



**CANADIAN CONFERENCE**  
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

**ARTICLE 7 [MB Confession of Faith]**

# Mission of the Church

COMMENTARY

---

The redemptive design of both the Old and New Testament finds its continuance and fulfillment in the mission of the church. The Old Testament prepares the stage for Christ's mission. The New Testament gospels take us through the events of Christ's life and teaching, death and resurrection, which lead up to the mission assignment of making disciples of all nations. The book of Acts and the epistles tell the story of how the church implements the Great Commission. The primary task of the Christian church from its inception has been the propagation of the gospel to the ends of the earth, as exemplified by the New Testament church.

## God's Mission Design for the Church

There are various biblical descriptions that help focus God's mission design for the church. Metaphors such as being salt, light, a fragrance, or an open letter strongly suggest having an impact within one's sphere of influence. Metaphors of action such as being ambassadors, witnesses, reconcilers, fishers of men, and co-laborers with God help clarify God's design for believers. Descriptions such as the Jerusalem church growing in numbers daily (Acts 2:41), the Antioch church seeing great numbers of people turning to the Lord (Acts 11:21), and the Thessalonian church having their faith in God known everywhere (1 Thess. 1:8), help to focus on the mission of the church. Paul's teaching to the Ephesians to prepare God's people for active mission with all the gifts of Christ's body (Eph. 4:11-12) gives support to the missional design of the church.

Effective mission involves both word and deed. The scriptural design for representing God's kingdom connects the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) with the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40). In both the Old and New Testament God's people are known for their expressions of love and kindness within a society of poverty, injustice, and hopelessness. God's people are mandated to live within a covenant relationship where God is our God and we are His people demonstrating grace, justice, faith, and works.

## The Mission in Preparation

The mission mandate known as the Great Commission was given after Christ rose from the dead. The content of the mandate was not new to the followers of Christ. When Christ called his disciples to follow him, he indicated that they would become fishers of men (Mark 2:17). Later he gave them power and authority over demons and sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:5-6). The seed thoughts of the Great Commission were also clearly evident in Christ's prayer for the believers in the world (John 17).

When Christ gave the mandate to make disciples of all nations, he gave meaning to the gospel both in words and by example and declared the cost of following and serving him. Christ was a model to his disciples in how he interacted with people, including the poor, the rich, the helpless, the sick, the prominent, the curious masses, and the hidden individuals. Christ was their model in lifestyle witness.

## The Mission Declared

The Great Commission mandate (Matt. 28:18-20) is a victory statement that flows from the lips of Christ who had just overcome the world of sin and death through his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. It is now possible for the entire world to be saved, hence the command, "Go and make



disciples of all nations.” This Great Commission statement has been hailed as the great missionary charter and the church’s mission statement since the first century. The Great Commission brings focus to the church’s life and work in a number of ways:

It declares Christ as having all authority over heaven and earth, qualifying him to give the mission assignment to the church. No other authority can challenge Christ the King.

It clarifies the mission results in terms of disciples made. The task is to make disciples who will disciple others. There is a commitment implied that involves serious followership.

It commands the mission assignment to be worldwide. All people are to be gathered into the kingdom regardless of race. It is an all-inclusive mission vision with no limits or exceptions.

It assigns mission responsibility and initiative to all believers. Everyone who believes is expected to be a witness and a discipler.

It expects the believers to be identified by baptism. The Great Commission makes baptism a sign of Christian discipleship. It signals sincerity and commitment to the kingdom body.

It describes the new followers as learners and practitioners of the faith. A life of Christian discipleship is profiled in the Great Commission mandate.

It promises Christ’s partnership and presence in the implementation of the worldwide mission assignment, until the very end. Christ remains vitally connected as the Savior and the inspiration in the midst of the church’s mission assignment.

The Great Commission starts with Christ’s authority and concludes with Christ’s continuous presence. This non-negotiable assignment is to be carried out worldwide by all those who belong to Christ. The assignment is clearly focused in its purpose of making disciples or diligent followers of Christ. The primary motive for this mission assignment is not so much the plight of the unconverted or the eternal blessing of the believer. Its primary motive is the church’s calling to love neighbors and to make disciples of all nations.

### **The Mission Implemented**

The Scriptures expect the church to be involved in redemptive action in society as a sign of God’s kingdom in the world. The body of Christ authenticates its faith through an integrated witness of deeds and words.

#### **The Witness of Commitment:**

Holy life in community is a powerful witness. When society sees the church living as a transformed community in the world, the church is being faithful to Jesus’ description of believers as salt and light (Matt. 5:14-16). Simple obedience to the Scriptures through lives of devotion, worship, and faith gives credibility to the Christian life. The steadfast faithfulness of the church disarms and impacts would-be critics who are looking for inconsistencies among Christians. This witness of faithfulness is the first step in fulfilling the Great Commission.

