission can lead to social and political revolution, but the reason behind our defense of those whose basic human rights are violated is the Lord of Life, not a transitive ideology. The Sermon on the Mount, especially the version in Luke 6, and Mary’s Song in Luke 1:46–55 were revolutionary in that day and even now. Yes, we may fight, protest, and advocate for the rights of others and against abusive practices, but we do it in the name and in the spirit of Jesus Christ. In my conversations with Presbyterians who are adamant social activists, I am distressed when they say, “I can’t tolerate those who have an evangelism fixation.” Likewise, I am sad when someone excited

about personal or international evangelism snidely remarks, “Those activists are too political for me.” When we see mission as holistic, we are happy to have others do what is hard for us to do. We see what we do as only a part of the puzzle, as incomplete.

4. *The World Council of Churches (WCC) affirms, “There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God’s promise to the poor of the earth.”* Not many Presbyterians in the United States are comfortable with both of the words “evangelism” and “solidarity.” For Christians in the Southern hemisphere, they go together quite naturally. The WCC’s statement goes on to affirm: “There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice.”<sup>22</sup>

So could much of what we do and say with good intentions in our mission outreach simply be “a caricature of the Gospel”? Could our bumper stickers, mobilization, and efforts be “a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice”? Ouch! This hurts. It sounds as though the credibility of all we do depends on our commitment to the holistic nature of God’s mission. Seeing only part of the picture is worse than counterproductive. A lot is at stake.

5. *The gospel mandate is not to increase church membership rolls, but to invite all people to become authentic disciples of Christ.* Evangelism is making disciples (Matt. 28:19–20). All of us are disciples who are constantly learning. At the same time we seek to invite and disciple others. Authentic and costly discipleship results in an empathetic awareness of the sufferings and injustices of people and creation and an incarnational insertion into the lives of those who suffer. Disciples of Jesus feel and experience the pain our Lord felt when he saw the suffering of the blind, the lame, the women, and the children who were rejected. Disciples weep as Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and at the death of Lazarus. Disciples feel anger over injustices as Jesus did when he saw people being exploited in the temple. When we take on the pain of others as Jesus did in his incarnate body, this leads to ministries of compassion and justice.

### The Both/And Path

What does embracing the big picture of God’s mission entail? What are some of the paradoxes involved in integration and convergence? First, we

must understand that *Christians both cooperate ecumenically and compete evangelistically with others*. Let me explain what I mean because I generally reject competition. Christians, churches, religions, governmental and non-governmental agencies all need to cooperate in seeking sustainable solutions to the global food crisis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the ecological crisis in order to promote fullness of human life on the planet. We do this with no intention of proselytism. In other words, as we engage in these efforts together, we do not try to pressure or manipulate others to join our faith community. At the same time, we do seek opportunities and respectful ways to share our faith in Christ with others. In this sense, we are competing fairly with other religious faiths that also evangelize.

Another way of saying this is that we practice both *dialogue* and *witness* with people of other faiths. Christians *witness* to persons of other religions and to secular persons with no religious affiliation through our lifestyle and faith sharing when we discern it is appropriate. In our conflicted and multi-religious world, we have no choice but to learn to dialogue with persons of other faiths. Dialogue permits a creative tension between interfaith cooperation and witness. In authentic dialogue, Bosch says, there is mutual learning while “asserting both ultimate commitment to one’s own religion and genuine openness to another’s.”<sup>23</sup> This kind of dialogue is not a threat to our faith or a compromise of it. On the contrary, such dialogue can strengthen our faith and demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. Respect for other people’s consciences *is itself* a Christian witness because it shows that we believe humans are made in God’s image and must be treated accordingly. To be credible today, our Christian witness must be *both* dialogical *and* collaborative.

While many African Christians are suffering from violence caused by tensions between Muslims and Christians in their countries, hosts of Christians in Africa live side by side in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. They collaborate in community efforts to engender peace, food security, sustainable agriculture, health care, and quality education for all. At times they respectfully share their religious commitment with one another. My African friends tell me that the two points where their witness strikes a real chord is when they share who Jesus is to them and the great power of God’s Spirit over all other spirits. As a result, many Muslims have become followers of Jesus.

Second, in order to engage in holistic mission, we need to be *both evangelistic and ecumenical*. When we practice evangelism, we often invite people to join our particular faith community. Desiring the numerical growth of our congregation is certainly at issue. It is good to attract new members. Growth is healthy when it is holistic. We also want growth in discipleship and mission. However, sometimes for diverse reasons it is better to suggest

that people with whom we share the gospel become a part of another church of their choosing.

