

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MISSION?

Reflection by the Revd Canon Tim Naish

What do we mean by ‘mission’, in the context of PWM’s work?

An adequate enough simple definition is ‘Christian engagement with the world around us.’ Over recent decades, the phrase *missio Dei* has become something of a slogan within mission circles. It is simply the Latin for ‘the mission of God’.

One of the key shifts in emphasis that this signals is away from ‘mission’ as a programme of the Church or a series of activities, towards mission as a way of being – God’s way of being. God doesn’t turn away from the creation but remains engaged, constantly present to sustain, redeem, restore that which is lost and broken. God invites us all to participate in that way of being and the work that flows from it.

Gone are the days when mission was just something that happened ‘out there’, done by a few missionaries. Current thinking about mission would stress that every Christian is an agent of God’s mission, and mission goes on everywhere, its goal nothing less than ‘...the creation itself [being] set free from its bondage to decay and [obtaining] the freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom 8:21, with tenses changed)

This ‘setting free’ involves the healing of all kinds of broken relationship: the relationship between human beings and God; the relationships between different human beings; the relationship between human beings and creation, and between God and creation; and the relation of each person to his or her self.

So mission encompasses a diversity of forms of engagement with the world. Evangelism is crucial and central, but there is more to mission than evangelism alone. Work to embody right relationship at every level, whether that means offering health care, alleviating poverty, caring for our planet, protesting at all forms of evil and injustice, striving for peace – all this and much more is part of God’s mission and therefore ours.

The Anglican Communion worldwide has developed over the last twenty five years or so the following *Five Marks of Mission* as an attempt to summarise this diversity:

- to proclaim the good news of the kingdom
- to teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- to respond to human need by loving service
- to seek to transform unjust structures of society
- to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

However, the fact that we are called to mission everywhere – and many local churches have grown greatly in their awareness of their local mission – does not remove the pressing need to understand our task as a global one.

Indeed, to be fully alive to our own needs and opportunities means to be alive also to the nature of our world in its manifold richness and poverty. This is true because of both the contemporary situation – where as never before we are inter-dependent and multi-cultural – and also the theological reality that we are brothers and sisters in Christ with all who own his name, many of them very different from us.

If you want to explore more fully what ‘mission’ means theologically, see the PWM website for a list of books that can help you on your explorations.