

Called to Mission

By David Lerseth

History of Mission, April 2025

Introduction

“But you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, who will come upon you, and you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

— Acts 1:8

Acts 2:1-13, marks a very pivotal time in the history of Christianity: the Biblical account of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles. This event is called Pentecost, and it is the beginning of the Christian’s calling to spread the Gospel throughout the world. It is the beginning of the Christian Church and the calling of all Christians to share the Gospel with others. Pentecost reminds us that every Christian, thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit, has the power and responsibility to be a witness to the faith and to contribute to the spread of the Gospel to all cultures and peoples, regardless of race, language or nation.

Acts 1:8 is a good description of who, what and why Christians, the Church, are called to be about mission. This verse means the mission has a beginning, but there is no ending to our responsibility to be about sharing the Gospel to the whole world: our hometown, our home state, our country and to the whole world!



**Timeline of
Christian Mission**

Apostolic Age

**Early Christianity
Until 2025**

To see an impressive timeline of Christian mission from Pentecost until today, please Google “Timeline of Christian missions” at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Christian_missions

Dangers that Prohibit Mission in Our Christian Life

Dangers include:

1. **Having a lack of Biblical knowledge.** One cannot read the Bible without knowing that God calls us to share the message with others. Mission begins with me and grows as we share this calling together with others in the Church.
2. **Being timid or unwilling to live our faith.** Living ones faith may be done in many ways, such as reaching out to others in their times of need with a Christian way of listening, caring and responding to a person/people's needs.
3. **Limiting our mission outreach.** Often we hear people say, "We have plenty of needs at home, so why do we need to be in mission somewhere else?" Acts 1:8 quoted above, shows that mission is a multi-outreach calling for us Christians.
4. **Thinking we do not have enough money as individuals or our congregation.** Mission is most often lacking because we do not have a vision, a challenge, a goal for mission in our individual lives or our congregation. Proverbs 29:18a describes such a challenge: "Where there is no vision, the people perish..."
5. **Failing to emphasize or tell stories of mission by the Church (local and national).** It was very common not too many years ago that every congregation had at least one Sunday a year to celebrate a Mission Sunday. But most often the mission of the Christian Church was included in the Sunday school lessons, confirmation classes and worship/sermons. All of these opportunities spoke of our responsibility to be involved in mission. Today, the Biblical imperative emphasis of the individual Christian and the Church is too often totally lacking.



Developing a Mission-Driven Life/Church

mission:church

Christ Centered / Mission Driven

As an individual or a group, we can challenge each other to speak out and emphasize the Biblical calling of Pentecost to share the love of God in all areas of our world. I remember a song, *Pass It On!*, which states:

"It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That's how it is with God's love, once you have experienced it, you spread His love to ev'ryone. You want to pass it on!"

Let's challenge ourselves and our congregation to develop a Christian mission program:

- 1) Our home/congregation,
- 2) Our state/USA, and
- 3) Our world.



Set goals for each annually. How can you provide resources to accomplish each of these? Every person and congregation has their own methods for receiving financial gifts but there are numerous ways to receive the money for mission. Once it catches on, it grows and grows and we will look back and say, "Oh you of little faith? How did this become a reality?" We live in faith, God opens the doors for mission to happen!

My Personal Testimony



I know this to be true from my life and experience as a Christian, as a member of a church and in my experience as a pastor. Every congregation will respond when the Word of God is studied, mission goals are established and we ask for financial support. We spend a lot of money on ourselves. We live lives with more things than any other country in the world. We also waste a lot of money on things that perish. But when we are challenged, I believe people will respond to support a food shelf, small groups for support of people's pains and needs, emergency relief for people suffering from natural disaster at home, in our state/country and for global mission causes around the globe. Christians have a loving and giving spirit. We only need to be asked and challenged.

Focusing on Global Mission Opportunities

The way global mission has been organized changes over periods of time. In the 19th and 20th centuries, global mission was organized and implemented by national church bodies. They challenged congregations to support global mission, primarily missionaries. As we entered the 21st century, the need for missionaries decreased as the "mission fields" became indigenous churches and had their own people to lead their church's mission. Without the missionaries being the "poster image of mission", national church organizations became more disengaged from their global mission relationships.

