MISSION TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

An Inspiration paper for discussions on Mission in the congregations of the Uniting Church in Sweden



Uniting Church in Sweden

A Church for the whole life where the encounter with Jesus Christ transforms Me, You and the World

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Dear Friend,

THE UNITING CHURCH IN SWEDEN is pleased to present this paper of inspiration for the important discussions in our local churches about mission, with the name Mission Transforming the World.

THE TEXT HIGHLIGHTS a holistic view on mission: mission in Sweden and mission globally, a holistic view on the human beings and their needs and a holistic view on the Gospel. We also highlight a missional perspective which means that mission is not only different kinds of activities, it is not only what we do but what we are. All this is in relation to the vision of the Uniting Church in Sweden, which is to be "a Church for all aspects of life, where the encounter with Jesus Christ transforms me, you and the World".

THIS MISSION PAPER is the result of a long process and a close cooperation between the two departments International Relations and Congregation & Society. We have also had good discussions with representatives for Cooperating churches in the world and representatives from the local churches in Sweden.

THIS PAPER IS NOT A FINAL document about Mission, but a text for inspiration to the local churches. This is also a basis for the long-term plans for the international work that today is carried out in 27 countries in the vast network of contacts that the three founding churches of the Unting Church in Sweden had. At the same time this document is an important foundation for the long-term mission work in Sweden.

IN THE END OF THE DOCUMENT there are questions for discussion for the studies in the congregations and in small groups of different kind.

IF YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS or questions please send them to the International coordinator of the Uniting Church in Sweden, Bertil Svensson, bertil.svensson@equmeniakyrkan. se or to the coordinator for Congregation & Society, Per Westblom, per.westblom@ equmeniakyrkan.se

Looking forward to good discussions about a Mission Transforming the World!

Stockholm in the month of May 2014

Lasse Svensson

President

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The vision of the Uniting Church in Sweden is to be "a Church for the whole life, where the encounter with Jesus Christ transforms – me, you and the world".

The ultimate goal of Mission is transformation.

The transformation of people.

The transformation of society.

The transformation of the whole world and all of creation.

MISSION IS THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH

Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you..."Receive the Holy Spirit."

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down; Fix in us thy humble dwelling; All thy faithful mercies crown! ² MISSION IS THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH "The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."3 In its strategic platform, the Uniting Church in Sweden states that she wants "the Church to be characterized by God's Mission. Jesus Christ has given us the task of bringing people to believe, and the Church is there for us to be able to do this."4 Mission is more than and totally separated from just recruiting people to a congregation or a denomination. Mission is "... the alerting of people to the universal reign of God through Christ." In that way Mission and the Kingdom of God are linked together in the early Christian confession: "Jesus is Lord".6 By living in God's Mission, the Uniting Church in Sweden wants to be a sign of the Kingdom of God for the world. Thus she becomes "... a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God."⁷ In the Foundation of Faith it says "Of its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to serve in the creation of God as an instrument of the Word and the Spirit, as a witness to the Kingdom of God."8 But it is not a question of the Church having a Mission, but the Mission having a Church.

THIS MISSION OF THE CHURCH BEGINS in the abundance of infinite love flowing from the heart of the triune God which "overflows to all humanity and creation."9 In this stream of love there is an outward movement which is "the source of all mission and evangelism." 10 The Bible says that God's very being is love.¹¹ In the same way that Creation can be seen as an outflow of God's abundant love, so there is a new outflow of this love, only so much more beautiful and stronger, in the atoning work of Jesus which culminates on the cross, on Good Friday, when God's arm are stretched out to embrace and save a broken humanity and a decaying creation¹² from sin and death. Jesus' resurrection is the starting-point for, and witness to, the new creation which reaches is perfection the day when God creates a new heaven and a new earth.13

"LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT is the essence of mission."14 Through it God equips his people for the Great Commission. Through it God forms the new community which incarnates the Kingdom of God. Through it God consoles, guides, sustains and empowers us to take part in God's life and mission in the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit the Church is sent out in God's Mission. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus fulfils his promise to be with His followers "always, to the very end of the age."15 "Without the gifts, guidance and power of the Spirit, our mission is mere human effort. And without the fruit of the Spirit, our unattractive lives cannot reflect the beauty of the gospel."16

THE CHURCH NEEDS, AT ALL LEVELS, to be shaped on the basis of being sent in God's Mission and on the basis of life in the Holy Spirit. This is what transforms her from being merely a missionary Church to living a missional ¹⁷ life. A missional Church forms its life on the Great Commission and its work on the mission context in which she is living. Mission is no longer an activity among others but the very life the Church is living. A missional Church is thus characterized by the way she thinks mission and how everything she undertakes is done as a participation in God's ongoing mission in the world. A missional approach means incarnating the Kingdom of God in every culture and subculture where people live and striving to be Christ to those who do not yet know Him.

