

1 *Inviting - inspiring - evangelical*

2 The Mission Understanding of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia 3 facing the challenges of the 21st century - **DRAFT**

4
5 *Easter 2021*

6 *With these theses, developed in a working group of members of the Standing Committee on World*
7 *Mission, Ecumenism and Church World Responsibility Standing Committee and the Theological Com-*
8 *mittee, we give an account of our understanding of mission. We ask about current religious-cultural*
9 *challenges and social developments, clarify the mission of the mission given to us by God in dialogue*
10 *with ecumenical partners, and draw conclusions for the process of intercultural development of our*
11 *church.*

12 13 I.

14 **God's mission**

15 Mission is the "heartbeat of the church" (Eberhard Jüngel)¹. We are commissioned to show people
16 "the truth and beauty of the Christian message" (EKD Synod Leipzig 1999).

17 As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we know that we are part of God's mission (*missio Dei*). God
18 commissions and sends us. This mission applies in ecumenical solidarity in our own Westphalian con-
19 text as well as in the fellowship with our partner churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin
20 America. "For today's understanding of mission in our church, worldwide mutual learning is im-
21 portant." ²

22
23 We gratefully receive impulses for mission from global Christianity, conveyed by our partner
24 churches as well as by the many new churches that have arisen here as a result of migration. At the
25 same time, in our society we increasingly encounter people of other religions and people to whom
26 faith means nothing or who fundamentally reject religions. This situation challenges us to ask our-
27 selves about the charisma and the special message that we, as a Protestant regional church, have for
28 our fellow human beings in the pluralistic society of the 21st century.

¹ E. Jüngel, Mission und Evangelisation, in: E. Jüngel, Ganz werden. Theologische Erörterungen V, Tübingen 2003, 115-136, 116.

² Mission Statement of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, in: Glauben aus gutem Grund, June 2006.

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31 Inviting - inspiring - evangelical. The EkvW's understanding of mission

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33

34 Thesis 1

35 **Mission starts from the triune God (*missio Dei*). God comes into the world in his Son and his Spirit.**
36 **In God's mission, both in the Old and in the New Testament, there were people who were sent by**
37 **him. We are also part of this mission. The church invites people to trust in the word of God and to**
38 **join his church.**

39 **At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus puts it this way: "Go therefore and teach all nations,**
40 **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to**
41 **observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the**
42 **age." (Mt 28, 19f - Luther Bible 2017)**

43 The Christian mission did not begin with the missionary activities of the Christian churches, but with
44 God Himself. God calls "*the earth and all that is in it, the world and those who dwell in it*" his own. (Ps
45 24:1 - Luther 2017) He gifted human beings with specific abilities and charged them with a special
46 role in relation to their fellow creatures and to cultivate and preserve creation. (Gen 1:28; 2:15)

47 But people often fail to fulfill their specific mission. In the Bible, there are many narratives that tell of
48 various attempts by God to prepare a way for people to return to Him. We can say that God's own
49 mission is to convince people to turn back to him in order to live with him. In this mission, God sent
50 his prophets to the people of Israel. In the same mission, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ. In John's
51 Gospel, Jesus says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for it. Everyone who believes*
52 *in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* " (John 3:16) And³he adds, "*God did not send the Son into*
53 *the world to condemn it. Rather, he is to save the world.* " (Jn 3:17).

54 The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit as the Son announced his coming: "*When the Helper*
55 *comes, whom I send to you from the Father, he will be my witness. He is the Spirit of truth who comes*
56 *from the Father.*" (John 15:26)

57 The core of Christian mission, then, lies in God himself: He sends his own Son and Spirit to humanity,
58 he turns himself to the world that has turned away from God, that is lost without the reconnection to
59 God, its Creator.

60 Like the term "mission," the term "evangelism" is rooted in the Bible. While "mission" means the
61 broader "being sent out," "evangelism" refers more concretely to witnessing the gospel of Jesus
62 Christ. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, this task is explicitly formulated: "*Go therefore and*
63 *teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*
64 *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to*
65 *the end of the age.*" (Mt 28, 19f - Luther Bible revised 2017)

As an evangelical church, we see it as our mission to spread the Word of God. We preach and invite
people to trust the Word of God and join a congregation. We invite people to our worship services
and create inspiring opportunities to encounter the fullness and beauty of the biblical message.

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67 Credible communication of the gospel takes place both through individuals and in the public presen-
68 tation of Christian professed positions. This also includes credible action by the church as an institution
69 and the ability to live in the spirit of fundamental Christian convictions and to assume responsibility
70 in society and the world.

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II.

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73

The challenge of modern society: Protestant as one voice among many

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75 The Protestant Church of Westphalia is convinced that all denominations and religions can and
76 should contribute to positive change in society. In its work for more justice and the protection of the
77 natural foundations of life, it naturally also cooperates with communities of other faiths or with peo-
78 ple who have no religion.

