



# Worldwide joy

**“A living, acting and missional church in every country!”**

**BASIC DOCUMENT ON MISSION  
CONSIDERED BY THE NMS' NATIONAL BOARD  
ITEM 24/04, JUNE 2004**

# **1. Motivated by joy**

## **WHY A NEW DOCUMENT ON MISSION?**

Christian mission is a result of the joy of belonging to God's worldwide church. Mission is based in and springs from living Christian congregations, and mission aims to create living Christian congregations. Christian congregations live by and aim to share the good gifts of God in word and deed. Mission is the task of the Christian church.

Mission is a dimension of being a church. It represents the boundary-transcending force encased in the message itself, and in the church's being: the gospel should be made known in new places, at new times, to new generations and in new cultural contexts.

The Norwegian Missionary Society is an independent organization and simultaneously an instrument through which the Church of Norway and Norwegian congregations carry out this commission. We desire to share our vision and make it better known through this document.

More than 20 years have passed since the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) previously presented a document like this. In 1981 the National Board of the NMS presented *Faithful to our calling – A principle declaration about mission*. We present here a new document because every age needs to express its vision in its own way, and because we are confronted by new questions and challenges.

## **THE SITUATION IN WHICH WE SPEAK HAS CHANGED**

Several questions continue to challenge us in new ways:

- We are often asked what authority mission has in a globalized world. How can one claim that only we know the true answers to life's questions in a global world where many religions meet and exchange ideas and beliefs?
- The old question of mission as cultural imperialism is still alive.

Several other conditions have changed greatly in the last 20 years: it is no longer easy to differentiate between a 'Christian' and a 'non-Christian' world. It is no longer possible to define two-thirds or three-quarters of the world as "non-Christian". This is largely due to the effect of Christian mission during the last hundred years. Even so, there are still areas where the Christian presence is very weak or almost absent. (More about this under 8: 'Unreached peoples'. But today we must think differently, *globally* about the mission task.

Not even the 'Christian world' is Christian in the same way as before. Particularly in Europe, the formal position once enjoyed by Christianity has been notably weakened. Amongst other things, this has happened due to the link between church and state being broken in most countries. This is a reflex of Christianity's changed status, at the same time as it affects the

church's and Christianity's position in society. (More about this in 10: Globalize hope). But the time for a divided world – a 'Christian' and a 'non-Christian' world – is over.

But there remains a great divide between that which is God's and that which belongs to the world. But it goes *through* and not *between* continents and countries. It does not even go between churches, but rather through churches, congregations and people. We admit that at the same time as the world is God's and is created to belong to him; it is also under the influence of evil, as shown everywhere in the consequences of sin and the revolt against the good will of God.

This is exactly why the call to *faith*, to *discipleship* and to *mission* is a calling not just in one direction and with certain nations, peoples, or colours as its aim. It is for everyone.

At the same time we are strongly challenged by all those who have not had a chance to hear the good news of God who became man in Jesus Christ, who have not had the opportunity to respond and to be incorporated by baptism into the Christian church, nor to live a life of struggle and discipleship. Their cry calls us to work in many different directions, not just in one.

But in one way the world is just as dichotomized as ever: it is split between those who have and those who do not, between those who share the world's wealth and development, and those who do not. This challenges us to consider anew how our witness comes across, and what we think of the relationship between our diaconal ministry and our teaching (6: Proclamation and service). There is a necessary connection and a fruitful tension between *diakonia* or development work, fighting poverty and need on the one hand, and preaching, teaching and the call to discipleship, on the other.

## **WE READ THE SCRIPTURES THROUGH NEW GLASSES**

During the last twenty years, the churches with which we cooperate have grown in self-consciousness and strength. We are developing a different relationship with these churches – we are equal partners in the work to which we are called.

Churches that have been founded as a result of the NMS' work, and churches with which we cooperate, appear clearly, with their own individuality and theological profiles. They emphasize different aspects of the Christian message, thus expanding our own perspective and giving us new insights. We see more clearly that the Christian message gives hope, not just for eternity, but is a power that changes reality here and now. These churches witness confidently of the power of Jesus' name in the face of oppression and spiritual phenomena. A clear belief in the resurrection is obvious in these churches.

The world is becoming more globalized. At both international and local levels, there is a lot of ecumenical cooperation. Ecumenical contacts are becoming important. This is not a result of us discounting the importance of tradition and different confessions. But we see that

confessional boundaries must also be read in the light of both history and contemporary times.

We also, who are to continue the work and tradition, are influenced by our time, we are children of our time, at the same time as we bear an inheritance which we desire to bring further and a commission that we wish to take seriously.

Our desire is that this document will help us to polish our ideals. But we need to evaluate our methods, strategies and our understanding, so that we are in step with the basic values and goals that our organization exists to serve.

## **NEW AND DIFFERENT FRAMEWORK**

The circumstances and framework, under which we operate, are constantly changing:

1. **Empowerment:** When the global church is a missional church, our mission work should be seen in a different perspective. We will continue to equip and send missionaries to serve and plant churches. Equally important, however, is our role as co-worker and partner – aiding, equipping and helping others to fulfil their own missionary tasks and challenges.
2. **Recruitment:** We notice that the recruitment situation for Norwegian missionary candidates is changing. Some tasks are relatively easy to recruit to, whilst it is difficult to recruit missionaries to other tasks. This is a challenge which we are trying to address in two ways: we continue to encourage missionary service; at the same time we see the NMS as an important Norwegian player in a worldwide network of mission organisations.
3. **Appeasement:** The role of religion is increasing in a global perspective, both politically, socially as well as religiously. We see an increasing tendency for religion being (mis)used in conflicts of ethnic, cultural, economic and political character. In such a world, it is an important task to release the appeasing potential which lies in Christian faith and ethics.

## **2. A God who sends**

### **A MISSIONARY GOD AND A MISSIONAL CHURCH**

Christian mission has its basis in the Christian image of God. It is God who sends, and he sends his son. Mission is fundamentally Gods mission.

