

The Challenge Before Us

by Ernst H. Wendland

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The topic assigned for my address to the Board for World Missions is *The Challenge Before Us*. The word “challenge” implies urgency. Webster defines the word as “a call or an invitation to a contest.” When our board’s administrator, Dan Koelpin, enlarged on this word, he described it as “the challenge of our Lord to reach a dying world, a challenge that is greater than ever due to the unique developments of these last times.” Considering how much closer the world has come to the edge of Christlessness, one can well refer to the mission challenge as “the greatest challenge in the world.”

The ultimate urgency of this challenge was expressed by our Lord himself when he encouraged his followers to work “while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work.” The theme of our synod as it entered this biennium, re-echoing these words of Christ, is also expressed by our Synodical Council with its own watchword: “WORK WHILE IT IS DAY.”

This isn’t the first time that I’ve spoken to our synod about the Lord’s urgent challenge. Thirty years ago, when our synod met in its 1971 Convention in Watertown, Wisconsin, I was asked by President Oscar Naumann to preach for the opening service. I was returning from Africa on furlough that year. The convention service was held in St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, where I had been confirmed as a teenager. Was I nervous? Very much so, of course. To counteract this feeling, however, was my text, the same words of Jesus in John 9:4: “We must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.” Please note the Lord’s use of the word “must” in this connection!

Somehow, when coming from a mission field ten thousand miles away, the challenge of missions becomes more urgent than ever. It was reassuring while ascending the steps to the pulpit to hear the delegates singing mightily Luther’s great mission hymn:

May God bestow on us his grace, with blessings rich provide us,
And may the brightness of his face to life eternal guide us
That we his saving health may know, his gracious will and pleasure,
And also to the heathen show Christ’s riches without measure
And unto God convert them. (*Christian Worship*, No. 574)

Somebody asked me after the sermon if I was preaching a synodical sermon or a mission sermon. The only answer I could think of at the moment was, “What’s the difference?” At that same convention our synod’s delegates resolved unanimously “to go in Jesus’ name and proclaim the gospel in South America, that ‘sleeping giant to the south.’”

Once again, in this my sixtieth year in the ministry, I have been granted the privilege of addressing my co-workers on the urgency of mission work. “It is nearly evening,” I can say with the Emmaus disciples, and for me “the day is nearly over.” Yet still time to consider together the assigned topic: *The Challenge Before Us*.

1. The Challenge Before Us From the Viewpoint of the Past

Historically it’s appropriate, I suppose, that I serve as your introductory speaker today. Why? Simply because I go all the way back to the time when we got started as a Board for World Missions. We had a fancier name then, “The Board for Heathen and Foreign Missions.” It’s always good to go back to one’s roots where age is no deterrent. When the writer of Hebrews goes back to the Old Testament witnesses of faith, he lists men like Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, all beyond 70 years of age when called into special service. I feel highly honored and privileged to be speaking to you today in my mid-80s.

As a World Board we were established in 1953. That's nearly a half century ago. Prior to that time there was in our synod but one General Board of Missions, which included a mission in Germany, as well as the Apache Mission in Arizona. I belonged to this general board at the time as a member of the Germany mission committee. I qualified, I suppose, because I could still speak German. When in the early 1950s our own WELS moved into Japan and Northern Rhodesia, we must have felt that it was high time for the synod to become more seriously involved in working in other cultures and countries. And so I was included in the newly established Board for Heathen and Foreign Missions.

This organizational step was significant. We were now venturing overseas *independently*. We were going into countries where many people had never heard the gospel before! After having existed as a synod for over 100 years, we were now going into all the world, mind you, on our own, taking personally, seriously, intimately, and directly our Lord's command to make disciples of all nations!

Why did it take so long for us as a synod to take that step? That's a story for itself, a part of our ever-so-gradual growth as a synod. It may be just as well not to go into this now. In any case, we were now committing ourselves more definitely to places like Japan and Africa. Do you know what this meant for many of us at the time? Have you any idea? The world was now also our field!

