

Mission First

A Bible Study for Mission First!

By Dr. Jon Berquist, President, Disciples Seminary Foundation and member of the 2016 Mission Council

God calls us to work together across all generations so that we may share and receive the good news of Jesus Christ by creating communities of healing, learning, and transformation. —Emerging Mission First! pilot priority

To understand the emerging Mission First! priority, we need to talk about the meaning of mission. According to dictionaries, “mission” is an important goal, or a purpose with a sense of conviction. We sometimes talk about it as a strategic plan, or a vision of a possible future, or the identity we embrace. But as Christians, mission must mean something more than just this year’s goal. A biblical and theological sense of mission begins with God. The identity of God is foundational for the church’s mission; it all starts with God. From scripture and from our own lives, we have learned about this God: God loves the world and cares for each of its inhabitants with a powerful, enduring love (2 Chr 6:14, Ps 36:7, Joel 2:13, John 3:16, 1 John 4:7).

Because God loves the world, God claims us as God’s people and then sends us out to spread that love and compassion everywhere possible. After all, our mission statement has long been, “To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps ‘to the ends of the earth.’” – Acts 1:8

Mission is what happens when God *sends* (Ex 3:12, Is 6:8, Is 42:6, Matt 28:19., John 20:17). God inspires and directs us; God empowers us; and then God puts people into motion, by the strength of the Spirit (Is 61:1, Zech 4:6, Luke 4:18, Acts 13:4). God’s mission is God’s motion. The God who sends us defines the mission of bringing God’s love to every corner of the world. The New Testament word for this is *apostolic* – that which God sends (Luke 9:1-2 and 10:1).

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Wherever God sends us, we form community in God’s name and in God’s presence. When God sends one or two of us to share love with one or two others, Christ is with us (Matt 18:20). Every place we go, we bring God’s presence with us, and every conversation becomes a community. God sends apostles (and Disciples) to heal; we know that from Luke 9:1-2, when Jesus first sent out the twelve to minister in his name. That’s why we need to form communities of healing; it’s what God has always sent us to do.

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God also calls us into communities of learning, including teaching and proclamation (Is 61:1, Matt 28:18-20, Luke 9:2, Acts 2:42). From as long ago as the time of the Exodus, when God rescued the people, God commanded us to form learning communities (Deut 11:18-21). Teaching about our faith in God is a core value of Christian community, just as it is essential for Christian mission (Prov 3:1; Matt 28:18-20). But we must also heed the scriptural advice that, even though some among us are teachers, we all remain learners (Deut 5:1, Prov 1:8). Jesus came to teach, and we all continue to learn together from his teaching (Matt 11:15). Our role is to be a community that learns together and from each other, along with our mission of healing the world’s brokenness and showing forth God’s wholeness. This is the path toward transformation, of ourselves and of God’s world. We are called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2), which requires that we all be learners together and that we all work for healing of the world.

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As Disciples, we have long known some of our special gifts in the whole family of God. We know that God calls the whole people of God, not just us. Disciples don’t own the mission; we are set in motion by the one God who puts all things into motion. For this reason, we are always looking for ecumenical partners and other Christians throughout the world, and we need to listen to their witness, for they are called by the same God as we are.

In the same way, we must continue our Disciples commitment to work against the racism that injures everyone in our world and devalues the God who creates us all (Gen 1:27; John 3:16; Gal 3:28). Although racism is not humanity's only sin, Disciples have rightly made our work to dismantle racism a top priority for decades, and our work is not done. God's calling for all people to live with freedom remains at the heart of our mission (Gal 5:1).

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God's mission leads us to shape communities of healing, learning, and transformation, and God compels us to include everyone. If all of us will be learners, then all of us will need to be teachers as well. We have heard the scriptural witness to teach the children (Prov 1:2-6; Matt 19:14), but we must also remember that children can be leaders and teachers. We confess that Jesus is the child who leads us and teaches us (Luke 2:39-52), and throughout history, God has raised up leaders and teachers of all ages in our community (1 Sam 3; Is 11:6, Ps 8:1; Matt 21:16; 2 Tim 1:5). We call the church to see that God gives dreams to children (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17), and God gives strength and wisdom to youth (1 Sam 3:19-21; 1 Sam 17:42; 1 Kings 18:12; Jer 3:4; Hos 2:15; Ps 103:5; 1 Tim 4:12). Proverbs 20:29 tells us plainly that God strength, splendor, and beauty in every stage of life, and Zechariah 8:4 shows how youth and age belong together in joyful community. God has raised up spectacular leaders among those of age (like Abraham and Sarah, or Elizabeth and Zechariah, or Moses, whose work started when he was 80) and of youth (like Samuel, Ruth, and David - the children, youth, and young adults of their day). God gives us leaders of every generation, and we need to receive them all as gifts from God for the upbuilding of the whole body. For the church to be true to God's mission, we all need to realize we are all learners as the whole people of God, no matter what our life experience.

God's mission sends us to the world that God so loves, and calls us to form inclusive communities where God's people find healing, learning, and transformation. As Disciples, we covenant together to live out this mission, including all ages, all races, all kinds of people, equipping all the saints for the work of ministry, because God calls us into unity and wholeness for the sake of the whole world (Eph 4:13).

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Questions:

1. Read Exodus 3:1-15. Scripture tells us that, after Moses's call, he spent 40 years leading the Israelites and then died at the age of 120 (Deut 34:7), so he must have been 80 years old when he began leadership and his teaching role. Why would God choose a leader of this age?
2. After Moses, God chose Joshua as the next leader. Joshua began his ministry as a youth (Num 11:28). He may have been in his early twenties or even younger when he became leader (Num 32:11). How did this transfer of generations help the Israelites adapt to the Promised Land?
3. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21. Samuel is quite young in this story; maybe a child of 6, or maybe a youth of 11 or 12, according to traditions. Why would God give visions to a child like Samuel? How do Samuel and Eli, his older mentor, share in ministry?
4. Read Matthew 11:25-27 and Matthew 18:1-7. How does this help us realize our church as always learning like children? How should the church treat its youngest members?
5. Read Acts 2:40-47. What does this show us about how to be *inclusive communities*? What does it look like when we are *healing, learning, and transforming*?

