

ARTICLE 7

Mission of the Church¹

Note 1:

Any attempt to describe the mission of the Church (universal and local) must begin with clarity about God's mission as described in Scripture. The Church is created above all else to participate in God's mission. God's cosmic and gospel mission is encapsulated through the entire Scripture from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. The Bible is not firstly a collection of doctrines nor an easy step-by-step guide to achieve personal salvation, but a story (or rather a "massive drama"). The Bible is "*the true story of the whole universe,*" "*the great story,*" and fundamentally "*our story*" (Christopher Wright, *The Great Story and the Great Commission*, 13-15 [emphasis original]). There is no real understanding of God's mission, and the Church's mission within this larger mission, without clarity about the shape and meaning of this story.

There are several ways of describing the shape and goal of God's gospel story:

1. **This gospel story could be described as stretching from creation (Gen 1) to new creation (2 Cor 5:17) from the first Eden (Gen 2) to the restored Eden (Rev 22:1-3), the first heaven and first earth (Rev 21:1) to the new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1; cf. 2 Pet 3:13) as God brings "unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Eph 1:10; cf. Col 1:20). The story moves from a "good" creation, to corruption and death, and then finally to renewal, restoration, and flourishing in the new creation. The emphasis here is that all creation "will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). This new creation way of describing God's mission highlights its cosmic nature involving the renewal of all the human and non-human creation (Rom 8:22-23).**
2. **The gospel story could also be described using the language of God restoring God's Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven (cf. Matt 24:14). Genesis 1-2 portrays God as King who creates the world through royal command ("Let there be...") and then creates Eden as a royal garden (cf. 2 Kings 25:4; Neh 3:15). God, as the earth's Creator and King, visits his royal image bearers who are invited into relationship and tasked with the responsibility of representing him in the world. Genesis 3 records human disobedience and rebellion, which begins the downward spiral and allows the powers of Satan, sin, and death to gain traction in the world. The Bible records what become a full-scale battle of kingdoms as humanity rejects God's sovereignty and their own calling as royal image bearers, in exchange for idolatry and the pursuit of doing whatever seemed right in their own eyes (cf. Judges 21:25). Even with God stepping in to create a redeemed people on mission to bless the whole world (Gen 12:1-3; 22:18), the Old Testament records a long history of victories and defeats, faithfulness and unfaithfulness—all intertwined with God's loving interventions of judgment and grace.**

Before Jesus was even born, the angel Gabriel declared to Mary the Kingdom news that Jesus will be given the "throne of his father David" and Jesus "will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33). In his earthly ministry, Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:11; Acts 1:3) and invited people to enter the Kingdom (Matt 4:23; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16) through a response of repentance and faith (Mark 1:15). After his sacrificial death and resurrection, Jesus declared the cosmic claim that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18) which fundamentally means that Satan as the "prince of this world" has been "driven out" (John 12:31). God's Kingdom in Jesus is not simply about his reigning inside people's hearts (contrary to the Luke 17:21 KJV translation locating the Kingdom as "within you"). Jesus' Kingdom is in the "midst" of his people but also over all creation, over every spiritual and human power. God "seated [Jesus] at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:20-21; cf. Matt 26:64; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55-56; Rom 8:34).

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide and empower his people, the Church, to live into this ongoing story of redemption and healing until he, recognized fully and finally by all as the world's Messiah/Christ, Lord, and King (1 Tim 6:15), comes again to restore and renew all things (Col 1:20; Rev 21-22). The early apostles preached that humans can become part of God's Kingdom people only through the atoning work of Jesus (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Col 1:12-13), which offers forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. Living as Kingdom citizens with our "citizenship...in heaven" (Phil 3:20) involves confessing Jesus as King (or Lord) and following him in obedience (Acts 2:36; Rom 10:9-10). Redeemed people worldwide gather together to form the Church which worships the King, joins the Kingdom story, invites all people to become part of this story, and in so doing attacks the very gates of Hades/Death whose gates cannot withstand it (Matt 16:18).

