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**Love for the Lost**

**Imitating the Great Commission**

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# **7 Habits of a Mission-Minded Congregation**

Prepared by the CLC Committee on Domestic Fields

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The **Committee on Domestic Fields** is a subcommittee of the CLC Mission Board. "The purpose of the Committee on Domestic Fields (CDF) is to make outreach ideas and material available to CLC congregations and to encourage them in carrying out the Great Commission of our Savior, Jesus Christ."



Oftentimes, you can build on planning done by other churches, with resources like the Tacoma Outreach Menu (available online here: <http://clclutheran.net/documents/>). Your pastor is also an available resource for ideas as he can draw upon the advice of other pastors and also of synodical groups like the CDF.

As a parting thought to this article series, remember that even the most important work of our Savior Jesus on earth, the very thing we desire to share, was not completed overnight. God, who planned our salvation in eternity, is more than able to bless each step your church takes to promote the gospel - everything within its proper time, however. If you've thought and prayed about outreach for sometime, or if you've tried ideas that haven't stuck, take a step back and consider if your church is effectively communicating.

*But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)*

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Part 1

## Love for the Lost

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**When was the last time you reached out to someone that was lost?** Is there confusion as you read this as to what, "lost" means? Often the initial reaction to the word lost is someone who is an unbeliever. Yet the Lord tells His disciples that He came to reach the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6). He came first for those that already knew of the Messiah and grew up in faith.

Consider that for a moment. When was the last time you looked at your congregation's directory and prayed for or reached out to your brother or sister in Christ? There may be souls who haven't come to the Lord's house lately, or who are suffering through some trial, or might even have "everything together" but have become lazy in their faith. No doubt we ourselves have had the same trial, have been lost, and have been thankful for Jesus seeking us out. (Ezekiel 34:16)

James 1:22 says, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*

Often the barrier in reaching out is ourselves. We are afraid of being unequipped to handle what might come, uncertain about what we might say or do, or even lacking a desire to get started at all.

2 Corinthians 12:9 says, *"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"*

The calling of our Lord is clear, and He has given us the opportunity to bring the gift of the Holy Spirit and the word to those who seem to have lost it. Galatians 6:10 says, *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those*

*who are of the household of faith!"* As the Devil tries to lead our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ away from Jesus our good Shepherd, let us, as Christ did, go and seek them out to bring them back. To bring them back to the nourishing word of our Lord and the blessing of growing in Christ as a congregation. Let's start as Jesus did, by looking at those we are closest to, those in our midst that need to be sought out. If we are uncomfortable, nervous, or lack the desire, then let's pray about it! Pray the Lord gives us His Holy Spirit and the desire to serve Him. Discuss it with each other. Work together to show Jesus your love for Him and your "LOVE FOR THE LOST!"

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

Redemption Lutheran Church and School in Lynnwood, WA practiced showing "love for the lost" with a three-week Vacation Bible School series on Christmas. Each week focused on a different aspect of Christmas, such as: ornaments, the tree, and gift giving, and brought out the love of Christ in these symbols. VBS kids also assembled blessing bags for homeless kids in the community with hygiene items, toys, gospel pamphlets, and a personal Christmas card. This is just one example of showing and proclaiming the love of Jesus for the lost. Maybe your congregation can try it too!



projects going. Not everything you suggest will sound awe-inspiring right off the bat. You may have to work at it a bit to help others see the plan and purpose of a project.

In each of the articles of our series, we've tried to share ideas with you. Remember, however, everything in its right time. If your congregation doesn't have a foundation in place for evangelism programs, it will be tough to implement ideas. To see where your church's starting point is at, consider two basic questions about communication:

**1. Does your church have a website?** The internet is the place where people go for information today. Each church should have a functioning website. Furthermore, is your church's information on the web updated? Could you make improvements to your website like offering a mobile friendly platform? Can you expand your web presence into other mediums like social media? How well your church can communicate its message on the web will go a long way in determining how many people are aware of your outreach programs. If you feel lost in this area or are looking for help, the CDF can point you in the right direction.

**2. Does your church have an outreach committee or group?** When doing important work, organization matters (1 Cor. 14:40). It helps to organize outreach efforts if possible. A group or committee can help spread out responsibilities and also provide a format for meeting regularly so as not to neglect the work. Having an official committee within the congregation that is devoted to outreach will also ensure that the entire membership receives regular updates on projects and needs at voter's meetings.

Before jumping right into ideas, think about these two aspects of communication, outside of and within the congregation. When your congregation is ready to communicate outreach, there are plenty of resources that can give you lots of ideas.

for their little ones. The more time spent in that Word, the more prepared we will be to share it. On top of this, parents often have opportunities to share the Gospel. They come into contact with so many people when they bring their children to daycare or sports or classes of one kind or another. What an opportunity is before you young parents! But don't let the parents have all the fun alone! Christians one and all—dust off those catechisms and Bibles. Teach them to your family, insist on true doctrine at home and then get out into the world to share what you know!

