

Church and Mission: Theological Guidelines for mission 21

Preamble

“Mission 21 is rooted in the biblical teaching on the deeds of the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is part of the worldwide church and takes an active role in the ecumenical movement.”

The Content of Mission

According to its statement of intent, mission 21 is a worldwide fellowship of churches, missionary societies and organisations active in God's mission in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. It understands itself as an international learning fellowship for sharing experiences of life and faith.

mission 21 follows the definition offered by the World Council of Churches*. “Mission carries a holistic understanding: the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel by word (*kerygma*), deed (*diakonia*), prayer and worship (*leiturgia*) and the everyday witness of the Christian life (*martyria*); teaching as the building up and strengthening of people in their relationship with God and each other; and healing as wholeness and reconciliation into *koinonia* — communion with God, communion with people, and communion with creation as a whole.”

By the use of the name “mission 21”, we assume the mission history of the various organisations joined together in it. This includes a constructive reflection on the ambivalent aspects of this history.

Mission 21 continues the mission history of the various organisations joined together in it. We are thankful for the dedication of our forerunners in all continents who made the first steps on our shared journey and transcended the boundaries of nation and culture. We will continue their endeavours in the 21st century.

Mission is one of the marks of the church

The worldwide fellowship of those who believe in God through Jesus Christ makes up the church.

Mission is an encounter with the triune God in which He already reveals Himself and has revealed Himself to all peoples. Mission is the common task of building the kingdom of God. Thus mission is an indispensable mark of the church.

In connection with the radical changes in world politics in the middle of the 20th Century, the churches have increasingly understood themselves as a worldwide ecumenical network of relationships. The Churches and Church organisations joined together in mission 21 want to stimulate and to challenge each other in their missionary task.

The visible coherence of church and mission

In Europe both mission as "movement" and church as "community" have constituted themselves in the course of time as missionary societies and as institutionalised churches. To some extent they have gone and continue to go their separate ways.

The historic missionary societies have contributed to the development of the worldwide ecumenical movement in its present form. This has led to various forms and models of partnership.

mission 21 understands itself as having a part in this historic development. It seeks structures that demonstrate that mission and church unavoidably belong together. As an international fellowship it seeks to ensure that all partners may share fully in decision-making.

Mission as a network of communication and cooperation

The work of the missions now joined together in mission 21 led to the development of reciprocal relationships between churches and organizations in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. We wish to live up to these relationships in such a way that the churches may make fruitful their respective gifts and tasks. They are encouraged to live the hope that fills them.

Through mutual exchange we come to recognize how God is present among us and what future He opens up to humanity.

The worldwide economic imbalance shapes and influences the relationships of the churches. The learning community of mission 21 should be an instrument to encourage and enable relationships of mutuality and respect among churches from the militarily and economically powerful to the less privileged countries. In doing so, different cultural and religious contexts have to be respected. Thus mission 21 assumes its prophetic task and, under the mandate of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, strives for justice, peace and the integrity of Creation, including racial, gender and religious equality. It stands overtly for the interests of the disadvantaged, even when it becomes uncomfortable.

The Mission Synod as a fellowship on the way

At the Mission Synod, the partners of Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America are represented in the decision-making structures and participate in the decisions. The designation "Synod" brings out the ecclesial and spiritual dimensions of that gathering. "Syn-hodos" means the way journeying together. Thus the Mission Synod is an event as well as part of a process developed together.

What is done and is decided is therefore always provisional and oriented towards the present circumstances. The Synod is the expression of our trust in God's acting and of our hope of being moved and led by His Spirit.

It is a God-given fellowship in which people of different origins find their place. They should experience justice in this life and their gifts should be valued

Through the constructive reflection on our own history we build upon what has been successful and venture into the future putting our trust in God's presence with us.

***Source:** Study document "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today" adopted by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, published in: International Review of Mission, Vol. LXXXVIII Nos. 348/349, January/April 1999, 109-127.