This Kingdom way of describing God's mission is also cosmic but it highlights the personal and relational nature of God's mission as all of creation and humanity is called to live with God in a love relationship of joyous submission and worship.

The Church's mission, therefore, involves joining God as active participants in God's cosmic gospel story. This means that the Church's mission cannot be reduced to one or two key activities but is a rich and integrated mission. Christopher Wright (*The Great Story*, 72-73) argues that Matthew 28:18-20 provides three focal point activities that are necessary elements in the Church's mission:

1. Building the Church (through evangelism and teaching)
2. Serving Society (through justice and compassion)
3. Ruling Over and Caring for Creation (through creation responsibility).

While the third focal point activity is expressed primarily in Article 15: Stewardship, the first two are present here in Article 7.

The Great Commission and the Great Commandment

*We believe the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ is for all people.*²

Note 2:

Mennonite Brethren **embrace faithfulness to both the Great Commission** (making Jesus disciples of all nations—Matt 28:18-20) and the **Great Commandment** (loving God and loving neighbour—Matt 22; Mark 12; Luke 10) as a way of summarizing the Church's participation in God's mission. The first two sentences of Article 7 articulate the Great Commission's first focal point of evangelism and teaching ("make disciples...and teach them to obey"; Matt 28:19-20).

There are a number of key convictions expressed in the first sentence.

- 1) **We believe that God's salvation in Jesus Christ is the gospel.** As described earlier, the gospel is not simply a few verses that need to be believed, but the proclamation of the larger story of what God has done in and through Jesus. To use Christopher Wright's words: The gospel "is nothing less than the *cosmic* story of God's redemptive purpose for his whole creation, *promised* in the Old Testament, *accomplished* by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, *embodied* in the good news of the kingdom of God in the lordship of Christ, and to be *consummated* at his return in glory. In evangelism we tell this story. And from this story, and this story alone, all our mission flows" (*The Great Story* 80-81). From that proclamation of the gospel story comes God's invitation by grace to be forgiven and join the story. It is good news to proclaim that God has revealed the way, the truth, and the life—and his name is Jesus (John 14:6).
- 2) **We believe that this good news is for all people.** There is much to support this audacious claim:
 - The good news is for all people because God's story is universal and even cosmic in scope. Jesus declares that his followers are to make disciples "of all nations" (Matt 28:19). There is no human being who is outside of the story or unaffected by this story. The story is both a mirror revealing our hopeless situation and a map pointing to salvation and life. Jesus is the creator of everyone (John 1:1-3; Heb 1:2), the only

redeemer of humanity (John 14:6), the rightful king over all people, and the only one worthy of worship (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

- The good news is for all people because the path to life and flourishing is available to every human through the gospel story—because it is everyone’s story and the only path to salvation. The gospel story is all about God seeking the well-being of the larger world. Abraham is promised that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3; cf. 18:18; 22:18). The Church, although the valued bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27), exists not for its own benefit but for the salvation of the nations.
- The good news is for all people because all people are loved by God. The foundational motivation for the whole story is that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). The gospel story is a love story for the nations from a God who wants all to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). Every human is a valuable image bearer—and no human on earth past, present, or future, is excluded from the love.
- The good news is for all people because all people desperately need the good news. This is the only path to a restored relationship with the Triune Creator God (John 14:6), to forgiveness of sins, to freedom from Satan, sin, and death to Kingdom life with God and his people now, and to the hope and assurance of bodily resurrection and life in the new creation when Jesus returns (cf. Eph 2).

(For more on the question of salvation, evangelism, other faiths, and Jesus’ final return, see Articles 5, 17, and 18.)

Christ commands the church to make disciples of all nations by calling people to repent, and by baptizing and teaching them to obey Jesus.³

Note 3:

This statement describes how making disciples of all nations involves the following three actions: calling people to repent, baptizing new believers, and the teaching/instruction of new disciples on the path toward greater obedience to Jesus.