AS BEING BOTH CALLED AND SENT OUT, the Church constantly seeks to discern God's specific task or calling in the missionary context in which she is engaged. Both the Uniting Church in Sweden and its congregations need to continually live in a process of seeking their missional identity (who we are), their missional expressions (what we do), their missional style (how we do it) and missional motivation (why we do it).

MISSION INVOLVES THE ENTIRE LIFE

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. 18

Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation.
Enter every trembling heart.¹⁹

THE MISSIONAL HOLISTIC APPROACH described in this document helps us to understand that the principal task of mission concerns both people starting to believe in Jesus Christ and making this world a better place for everybody and that none of these two aspects is to the detriment of the other. If sincere, the confession of Jesus as Lord must include the entire life²⁰ and life in its totality. "We speak about Jesus as Lord of the world - not only as Lord of the private spiritual inside of all people, but of what they do with their money, their homes, with their national welfare and with the planet."21 The entire life comprises not only all the different ages of life but also all its aspects. The Gospel tells us that "the death of Jesus and His resurrection have transformed the world, and that we can all be transformed."22 In the Kingdom of God a new option is created, an option to the realms of greed, power, evil, and death. This option will ultimately transform the world.

THE CONCEPT INTEGRAL MISSION²³ describes a holistic view of the Great Commission, in which traditional tensions between for instance the global North-West and South-East, between sending and receiving, between social/diaconal work and evangelism can be overcome. "When the church is committed to integral mission and to communicating the gospel through everything it is, does, and says, it understands that its goal is not to become large numerically, nor to be rich materially, nor powerful politically. Its purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and to witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, both on the individual level and on the community level."24 So it is all about the entire life, the whole of Creation, the whole Gospel, and the whole world.

AN INTEGRAL APPROACH also includes a holistic view on spirituality. Instead of seeing it as divided between what is sacred and what is profane, we need to see the world, and God's place and acting in this world, in a holistic and integral way. God is active in all His crea-

tion, through His Spirit and His grace and not only where the Church exists and operates.

WHEN THE UNITING CHURCH in Sweden speaks about diaconal work, testimony, and fellowship as being the Church's main features, it is important that these three are held together without becoming substitutes for each other. "Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ." Only in that way can the Church become the instrument of God which can portray the Kingdom of God in our world.

THE BIBLE TELLS US that God cares in a particular way for the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger²⁶ i.e. people without their own rights who are excluded from society's economic opportunities and justice. They are the most vulnerable persons in a community. God hates injustices. As His people we should act likewise. Moreover Jesus invites us to love our enemies.27 Those who in our eyes, and in the eyes of society, are looked upon as enemies, or just as being different, are people, created by God and they have an intrinsic and inviolable value. The Uniting Church in Sweden "... wants to defend what is just and disclose what is unjust, encourage participation and co-responsibility in the society, contribute to an equal distribution of the world's resources, work for peace and reconciliation, and assume its responsibility for the stewardship of God's creation."28

BY TAKING PART IN GOD'S MISSION, the Church is called, through her life in the world "to be now already what the world will be at the end." She is called to be a community which, with a prophetic fervour and in the power of the Holy Spirit, challenges evil and oppression, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and release for the oppressed. This is the good news, the gospel, which Jesus preached. It is likewise the message of mission.

