

# Global Mission Theology

## Q: Why should we engage in global mission when there are so many needs around us close to home?

*by the Rev. Canon Dr. Titus Presler*

This is a natural and important question that concerns the nature of mission and how God's vision can shape our faithfulness. Mission means reaching out beyond who and where we are. It means forming community beyond our own communities in the name of Christ. Mission is ministry in the dimension of difference.

But reaching out to difference can happen down the street as well as across the world. "Love your neighbor as yourself," said Jesus, echoing Leviticus. Why reach out to the far neighbor in Tanzania when refugees are becoming our near neighbors down the street? And isn't it presumptuous to imagine we can solve problems abroad when we have so many unmet needs at home? – racism and sexism, gun violence and deepening poverty, diminishing interest in Christianity or religion of any kind. Why send teachers to Honduras when public schools are decaying in our own cities? How can we contribute to reconciliation in South Africa when racial conflict is rising at home? Why send a pastor to Japan when Christian witness is declining in the USA?



**“What happens in one community affects all other communities...”**



One basis for global mission is the imperative of world-mindedness in today's world. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are ever more aware that we live in a global community where intercommunication and interdependence, not isolation, are vital. What happens in one community affects all other communities, and most regional issues are shared by people in other societies as well, whether it be poverty, climate change, or ethnic and religious conflict. Our collaboration with people abroad often offers lessons that help us at home. So we may feel we face a dilemma between local and global, but the choice is not *either-or* but *both-and*. "Think globally, act locally," says a popular bumper sticker, to which we should add, "The global is local, so think and act *both!*"

# GLOBAL MISSION RESOURCE

## GLOBAL MISSION THEOLOGY

Second, widening humanity's experience of reconciled community in God, not solving problems, is the motive and content of Christian mission, both global and local. Historically, the western mission enterprise has worked intensively in education, healthcare, agriculture and technical training, but those contributions have been the fruit of a foundational commitment to building community around the gospel, being with people in the presence of Christ. Inevitably mistakes were made, and churches have learned from those. One learning has been that as we form community across differences we have as much to receive and learn as we have to give. As we live and work as companions with people in other cultures we grow in understanding who God is, what the gospel is, and who we ourselves are. It is only in such companionship that needs, both theirs and ours, can truly be discerned and met.



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Third, global mission participates in the vision of God, who has a history of calling local people to experience God afresh among peoples and cultures beyond their experience. Abram was called from Ur of the Chaldees to an unknown promised land. Elijah was called not to a widow of Israel but to a widow in Zarephath. Jonah was called

to the foreign city of Ninevah. Israel's faith was affected profoundly by being exiled in pagan Babylon. Jesus never settled down but felt compelled to move from town to town. His own mission vision was enlarged by the Syro-Phoenician woman who insisted that his call extended beyond Israel. The risen Jesus sent his disciples – and us – to “the ends of the earth.” Indeed, most of us today are Christian because someone somewhere at some time was faithful to the call to share Christ across a boundary of difference. Sure enough, Christian expression has been diversified and enriched as the gospel has taken root among the peoples of the Middle East, Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. And, as part of the same dynamic today, missionaries from Nigeria, India and



Korea are serving far beyond their home countries – including the USA – not because there are no needs at home but because God's global vision invites them.

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The Triune God is an intimate God and also a global God – indeed, a cosmic God. It's only natural that such a God would call us to mission right where we are and also to mission far beyond where we are. As we respond, we grow in our humanity and in our experience of God. And we participate in God reconciling the world in Christ.

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