We need to continually remember that we are building up the one universal church of Christ in many particular communities and denominations. We desire the growth of all churches. We are not simply competing with others in the aggressive spirit of the market. Nor are we proselytizing or stealing sheep from other flocks. Sometimes one must stop to ask, “What is our motivation? Are we building up the body of Christ, or simply adding numbers to our own congregation?” We seek to evangelize the unchurched and secular agnostics. We receive seekers. Ecumenical evangelism is invitational, loving, gentle, and respectful of free choice.



Claire came to the water gymnastics class the first day on crutches and entered the water with some difficulty. “What happened?” her friend Janet asked. “I was hanging curtains and fell from a small ladder in my home. To complicate things, with the economic crisis, I had just been dismissed from my job. I am fighting with depression, but at least I want to lose the weight I gained while convalescing and get my muscle strength back.” During the classes Janet, Claire, and Shirley conversed about everything. When Claire passed from a cane to just limping, Janet mentioned that she volunteered as a tutor in a computer class every Saturday afternoon in a Roman Catholic parish. Claire was interested in obtaining new marketable skills. Janet offered, “Would you like for me to give you a ride on Saturdays to the class?” Claire suspiciously responded, “You know I am not religious.” Janet assured her that there were no strings attached. Claire took up the offer and started attending the classes.

One day Claire noticed a poster telling about the upcoming Easter Vigil. On the way home that day, she asked Janet about it. “That is my favorite service of the year. It captures the essence of the Christian faith with many symbols and much celebration. Shirley is going with me, and she is Presbyterian. Do you want to join us?” After some hesitation, Claire agreed. The three of them went.

It was a magnificent service with a celebration of Christ the light of the world, who was victorious over death; the cleansing and renewing waters of our baptism; and moving texts from the Word of God. Something deep inside of Claire was touched. For the first time she was ready to talk about God with her friends. Shirley shared some of the new ways of thinking about God she was learning from reading *The Shack*, and Claire asked to borrow the book.

As a result of more conversations with Janet and Shirley, Claire decided to get her life right with God, to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to begin

attending a church. Over pizza one night, she expressed this desire to her two friends and told them that before her mother died, when she was a child, she attended an Assembly of God congregation with her, and that there was one near her home that always held some mysterious attraction. Janet and Shirley encouraged her to visit the congregation and to talk with the pastor. Soon she was an active member there. She had a new job in a computer company and was walking with only a slight limp. This is an example of holistic ecumenical evangelism.



Finally, we are called *both to announce the good news of Jesus Christ and to denounce the bad news—all the values, attitudes, structures, and actions in the world that are contrary to the realm of God*. Mission is both evangelical and prophetic. We follow the example of Jesus, who began his ministry “proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (Mark 1:14–15). We joyfully announce the presence of God’s realm of love on earth here and now. We lovingly invite people to respond and to receive God’s forgiveness and grace. The good news is that God is with us both in good times and bad times. God knows and loves us and cares about our daily lives and problems. In holistic mission, we do everything we can to make known the good news. But that is only one side of the coin.

Jesus also is our model in confronting every part of our own lives and institutions that is not in accord with the values of God’s realm. This is hard because we usually are blind to our own attitudes and incoherences. Often we pray the prayer of repentance in church without really owning it personally. On Monday morning we are back to the same sins. The prophetic denunciation of greed, pride, self-sufficiency, superiority, cheating, violence, discrimination, and economic exploitation begins with us and our own Christian community and our society. Courageously, we must confront the unjust and unfair structures that bring benefits to some and cause much harm to others. It took years for some churches to recognize, repent of, denounce, and seek reparation for the sinfulness of slavery, the Holocaust, and apartheid. We continually seek to empower people in order to transform the structures that perpetuate the bad news.

### Integrating Many Parts into One Mission

Integrating the many parts in which we and many others participate into the holistic mission action of the triune God is complex. It requires that we keep

before us the big picture of God's plan for the whole of creation. We have to believe that God's mission sends the church into the world to engage in three distinct interwoven, but not disconnected, missional activities: evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice. We have to open ourselves to understanding many ways of engaging in mission, some of which we have never even considered to be mission.

Integration and convergence are difficult because we tend to focus attention on the parts. Often we lift up one aspect and criticize the others. To integrate the parts, we have to be committed more to fullness and wholeness of faith than to our own agenda or preference. When we decide to see each component of mission as a vital part of the whole and in relation to the other parts, we get out of our comfort zone. When we choose to value differences rather than defend our priorities, we make ourselves vulnerable. When we take seriously the challenge to find convergence, it is unsettling because suddenly the boundaries become fuzzy. Over time, we can celebrate together the unity and diversity in God's mission and integrate our own mission practices into the whole. A missionary dialogue between those who engage in evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice is as hard as juggling three balls without dropping one. It will take a lot of coordination and patience.

Are you willing and ready to work on mission convergence?