In the same way, the Son sends his church into the world. And in turn, the church sends its message further through the help of people who convey it through word and deed. Christianity is a missionary religion because we believe in a missionary God. In that the

church and the disciples are sent, mission is the responsibility of the whole Christian church and the whole Christian church's privilege.

Mission is thus understood as being a *dimension* of being a Christian church. Such an understanding gives mission additional perspectives, amongst others a geographical perspective. This perspective was long dominant in understanding mission. But it is not the only valid perspective. The church always has a missionary dimension everywhere: it is about making the gospel understood and understandable where it hasn't been received, and about making the fruit of the Gospel (the gifts of Gods kingdom) available where they are unknown.

Mission is thus the responsibility of the whole of the Christian church. This has important consequences for our attitude to mission. We are in a global perspective and we are together with the whole of God's worldwide church in this great commission.

### **THE MISSIONARY'S PLACE**

*"It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world"* (Tim Dearborn, 1998). But the church consists of people and they are called to service.

Therefore missionaries are just as important as ever. The task does not accomplish itself. Someone has to do it! Sending means that someone must be sent, that someone has to accomplish the task. (3.1: Mission is the witness of God's kingdom)

Mission, then, is not just something that happens. Someone has to organize it. Therefore we need organizations with this dimension as their focus and speciality.

### **MISSION AND CHANGING CULTURE**

For more than 1000 years, Europe was the centre of the Christian church. The church was characterized by European culture and identity to such a degree that "Christian" and "European" were often understood as meaning the same thing.

This has changed in the course of one generation. We are witnesses to a global **religious change**: Christianity no longer has its numerical basis in the western world, but in the South. The Christian religion is no longer solely tied to western society. It is no longer a given that western or European culture and Christianity are tied together. One side of this is that European culture no longer has a singularly Christian basis. The other side to this religious change is the success of mission itself. The "South" has taken over. Today there are Asian missionary societies that have sent several hundreds of missionaries, and the NMS cooperates with African missionary organizations in some of Europe's cities.

Parallel to this, an exciting **cultural change** is taking place in our part of the world. We are moving from a modern truth-seeking culture to something we could call a post-modern materialist café- and experience-culture. We have, by no means, an overview of what this

entails. But we clearly see that this affects the NMS and other charities. We notice a strong change in the patterns of giving and organizational loyalty: We no longer recruit people to lifelong membership, but to a network where the question is “*Does this work? For me?*”

## **THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT**

Our missionary engagement brings with it the heritage of Christian Europe. A lot of this we acknowledge and appreciate, but by no means all. The NMS has already distanced itself many times in a self-critical way from sides of this heritage that are worthy of criticism, e.g. the connection between mission and colonialism, a triumphalist understanding of mission, and imperialist thinking.

The criticisms levelled at the mission on these points are still alive today. Even though they are often imprecise and general, they must still be taken seriously for they create a backdrop for our work. This makes it even more important to emphasize that mission springs from and confirms a *radical egalitarianism*: all people, no matter their outer and inner differences, are invited through Christian mission to a living relationship with God, and to receive all of God’s good gifts (Gal 3:26-28). This egalitarianism and the humanistic view that underlines it, has had strong effects.

The NMS can for example show how our work in Cameroon and Ethiopia has led to liberation of oppressed peoples, both socially and politically as well as religiously.

## **CONTROVERSIAL MISSION**

Mission has always been controversial. Christian mission is still strongly criticized for having had and for having strong connections to the West and Western (cultural) imperialism. The strongest criticism is meanwhile somewhat different: it is the phenomenon of missionization which is criticized. It is understood as an expression of unacceptable attitudes. This criticism is based on an understanding of how the desire to convey a message to others, is translated into an expression of disrespect.

These are viewpoints we do not share. We would contend that one shows others respect exactly through the sharing of one’s own innermost and most valuable – one’s faith and conviction (see 7, Dialogue and preaching).

The desire to share Gods goodness through word and deed in a culturally sensitive way is not an expression of a lack of respect. On the contrary, it is taking the other’s humanity and equality seriously. It is through meeting face to face with others, with those who are different, that one shows true and real humanity.

Mission is demanding and the concept of mission can be understood in different ways. It is an important job to fill it with precise meaning, so that it does not appear to be an empty tradition. Both the activity and the term “mission” must be filled with positive and precise content that reflects the standpoint and meaning supported by the NMS. The important thing

is whether we – in our churches and on their behalf – manage to keep alive the global vision, the vision of the gospel belonging to everybody, of the gospel never coming alone, but through people generously and freely sharing the gifts of God. As a church we are called to share good news (a joy for all peoples) and to administer in a responsible way all that which the Lord has given us to manage – in a global perspective.

### **3. The whole Bible as a basis for our commission**

In this chapter we present briefly the biblical basis for mission.

Mission has its basis in the whole of the Bible. The global perspective is apparent from the first to the last page of the Bible.

#### **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The Bible opens with the declaration that God created the world, and with man in his image as his crowning achievement, and that the whole of creation was “very good” (Gen. 1-2). But through his rebellion, man demolished the good basis for life (Gen. 3). The rest of the Bible can be read as the big story of how God arranges for life and salvation to reach all peoples and the whole of creation. By choosing Abraham as a forefather for the chosen people of Israel, God’s plan of salvation takes shape. (Gen 12:1f; Deut. 7:6). God’s plan with his choice of Israel is not to limit his love just to the one people, but through the help of Abraham’s lineage, Israel, he would bless all the peoples of the world (Gen 12:3). As God’s servant, Israel is given a responsibility in relation to all nations (Isaiah 42:1ff), and shall amongst other things, make God known amongst them (Psalm 96). The main expectation in the Old Testament is that when God finalizes salvation for his chosen people, they will pour into Zion, the mountain of salvation (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; Micah 4:1-4; Zach. 2:14f and there God will prepare an eternal feast (Isaiah 25:6-7).