OF MISSION IS JESUS CHRIST

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.³¹

Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.³²

IT IS THE ENCOUNTER with Jesus Christ that transforms people, communities and the world. The message of mission is to proclaim salvation and liberation for all people through faith in Jesus. "As the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism." ³³

EVANGELISM IS "the communication of the whole gospel to the whole humanity in the whole world. Its goal is the salvation of the world and the glory of the Triune God ... while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship. While the Holy Spirit calls some to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), we are all called to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Not only individuals but also the whole church together is called to evangelize (Mark 16:15; 1 Peter 2:9)."³⁴

THE UNITING CHURCH in Sweden has from the outset focused attention on supporting the local congregations in their renewal, development and growth. This applies equally to our own country and to other countries. Alongside with church-planting, this is done in order to make people get to know Jesus Christ, come to believe in Him, and discover the congregation as a fellowship for life and ministry. Through His spirit and grace, God is actively present in all people and all cultures. The Church needs to seek the guidance of the Spirit concerning where and how God is active, in order to cooperate with God in what He is already doing. "Today's changed world calls for local congregations to take new initiatives... Exploring contextual ways of being church can be particularly relevant to young people."35

TO BE UNDERSTOOD and accepted the gospel must be communicated in a way which is meaningful and relevant. It needs to be contextualized. However this can only be done through a community living an incarnated life in the host culture and "...which lives faithfully by the gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus." This means that the gospel must take shape in its context and the congregation needs to take shape and body in the cul-

ture where it is working. For instance, there is a great difference between a congregation in an Indian village and one in a Swedish city.

LIVING IN A MULTI-CULTURAL and multi-religious world makes it necessary to engage in dialogue with other religions. What is essential in the meeting with people of other faiths as well as people without faith is a respectful listening to the other. With His Spirit, God is active in everyone's life. Our task is to recognize what the Spirit does and then "quite simply tell the story of Jesus". After that it is through the work of the Spirit and the hand of God that the other may be convinced of the truth of the story.³⁷ On the basis of this approach it is natural to interact with people of other faiths in fighting oppression and human suffering and in promoting what benefits life and what is best for the community and the world. In the dialogue there are opportunities for Peace.

THE CENTRE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH is Jesus Christ and confession Him as Lord. Jesus is the one who calls people to follow Him; He gave us the Great Commission. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." In this calling the church is born and renewed every day." 39

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW of a mission strategy, it is important that we rediscover what it means to follow Jesus in a total commitment to Him. It is impossible to be a true disciple without at the same time living in God's mission. It is in God's world that Jesus calls his disciples to follow Him. A missional discipleship goes beyond each person's individual spiritual life and relation to God, even though it also contains that, and engages us as Jesus' followers in God's eternal aim with the world: to save and liberate it, and then "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."40 "Therefore as a disciple one has a yearning to get to know Jesus more and more so that His truth, grace, love, wisdom, and power may affect one's everyday life in terms of relationships, values, and priorities. One wants be more like Jesus in word and deed so that His good will may be done. As a disciple one is therefore constantly on one's way through life in order to learn something new every day, and to serve God and live for Him."41

THE GOAL OF THE MISSION IS A TRANSFORMED WORLD

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" 12

Finish then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be, Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee.⁴³

A WORLD WHICH HAS BEEN transformed is made up of people who through the encounter with Jesus and their relationship with Him in the Holy Spirit have been transformed, from the inside out. By God's grace we are shaped into holiness and Christ likeness. This lifelong sanctification process is manifested in loving God with all one's heart, soul and mind and then one's neighbour as oneself.44 Sanctification is however not limited to the individual but must be manifested in our relationships with others too, and with creation in its totality. Therefore a commitment to peace and justice, to all of creation and the transforming of the world is a natural part of Christian life.

"THE GREAT COMMISSION is universal and is valid for all." When we meet the scout in the patrol, when we sing together in the gospel choir, when we bear witness to our faith in the lunch room at work, when we try together with others to support new arrivals, when we are involved in diaconal work, when we raise money for our international mission project, when we send and receive missionaries, when we meet other Churches in the world for joint commitments, when we work in reciprocity with our partner Churches and learn from one another – then, we are part of God's mission.

THE WORLD HAS SHRUNK and come close to us. In a globalized world we in Sweden are also affected by the world's conflicts and joys. The world and the reality we live in are becoming more and more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and pluralistic.

WHILE ALL THIS CREATES MANY new opportunities and presents us with new challenges, Western society has become increasingly secular. Faith and religion are no longer core ingredients in our culture. The old missionary sender countries, and in particular Sweden, are today regions in urgent need of mission. People in Sweden need to get to know Jesus

Christ and become his disciples. New congregations and Christian communities must be created. The Uniting Church in Sweden needs to invite Sister Churches and partner organizations to work together with us for God's mission in Sweden.