How were we now going to face this world in more direct obedience to our Lord's command? We were to a great extent nothing but beginners. And so we began by studying what world mission work was all about. Under our Executive Chairman, Edgar Hoenecke, we reviewed mission books as a part of our agenda. I remember especially the book entitled *Missions at the Crossroads*, by T.S. Soltau, and *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's and Ours*, by Roland Allen. We learned for the first time about the "indigenous church policy" as it was first developed by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn a century and a half ago, and introduced by John Nevins into Korea. It's interesting, isn't it, that we're still plumbing the depths of this policy, as you can see from the agenda of this retreat.

We became familiar during those early years with names like William Carey, Stephen Neill, Kenneth Scott Latourette, Eugene Nida. None of these was Lutheran, but they presented exciting ideas about concepts with which we were to be engaged as a synod for the first time. Under Edgar Hoenecke's leadership the underlying principles and the primary objectives of the synod's Board for World Missions were carefully formulated and incorporated into the 1957 *Proceedings* of our synod's Thirty-Fourth Convention.

Meticulously they were adopted, point for point, step for step, in joint meetings of the board, and then later by the synod in session in 1965. They are worthy of continued study. Hoenecke was an inspiration. I say that without hesitation. This year he and his wife, married seventy-five years, are being especially honored as we mark the fortieth anniversary of the Central Africa Medical Mission. As we do so, we marvel again at their insights when undertaking this humanitarian project.

I look back fondly to those sessions of nearly 50 years ago. Since then we've grown so big that only on rare occasions, as at this retreat, our entire stateside team is getting together to think about "teamwork" and to reaffirm its aims and purposes. As our administrators reminded us in organizing these sessions,

The retreat is an attempt to gather the entire team together to reaffirm BWM aims and purposes and get a sense of ourselves as a team We're hoping that the outcome will be world mission team-members who understand the task better, carry it out more confidently, and are aware of how they fit into the larger team.

Our agenda for this session has been planned with a learning purpose!

Shades of the Hoenecke spirit as we began 50 years ago! Let's make the most of it! Let's strengthen ourselves again in the Mission Objective Vision (MOV) adopted by our synod, recently formulated and entrusted into our hands:

As men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and eternity,

using the gospel in Word and Sacrament to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

This statement so beautifully reflects the heart of Scripture: beginning with its Old Testament promise of a Savior to all descendants of Adam and Eve; perfectly fulfilled by the Savior himself; who closed each of the four Gospels with his command to bring this good news to all creation; fortified by all the New Testament epistles, urging us to go forth to a world of sinners and appeal to them to “be reconciled to God.” Shouldn’t we wonder at times about our own lack of aggressiveness in responding to these clear statements of Scripture? Missiologist George F. Vicedom sums it up with the words, “Only when we have grasped the fact that the whole purpose of the Bible is the rescue of mankind and therefore mission work, only then do theological thought and type of church work receive their proper direction” (*The Mission of God*, St. Louis: CPH, Preface XI).

Could anything be more compelling, more urgent than this? I’ll never forget how Ray Zimmermann, an early chairman of the World Board, declared at a synod convention:

The task of our synod as defined by our Lord is fantastic in its extent: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The world is so very large. There are so many—so tremendously many—people in this world. How can a comparatively small church body as ours make a dent in this challenge? Rather than to let ourselves be awed into a complacent kind of inactivity by the immensity of our task, let us rather follow the example of the apostles, who had an even greater task, and go to work!

Having served on our synod’s Board for World Missions, you can imagine what an added privilege it was for me in 1962 to receive the call from the commission to Northern Rhodesia, Africa, to serve as a missionary there. The call stated that I was to “help establish a course of study in a Bible School.” Talk about a challenge! At the time I didn’t know what purpose a “Bible School” in a foreign field was to serve. This term, I soon found out, was commonly used at that time in world mission fields for *worker training*. Here at home we customarily thought of the training of pastors as beginning in an elementary Christian day school, continuing in a Lutheran preparatory high school and Lutheran college, and finishing in a Lutheran seminary. I soon learned that in a world mission field one begins worker training with mature adults, preferably already married. One fits the entire program into the cultural situation of the country where one is working. One starts from absolute scratch. From other missions already engaged in theological education for nationals we learned many practical hints. It was important for all of us at first to learn the hard way.