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Part 7

## Thinking of Ideas

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Evangelism can seem like an intimidating task because we don't always know where to start. So often, churches begin with brainstorming sessions about projects, goals, and implementing a grand vision of success in their outreach. While it's good to develop ideas, it's also helpful to remember that any task worth undertaking involves steps. Consider what Jesus taught about planning:

*“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ‘saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish?’” (Luke 14:28-30)*

Responsible planning means not just keeping an eye on the long-term goal, but also completing the more mundane, day-to-day steps along the way. It's easy to get frustrated early on in congregational outreach because we often don't see the results we want. It also takes individuals who lead by example to get

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Part 2

## Imitating the Great Commission

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**Every Christian congregation wrestles with concerns about church growth**, keeping members, and a viable mission presence in their community. You can be sure that you will see plenty of so-called solutions to these issues across different churches. Some approach the work of the church like a business. As long as you meet your goals and keep your commitments, growth will eventually happen. Some are so afraid of these concerns that they discard any approach that doesn't lead to numerical growth. Still, some make the elements of the worship experience, namely music, architecture, and atmosphere the chief priority.

All of these thoughts beg the question, what is the best model for a church? To answer, we look to the Bible, which is very straightforward. The Gospel of John is a good example. Near the end of both that book and Christ's ministry, Jesus gave instructions to His disciples about this very thing. He said,

*“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23)*

A church's responsibility is to preach the law and gospel. The law at times when sin needs to be revealed and repented of, and the gospel at times when the law has generated this effect. Forgiving or retaining sins - that's what it all comes down to. It's very easy for a church to stray from this mission and focus on the lesser alternatives like those previously mentioned. A truly mission-minded congregation will bear the marks of the law and the gospel. So, what does that look like today? Our image comes directly from Christ's Great Commission -

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing*

*them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” (Matthew 28:19-20)*

The Gospel in Word and Sacrament, also called the Means of Grace, is the vehicle upon which the ministry of the Church grows. Jesus commands His followers to baptize and preach all which He has commanded. We could also add in His command to practice the Lord’s Supper often, in remembrance of what He did. The Gospel’s effect cannot be measured solely in numerical growth or societal popularity. The Church does not rise or fall on fads and customs. It stands firm on Christ, the Cornerstone, and His Word is the unchanging foundation for growth and strength.

Many churches may tout a highly functioning mission program but leave the word of God out of the picture. It is true that the churches have opportunity to provide many outreach services that care for bodily needs. However, without the gospel in Word and Sacrament at work, a church can never fulfill its purpose or generate lasting spiritual growth. Be a mission-minded congregation that stands, defends, and promotes the law and gospel ministry by continuing to imitate the Great Commission.

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

How is your congregation celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation? It was 500 years ago when the Lord Jesus used men like Martin Luther to uncover God’s Word of truth about His Word and Sacraments and how they are to be properly used. What a great opportunity to show your community that your congregation *still* stands for the proper use of the Means of Grace in the Sacraments.

**1. Hold a joint Reformation Service!** If possible, contact area CLC churches to celebrate the truth about the Word alone, Faith alone, and Scripture alone. Invite the public to the service

and bring more people to Christ. They claim that fighting over doctrine turns people away from the faith and harms our witness.

And that all seems to make sense. But it’s completely wrong.

It is the Word which makes us one. It is the Word of Christ which is Spirit and life. It is the Word which is living and active. It is the Word which is everything! Wherever any part of that Word is given up or replaced with human ideas, the church becomes less, its witness weaker, its mission less mighty. A truly evangelical insistence on doctrine is a desire for true unity! If we hear and keep God’s Word, we will want to share it with others and unite with those who do the same. Just as we cannot be mission-minded without a love for true doctrine so we cannot have a love for true doctrine without being mission-minded!

Remember, Christ is the head of the Church. She is His alone. He bought her. He cleansed her. He called her. The Word on which she is founded is His Word. And that is the Word spoken of in the Great Commission “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

A recent survey of some Lutheran congregations noted that those congregations which had large numbers of families with children tended to be the same congregations which saw more visitors and adult converts. Why? I think perhaps it’s this. Parents often spend a great deal of time teaching their children the faith—reading from Luther’s Small Catechism, singing hymns, working on Bible memory verses, Christmas Eve parts etc. This review of true doctrine is as beneficial for the parents as it is

taking them out to eat or listening to their ideas about how they can plugin to church work. There are plenty of ways to strengthen people without having to directly teach the Word of God. Keep your eyes open for opportunities that God may be giving you!