#### **WITH JESUS**

the boundary-breaking perspective is obvious from the time his birth is foretold and he is worshipped by wise men from the East (Matt.2), to the time when he, resurrected, meets the disappointed disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24). Jesus ties into this universal vision of salvation when he describes the final kingdom of God as a feast of nations from every direction (Luke 13:29; Matt 8:11; compare with Luke 14:15-24). During his ministry, Jesus anticipated this feast with sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2:15-17; Luke 15:1f).

The orders for mission at the end of the gospels are therefore a consequence of the whole of the story of Jesus. This must be proclaimed – for it is good news of great joy for all the

people (Luke 2), it is a source of life (John 4), of freedom (Matt 11), of light (John 6), it gives hope and is an expression of unlimited love (John 3). It is an invitation to find the meaning of life, to come home, free from being under the unwanted influence of other strengths and powers, and to live forgiven, raised up in a reconciled relationship between man and God, and thus attain salvation (Mark 10, 2 Cor. 5).

## **PAUL**

is the one who proposes the idea of mission, and is himself the first missionary. After his experience at Damascus (Acts 9), which is both a conversion and a call for service, Paul admitted that the time for God's realisation of his salvation plans had come, and that he had been given a special responsibility for preaching for the peoples. Thus the Old Testament's prophecies on mission are realized (Acts 13:47 [Isa 49:6]; Rom 10:15b-16 [Isa 52:7, 53:1]; Rom 15:20 [Isa 52:15]). It is God's universal will for salvation for the whole of humanity which is finally actively working in mission work among the peoples. Mission is essential for salvation reaching to the people. It is the baptism to – and the faith in – Jesus who saves, and this faith is awoken by the preached message: Mission as sending by proxy is according to Paul a prerequisite for this to happen:

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15a).*

It is the Bible's whole testimony which is the basis for the Norwegian Missionary Society's understanding of mission.

## **MISSION AS A TESTIMONY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The NMS' motto has from its start in 1842 been the prayer *let your kingdom come* (Matt 6:10, Luke 11:2). We understand mission as our right and duty to testify about God's kingdom, the kingdom which is the source of all the gifts God wants the people to receive. God's kingdom is a future kingdom, which God himself will establish in a visible way when Jesus Christ returns. At the same time it is also a kingdom which people through words, sacraments and ministry of service, get a share of here and now. We are invited to, and invite others to, being Jesus' little siblings through baptism and preaching, and live this in the life of faith; we are given a foretaste of the kingdom's feast in communion where we receive forgiveness and restitution, we experience a glimpse of God's goodness through the love God allows us to meet through other people.

By this approximation we avoid an unacceptable division between words and deeds. In our mission program there is room for them both. They both point to themselves – and to Jesus



and the gifts he wants to share with us. The word, preaching, points to the reality of God, and to the sacraments that are actions where God is made present in the midst of human ambiguity. Diaconal activities are symbols which on the one hand are an expression of God's good creator purpose for us, and on the other hand point beyond themselves and signalize in human ways the essence of God's kingdom.

NMS is called to boldly carry the testimony about God's goodness as creator and about God's saving works in Jesus, and we want to attain both through meaningful words (proclamation and preaching) and serving ministry (*diakonia*).

## **PARTNERSHIP AND ACCOMPANIMENT**

The testimony in word and deed about good news to man who isn't familiar with the message, is completely central in our mission, as expressed in Acts 1:8: *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth*".

The testimony, in other words, does not only flow one way – but all ways – to all continents. And the testimony is something we work together for. It assumes a co-operation – a partnership. The terms *partnership* and *accompaniment* express in our contemporary language some affairs we believe are important.

- They express the Biblical affairs of brotherhood and reciprocity.
- They can represent models which also communicate with our contemporary understanding of life.
- They are expressions of structures which reflect a reality where we from the West are no longer deliverers of religious information and civilising values to a darkened world, but where we still have a message to proclaim and a story to tell.
- They are carriers of models which are Biblical, which are inherent in the founding structure of our faith and in the worldview our faith creates in us and around us.

Mission is partnership – and the primary partnership is represented by the living and resurrected Lord Jesus. When we are *partners in mission*, we are so in the extension of the reality of the resurrection. The Lord's invisible accompaniment is apparent throughout the whole of Acts. Also the classical, Western missionary movement's base in Matthew expresses the same thing: *And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age* (Matt 28:20). This is a strong emphasis of mission as an *accompaniment*,

The great commission is so-called for a reason. Notice the phrase "com-mission". Jesus is in other words the prime com-missioner, the prime missionary partner and companion.

The West has no monopolistic right to missionary work. Nor are we exempt from the mission task – together with other partners and companions – directed at our own country and our own Western culture.

We can see the same thing in Luke's narration of the disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus: Through the words .....*Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and*

*he disappeared from their sight* (Luke 24:31) they were called to make visible the invisible and resurrected Christ, through their words and their actions.

The invisible companion is made visible through our accompaniment. The great commission demands visible com-missionaries, missionary partners, visible companions on the road.

## **THE BIBLE, THE TEXT AND THE CONTEXT**

The Bible preaches the living message into every context. The Bible is the same in all ages and in all places. But the people, who are met by the message of the Bible and of the resurrected Christ which it preaches, interpret and understand the Bible in light of their own culture, history, understanding and horizon. The Bible as a text therefore both speaks into the context, and is interpreted by the context. The context does, in other words, play an important role in how the Bible is interpreted, and in how the message's different aspects is weighted in different situations and at different times. The Bible is unchanging, but any interpretation of the Bible always has a contextual dimension. A non-contextual interpretation does not exist. And if it did exist, it would be irrelevant, for it would not touch people's lives *where they are*.

Simultaneously, the Bible's truth breaks the confinements of context. What remains purely contextual, can never add anything qualitatively new, never reconcile, never set free. The Bible breaks with the tyranny of contextualisation through constantly breaking through the context's frames by its message. The message of the Bible – the text – becomes more than what lies within context. It always becomes a message from the outside. The Bible speaks the truth about man, about the world and about God, because the Bible is a carrier of the message of he who himself is the Truth, Christ Jesus. This truth is universal – it is applicable to all ages and to all people.