- 1) **Calling people to repent—which involves “turning in a new direction” and bowing in front of Jesus—is a key part of what we call “evangelism.”** Evangelism involves everything (verbal and non-verbal) that proclaims and embodies the gospel story of what God has done through Jesus to restore God’s Kingdom and through that to heal the world. While proclaiming and embodying the gospel story is invitational in itself, most people will not respond without a non-coercive verbal invitation to repentance, faith/allegiance in Jesus, and inclusion in the people of God community called the Church. Given that many are de-prioritizing this verbal invitation component of evangelism, it is critical to remember the centrality of the New Testament call to a full-orbed evangelism.
 - **Jesus, as head of the Church, commanded and expected disciples/churches to embrace evangelism.** The will of God is for the world to hear the gospel story, become disciples of Jesus, and join Kingdom communities of worship and mission in the world. While the Church is called to be a forgiven and reconciled community that worships Jesus and grows its members in discipleship, the primary commandment for a church obedient to Jesus is to make the gospel of Jesus and his Kingdom known among all the nations through word and deed (Rom 15:18). Jesus’ big Kingdom mission must become the mission priority of every church (Matt 28:18-20). The call to evangelism is evident as well in Jesus’ prayer for the believers desiring that through them “the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). Jesus expected his disciples, individually and corporately, to embrace and embody an evangelism of both proclamation and invitation.
 - **The New Testament writers consistently expect every disciple and local church to embrace full-orbed evangelism.** Metaphors of action such as being ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20), witnesses (Acts 1:8), reconcilers (2 Cor 5:18), fishers of people (Matt 4:19), and co-workers with God (1 Cor 3:9) help clarify God’s call for Kingdom disciples of Jesus. Descriptions of the Jerusalem church growing in numbers daily (Acts 2:41), the Antioch church seeing great numbers of people turning to the Lord (Acts 11:21), and the Thessalonian church having their faith in God known everywhere (1 Thess 1:8), highlight the evangelism part of the Church’s mission.
 - **A church that is not living out an invitational witness to Jesus and the Kingdom is not really the Church.** New Testament metaphors for the Church imply the presence of evangelistic witness. The Church as salt

(Matt 5:13), light (Matt 5:14), an aroma (2 Cor 2:15-16), or an open letter (2 Cor 3:1-3) strongly suggest disciples, individually and corporately, are to live as a clear testimony about the gospel within their spheres of influence.

- **Jesus disciples are not really following Jesus if they lack interest in obeying Jesus' command to participate in evangelism.** Disciples by definition "follow Jesus" who in his earthly ministry modeled the calling and making of disciples (albeit initially only to Israel). Jesus is our model as he interacted daily with a wide variety of people, including the lepers, the deaf, the grieving, the sick, the wealthy, the curious masses, and the outsiders (Matt 8:1; 9:35; 11:5; 14:14; 19:20-22; Luke 19:7-9;) and as he invited personal response (Matt 4:17; 11:28; Mark 1:15). There can be no "making disciples" unless one interacts with people who are not presently disciples of Jesus. But this interaction alone is not enough. Jesus "made disciples" by inviting people to follow him no matter the cost (cf. Matt 4:18-22). Discipleship behind Jesus must include full-orbed evangelism as modeled by Jesus.
- **If disciples of Jesus claim to be seeking first God's Kingdom (Matt 6:33), this necessarily involves embracing evangelism.** When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he indicated that they would become fishers of people (Mark 1:17). Later he gave them power and authority over demons and sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:5-6). If we claim to be prioritizing the Kingdom, evangelism is about inviting people into this Kingdom story.

It is difficult to understand evangelism as anything other than a non-negotiable calling for each disciple of Jesus individually and each local church corporately. While evangelism is something humans do, it is only God through the Holy Spirit who can bless these efforts and do the work of salvation.