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Part 6

## Desire to Achieve Unity

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Some things just go together. Root beer and ice cream. A ball game and a hot dog. The fourth of July and fireworks. One pairing which in the minds of many might not be such a ball and glove sort of fit is unity and insistence on true doctrine. But since true unity can only be found in and created by the Word of God, this is really the tightest pair of the bunch! If our congregations want to be mission-minded we must have a thirst and love for true doctrine.

Compromise never accomplishes Christian Unity. Jesus prayed that His Church might all be one, but don't overlook what he prayed would make them one, "Sanctify them by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth" (John 17:3). This is what Jesus wants for His Church and this is what only His Word can give. He does not bring us together by compromise but by sanctifying us, that is, setting us apart. Setting us apart from sin. Setting us apart from false ideas and doctrines. Setting us apart to Himself.

Many Christians today think that our duty to spread the gospel means that we need to stop being so picky about doctrine, that we should just agree to disagree on certain areas in order to focus on what really matters. Then we'll be stronger, more impressive. Then we'll be able to accomplish greater things

through social medias - Facebook, email chains, church yard signs, newspapers and radio stations, and even better, personal invitations from you!.

**2. Hold a seminar!** Advertise and invite the community to a presentation/discussion about what the Reformation was *really* all about. Emphasize not just the history, but more importantly the defense of the Gospel as Peter writes, "*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*" (1 Peter 3:15)

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Part 3

## Encouraging One Another

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**Encouragement is often tough to come by these days.** We naturally look for approval and appreciation for what we do for others whether it be at work, school, at the home, or even at church. But it is far easier to tear someone down than to build someone up with an encouraging word and support.

*An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. (Proverbs 12:25)*

*A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word! (Proverbs 15:23)*

There are hundreds of encouragement passages throughout the Bible that deal with encouragement in both the spiritual and earthly sense. Take some time to look them up! Because both are important.

*Earthly encouragement* displays a kind and loving attitude



towards others. It shows a genuine interest in their life and can literally change their outlook on their day. Most people really appreciate this type of care and concern.

*Spiritual encouragement* is much more difficult on average, because it involves building up others in Christ's Word and may mean going out of our comfort zone. However, this encouragement will have an impact on the eternal outlook of their soul. In Luke 22:32, the Savior said to Peter: *"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."* While it is very discouraging to see people placing other things ahead of the Lord, encouragement can be as simple as helping someone make use of the opportunities to hear and study the Word of God (home devotions and readings, attending worship at the Lord's house, Bible classes, Sunday school, etc.). This may be either a verbal encouragement, invitation, as well as by example.

*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting (encouraging) one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

No matter what you do, make it a deliberate, ongoing, prayerful attempt to be an encouragement to others, especially when it comes to their faith and walk with Christ our Savior!

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

Encouragement goes so much further than words. James 1:22 says, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only."* If you want to become better at being a good spiritual leader and encourager of others, spend time with Jesus praying about it and working on it!

**1. Make visits with your fellows Christians!** At one congregation,

we expect.

By faith in the work of His Son, Jesus, we have confidence that God will strengthen us for the task of sharing His Word, as David wrote: *O Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will **strengthen** their heart, You will incline Your ear... Psalm 10:17*

Like with many things we often are our own barriers. We might say, "I don't know how to do this." or "I don't have the gifts to be able to help someone else in this way." Let us also remember the words of the Apostle Paul:

*And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

May we boldly step forward in the grace of God, using our witness of His Word to strengthen the work of the souls in our congregation and abroad; trusting in the faithfulness of our Lord to take our feeble attempts and demonstrate His strength in our work!

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

What opportunities has God presented to you for strengthening other people? Try to build your discernment by following these steps:

- 1.** Take a few minutes to visit with someone after church. It will show that you care about their life and through communication you will better understand how you can help strengthen them in their faith.
- 2.** Look for ways you can help those in need. Perhaps it's offering assistance to the young parent struggling with little kids in the church pew. Maybe it's visiting an elderly person who is lonely. Or, it could be mentoring a teen by



the books *Prepared to Answer* and *More Prepared to Answer* by Mark Paustian.

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Part 5

## Strengthening the Individual

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The thought of strengthening is certainly not foreign to the Bible. Most biblical examples involve strengthening through personal interaction. Think of Moses' relationship with Joshua as an example. Near the time of Moses' death, God told him:

*But charge Joshua and encourage him and **strengthen** him, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he will give them as an inheritance the land which you will see. (Deuteronomy 3:28)*

What's interesting is that in most cases an individual was strengthened before or during a difficult task, as it was with Joshua. It's important to recognize this in light of a desire to become more mission-minded. Evangelism is a difficult task. It takes work, and so we need the strength that comes from the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is often brought by the encouraging words of our fellow Christians.