We have, admittedly, been left to interpret the Bible in light of our own history, but the Bible always breaks the confinements of history by putting our lives into a wider framework:

- A worldwide framework, through the Bible's presentation of a universal truth
- An historical framework, because this happened in history and simultaneously is applicable today
- A framework of time, because the Bible is about God's intervention from the outside, in the middle of history, and thus also the horizon of history is broken.

## **THE CHURCH'S CONTINUING CONVERSION**

Christian mission sprang out from its meeting with the living Jesus Christ. The goal of Christian mission is to convey that because Jesus is risen, the world has been changed, people have hope, and the powers of God's Kingdom have been released in our midst. We

meet the reparation and restoration that these powers create through the preaching of the Gospel, and we see the signs of victorious life in the everyday reality of diaconal ministry.

We convey this together, all of us who have been restored. This is our foundation of our partnership. Mission is to be on the way to our fellow human beings, on the way where our Christian brothers and sisters, from the south, the east, the north and the west, walk together with us. But first and foremost, the resurrected one is walking with us.

## **4. Jesus' unparalleled position**

The question about how we should understand Jesus, his position and his work, is among the most central in the life of the church. It is one of the most hotly debated topics in today's debate on mission. The question has both a theological/ philosophical aspect (How can anyone believe that only one person represents the truth?) and a more practical/ political aspect (How can one avoid becoming authoritarian, and avoid representing an intolerant culture of conceit when believing that only *our* belief is true?). In this chapter we will comment on both aspects of this question.

We believe it is possible to combine an ethically justifiable and culturally tolerant and sensitive attitude with a clear theological understanding of Jesus' unique position. Our viewpoint is that it is possible – and that it is important – to insist on this fundamental attitude, while at the same time being both tolerant of, and open for, other people's right to believe in and to work for their conviction.

### **JESUS – THE ONLY INTERMEDIARY AND SAVIOUR**

We boldly present that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is not one way among many, but THE way. Jesus is the saviour of the world, the saviour of everybody. The Bible is bold in its testimony about Jesus' unique position as the only intermediary between God and man. The whole Bible, from the first to the last page, has a universal perspective. The centre of this universal perspective is Christ's universal importance: He binds together heaven and earth by his birth; he opens the way between man and God by his death and resurrection. No one else has this position; no one else summarizes everything and everyone in his lifework. For this reason, Christ must be preached, so that his gifts can be accepted by everybody.

### **OPEN TO EVERYBODY**

Scripture emphasizes and underlines Jesus' unique position. He alone is the road to salvation, and everybody can be saved by him. The Bible emphasizes the seriousness of the possibility of closing oneself off from God's gifts by refusing to accept them (John 3:17). At the same time, however, it hesitates to elaborate negative consequences of this on an

individual level for 'those far away'. On the contrary, the Bible highlights that also those who used to be far away, now have the opportunity to draw near (Eph. 2:13). Scripture is far more forward in addressing us who have heard, and are close: *Make sure that you, who know the Gospel, do not throw it away* (1 Tim 6:14-16, 2 Tim 3:14). Jesus' unique position should not be used to frighten or coerce. Rather, it should be used as an essential impulse for us to share God's blessings and gifts with everybody – also with ourselves.

## **CHRISTIANITY IS ONE OF MANY RELIGIONS, AND IS A MISSIONARY RELIGION**

The Christian church desires to share the message with all people, because we are convinced that it is true and good, that those who accept it receive the gifts of salvation, which in turn will lead to an altered and improved quality of life in the here and now. The awareness of these two aspects of our religion, poses high demands on our thoughts and actions. We believe that Christian faith, too, is best served with full freedom, also for those who do not share the Christian faith. We realize that this can be arranged in a large number of ways. In some cultures, the Christian faith serves as an ideological foundation, a 'glue' of society that binds people together. In other cultures, a superior and non-religious foundation, or a superior cross-religious foundation has been developed. Christian churches can thrive and function well within multiple social foundations. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize a few simple principles which we believe are of vital importance:

1. **Freedom to practice religion:** The right to practice one's religion is a fundamental right. This right is also grounded in the UN's universal declaration of human rights. It is accepted by most countries, but still Christians everywhere experience that this right is being restricted, for both cultural and political reasons. We seek to work for the Christians' right to practice their religion, even where Christians represent a historically foreign element and constitute a minority. In the same way we want to claim the right to freedom of religious minorities in societies where Christianity is a dominating religion.
2. **Religious freedom and the right to influence.** We would also like to highlight that religious freedom encompasses the right to influence other people religiously, as well as the right to change one's religion. This right is even more frequently restricted. Simultaneously as we work against such restrictions on religious and political bases – also in Christian cultures of plurality – we admit that we find ourselves on difficult ground. We encounter deep questions tied to history, culture and identity. Similarly, we would like to propose that the right to influence and to change one's religion is a test of whether religious freedom is genuine or only an outer shell.
3. **Ethical awareness and choice of agents.** The right to influence does not, however, entail an employment of *all* agents or methods. The choice of agents is about a

choice of ethics. Christian mission should, as we see it, restrict itself by always using methods which listeners/ recipients have the choice of protecting themselves from. Christians often belong to a technical and economically superior culture. NMS wishes to be conscious of its use of agents, and through all our work to represent a cultural sensitivity, as well as to show the respect due to the recipient, by being culturally accommodating in our communication.

## **5. God's kingdom and God's church**

In this paragraph we wish to say something directional about how the NMS understands the relationship between church/mission and God's kingdom.