As a result, small independent non-profit mission organizations began and now dominate much of the global mission connections around the world. Such is the case with the five mission organizations that provide articles for the *Celebrate Global Mission (CGM)* magazine you are reading. Whether this is good or bad is not the question. The question is, "Who will carry on the Biblical mission to the nations?" All five of these organizations have responded with, "Yes, it is our responsibility!" I



**Celebrating
Global
Mission**

A DIGITAL MAGAZINE

encourage you to also learn about each of them and the specialties that they offer to the Christian witness of the Gospel, globally.

I have been asked numerous times, “Aren’t you in competition with each other? My answer is always, “No”. Each of us has a specific calling, ability and opportunity to be about God’s global mission and there are enough resources for each of us to do our work. So, I invite you to read about these other global mission partners as well as other mission organizations that are not a part of our Celebrate Global Mission group. I also caution you to examine any mission organization to be sure they are a reliable organization.

The Friends of Madagascar Mission Story



When I was a young child, there were several missionaries from Madagascar who would come to our congregation to tell the story of mission in Madagascar. I was amazed as I heard these stories. I believe God planted a seed in my heart from those visits that remained with me throughout my whole career as a pastor and as the Director for Global Mission Support at the ELCA.

When it came time for me to retire, I believed that it would be a waste of the skills and abilities I had learned through 39 years of ministry to simply quit serving in mission and ministry. I believe that God directed my ways because I do not remember sitting down and thinking, “I should start a mission organization that works in Madagascar.” No, it was a miracle of God to direct me into this new ministry. The people in Madagascar ask me many times, “Why do you love us so much that you organized Friends of Madagascar Mission?” I tell them this same story, “It is a miracle of God’s and I am simply God’s servant. Do with me as you wish.” And it happened!



I have a great admiration of the missionaries who went to Madagascar to share the Gospel. They were real mission pioneers and heroes of faith. They are the ones who did the “heavy lifting” of forming a Lutheran Church in Madagascar that now has over 4 million members.

Some of the first missionaries from America



Because the Malagasy Lutheran Church has a great resource of faithful pastors, evangelists and Shepherds (laypersons who are trained and serve in local congregations as leaders), they do not need Christians from other countries to come and serve (although there are areas where Christians from other countries are welcome to come and serve in mission). What they mostly need are our prayers and our financial support because Madagascar is always one of the five poorest counties in the world.

So, in 2009, Friends of Madagascar Mission was begun with a blank piece of paper – no organization, no donors, no programs to support – but with lots of prayer and willingness to be in partnership with the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

With God directing our ways, Friends of Madagascar Mission has grown beyond our dreams. God has directed every step of the way. We just step out of the way and let God move through our willingness to serve. We began with three programs: prison ministry, evangelists, and a hospital nutrition program. The first year of operation we received \$7,439 from 14 donors.

We have now grown into an organization with three general areas of programs that we support:

1) Evangelism: 77 evangelists, prison ministry (spiritual ministry), Bible schools and theological education;

2) Children in Peril: School for the Visually Impaired, School for the Hearing Impaired, Dr. John Dyrnes School, Hope Street Children School and the Nofy i Androy Program (for girls to keep them in school and protect from sexual exploitation)

3) Development: Hunger programs, prison ministry (humanitarian needs), agriculture, water well drilling and water distribution systems



Malagasy evangelists today



Happy participants in the Children in Peril program



Right: Development projects include new water wells

For more information on these programs, please go to:

<https://madagascarmission.org/programs-projects/>

GO THEREFORE...

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— Acts 1:8



My prayer is that you, as an individual and as a congregation, will do the following:

1. Study God's Word to become empowered for service and mission.
2. Pray that God will give you strength to challenge yourself and your congregation to become more deeply involved in a total mission program.
3. Seek out a mission organization that is:
 - Christ centered;
 - Legally incorporated;
 - Has an approved 501(c)3 non-profit status by the IRS; and
 - Sends you updates and reports on the program you support.

God bless your growth and faithfulness to God's mission work!

For more information, contact us via website, email, phone or mail.

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Pastor David Lerseth served parishes in Rosholt, SD; Bartonville (Peoria), IL; and Aberdeen, SD. He also served as an assistant to the Bishop in the former Iowa District of the ALC and as Executive Director of the ELCA Office for Global Mission Support. He is the founder and current Executive Director of Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM).

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Links:

Pentecost: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecost-Christianity>

Timeline: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Christian_missions

CGM: <https://www.cgmmag.com/>

Madagascar: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Madagascar>

Malagasy Lutheran Church: <https://www.cgmmag.com/historyofmission/malagasy-lutheran-church/>

Programs: <https://madagascarmission.org/programs-projects/>