2) **Baptism should be the natural outcome of faithful evangelism.** It is a joyful symbolic action that celebrates what God has done in the life of each new believer, and is the formal initiation process into the local church community. (For a fuller description of the meaning and purpose of baptism, see Article 8.)

3) **Finally, "teaching them to obey Jesus" is a key part of the Church's mission.** "Churches need to be not only planted through evangelism but also watered through teaching. Both evangelism *and* teaching are Great Commission mandates" (Christopher Wright, *The Great Story*, 82).

- **Jesus used multiple methods to teach people what the Kingdom was about and what discipleship looked like.** Jesus spent much of his time teaching (Matt 4:23; 7:28-29; 11:1) and was even given the title "Teacher" (Matt 8:19; 9:11). Jesus taught the crowds and his disciples through authoritative, creative, and powerful speech (Matt 5-7; 15:53-58; 26:55). Jesus taught his disciples through "experiential learning" when he sent them out two-by-two with power over evil spirits (Mark 6:7-13). Jesus taught his disciples through the powerful symbolic actions of baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper (John 3:22; 4:2; 13:5-20; Matt 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-22). And Jesus promised that after his death, he would send the Holy Spirit to "guide [us] into all the truth" (John 16:12-14; cf. Matt 28:20). Jesus' teaching methods were multidimensional, holistic, and ongoing through the Holy Spirit.

- **The apostles traveled and taught "the whole will [or purpose] of God"** (Acts 20:27). The apostles taught the gospel story to hostile crowds with an emphasis on the story's culmination in what God had done in Jesus (Acts 2:14-40; 3:11-26; 7:2-53). Paul went to the synagogue at Ephesus and "spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

The ministries of Jesus and the apostles demonstrate how central teaching was to the founding and the growth of the Church. This teaching often included an evangelistic intention as it concluded with an invitation to repent but it was also speaking to those already redeemed in Christ. While there is a limitless depth to this teaching, it was never intended simply as an academic exercise with no direct impact on everyday life. Obedience to Jesus (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 9:13; Eph 4:17-32) is the goal of all teaching that is meant to be faithful to the Great Commission.

Article 2 highlights that Christ has called the Church to make disciples by means of evangelism, baptism (welcome into the church community), and teaching. All three must be present in the life of a church wanting to be faithful to Christ.

Jesus teaches that disciples are to love God and neighbor by telling the good news and by doing acts of love and compassion.⁴

Note 4:

This statement alludes to both the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27-28) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and implies that they are inseparable. The Great Commandment to love God and neighbour is part of the “teaching them to obey everything that I have taught you” (Matt 28:20). Therefore, any efforts at missional witness, evangelism, teaching, and disciple-making that do not grow out of love for God and love for neighbour are not faithful to Jesus. But in the same way, any claim to love God and love neighbour that omits missional witness, evangelism, teaching, and disciple-making misunderstands the nature of God’s love and the nature of neighbour love.

- 1) **Loving God (Mark 12:30)** means more than expressing affection (as important as that is) but involves living a life of faithfulness, obedience, and zeal for God. For the Church corporately, this love is expressed in worship that values/glorifies God, in faithful disciple-making efforts, and in a commitment to embrace the Church’s mission. **Without the love of God coming first, the Church’s mission to our neighbours will be undertaken without passion, authenticity, and Holy Spirit power.**
- 2) **Loving our neighbour (Mark 12:31)** means more than expressing affection for our neighbour (as important as that is) but is about embodying a sacrificial care for people that encourages them to live more into God’s intended Kingdom life and purpose. In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s people were called to express love, justice, and compassion within a society of poverty, injustice, and hopelessness (cf., Isa 58). Jesus provided the paradigm for disciples to follow in his example of caring for the needy, feeding the hungry, liberating the captives, and healing the sick (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus even commands us to love the neighbour who has taken the posture of an “enemy” (Matt 5:43-48).

Sacrificial love for others should be motivated by God’s sacrificial love for us (John 13:34), empowered by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22), and guided by Jesus’ own love for our broken world (John 3:16-17). Paul says to the Thessalonian church: “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess 2:8).