In light of this, it is important for us to remember as church leaders, or ordinary Christians, that in order to become more mission-minded, we can begin by encouraging each other in Christ. Think of Moses. Although God kept Moses from crossing over the Jordan He still provided an opportunity for Moses to serve, by strengthening the next leader. We can also encourage our fellow Christians to use their gifts of evangelism, teaching, and the like even if we are not called to the same type of outreach work, and even if the Lord's calling for us is not what

a group of ladies (typically 4 to 6) meet weekly for Bible study at the individual's homes. At another, they hold a men's breakfast once a week. They select their own topics to discuss. It is a good opportunity to study the Word and to help, pray, and support each other. Essentially a Christian friend network. Take a minute to talk to your pastor and church leaders about starting or joining one!

**2. Attend a Christian Retreat!** Sign up to attend and also invite others to a seminar specifically designated to encourage the Christian's faith life! One example is of the newly formed ManUp Weekend—"Leading in the Image of Christ", held in the fall. Or the Women's weekend in the Spring. There's also the "Arise and Shine" group. And many Youth Camps for children and young adults. Talk to your pastor and check them out for some great faith-building encouragement in Christ!

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Part 4

## Reliance Upon the Word

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1 Cor 1:18-20: **"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"**

I felt like a fool. I'd been working a banquet and had an opportunity to share the gospel with a co-worker. He was nominally Christian but clearly knew next to nothing about Christian doctrine. I started to talk to him about the doctrine of election. Yup. I went there. And afterwards it just seemed like

such a waste of the opportunity to talk about such a complicated doctrine.

But when I think back on it now, was it really that foolish? Sure election isn't exactly your go-to evangelism doctrine but I've thought about why I felt foolish. He might have found it offensive. He might not have understood it. Maybe I didn't explain it well enough. But those are all human reasons, human wisdom, human foolishness. When we think that way, we are overlooking something vital: the power of the cross. The preaching of the cross always seems foolish to human wisdom and human thinking. And since we are humans, we all too easily think like humans. But in truth, the preaching of the cross is the power of God. It is dynamite which blows apart human wisdom and self-reliance. It is the power of God for salvation.

Have you ever played on a team with someone who did everything? You are in right field but the center fielder runs over to catch balls that were hit at you? And gets there before you? Does your job better than you? The gospel is kind of like that. It is the power of God, the wisdom of God to save. That is, there is no other power and no other wisdom. Nothing needs to be added to it. It covers all the positions and does so far better than you ever could. Sometimes I think we forget that. Sometimes maybe we think evangelism is about saying exactly the right things in exactly the right way and in exactly the right tone of voice otherwise we feel we've failed. Really, it's only about one thing: Preach the law. Preach the gospel. And that's it. It's not about you and whether you've done a good enough job. It's about God's Word and God's power.

Now sure, there is a place for giving thought to how to present the gospel in a given circumstance. There are many doctrines in the Bible. All of them are focused on and lead to Christ. Consider a skilled woodworker. He has many different tools. He could likely use any number of them for a given task. But when he knows

his tools and his work well, he can pick the one which may work best. There are many different ways you can use God's Word to share the gospel with someone. And some might be more suitable to certain people in certain situations. Peter's sermon on Pentecost started with the Old Testament which his audience knew well, it ended up at Christ. Paul, speaking to the Athenians, started with their "unknown god" and ended at Christ. There's no doubt that there can be wisdom in approaching different people in different ways. And there are times when you want to be careful what you say to someone. For instance, not everyone necessarily should hear the gospel from you. Jesus spoke only law to the young man who thought he was good enough.

But...you're not Jesus. And Jesus doesn't ask you to be. Just preach the word. You might not do it perfectly. You might talk about the doctrine of election when you'd be better off with the basics. They might not understand. They might not like it. They might be turned off. So what? The cross and the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins by that cross is the power. Rely on it. It will offend people when it is preached. It will also save people.

### **An Example of Mission-Mindedness**

Your tool is the Bible. If you're going to know how best to use it in a given circumstance, you should know it well. That means you need to study it, try to memorize sections of it (I suggest starting with the Psalms). Meditate on it. Ask your Pastor questions about it. Apply the sting of the law and comfort of the gospel to yourself. In doing this you will far better understand also how to apply it to others. As a specific suggestion try what a CLC congregation did for Bible Study. Read through the gospels and with each story ask "What does this say about Jesus?" "What doctrines from the catechism does this present?" "Who needs to hear this?" Perhaps try role playing a witnessing opportunity using that day's Bible study. For a similar approach, check out