### **GOD'S KINGDOM – A KINGDOM WHICH IS AND IS TO COME**

When we pray in the Lord's Prayer that God's kingdom will come, we are simultaneously relating to different perspectives: One is the personal perspective, the one Martin Luther highlighted in his catechism: That God's gifts should become *ours*. We pray that the reality of God's kingdom should come to us as individuals, as members of a family or a church, so that the reality of salvation can become ours. This happens in close proximity to us, in the working of the sacraments and the life of faith.

On the other hand, we hold on to the hope that the realities of God's kingdom shall delight the world we live in, change reality and create reconciled relationships here and now.

And we pray that this one day will appear as visible reality, as a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness lives, with reconciled relations between God, mankind and creation, and between people as part of creation.

### **GOD BECAME MAN; THE INCARNATION AS AN HORIZON OF UNDERSTANDING**

We believe that through the incarnation, the miracle whereby God let himself be born as a child into this world happened. Thus, the reality of God's kingdom becomes a part of the world as we know it. And at the same time, he who was born as a human being did not stop being God. God's Kingdom will never be limited by reality, but sheds light upon the world – as we know it.

### **GOD'S KINGDOM IS TIED TO SALVATION IN CHRIST**

Jesus came from outside the world with a good message, and with righteous deeds so that we as a church would transcend our own limits through this good message and righteous deeds.

## **GOD'S CHURCH AND GOD'S KINGDOM**

God's kingdom must be tied to the church, its presence and its work. A fusion between the church and God's kingdom is a fundamental impulse in NMS' theological universe. NMS' motto is: *Let your kingdom come*. Our fundamental work is to build churches. It is through doing this that we carry out our motto. Through doing this, we take part in God's mission.

## **TO THE PEOPLES**

Because God's kingdom is inseparably tied to God's church, the task to carry the message of the presence of God's kingdom to new peoples, and to places and ages where the message is unknown becomes an essential one, as does the hope it entails.

## **GOD'S MISSION IS GREATER THAN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

Human missionary work can, however, never become any more than human. God's plan and action for mission is always greater than, and always exceeds the results of our human plans and actions. God also acts in his way, to bring his kingdom to completion, and to make the gifts and effects of the kingdom present for his people in the here and now.

## **IN THE AGE**

The thought of God's kingdom brings with it a clear expectation of a hope of a new heaven and a new earth. This hope is not a reason for escapism and apathy in relation to the life we are living now, but a source for life, action and involvement here and now. It sheds a new dimension on life and on the fight for freedom, justice and righteousness. In Lutheran teaching it is a tradition to distinguish between God's gifts as good, upholding creator gifts, and the presence of the Kingdom, as an expression of God's salvation purpose. Creation and salvation are not entirely comparable in terms of value. However, it must not be forgotten that it is the same God who, according to his own plan, works with the same world. The two sides cannot be separated completely. Good deeds are often understood as expressions for, and signs of, God's saving purpose. And outer changes often appear as signs of God's will to interfere with his saving hand.

## **THE HOPE OF THE NEW**

The incarnation happened 'in the fullness of time'. It points, in turn, towards the completion of time. We dare to hold fast to our faith and the hope of a new heaven and a new earth. Mission – making the Kingdom's sacramental gifts a reality for people today – is in an odd way connected to the hope that God one day will intervene to complete his undertaking: then he will re-create the world, and bring salvation and creation together again through realising the hope of a new heaven and a new earth.

## **6. Proclamation and service (holistic mission)**

Here we would like to express how we understand the relationship between word and deed in mission.

NMS sees itself as a mission for church planting: our particular task is to be a tool for church planting – and to contribute to these churches – and other churches we cooperate with – being trustworthy witnesses of the Kingdom of God – in word and deed.

### **LIBERATING WORD**

To accomplish this goal, we convey the Gospel through *words*. We boldly convey the story about Jesus to people we meet. We do this because we believe this message to be a carrier of saving, liberating and life-changing powers, and that when it is received through baptism and faith it will lead to humans having a part in these gifts.

### **PREACHING SERVICE**

In the same way as Jesus conveyed his gifts to the people both through his words, his miracles and good deeds, we are as his disciples called to follow his pattern of service. We therefore believe that the gifts of the Kingdom are also conveyed through service. Because service is situated in a certain context, our actions preach about the gifts they convey.

### **THE DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE OF DIACONAL SERVICE**

There is always a double perspective to our service. In a Christian perspective, it can be an expression of the Gospel's good message – because it is in a context where this is made credible. We may, perhaps, speak about the spiritual dimensions of diaconal service. At the same time, diaconal actions are *always* an expression of God's good will for the people. *Diakonia* is an expression of God's good creator will – and thus our service has a physical perspective.

### **THE HUMAN BEING IS HOLISTIC**

This corresponds to the human's state as a holistic being: the human being is a spiritual being, and this side of the human life should be taken seriously. For us, this means that the individual is created with, and carries within himself, the dimension of God. For he who believes and is baptized, this gives community with the Trinitarian God. For others, it may point to community with God as a possibility. Therefore, on behalf of our church and as a missionary movement, we convey the Gospel about Jesus and about eternal life and salvation through faith in him. At the same time, a human being is never just spirit, neither is it just body. It exists only as both. Therefore it is our call as a missionary movement and as a church to relate to both sides of the human life. God's saving gifts can only be conveyed both

through word and deed. And therefore the church must always convey the fruits of faith in the form of both word and deed.

## **DEEDS AS WORTHWHILE IN THEIR OWN RIGHT**

Even though diaconal actions contain a dimension of God's kingdom, good deeds are never important just in their *own* right. We perform good deeds because they are important and because it is right to do so. All diaconal work, all aid projects and all tasks related to development are important in their own right.

*Diakonia* should not be regarded as something secondary, or as something less than proclamation or preaching. Neither does *diakonia* have a hidden agenda – any more than preaching would have one. When we build wells in Mali, we do it to give the inhabitants clean water. When we build schools in Ethiopia, we do it so that the level of education can increase. Countryside projects in Madagascar aim to improve the quality of life for people in the countryside. Their level of success should be measured according to these criteria.

