

# GOD'S MISSION AND OUR PARTICIPATION

## An Introduction to Mission Theology

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Preliminary words of thanks to World Mission Advocates

### I. Where do we begin the discussion of mission in our churches?

#### A. How do folks in our churches think mission?

##### 1. Work of mission committees

Coordinating activities, planning mission projects and trips, writing checks, maintaining contact with mission workers

##### 2. Definition of mission

The act of going to another place, or of doing something for someone else  
These definitions make mission about us

#### B. Starting with God, not with us

### II. Initial observations about mission

#### A. Mission – not a Biblical word

##### 1. A Relatively new term used by the church to describe its activity in the world

16<sup>th</sup> Century

Term taken from military and diplomatic language

##### 2. Comes from Latin, *missio*, “to send”

#### B. Sending in the Bible

##### 1. God sends forth God's word and calls all of creation into being

##### 2. God sends Abraham and Sarah forth

##### 3. God sends God's law to the people at Sinai

4. God sends a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead those rescued from slavery to the promised land
5. God sends the prophets to call the people back to faithfulness
6. God's supreme act of self-giving

“God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3: 16-17

7. Jesus Christ sends his followers into the world

John 17:18 “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

Continues the dynamic of the incarnation

John 20: 21 “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me into the world, so I send you.”

Continues the dynamic of the resurrection

### III. Mission defined by the nature of God – *missio Dei*

- A. The triune God has sent the Son into the world, who then sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit into the world
- B. Mission, as Andrew Kirk says, is how we understand God's dynamic relationship to the world
  1. The church's relationship to the world is located within this dynamic relationship
  2. Mission belongs to God, not to the church

Church has the privilege of participating in God's mission

### IV. Implications

- A. God's mission is one because God is one

Why we have a World Mission, not Missions program

One mission with many facets which are complementary

Includes, but is not limited to, evangelism

Impossible for us to define mission once and for all

B. The source of the sending is God's love alone

Not our desire to help others, not our denominational structures

Requires discernment about our motivations for mission

C. God's mission embraces all of creation

1. John 3:16-17 "world" is *cosmos*, the entire creation

As God is active in all of creation, so the church is called to embrace all of creation

We cannot put limits on God's mission

2. The world's pain is God's pain

The Holy Spirit allows us to feel the world's pain Romans 8: 22-23, 26

D. Mission defines the nature of the church

1. Mission is not optional

If we do not allow ourselves to be sent into the world, we cease to be the church of Jesus Christ

2. Mission embraces all of the church's life

The term "missional church" (Guder and Hunsberger) tries to capture this idea of the entire life of the church focused on mission

Worship, educational programs, service and outreach, fellowship and proclamation should all focus on mission

E. All followers of Christ everywhere are sent into the world in mission

1. When we leave our own context to engage in mission, we engage in mission together with the Christians in that place

Why missionaries today are called "mission co-workers"

"Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership"

2. Encouraging one another toward greater faithfulness

Importance of structures and processes of mutuality accountability

As Reformed Christians, we know that sin is always active in our personal lives and in the relationships we construct

Therefore, we need to limit the opportunities for sin

#### F. Mission points toward God's future

1. Biblical images of the future God wills for God's creation

- a. "New heaven and new earth" Isaiah 11, 65,

- b. "new Jerusalem" Rev. 21

- b. "the reign of God" used by Jesus

Brian McLaren – the dream of God

2. Our continual prayer "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"

Mission is putting our prayers into action

Questions for discussion:

1. How does thinking about mission as God's mission change the way you encourage churches and presbyteries in their international mission involvement?
2. How can World Mission and you help congregations to discern where and how they are called to become involved in God's mission?