For the Church today, love of neighbour is lived out in word and deed as we find practical ways to bless our neighbours. We demonstrate this love through kind deeds, grace in times of interpersonal challenge, acts of justice, hospitality, peacemaking, and the generous giving of ourselves for the well-being of others. When the world observes churches showing God’s concern and compassion by protecting the vulnerable, defending the powerless, seeking peace and reconciliation, helping the poor and hurting, and loving the enemy, these churches have truly demonstrated something of the gospel of God’s in-breaking “now and not yet Kingdom.” Our words of testimony about God’s Kingdom story, Jesus as King, and God’s future hope for all creation—along with our spoken invitation to all to join Jesus’ new redeemed family through forgiveness and reconciliation—will have greater impact if we, by God’s power, are demonstrating and embodying God’s love in every area of our lives. **Without this sacrificial love for neighbours, our proclamation of the gospel will be unlikely to be heard by them as good news.**

The Witness

The Holy Spirit empowers every Christian to witness to God’s salvation.⁵

Note 5:

Even though Jesus has given the Church certain disciples with a special gifting in evangelism (cf. Eph 4:11), every Christian is empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to what Jesus has done in their life and to invite others to salvation in Jesus as opportunities arise (Acts 1:8). The Great Commission is not limited to the eleven disciples who received the original command from the resurrected Jesus on the mountain (Matt 28:19-20). Instead, the command is for every follower of Jesus throughout the centuries. Paul highlighted this when he told the Corinthians that they were to be “ambassadors for

Christ” bearing the “message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-20). In Acts 8:4, the scattered believers who left Jerusalem “proclaimed” the message. While some Christians have special evangelistic giftings and callings, every Christian must be ready to give an answer for one’s faith (1 Pet 3:16), doing their part to participate in the evangelistic component of the mission of the Church.

There are many types of “witness” possible for Christian disciples:

- 1) **Witness of the Verbal/Written Word.** This involves communicating God’s gospel story to people. Everything that communicates the cosmic story of redemption, restoration, and healing that God has done (and is doing) through Jesus is part of the witness of the verbal/written word. While it is often easiest to focus on one or two Bible verses at a time, the gospel story is big and comprehensive, and it is this story that needs to be told to our world.

The telling, verbally and/or in writing, of one’s own experience of salvation in Jesus, welcome into the church community, and Jesus’ faithfulness in the midst of the ups and downs of discipleship is also a form of witness. Any Christian can witness to what they have seen, heard, and experienced. While there may be times when telling the stories of our own experiences may not seem that powerful (especially for those who have not had dramatic stories like that of Paul had on his journey to Damascus [Acts 9:1-9]), the Holy Spirit can use our stories to enlighten and nudge people to respond in faith. Sharing personal stories of how God has reconciled us to himself can be part of our calling as “ambassadors” involved in the “ministry of reconciliation” that God has given us (2 Cor 5:18-21).

Besides simply the telling of our own stories, listening to other people’s stories of joy and pain, victory and loss, can provide opportunity for verbal witness as we express empathy, compassion, and spiritual sensitivity. It is often in times of change, instability, suffering, and loss when people are most open to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus’ invitation for all to come to him (Matt 11:28)

- 2) **Witness of Good Works.** Good works can be defined as sacrificial actions that demonstrate God’s love, care, compassion, and justice for those experiencing brokenness and suffering in our world. Jesus did “good works from the Father” (John 10:32; cf. Acts 10:38) so this is part of what discipleship to Jesus involves. As Jesus commands in Matthew 5:16: “...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (cf. Phil 2:15-16). Or as Peter writes in his first letter: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet 2:12). According to Ephesians 2:10 “we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works....” Paul tells Timothy to command the rich to be “rich in good deeds” (1 Tim 6:18) while the author of Hebrews speaks about how we should “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24). Good works are part of authentic Christian witness in the world.