At the same time these projects – like everything else we do – spring out from the message about God's care and love – for the people and for creation.

## **7. Dialogue and preaching**

Whoever wants to be engaged in communicating the Christian faith in word or deed cannot choose whether he or she wants to be missionary or dialoguing in their approach. Both are necessary. They are both two separate tasks and two sides of the same coin.

The question of dialogue and its role is among the most complicated, both theologically and strategically. But some simple main viewpoints can still be made applicable.

### **DELIMITATIONS**

First we would like to present some delimitations.

In everything we do, we are dialoguing in our approach. This is not the same as inviting to religious dialogue in all things. Dialogue as a communicative method or a form of address must, on the one hand, be delimited from dialogue as a specific theological act, and theological process on the other hand.

**The Church and Christian mission can have a dialoguing form of address in all their conveyance of the Gospel.**

- All Christian communication can be based on dialogue. Dialogue presupposes that there is room for response, that it is possible to ask questions, and that there is room for the relational.



- There is an inner connection between the Christian understanding of God, where God appears as a Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and a dialogical perspective. The Trinity is in dialogue with itself. This is a model of how the Christian church communicates the message it has been given.
- The form of testimony is normally dialogical. It is by stepping close to the other party in open conversation, that one opens up for vulnerability which is the requirement of truthful communication.

In other words, when we are dialogical in our preaching and our missionary approach, this is essentially the nature of the message. This is different to inviting to religious dialogue.

The other side to this is that dialogue should never appear as a new missionary method. If we did this, we would be wronging both parties in our communication:

On the one hand dialogue could be understood as undemanding exchanges of viewpoints, as “lightweight mission”, where exchange and sharing appear as a *replacement* for Christian testimony. Even though many may think that that would be an acceptable approach to the question of truth in our modern world, it would go against the principle of the church’s message.

On the other hand, the church does not want to lose its trustworthiness with its partner in dialogue: if what one thought of as real dialogue where the goal was to get to know each other better, turned out to be, in reality, a sort of modern and more acceptable missionary method, one is wronging the dialogue partner.

## **THE GOAL OF RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Dialogue as a theological task seeks not to convey, but to understand. This too is an important task for the Christian church. Also in missionary work it often becomes natural to enter into conscious dialogue with this particular starting point. But also in this area it becomes important to specify certain delimitations:

*Dialogue takes place on many different levels.* It can range from the everyday, explanatory, clarifying conversation with ‘the other’, through discussions of a more or less organized character, to scholarly theological conversations where one comes together in order to seek to dig deeper into each other’s reality.

*Dialogue has no hidden agenda:* It is important to limit the use of dialogue as a method for mission. It is one thing when we act through dialogue to openly convey the Christian message; it is something completely different when we use dialogue as a cover for the desire to evangelize.

*Dialogue does not replace testimony.* Dialogue has another starting point: it exists as a means to understand and deepen our understanding of the other party and ourselves.

*Dialogue should therefore have room for testimony.* Even so, in the process of open dialogue, it should be natural for the participants to be challenged to disclose what is important to them. In this case, it happens in complete openness and with a reciprocal understanding of what is going on.

*Whoever enters into dialogue does so with their own convictions.* Nobody benefits from the attempt to lay aside one's identity, or to act with an artificial openness or artificial neutrality. One does not lay aside one's inner conviction, but on the contrary brings it into the open dialogue.

### **WHOEVER ENTERS INTO DIALOGUE WILL HIMSELF BECOME MOVED**

Nobody can openly enter into dialogue with a fellow human being with a certain faith and conviction without the risk of being changed or moved by this meeting with the other party. One of the things that complicate the discussion about dialogue is ownership of the term. With what we have said here, we claim back some of the ownership to this term dialogue. With this, far from everything has been said about dialogue. But we wish to show that for an acting-orientated missionary movement like the NMS, dialogue is important both as term and a phenomenon, and we wish to point out some ways in which this term relates to our work and approach.

## **8. Good news to all, and to 'unreached peoples'**

The term 'unreached peoples' has played an important role in evangelical missionary thought for decades. It points to a vital dimension of the missionary vision, namely that the message about Jesus Christ should reach to those who have not yet heard it.

The commandments for mission, which in different forms conclude all the four Gospels, point to a clear *geographical*, *time-related* and *ethnic* dimension. They emphasize that it is our *responsibility* as a Christian church to make sure the Gospel is preached further, and that the reality of God's kingdom is conveyed through word and deed to ever new ages and places. This message has been given to the Christian church and to Jesus Christ's disciples. This message – the Gospel – exists to be shared, and to be spread continually, to new places, ages and peoples.

At the same time, mission is an expression of an abundance of *joy*. This desire to continually spread is also something that springs out from the character of the message

itself: it is a message of joy for all people (Luke 2:21), it is a message that liberates and that renews relations to God, fellow human beings and to creation. It is a message that raises up and gives hope and a future to whoever accepts it. Christianity is a missionary religion because the Christian message creates people who wish to share with others what they themselves have experienced, met and received.

Simultaneously, the Christian faith is grounded in a universal view of humanity. The Bible does not divide people into categories or groups. The New Testament is the first writing in mankind which uncompromisingly places everybody, irregardless of ethnicity, sex and position on the same level: *They are all one in Christ* (Gal. 6). God's Kingdom will encompass all peoples, and in Jesus Christ's church there is room for everybody – on the same level.

In other words, the geographical vision is inescapably present as a driving force in all Christian work. The people groups, to whom the church has not yet reached, shall also be reached by the message of joy for all peoples.