We’ve been learning ever since. The doctrine that we teach doesn’t change; neither does its purpose. We simply do what Paul told Timothy to do when he wrote: “*The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*” In other words, simply entrust the teachings of the Word of God into the hands of those qualified to teach others. Teach them to do it like a soldier in battle, an athlete in a race, a hardworking farmer raising crops. Do it, above all, remembering to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Ti 2:1-6). In the overwhelming grace of God, demonstrated so mightily, lovingly, and effectively in the life and death of Jesus Christ, lies the dynamic of it all!

Dear people, it works! By the overwhelming grace of God we do what he tells us to do. We accept what he promises. In doing so, we turn our own lives as well as the lives of our families upside down. I had six children between the ages of 5 and 18 when I accepted the call to Africa, every one in the family was involved in culture change, both in going to Africa as well as later in returning to America. Total family involvement is a part of it. We go where we are convinced the Lord wants us to be.

Often at first we have to feel our way. We stutter and stumble about in our inexperience and our unfamiliarities. Sometimes it seems that everything we try to accomplish could be at the point of total collapse. Yet we find out again and again how God’s “strong Word” can “cleave the darkness,” and how, “at his

speaking,” miracles are done! It has happened in Africa, and as I read the field reports of this year from practically every part of this world, this has happened repeatedly and is happening again.

As members of the Board for World Missions, in whatever area your committee has been serving, don't hesitate to take on yourselves the awesome responsibility of turning the lives of those whom you call upside down. You are sending them into the greatest work in the world. And believe me, those who accept this call and stay with it will always receive more than they can give, both they as well as their families. I have personally heard many fellow-missionaries say just that!

Our call is unique. It's a call to proclaim an unconditioned gospel. It's empowered with the full use of the means of grace. It's based on God's justification of a world of sinners, a call to implement the precious means of grace, entrusted to us centuries ago by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Book of Concord. No other church body has the spiritual equipment we have. We say that not boastfully, but humbly, awed by the privilege that God has entrusted into our hands. It's a call that's as important in Sofia, Bulgaria, or Durados, Brazil, or Lilongwe, Malawi as it is in Watertown, Wisconsin, USA.

Please remember that ! It's tremendously important. As fellow members of the WELS Board for World Missions it's not only consequential that we are engaged in world mission work in a general sort of way, but that we are doing it as members of the WELS. The Germans refer to this as our "*Existenzberechtigung*." The French call it our "*raison d'etre*." I've referred to this frequently when speaking about world mission work as our primary reason for existence as a church in other parts of the world, briefly stated, why we are where we are. Our task is to plant churches that are Scriptural, evangelical, and confessionally Lutheran-teaching workers to proclaim a pure gospel message, establishing a church built upon Word and Sacraments, centered in God's marvelous declaration of peace and forgiveness of sins to all mankind.

No matter how small our beginnings, or how miniscule our efforts may seem to us at first, what we are doing is the greatest work in the world and supplying its most urgent need. *That is our challenge!*

2. The Challenge Before Us in its *Present* Context

So much for the past and the precious heritage that our God has placed into our hands. Let's now also view this mission challenge *in its present context*.

It's been great, hasn't it! The Lord has been so good to us. During the past half century we've been privileged to extend this mission activity to so many places. If somebody would have told me fifty years ago that we would be working in so many countries of this world by this time, I would have considered this beyond our most optimistic dreams. When at a recent LWMS WOW retreat in my home town Mishicot, Wisconsin, I saw the LWMS women marching into the assembly hall with those 26 flags from world countries in which we as a synod are now actively engaged, I felt tremors go up and down my spine. Perhaps the word "thrilling" best describes the feeling.

A former chairman of this board, William A. Meier, expressed the awesomeness of our synod's mission activity in his foreword to the book entitled *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*, as we celebrated our 100th birthday of world outreach:

As you read this centennial history of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod world missions you will thrill to see the ever-present and all-powerful hand of God in our history. You will be spellbound at each demonstration of the grace of God at work. You will be startled to see the unfailing faithfulness of our God in the face of so many currents and cross-currents of the past century...Some would suggest that this world is near its final destruction. Others are preoccupied with predicting God's infinite timetable. This book encourages us to work as though this book were only the first chapter of WELS missions. All else we are happy to leave to God, to whom be all glory.