- 3) **Witness of Integrity.** The witness of integrity means that disciples of Jesus live out in everyday life what they claim as their convictions, values, and life mission. If disciples of Jesus live lives of worship, faithfulness, hospitality, generosity, compassionate love, and sacrificial service, these will provide authentication for the power of the gospel to transform human beings. Verbal/written witness will likely be fruitless without the witness of integrity.

The witness of integrity does not mean that disciples of Jesus must live morally perfect lives before they can verbally speak about Jesus and the Kingdom, since all disciples fall short of that standard. Instead, the witness of integrity means that disciples of Jesus should be quick to repent in humility, seek God’s (and others’) forgiveness, make things right as much as possible, and return to the Jesus path.

While the witness of integrity is critical in all of life, this witness is often most challenged in times of great success and great suffering. Wealth and success are a huge threat to Christian integrity (Matt 19:24) as are suffering and loss (Job 2:9-10; 2 Cor 4:7-10).

- 4) **Witness of Faithfulness in Suffering.** For disciples of Jesus, suffering is an ongoing test of our commitment to Jesus. We all will experience various forms of suffering simply because we share life with all other humans in our

broken world. We may experience the suffering of disappointments, shattered dreams, physical illness, loss of loved ones, and so on. And this suffering gives us opportunity to testify that while we grieve in the midst of this suffering, we have the confidence that Jesus is with us, that Jesus' Kingdom is coming to earth as it is in heaven, and that there will be a day when Jesus will return to make all things right. Our ongoing worship of Jesus through our suffering is a form of witness to the watching world. Christians can also rightfully expect the suffering that involves persecution and opposition as we "seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33). Jesus pronounced a blessing over disciples facing this situation (Matt 6:10-12). Tertullian in his second century book *Apologeticus* coined the phrase "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." The word martyr literally means "witness." As disciples of Jesus, our commitment to faithful worship of Jesus while facing these various forms of suffering can be a powerful witness for Jesus in our world.

While the Holy Spirit may work without it, all these forms of witness will be unlikely to bear fruit without the presence of a non-coercive encouragement to respond to Jesus' loving invitation to forgiveness, redemption, and life. Even with all our best efforts, we must acknowledge that it is only the Holy Spirit who does the saving (cf. Acts 16:14; Phil 2:13). We are called to witness to what God has done and to lovingly point people to Jesus' invitation to respond to that good news (2 Cor 5:20).

The church as a body witnesses to God's reign in the world. By its life as a redeemed and separated community the church reveals God's saving purposes to the world.⁶

Note 6:

While every individual believer is called to witness to God's salvation by means of word, good works, and integrity (see Note 5), the Church as a corporate group has several other ways it can witness to God's gospel story. The Church can be a witness by embracing its identity as a Kingdom community, by demonstrating how it has experienced God's redemption, and by embracing a very practical Jesus-honouring separation from the world.

- 1) **The Church as a Witness to God's Kingdom.** The Church is called to be an embodied sign of God's Kingdom on earth, reflecting the character, love, and values of the Kingdom. Aspects of this witness include:
 - **Community of the New Humanity in Christ (Eph 2:15).** Having experienced the forgiveness of sins and the new life available by grace through Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church embodies in its very being the good news that people from every ethnic, racial, caste, social, and economic group who have received this forgiveness can be reconciled to God and others, experience eternal life now and forever, and live as a community of compassion, justice, and reconciliation (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15; Eph 2:11-18; 3:6). By its very existence as a reconciled and diverse community of the forgiven, the Church provides a foretaste of the eternal redeemed multitude "from every nation, tribe, people and language" worshipping before God's throne (Rev 7:9-10).
 - **Community of Hope in Suffering (Rom 5:3; 2 Tim 1:12; Jas 5:7-8).** By its tenacious hope and faithfulness in suffering, the Church proclaims that Jesus is coming again to bring his Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. This hope and faithfulness in suffering, witnesses to the reality of God's Kingdom. As Paul says: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). By its very existence as a hopeful community living faithfully in the midst of suffering, the Church proclaims and demonstrates the nature of God's Kingdom in the "in between" times.
- 2) **The Church as a Witness to Redemption Life.** There is no Church witness to the gospel apart from living out redemption life together. Redemption life looks back on forgiveness, salvation, reconciliation with God, and the gift of life in Christ, but it is lived out in practical ways as a corporate community.
 - **Witness of Exclusive Worship (Matt 4:10; John 4:23; Rom 12:1).** When a group of individuals commit themselves together to "proclaim the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9), this exclusive worship and glorification of King Jesus (Matt 28:17) subordinates all other loyalties, allegiances, and identities. As a Jesus-centred worshipping community, the Church declares that the resurrected Jesus is the true King bringing his Kingdom fully to earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10), and