But in relation to the term 'unreached people', a number of delimitations are still important:

1. Mission is to take seriously the desire to share the faith in a living and resurrected Jesus Christ as saviour, and all the good gifts that God has given us, with ever new people. This task exists everywhere where there are people – and not just where people groups are defined as 'unreached'. Mission is far more than a constant search for and visiting of peoples and groups of people who have not yet been reached by the Gospel.
2. However, this delimitation presents a problem: What criteria must be met for ethnic groups or other groups of people to be defined as 'unreached'? Simultaneously, it is clear that there is a need to uncover areas where the Christian church is not visibly present with its sacraments, its preaching and diaconal presence. In such a perspective, it becomes important to use the tools for analysis that one has, and the term 'unreached' can be such a tool. But it cannot by any means be the only tool.
3. The third perspective is a communicative one: Who would like to be deemed 'unreached'? There could potentially be elements of an object-thinking or a centre-periphery-thinking here, which we must refrain from.
4. It is also important to have a theological delimitation: When we use the term 'unreached', the opposite question must be asked: Unreached by whom? One cannot mean that some people are outside of God's presence or without potential contact with God. God is everybody's creator. Therefore the thought must be *unreached by us*, by evangelism and by the church as we know it.

The issue itself, the dimension of the Christian faith that makes us want to share the Gospel with yet new people and people groups, and make it reach ever further places, is unforsakable. What we wish to express by the term 'unreached peoples', represents an

important perspective for the NMS. The strategic decisions which revolve around questions of where and how we use our resources to accomplish what we believe is right – and where they are needed the most, are decisive for a living missionary movement. They have to be one of the primary strategic questions and guiding principles for our work.

## **9. Church and organisation –** **the NMS and the Church of Norway**

The NMS is an independent organisation which has a clear ecclesiastical anchor. Both of these aspects have accompanied NMS throughout its history. We are rooted in both the inner revival (The Brethren community), in the conscious and organized laity (Haugianism), and in ecclesiastical enterprise (the activity of ministers and ordained co-workers). We believe that elements of all these historical streams will also be important to the NMS in the future.

The NMS is carrying out an *ecclesiastical* mission, and we boldly proclaim that we have a genuine and visible ecclesiastical mandate. This ecclesiastical anchoring has in the last few years been strongly emphasized through our active participation in a cooperative council for Church and Mission, and through the strengthening of our contacts with churches in both the Church of Norway and in other partnership churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Movement (DELK) and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (DELFI). NMS' ecclesiastical identity has been prominent throughout our history by virtue of our goal of being a church-planting mission.

We envision that the partnership with the different churches and their structures will continue and will be strengthened in years to come. We believe that churches and persons based in churches will play an increasingly important role in NMS' work. And we believe that an obvious ecclesiastical anchoring will be important both practically and theologically. The NMS wishes to keep its special position as a *missionary organisation*. We believe this is in the best interest of our mission: we are not a church, but we do have a certain perspective we desire to convey.

Included in this is the NMS' desire to also be a partner in encouraging its own church to take the missionary perspective seriously in the culture in which it is situated. Therefore, NMS is involved in the project *Church in movement*, where this is the goal.

It follows from this document that it is no longer helpful to divide the world into areas where mission is necessary, and where mission is unnecessary. Mission is a challenge also in our

Western world – as well as in Norway. Simultaneously, missionary work in Norway constitutes a necessary base for the NMS' global involvement. This understanding underlines the desire that the work in Norway should be a tool for global missionary involvement. But we will in times to come need to seek formulations which take the new global missionary situation into account in a new way.

## **10. The NMS in a global world**

In this chapter we wish to draw together the lines of thought that we have presented, and to point to the challenges which follow from being a western missionary movement in a globalized world – where the Christian church is one of the most global things in existence, before we conclude with an outlook on the future.

### **THE CONVERTED WORLD**

The NMS has existed for over 160 years. Throughout the last three decades, great changes have taken place: The weight of the church has been moved from the north and the west to the south and the east. In a global perspective, the Christian church is experiencing heavy growth. Today Christianity is the largest and most global religion in the world.

The role of the NMS has been changed from being part of a movement from the West to other parts of the world, to being part of a worldwide movement in many directions. One of these directions is also toward the West. The West is no longer exclusively a sender and subject of the church's mission. We are also a recipient and object.

This encourages the need for self-critical reflection. No one likes to be made an *object* of other people's actions. On the other hand, it opens up for strong possibilities to think: How are we now – in a world of opportunity and cooperation – to use our resources in the best possible way?

At the same time, the world's economical resources are at least as unjustly distributed as ever before. This challenges us both as a missionary movement and as an organisation with a global workplace.

If we are serious when we say that we understand man as a whole, we cannot as a church and mission be untouched by the massive injustice which affects great parts of the world's people without it affecting our trustworthiness. We cannot avoid speaking to injustice when we ourselves have become a part of the world's unrighteous structure. This must happen on several levels, and it must be reflected in our strategies and plans for action:

- *We act where we meet poverty and distress. We live among people and meet their distress where they are.*

- *We act to change arrangements, structures and systems.* We seek to enable sister churches, people and congregations to change their life conditions themselves. We seek to empower fellow human beings to change their life conditions.
- As a mission with a global network, we are bound to *speak out against injustice and seek to influence the world we live in ('advocacy')*. When we discover systematic injustice, we cannot help but speak out against it. We actively involve ourselves in issues where people struggle.

In all this, we seek to develop cooperation on the basis of real equality. Therefore we seek, in our work, to achieve real equality between the different actors involved.

## **OUR ROLE AS A EUROPEAN ORGANISATION**

We are conscious of our own European history:

*This is in part a 'cross':* We are part of an ambiguous history, and the world we live in has been very affected by the consequences of European and American historical (and present) injustice towards the rest of the world.

*Our identity and history is also a gift.* We accept the gifts and the competence that we have, and boldly claim that we with our European background and our Norwegian identity still have important contributions to make to the church's global mission.

*We need the others:* We must continually liberate ourselves from all aspects of our historical superiority-complex. The Christian Church in Europe is facing a hard time today. While the message of the church is embraced with joy in other parts of the world, the European people seem vaccinated against the Gospel. Our church and our churches must learn to accept experience and insight from others.

Our role as a missionary organisation becomes important in relation to this, then. We wish to contribute to the churches' taking the mission dimension even more seriously.