Well said, Bill! I urge all members here to read the book again. How varied the work in many fields! We see how in some places the mission story, as in Arizona, depicts “a century of patience and persistence.” In Europe we were, and still are, occupied chiefly with “a battle of confessionalism.” In some places we answered appeals for help from a mission organization already in existence. In others we preferred to do our own searching for places to begin. In some fields we struggle to gain converts “one at a time.” In others there are “blessings beyond expectations.” While some fields may seem at present nothing more than an exercise in patience, we can look upon them as “opening doors” to millions and billions of people. There was a time in Africa when it took fifteen years to gain the first convert, while today Christianity is growing there faster, they say, than anywhere in the world.

To Every Nation was written nearly ten years ago. Since then additional things have happened that are equally exciting. The former “iron curtain” is no longer a barrier. Countries like Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Albania can be added to the “opening doors.”...Particularly in India and in southern Asia, where mission work was seriously hampered by cultural, linguistic, and governmental problems, there is the promise of a development far greater than previously experienced. ...Not many years ago it was predicted that China’s takeover of Hong Kong would prevent a missionary presence there. This has not happened! SALEM (South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission) has made great strides in all phases of its work, and looks forward to further outreach among the countless Chinese people on the continent. ...In areas such as Albania, Colombia, and Indonesia the continued presence of missionaries for various reasons has been threatened. Yet we continue not only to carry on, but also to grow through the presence of competent lay leaders. ...A lack of missionary presence has not kept us out of Cuba. Our missionaries have continued to train leaders for house churches on that neighboring island, reaching hundreds of souls that persevere in spite of religious persecution. ...Here in our country we have expanded our mission work beyond Apacheland to other native American tribes. ...Perhaps it’s time that *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* have an addendum!

It’s fascinating, isn’t it, how the preaching of the word often brings forth growth where least expected, and how the tiny mustard seed can become “a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches” (Mt 13:32). To lay personal claim for any part of such success is self-deception. As our Augsburg Confession states, “For through Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God” (Article V). To review adequately this panorama of activity isn’t possible. I’ve chosen, therefore, to restrict myself to a *few observations* of your present work as I view it more or less from a distance.

My chief observation, as one might expect, refers to *worker training*, which I’ve already mentioned as the essence of it all. First, of course, we’ve got to find the “*reliable men*” to train. That takes time. Often when we begin a mission in a new area people may wonder why it takes so long to hear about numerical growth. It not only takes time, but it also takes patience and perseverance to “*entrust*” to these people “*the things*” we have received from the Lord. I recall how in Africa the entire process began so slowly, so gradually. First we had to find some reliable men to be taught in a Bible School, men whose first qualification had to be primarily how to use English as a second language. With over 30 vernacular languages to deal with in the country, there wasn’t much else to do. The basics of the Bible was the start, then the fundamentals of Luther’s Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. Slowly, ever so slowly, the materials to preach and teach such basic materials developed, as well as the capacity of the people to use them.

The Bible School led to a Seminary. The use of English and the vernaculars, after some years, led to studies in Greek and Hebrew. The eventual goal, never lost sight of, was to train theologians, following the principles as stated in the catalog of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, “to preach and teach the pure gospel of Jesus Christ and to carry out the pastoral duties of the holy ministry in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and in conscious agreement with the Confessions of the Lutheran Church” (*Catalog, WLS*, p 4). We’re still developing the program and working toward that goal, after nearly 40 years! It’s amazing what strides have been made. Some of the nationals from the early years of this struggle are now doing the teaching. Is this asking too much of people of another culture and language? I don’t think so.

Through going “the whole way” in our theological training program, including the study of Greek and Hebrew, we can open the way into other vital areas of outreach, and that is in the area of linguistics, especially Bible translation. Great strides in translation techniques and training have occurred within the past few decades, leading to new and revised Bible translations that have literally opened the Scriptures to countless people. By involving our seminary in Africa with its faculty, students, and national pastors in as many as a dozen or more translation projects within the past several decades, our church has become the translation center of one of the most concentrated efforts of this kind in all of Africa.

Another observation that I find worthy of special mention has been *the part that our laymen* have been playing in world mission work. From the very beginning in Central Africa our missionaries have made use of nationals to do the preaching and teaching under their supervision, working toward the goal of a national ministry to do the job. Even after nearly fifty years of activity, most of the sermons, while not always written, are being proclaimed by national laymen. We really did not reach out effectively in Africa until we were able to involve nationals in the work. Let that be emphasized! Getting nationals involved was, and still is, the key to our growth.