that because of Jesus—Satan, sin, and death have been ultimately defeated (Col 2:15; Rom 8:38-39). Worship is about more than simply singing and celebrating together, although these can be components of worship. Worship is a posture of surrender, submission, and sacrifice that is lived out best in a community. The author of Hebrews recognizes this in his admonition not to “give up meeting together” (Heb 10:24-25).

- **Life of Corporate Unity and Love:** When individuals from a diversity of economic, ethnic/racial, and educational backgrounds experience redemption through Jesus and then come together to form a loving, joyful, forgiving, generous, hospitable, and unified church community, this miracle of unity and love testifies to God’s transformative power. God changes people. God changes communities. As the local church demonstrates unity by living out its mission and convictions together, it reflects the nature of the Triune God and God’s Kingdom. The daily life of the body of Christ can be an attractive fragrance to others (2 Cor 2:15). Unity and love in a community where former dividing lines have been broken down (Gal 3:28) can be attractive in our polarized world (John 17:23).
- **Life of Peacemaking and Love of Enemies.** When a group of disciples pursues nonviolent peacemaking and practises redemptive love for enemies, the only possible explanation for this “strangeness” is the transforming power of Jesus. Jesus is the one who modeled this life to us (Luke 23:34) and commanded us to love this way (Luke 6:32-36; Matt 5:9-12, 43-48). Peacemaking and love toward enemies in an embodied visible witness that God’s Kingdom has come in Jesus.

3) Witness of Separation. Paul declares to the church in Rome: “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom 12:2). The Church is a “holy [or separate] nation” who live as “foreigners and exiles” within the culture (1 Pet 2:9, 11). This means that the Church is not to “love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15) because the Church has a different king (Rev 1:5-6), a different citizenship (cf. Phil 3:20), and a different mission (Matt 28:19-20).

While some Christians, particularly some Anabaptist groups, have interpreted not loving the world to mean a separation that rejects “worldly” clothing, transportation methods, and technology—and instead adopts things like the renunciation of personal property—MBs have interpreted the witness of separation as firstly about our internal posture of worship and life orientation that are not immediately evident simply by looking at our clothing or vehicle choice. Discipleship is not centrally about external appearance and easily observable religious-looking behaviours (Matt 6:1-4, 16-18; Mark 7:6). Unlike humans, “the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7).

However, discipleship must involve living in a way that is different from our culture so we must be a witness in our generosity (Ps 37:26; 1 John 3:17), our rejection of the idol of materialism (Matt 6:19-21; 1 Tim 6:10), our honest speech (Eph 4:15; Col 3:9), our refusal to use violence in response to injustice (Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:35), and our faithfulness toward God’s plans for sexual expression and intimacy (1 Cor 6:18; Gal 5:17-21). (For more on separation from the world, see Article 10: Discipleship.)

The Church, as a corporate body, has the opportunity and calling to live into God’s cosmic gospel story in multiple ways and reveal God’s saving purposes for the world. The faithful Church empowered by the Holy Spirit is itself a powerful witness to the gospel.

Matt. 5:13-16; 22:34-40; 28:18-20; Mark 1:15; 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37; 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16-18; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 3:10-11.

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