CONSEQUENTLY MISSION is both local and global. During the past 100 years great changes have taken place in the world of mission. Before, more than two thirds of all Christians lived in the global North and West; today more than two thirds live in the global South and East. Before, there were hardly any Pentecostal-charismatic Christians. "The emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities is one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today."46 So we have to think in a new and innovative way about mission. It is no longer we in the global North and West who should evangelize the South and the East. It is just as much the other way around, and we need to cooperate with Churches all over the world in God's mission and welcome their contribution. The global North and West constitute today's and tomorrow's major mission challenge.

THE WORLD DOES NOT END with a disaster. Instead the Bible tells us that the same God who created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead is the God who will once again make all things new. In this new order heaven will unite with the earth. The Bible's final vision describes how "...the living God lives among and with his people, he fills the city with His life and His love and he lets grace and healing overflow the nations through the river flowing out from the city." This is how the new creation is completed in which Jesus' resurrection is the first fruit and the very model and where God becomes all in all. 48

THIS VISION, when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness and perfection is the very target image of the Great Commission and our ultimate hope. It reminds us that mission is ultimately God's mission. In an era when many people are filled with feelings of hopelessness and hear prophecies of doom this hope emerges as a mighty counterforce, which we may proclaim in word and deed. The whole creation is waiting for the day when this hope becomes a reality. But today it groans and travails while awaiting its liberation.⁴⁹ And we know its agony when the earth's resources are being plundered, when the seas are being poisoned, when nature is being polluted and the climate changes. We know its agony when people's lives are ruined by famine, poverty, injustice, violence, war, and oppression. As God's people and as stewards of the gifts God has entrusted to us, we have a responsibility to protect creation and use it in respect for both the Creator and the intrinsic value he put into it, and in relation to future generations. As God's people we are in the service of reconciliation with a responsibility to bring peace and reconciliation wherever wars, conflicts, and intransigence prevail.

THE DEEPER WE "seek the cause of the global environmental crisis, the more confident [we are] that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual." The Bible could not have put it better. But it is not just the environmental crisis. The mission's task is to address the spiritual and moral causes behind what is happening in our world today and then present options. The vocation of the Church today is to live already here, and as a redeeming community, the transformation we are longing to see in the world around us.

JESUS HAS COME TO LIBERATE the whole creation. How this will come about ultimately we do not know. What we do know is that this has to do with his second coming. Then the whole creation will "be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God".⁵¹ Until then it is the calling of the people of God to stand in the ministry of reconciliation and liberation for the whole creation and for the transforming of the world.

Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place Till we cast our crowns before thee. Lost in wonder, love, and praise.⁵²

MISSION IN MOVENT

IT IS IN THE HISTORICAL ROOTS of the Uniting Church in Sweden to be a movement – a people's movement, a missionary movement, and a congregation movement. This tradition must be valued and converted into a new era and in new ways.

WHAT IS CHARACTERISTIC of movements is commitment, participation, that they work best on a relational level – that people may be involved and feel that they are included. "Movements are made up by people committed to a common cause." An important part of modern movements is the multiplying effect found in the movement itself. Social media are a good example of this.

As a Church we need to consider multiplying effects in our work and in our strategies. It is what we share with others that grows and is multiplied.

THE MISSIO DEI⁵⁴ perspective in the Uniting Church in Sweden's view of mission opens up new ways of being in movement. The movement in God's Kingdom is always wider and deeper; wider in mission and deeper in relation to Jesus and to one another. It is the commitment to and the involvement for God's mission that constitute the driving force in the Uniting Church in Sweden as a mission movement.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Here are some simple questions which might help you to reflect and talk about what has been said above, but which may also help you to take concrete action.

After reading this text...

- What is mission, according to you?
- What does the text say about the role and mission of the Church/the congregation?
- What inspires you as you read the text?
- What challenges you as you read the text?
- What approaches should you and we (as individuals and as a community; as a congregation and as a Church) try to adopt on the basis of what is said in the text?