#### **The Witness of Love:**

A very practical part of living out our faith is that of loving our neighbor (Mark 12:31). This witness of Christian love as commanded by Christ is a powerful representation of God’s love for the world. Our love needs to find practical expressions in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and homes. The body of Christ demonstrates its faith through deeds of love and the generous giving of self to the interests of others.

When the world observes the faith community showing concern and compassion by protecting the vulnerable, defending the powerless, and helping the poor and hurting, they have truly expressed the heartbeat that Christ had for the underprivileged. Christ provides a paradigm for the church to follow his example of caring for the needy, feeding the hungry, liberating the captives, and healing the sick (Luke 4:18-19).

#### **The Witness of Community:**

The corporate life of the church is in itself a powerful witness to the watching world. As the



church functions in unity and love, it reflects the image of God. The daily life of the body of Christ is a fragrance to others (2 Cor. 2:15). The unity of the church attracts (John 17:23). In a word-weary society, authentic expressions of joy, fellowship, and worship have great impact. Caring and praying are two further dimensions of community witness.

#### The Witness of Peace:

The community of faith is also about showing redemptive love within a society of alienation and violence. Kingdom characteristics express themselves through acts of peace and justice. Christians need to stand on the side of those who are disadvantaged and discouraged. Peaceful alternatives to violence and actions to defend the powerless become statements of love and goodness in themselves. Followers of Christ the Prince of Peace must also be expressions of peace in their world.

#### The Witness of Words:

The Spirit of God empowers the body of Christ to speak boldly regarding the good news of Christ (Acts 1:5). Personal stories and testimonies of changed lives are very powerful. The church gathered also needs to present a clear statement of what Christ came to do for humankind. Each Christian has a story to tell of how Christ forgives sin and gives new purpose and meaning for life. The combined witness of the church body and of individual Christians is what the world needs to hear (2 Cor. 3:2). The witness of words flows with power when joined with the other aspects of witness. For our witness to be fruitful it needs to be integrated into all of life. Not that our works save us (Eph. 2:5) but our deeds will identify the genuineness of our faith when we appear before God to receive our rewards (Matt. 25:31-46).

### **The Mission Requirements**

For the church of Christ to be effective in the implementation of the Great Commission, it needs to align itself with the biblical requirements for effective outreach. The records of Scripture provide a number of indispensable realities for fruitful witness and evangelism.

#### Empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8):

It is the Spirit of God that empowers the believer for witness. The Spirit guides, enlightens, reminds, convicts, intercedes, and provides new life. The Spirit also opens witnessing doors and makes us attractive and effective through the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts.

#### Confidence in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; 10:17):

Effective witness is the result of being confident that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. The gospel of Jesus as the only Savior who can forgive sins is good news. Faith comes from hearing the word. Therefore, we are not ashamed of the gospel.

#### Unity and Love Among Believers (John 17:23; Eph. 4):

Christ made it clear that love and unity among believers is a powerful incentive for people to come to Christ. A disruptive or disunited church has little to offer a seeking world. Love and unity have evangelistic drawing power for which Christ prayed.

#### Faithful Obedience to Christ (John 15; Gal. 5):

Christ links fruitfulness to faithfulness. If Christians remain in the vine and keep connected to the Lord, they will experience joy and answers to their prayers. Christlikeness through keeping in step with the Spirit brings power to our life of words and deeds. Witness is destroyed through lack of integrity but enhanced through prayer and faith.

#### Love Relationships (Luke 10:27; Mark 12:31):

Loving one's neighbor is the main bridge to winning people to Christ. Expressions of love through deeds of kindness create an environment for effective relationships. When those in the church show love, care



and respect for others around them they reflect the spirit of Christ.

Priority for the Church (John 20:21-23):

As Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, so the church has been sent on a redemptive mission. This priority must be expressed both individually and corporately. The church has no more right to keep the faith to itself than individuals have the right to live selfishly. At the corporate level the church takes responsibility to provide opportunities for the world to hear and respond to the message of Christ.

### **The Mission Urgencies**

Christ presented the mission of the church with a sense of urgency. There are a number of realities that motivate the church to faithfulness in its mission:

People are redeemable. God loves the world and wants all people to have eternal life and to live a life empowered by His purpose and presence. People can be set free and given a life of joy, peace, and purpose (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17).

There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only way to the Father. Christians are called to proclaim Christ as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6; Acts 16:31).

People are lost and condemned in their sins without salvation in Christ. The good news is that Jesus has died for our sins and offers forgiveness as a free gift to all who believe (Rom. 3:23; 5:1).

To make disciples is a command of Christ. The will of God is for the world to hear and believe. The primary task for the believing world is to make Christ known among all the nations. The mission of Jesus has become the mission priority of every church (Matt. 28:18-20).

The day of the Lord is coming and only those who have accepted Christ are assured of life eternal. There is an urgency of time in preparing to meet our God. (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

### **Conclusion**

Even though our witness for Christ is expressed in various ways, both corporately and individually we have a clear redemptive purpose. The gospel of God's kingdom finds complete fulfillment in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