As the national church in Africa continued to grow, a greater reliance was also placed on laymen from America through WELS Kingdom Workers, both because of financial support and volunteer efforts in the mission field to help things keep moving. I sometimes wonder what we would have done without that steady stream of lay helpers from America out at Mwembezhi to support both spiritual and medical missions out in the bush. The names Koester, Lucke, Schulte, Meier, Solofra, and Stelljes come to mind. I can still remember when Jim Haag and Bob Grebe, laymen who were among the early members of our World Mission Board, were instrumental in helping establish this Kingdom Worker’s organization, which has become such an important part of our world mission program in many areas. To me it’s also encouraging that laymen are equally included in our synod’s Synodical Council. More and more we are using our “priesthood of believers” (1 Pe 2:9).

Among my observations I’ve also found *humanitarian work* in connection with world missions especially interesting to observe. This year our *Central Africa Medical Mission* is celebrating the 40th year of its existence. Both Rev. Theodore Sauer and I, who were in Africa when this program was started, were requested to write a history of this undertaking, which has appeared under the title *Let Us Do Good*. Without going into detail in all the matters connected with a humanitarian effort of this kind, I would encourage you all to read the story of this mission of love, and how it has become a blessing to countless others as well as to ourselves. I sometimes wonder if we realize how many have been involved in this medical mission. In addition to the more than fifty nurses from America who have served overseas, the MDs from here who have been their medical directors, the board’s administrative committees who have governed the program, the dedicated women who have served on the Central Africa Medical Mission Committee, there have been hundreds of “contact women” and thousands of members of women’s organizations showing their Christian love in action, taking care of 55,000 to 70,000 patients a year in Africa at an annual cost of about \$200,000. None of the funding impinges on the synod’s budget. We can speak of this work as an “arm of the church” or an “aid to the gospel,” always remembering that it is primarily Christian love in action. Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Humanitarian aid in general is becoming more closely associated with world mission activities. Since our entry behind the former Iron Curtain a *Medical Mission of Mercy* has begun working in East Asian countries such as Russia, Bulgaria, and Albania, extending its support in various ways, especially through distribution of food, clothing, and medicine. Here, too, it is through the volunteer work of committee members and the generous gifts of organizations, private donors, and schools that this activity can be carried on without dependence on the synod’s budget. ...A program out of Tuscon, Arizona, that helps provide for the spiritual and physical needs of children in northern Mexican villages has recently been featured in the *WELS Connection* and in *Forward in Christ*. ...A fund administered by the WELS Relief Committee has for many years distributed help to disaster victims at home and abroad. Much of this recently went to the earthquake victims in India and was directed through the friendly counselor of our mission in that country. ...A Humanitarian Aid Committee

has been established in our synod to lend advice, support, and encouragement to a greater consideration of needs of this kind.

The “*observations*” I have referred to in this section may have seemed rather diverse, as though chosen at random—intensified worker training programs; the use of laymen involved in practically all aspects of the work; humanitarian activities in which thousands of women from here and abroad are involved—what do all these activities have in common?

To me they reflect in various ways that we as a synod are far more “outgoing” than we used to be. And what I have observed is only part of the story. We’re less introverted. We’re not afraid of new activities, different kinds of involvement. We seem to be more aware of the rest of the world, and the importance of sharing what the Lord has placed into our hands. I think we’re also more concerned about dealing with people of other cultures, using them and their gifts to reach back to their own people with the gospel. We’re more anxious, I think, about the millions, yes billions of people who don’t know the Savior. When faced with new opportunities we have not hesitated to explore them further. When confronted with difficulties we have found ways to continue in spite of them. Our presence in 26 countries, with over 100 representatives engaged in outreach activities is evidence of the Lord’s blessings upon our world mission work. This certainly indicates that we are becoming more mission-minded, conscious of the challenge that there’s a world out there that desperately needs what we have to share with them.

