

## Start at the Beginning

By Bill Moberly

From the Editor, July 2023

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### Let's Start at the Very Beginning: God's Heart for the Nations

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The famous opening line from the Sound of Music song, **Do-Re-Mi** goes like this:

*"Let's start at the very beginning,  
A very good place to start."*

The picturesque background of the Alps outside Salzburg, Austria, adds to the iconic scene as the catchy tune and memorable lyrics unfold.

The idea that "the very beginning is a very good place to start" rings true as well, although it's not always the way we do things from day to day. Shortcuts, or skipping seemingly self-evident first steps, can work when we genuinely know what we're doing and where we're going. But one of the places it does not end well is in our response to the Global aspect of the Great Commission.



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### Answering the Call

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For more than 130 years, Lutherans in the U.S. answered the call to "Go and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). Whether Norwegian, Swedish, German, or Finnish, at the local and national level there was a focus on taking the Gospel to the least and the lost.

Did this ebb and flow? Of course it did.

Was the same effort and intentionality common in every expression of Lutheranism? No.

There are many fascinating stories from over the decades, many inspiring and many "lost" here, but not in heaven where the angels rejoice over every "sinner who repents" and comes home to the Father through Jesus Christ! Some of these are best left for another article.



The fact is that from the first Lutherans sent from North America in the 1840s, up until the 1970s, more missionaries were sent to places like China, India, Madagascar and New Guinea - just a few of the places where hundreds of missionaries were sent over many decades. These are some of the “*tribes and languages and peoples and nations*” (Revelation 5:9) who were unreached with the Gospel, so it’s where we went.



August Edwins, missionary to China



Ernest and Hildegard Weinhardt

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## What Happened?

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The loss of Biblical authority over the last 50+ years has been well documented, and we still see the devastating effects in many areas. In Global mission, the loss of connection with missionaries at the congregational level started in the 1970s, with evangelism and discipleship disappearing from synodical mission in the ELCA by the early 1990s.

Thankfully, groups like WMPL (1930s) and LBT (founded in 1964) never lost focus on the call to make disciples of all the nations, and many of the front-line missionaries knew and held fast to their primary calling.



Thankfully, too, there have been some global-mission-focused Lutheran congregations that never waned in answering the call to their “Jerusalem” (local area), as well as to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).



Yet, the reality is that in many churches, and for many Lutherans, the idea that “everyone has already heard the Gospel” (yes, I have heard that one) is common. We have become accustomed to churches with little or no connection to genuine church planting and disciple making among the unreached and unevangelized. We have become accustomed to churches structured to include everything but intentional outreach to the nations. This is what happens when congregations start from the framework and experience of the past 50 years.

In addition to the *Erosion of Biblical Authority*, the last 20 years have also been dominated by *Expedience*. Expedience is defined as “a means of attaining an end, especially one that is convenient but considered improper or immoral.” When the focus is on benevolence to give, rather than beginning at the goal of making disciples, it’s easy to lose our way.

For example:

- “Mr. & Mrs. Johnson’s Uncle Fred has a cousin who is a missionary to somewhere, not sure what she does, but let’s send money there once a year.
- “We need a new copier. We mail out the newsletter. That’s outreach, so we can use benevolence to pay for it.” (Yep, that really happened.)
- “We have a mission field right here at home!”
- We support major relief efforts around the world where the organization purposefully excludes sharing the Gospel.

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## “Work” and “Hard” Are Not Four-Letter Words!

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Sally and I are just home from our 50th wedding anniversary family reunion, where our *entire* family gathered – nearly 40 of us – including grown children, spouses, grandchildren, and our great grandson! It was an amazing and unforgettable time of celebrating and reminiscing. Our family spearheaded the effort, as Sally and I never asked or imagined that we could all gather from both coasts and points in between in one place at the same time!



*right: Bill and Sally Moberly 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary family gathering*

*below: The Bill and Sally Moberly family*



As I write, I realize it illustrates one of the things we said frequently when raising our seven children:

- WORK is not a “four-letter word”.
- HARD is not a four-letter word.

It was one of our ways of training our children that something hard to do wasn’t bad or something to be avoided. Finding a week that worked for 7 families from 7 states and both coasts wasn’t easy! It took nearly two years of planning, but they never gave up. It was wonderful in so many ways, and our hearts are overflowing.



But that effort is no comparison with the eternal importance of God's call to the nations!

- Is it hard to start a mission committee when you've done just fine without one for years?
- Is it difficult to battle through the selfishness or misguided greed of a half-million-dollar estate gift to your church that sits unused in the bank, rather than making an eternal difference in a strategic project across the world?
- Is it work to pray about and decide where your congregation is called to invest benevolence dollars for a long-term disciple-making impact, rather than sending money "wherever" on an ever-changing mission-of-the-month, or to support what everyone else does?

So, the starting point for answering God's call to the nations can't be what we have been used to the last generation. Also, let's not avoid connecting directly with a mission agency or missionary because it's too hard to make a change!

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## 2023 CGM Mission Conference

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This is why I am so excited about the **CGM Mission Conference this fall!** Sponsored by the four Celebrating Global Mission agencies, FOMM, LBT, WMPL and ALWM, we are inviting and calling churches to ***Start at the Beginning: God's Heart for the Nations.***

The Great Commission is rooted in this truth:

*"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

— John 3:16 NIV

We are called to the nations because of the Father's heart for every person of every tongue, tribe and nation! We will gather to worship, pray, & study together.

We gather **Saturday evening, September 30, in St. Charles, Missouri,**  
**at the Best Western The Charles.**

This is on the eve of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual LCMC Gathering & Convention,  
but the Mission Conference is not just for LCMC Congregations!

With reproducible Bible studies from the main speakers, as well as other resources, we are praying that September 30 will be a new beginning for all who attend.

**2023 CGM Global Mission Conference**

**"It's Time: Understanding God's Heart for the Nations"**

To find complete Conference information, please visit:

<https://www.cgmmag.com/events/> or <https://www.alwm.org/upcomingevents/cgm2023>

To God be the Glory,

Rev. Bill Moberly, Founder & Director of ALWM

Co-Founder & Editor of Celebrating Global Mission (cgmmag.com)