- Mission is a task, a duty and a joy for *everyone*, also for European folk churches.
- Europe's churches need missionary structures in relation to their own members and large groups of their own people.
- Mission is also creating missionary structures.
- Churches that have their own people groups as their primary target must also think both locally and globally about mission.

## **THE ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE**

Ecumenical relations are important to the NMS. We accept our Lutheran heritage, and are grateful for our Lutheran identity. At the same time, we delight in a climate of increasing ecumenical openness.

The NMS actively participates in several ecumenical forums, such as a national church council (The Christian Council of Norway), and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Through our church and together with partnership churches we participate in the World Council of Churches (WCC) and several of its sub-organisations. On the other hand, we are also involved in alliance ecumenical connections, and are an active participant nationally (NORME). We participate in conferences and international meetings organized by for example the Lausanne movement. Regionally, we participate in organisations such as MICCAO (corporate Christian work among the Fulani people of West Africa), Cairo Communication (Chinese language Christian radio work), and Sat7 (corporate Christian Arabic television channel). To us, both these branches represent important impulses which we wish to bring with us.

In a global perspective, religious movements are playing an increasingly important role in both society and politics. Religion is important for building identity, and therefore also plays a vital role both in promoting peace and reconciliation, but also as a deliverer of premises for conflict and its creation.

In a global perspective, the Christian church is growing strongly. This is especially applicable to three parts of the church:

- *The Roman Catholic Church* and especially those parts which combine traditional (conservative) Catholicism with a strong popular base.
- *Conservative, evangelical denominations*, or historical churches with an evangelical tradition.
- *Newer ecclesiastical movements and groups*. A very visible group are the so-called independent movements that the NMS meets in Africa. (African Initiated Movements, AIM), but also Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal movements (in Norway such as 'Kristen Senter' and the like) or movements within historical denominations (Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, etc) are in steep growth (for example the Shepherd movement in the Malagasy Lutheran church, and charismatic groups in EECMY in Ethiopia).

For the NMS, it is important to maintain both goodwill and openness in relation to this, at the same time as we protect our identity, and hold on to our theological standpoint. It is our ability to be clear on our *own identity*, not what we distance ourselves from, which will ultimately decide what role we might play in the times ahead.

We have something to learn in different ecumenical forums, and from all the different groups we meet. And we believe that we, too, can have important contributions in such a connection:

- To reduce animosity between different ecclesiastical fellowships. Here, the NMS is unusually well positioned to play a role. Through our history, we are well planted in different traditions, and can thus be a positive conveyer of impulses and perspectives.

- In extension of that, we can also contribute by working against signs of animosity and mistrust associated with nationality or different religions.
- Development of healthy attitudes transcending faith, culture and religion, to promote the churches' involvement as carriers of peace-building and reconciliation.
- Theological insights. As a global missionary organisation, it is also a task for the NMS to contribute to conveying theological and Christian insights between our different partners. If we take a global understanding of mission seriously, a function of this is to convey African, Asian, and Latin American experiences and insights to our Norwegian church context.

## **11. Outlook**

### **POSITION, PROGRAM AND VISION**

Through this document we wish to achieve several things:

We have sought to place the NMS in relation to a series of relevant questions. There are viewpoints to reflect over – and hopefully to adopt.

A thorough reading of the document will also reveal that it supports what the NMS wishes to present as its vision: ... ***A living, acting and missional church in every country ...***

You will further see that all our three programs are clearly conveyed throughout this document:

#### **1. MESSAGE**

We emphasize that in church-building missionary work, a bold and boundary-transcending testimony about the Gospel in word and preaching must be clear. The narrative of the living and resurrected Jesus Christ is central in our work.

#### **2. AID**

This centrality can never be separated from the other aspect of missionary work: that this testimony has consequences for how the church acts in its missionary involvement, and how we proceed with our ministry of service.

#### **3. BUILDING**

Both evangelistic work and diaconal involvement presuppose an element of organisation and building of sustainable and independent churches and structures. We can never be a church on behalf of others. We can, however, seek to support and enable others to be their own church.



## **THE USE OF RESOURCES AND DIRECTION**

In a world where both our framework and external conditions change so quickly, as is the case nowadays, it is important that this document gives direction as to how the NMS should use its resources in years to come.

The document underlines four important directions for our work in coming times:

### **1. CALLING AND EQUIPPING**

The NMS still wishes to equip people for mission. This involves challenging different people, both young and old, to missionary service – in different ways, short term and long term cross-cultural work. And it involves strengthening our work to use our organisation's – and especially the School of Mission and Theology's – competence to give persons, organisations, our own church and partnership churches, the competence and boldness they need to meet today's mission challenges.

### **2. STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHICAL INITIATIVES**

NMS is facing several exciting geographical new commitments. In Asia, we face a new involvement in Laos, in Ethiopia we work close to several people groups that we till now have only had sporadic contact with. Here and in similar situations, we are exploring the possibilities of continuing.

### **3. A STRENGTHENING OF THE MISSION DIMENSION IN OUR PARTNER CHURCHES**

Through purposeful initiatives, we seek to strengthen and illuminate the mission dimension in our partner churches, including the Church of Norway. We aim to advance more cooperative projects with churches in the countries in which we work, for example in Madagascar and in Ethiopia. Here, a number of exciting perspectives present themselves.

### **4. THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

As a missionary movement we note with regret that tension is increasing in many areas between religions and people groups with different religions. We desire to take this seriously as a missionary movement, and seek to utilize all of the good peace-creating potential which lies in our faith. We believe it is a part of the task of mission to reconcile God and man, and man to man. In this lies a great and exciting challenge for us in this new century.

It is our prayer that in our contribution, which springs from the vision of a *living, acting and missional church in all countries*, we will be obedient to the Lord's calling and challenge, and help to realize the *service of reconciliation* between God and mankind (2 Cor 5:20). And reconciled with God, we are called children of God who are peacemakers in the world (Matt 5:9).