3. The Challenge Before Us as We Look to the *Future*

But there’s still a way to go, an arduous way, in many respects more complicated, more varied, more difficult, more sensitive. Anyone who’s been involved with mission work for any length of time will know that just when we begin to sit back and congratulate ourselves on our remarkable progress, Satan manages to concoct any number of difficulties to unsettle any feelings of complacency. All of which makes a conference of this kind tremendously important, a conference that has to do with *teamwork*, not only with ourselves, but also with those of other cultures with whom we’ve worked in the past. As we turn *from the present to the future*, the sense of urgency not only persists, but is exacerbated. “Night is coming,” Jesus warned, “when no man can work.” We don’t know how much time is left. We also see how the storm clouds on the horizon are getting darker.

The church bodies in America and Europe which once served as the parenting organizations of world missions are losing membership. In a recent book, published at the request of our district presidents entitled *We Believe in Jesus Christ*, one contributing author wrote, “Most mainline denominations have sold out their doctrinal birthright.” Another stated, “Today we see people turning to the irrational, to eastern mysticism, to New Age myth-makers.” Still another pointed out, “Confessional Lutheranism has dwindled to about 5 % of those who confess to be Lutheran.” The Pentecostals and the Charismatics are having a field day in Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia, much of this aided and abetted by hard-core evangelists coming from America. The World Council of Churches, which began in 1910 with the stirring watchword, “The Evangelization of the World in Our Generation,” has deteriorated into an organization chiefly interested in supporting humanistic philosophies and political reforms.

Many church bodies that were planted in Africa in the nineteenth century are being splintered into bits and pieces. In a book entitled *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, David Barrett writes about the thousands of churches and sects that have split off from their parenting bodies. This has happened for all sorts of reasons—prophetic, messianic, nativistic, syncretistic, you name it. Much of this has to do with culture clash. The *Times of Zambia* (which I still read regularly) frequently contains articles about battles over church leadership and church property. Usually these battles are between a new national leadership and the leadership of the church body that helped establish them.

It’s timely, therefore, that we consider very carefully the topics chosen for this retreat. The first topic, *Planting an Indigenous Church*, goes all the way back to the policy adopted by our synod in 1957. If ever we need to pray for churches that can govern themselves, support themselves, propagate themselves, and discipline

themselves according to the teachings of God's word, that time has come. At the same time we need to remember that this "selfhood" principle does not end the relationship existing between the planting church body and the national church which has been planted. The growth which has been achieved by the national church should continue in a state of partnership with the body that helped bring it into being.

I sometimes wonder to what extent we realize that we have arrived at a new era and dimension in our world mission activity. To what extent are we aware of the fact that we are working together with church bodies that we have planted nearly fifty years ago? All three of the topics to be presented at this retreat refer to "*church planting*." Much of our work as a mission board, I suppose, relates to the "*planting*" stage. But there's been a lot of growth experienced in many of those tender plants since then. They have already produced much fruit of their own. Some of these have developed into church bodies with their own national leadership. What about the continuing times of "*weeding, watering, fertilizing, and eventually harvesting*?" Are we primarily concerned about the initial phase in the entire process? What about the continuing stages of partnership, which we hope will carry on indefinitely? They still need us, and we need them. If ever our continued guidance and support is essential, it is during the confused times of doctrinal and confessional indifference that are threatening the very foundations of Christianity today, the "terrible times in the last days" that Paul warned against (2 Tim 3:1-5).

On the other hand, these are times that are great to experience, times when we see the national church gradually growing and taking on more responsibilities. Often we find that we can learn as much from them as they from us. But unfortunately they are also sensitive times, times when tensions can arise between "mission" and "national church," tensions in matters of leadership, ownership, organization, placement of church workers, plans for the future. Who is really in charge? Who "owns" the property? Discussions about money and property are always sensitive, especially when taking place between people coming from "rich America" and those scratching for their existence. How are the decisions made? Do both parties receive equal consideration? I'm not so sure that we've always given this period of "partnership" the consideration it deserves. Does the extremely sensitive matter of self-support somehow have a way of becoming an all-important issue? I look forward to the presentation of my good friend Roger Sprain, in which questions of this kind will have opportunity for more discussion.