ENDNOTES

- John 20:21–22 (If not otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are from the New International Version of the Holy Bible.
- Psalmer & Sånger 86:1 (Hymnal of the Uniting Church in Sweden)
- Emil Brunner, The Word and the World, London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931. p. 108.
- Strategic Platform for a Joint Future adopted by the Church Conference in 2012
- David Bosch, Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture, Valley Forge, Trinity Press, 1995. p. 33.
- ⁶ Romans 10:9
- ⁷ Together Towards Life, § 10
- ⁸ Foundation of Faith §32
- ⁹ Together Towards Life, § 2 and § 19
- ¹⁰ Together Towards Life, § 55
- ¹¹ 1 John 4:8, 16
- ¹² Romans 8:20-21
- ¹³ Revelation 21:1
- ¹⁴ Together Towards Life, § 3
- ¹⁵ Matthew 20:20
- 16 The Cape Town Commitment, § 5
- The neologism *missional* was introduced some 10–15 years ago. It describes a paradigm shift breaking with the traditional view of mission as an activity carried out among many others by the Church and instead it focuses on mission as being the very essence of the Church. The "missional" usage has been developed as an effort to answer the question often asked by Lesslie Newbigin: "How can the Western Church become a missionary Church again now that its own context has become a mission field?" / See also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis Books, 2013, p. 546.
- ¹⁸ Luke 4:18–19
- 19 Psalmer & Sånger 86:2 (Hymnal of the Uniting Church in Sweden)
- See also Hela livets kyrka, Magnus Sternegård and Per Westblom
- N T Wright quoted in The Great Awakening Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America by Jim Wallis, HarperOne
- ²² Ibid.

- Integral mission is a term coined in Spanish as misión integral in the 1970s by members of the Latin American Theological Fellowship to describe an understanding of Christian mission which embraces both the proclamation and the demonstration of the Gospel. Theologians use it to describe an understanding of Christian that affirms the importance of expressing the love of God and neighbourly love through all possible means. Its proponents (e.g. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar) argue that the concept of integral mission is nothing new - rather, it is rooted in Scripture and wonderfully exemplified in Jesus' own ministry. "Integral mission" is only a distinct vocabulary for a holistic understanding of mission that has become important in the past forty years in order to distinguish it from widely held but dualistic approaches that emphasize either evangelism or social responsibility. A commitment to integral mission is often reflected in particular concern for those living in poverty and a commitment to pursuing justice. Read more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Integral_mission (140407)
- ²⁴ C. René Padilla, What is Integral Mission? Del Camino Network.
- Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission, September, 2001. p. 1.
- ²⁶ Deuteronomy 10:17–18
- ²⁷ Luke 6:27–28
- Theological Foundation for the Uniting Church in Sweden, § 31
- John Howard Yode, The Kingdom as Social Ethic," The Priestly Kingdom, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984. p. 92.
- ³⁰ Luke 4:18–19
- ³¹ Acts 4:12
- 32 Psalmer & Sånger 86:3 (Hymnal of the Uniting Church in Sweden)
- 33 Together Towards Life, § 79
- 34 Ibid. § 80-81
- ³⁵ Ibid. § 72
- Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, Gran Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989. p. 154. See also C. Renè Padilla, Mission Between the Times, Carlisle, Langham Monographs, 2013. p. 103-127

- $^{37}\,\,$ Ibid. p. 182 and Together Towards Life, § 94–95
- ³⁸ Matthew 28:18f
- $^{\rm 39}$ $\,$ Strategic Platform for a Joint Future, introduction.
- 40 Ephesians 1:10
- http://equmeniakyrkan.se/om-oss/organisation/ karnverksamhetsomraden/larjungaskap/ (140306)
- 42 Revelation 21:5
- ⁴³ Psalmer & Sånger 86:4 (Hymnal of the Uniting Church in Sweden)
- ⁴⁴ Matthew 22:37–39
- $^{\rm 45}$ $\,$ Theological Foundation for the Uniting Church in Sweden, $\,$ § 32
- ⁴⁶ Together Towards Life, §5
- Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope, London, SPCK, 2007. p. 117
- ⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 15:28 (SFB)
- ⁴⁹ Romans 8:22
- Al Gore, Earth in the Balance, London, Earthscan, 2007. p. 12
- ⁵¹ Romans 8:21
- ⁵² Psalmer & Sånger 86:5 (Hymnal of the Uniting Church in Sweden)
- 53 Steve Addison, Movements That Change the World, Missional Press, Smyrna, 2009. p. 27
- ⁵⁴ Missio Dei is Latin for God's Mission.