The second topic, *Approaching Church Planting As A Team*, is equally valuable in helping us face sensitive confrontations that may arise. I've had the privilege of hearing Dr. John Johnson in orientation sessions for returning missionaries as well as for those departing to world mission fields, including Kingdom Workers and participants in medical missions. I wish this program had been in existence years ago. I find especially useful in these training sessions the instructions as to how to deal with people in cross-cultural relationships, and how misunderstandings can stem from our own cultural ineptitudes. Our German heritage carried with it the gospel in all its truth and purity, but it also brought along some cultural hangups that make it difficult to become, as the Apostle Paul expresses it; "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22). Let's face it, our Germanic background has a way of appearing quite overbearing and tactless when expressing ourselves in sensitive matters with people of another culture. I've seen this in others as well as having experienced it in myself.

I'm sure it will be very helpful, as mentioned before, for your committees to meet together as you consider *Approaching Church Planting As Administrative Committees*, presented by Kurt Hoenecke and Jeff Gunn, a former student at our Mequon seminary as well as a fellow-missionary in Zambia. To me it appears that the work is becoming far more widespread as well as more complicated. This is especially true as we enter this new dimension of dealing with missions that are in their second and third generations, more developed and more inclined to ask questions about the relationship between the sending and the receiving church bodies.

I look forward, finally to the closing presentation by our seminary president David Valleskey, which will deal with the problem of maintaining a balance between the board's responsibilities to the fields in which we are working and the synod which has initiated and continues to support this work. To me it is especially gratifying that the president of our synod's theological seminary is actively engaged in our synod's home and world mission programs!

Teamwork is the primary focus of this mission retreat, teamwork as we face a troubled world, teamwork as we face increasingly complicated problems. This teamwork is not only one that exists between us, the members of boards and committees of the sending church, but also between us and the members of boards and committees of the receiving church bodies that we have helped establish. It is based on a partnership that exists between people of differing nationalities, languages, backgrounds, cultures, and worldly means, people in some cases separated by thousands of miles. How important that a friendly and a brotherly relationship exist between mission and national church, carefully aware of any tendencies or failings on our part that could lead to misunderstandings!

While preparing this paper, searching for some kind of Scriptural answer relating to this problem of partnership, I thought again of Paul, a missionary of excellence, chosen by Christ himself to be his instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles. Let's look at the opening words of his letter to the Philippians, in which we find this very word "*partnership*" at the center of his greeting:

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus" (v 1). We note that he doesn't introduce himself as some great dignitary. Together with Timothy he's simply a servant, literally a slave. Christ Jesus is the Master! How important that we, too, avoid any feeling of superiority as we meet with our partners!

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons" (v 2). He greets them with the greatest respect, as fellow members of the Holy Christian Church, blotting out all thoughts of distinction in rank, showing also respect for their leaders as they communicate together in this partnership.

"Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v 3). This familiar greeting establishes the basis of this partnership, the "grace" that comes from a loving God, and the "peace" that rests upon Christ's work of justification for all. How important that we remind ourselves of this basis whenever we meet!

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (vv 4-5). Prayer and partnership go together. It's interesting that the word "partnership" is used here instead of "fellowship", which is usually used in translating the word occurring in the Greek text. Here the change in translation to "partnership" is more appropriate. It conveys the idea of meeting together to consider prayerfully matters in need of discussion. It occurs in a happy and a joyful spirit because it's based upon the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the foundation of a relationship that has been in existence since the Philippians came to faith. Do we sufficiently involve the national churches when planning strategies that pertain to their future?

"Being confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (v 6). What a powerful way to begin a meeting! What a beautiful way to express this "partnership" which began with Christ and which will end with him in all eternity!

Is Paul just living in the clouds? Is this some kind of unreal situation, a Shangri La, something too idealistic to be practical? Paul writes these words as a Jew, primarily to people of Gentile background. He writes from a prison in Rome. He's writing to people who are suffering because of opposition to the gospel. As we continue reading this letter we find that he encourages them to imitate Christ's humility, "who, being in the very nature of God...made himself nothing" (2:1-12). He offers advice in a personal matter as he speaks about sending back Epaphroditus (2:25-30). He warns against enemies such as the legalists and the libertines among them (ch. 3). He writes in a spirit of frankness, confidentiality, and partnership, yet in all of this there is an overriding note of joyful triumph, summarized in that well-known verse, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (4:13). Note the tone of love, fellowship, maturity, and experience reflected in these words of Paul.

LORD, help us as we face the challenge of working with our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world, striving for ways to improve our partnership with them as we continue to carry on with them the most important work in the world!

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