78

Thesis 2

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80 **The religious and ideological pluralism in our society and in its digital social networks presents our**
81 **church with a double task and gives it the opportunity: to affirm diversity and religious freedom**
82 **and at the same time to contribute and strengthen its own evangelical profile, to stand up together**
83 **with people of other religions and ideologies for integration, participation and sustainable devel-**
84 **opment of society, and to let the Christian faith have an inviting effect on society and the world.**

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86 The positive appreciation of denominational, religious and ideological diversity in Westphalia in-
87 cludes respectful regard for the freedom of other religious and ideological consciences. Any kind of
88 coercion in matters of conscience and faith or religious conviction is to be resisted. Like all churches
89 and religious communities, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia is challenged to work for a good
90 and constructive social coexistence.

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91 Every person should have the opportunity to live freely and self-determinedly according to his or her
92 religious or ideological convictions, to represent them publicly within the framework of the laws that
93 apply to everyone and, if necessary, to be able to change them. We as the Protestant Church are
94 grateful - especially against the background of a not unproblematic history of the churches in Europe
95 - that this is ensured for everyone in Germany, and we advocate a worldwide commitment to reli-
96 gious freedom as a core human right. Every person should be free to decide whether to follow any
97 religion at all and which religion to follow.

97

98 In a special way we hear about the plight and persecution of Christians worldwide, pray for them and
99 support their churches. We also call on German politicians to outlaw this form of human rights viola-
100 tion, not only with regard to Christians as the most persecuted religious community in the world, but
also with regard to all those persecuted on the basis of their religious or ideological convictions.

101 At the same time as contributing to positive change in society, our church is challenged to contribute
102 and develop its own evangelical profile not in opposition to pluralism, but within religious and ideo-
103 logical diversity. Tolerance and religious freedom also apply when the truth of one's own faith is
104 questioned. This leads to a permanent and in pluralism irresolvable tension, because the truth of
105 faith is - like every religious truth - always an existential and perspective-bound one. It is a truth of
106 life that proves itself in the individual and communal life of the individual human being and that
107 wants to be appropriated individually. It remains the concern and task of each and every individual,
108 as well as of the entire Evangelical Church of Westphalia, to make this truth comprehensible and ap-
109 pealing, inviting and inspiring in the multifaceted public discourse and in conversation with fellow hu-
110 man beings.

111 Increasing digitization further intensifies social pluralism. Religious and Christian questions and topics
112 are discussed in different places and individually. Church pronouncements rarely meet with a re-
113 sponse here; instead, contributions critical of religion and fundamentalist missionary contributions
114 are sometimes found in their own "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers," sometimes in irreconcilable
115 mutual polemics. For missionary work in the digital space, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia faces
116 the task of winning over people in its own ranks who are at home in social networks and at the same
117 time have a desire to lead discussions on Christian or religious topics as authentic persons. They need
118 to be trained and provided with pastoral care, and a pool of topics, positions and arguments must be
119 made available to them.

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III.

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Inspiring Path Community:

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Learning from each other in a global perspective

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Thesis 3

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As a learning and journey community, we are ecumenically on the move with many churches -

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within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European

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Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and especially with the member

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churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). In encounters, in common life and celebrations

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we are connected and give each other mutual impulses. This connectedness forms the global and

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ecumenical resonance space for our missionary work.

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When it comes to the topic of "mission," the Evangelical Church of Westphalia is on the move to-

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gether with churches with which it has close ties. It has learned a great deal about mission, especially

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from the churches that were once founded by German mission societies. But also the exchange with

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Protestant partner churches abroad, which witness to their faith as a social or denominational minor-

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ity, is extremely stimulating and fruitful. ⁴

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With their different experiences and social and cultural contexts, they all form the global and ecu-

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menical resonance space for the question of the missionary self-understanding of the Evangelical

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Church of Westphalia. Most formative for this self-understanding is probably the membership of the

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Evangelical Church of Westphalia in the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). ⁵

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The great success of the missionaries sent by the UEM in the late 19th century and at the beginning

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of the 20th century was based, for example, in Tanzania on the fact that they succeeded in combin-

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ing indigenous traditions with an invitation to the Christian faith without pushing either side to give

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up its identity. This created a space for possible and necessary change.

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⁴ The EkvW is connected with a large number of different churches around the world. These include the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the USA and the Evangelical Church on the Rio de la Plata (IERP) in Argentina and Paraguay. There are also intensive relations with the Church of Scotland, the Waldensian Church in Italy, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Transylvania/Romania, the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Hungary, the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Belarusian Orthodox Church. In addition, there are ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Church, various Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches, Protestant Free and Pentecostal churches, as well as international congregations belonging to the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia.

⁵ As a member of the United Evangelical Mission - Fellowship of Churches in Three Continents (UEM), the EkvW is closely connected with 17 churches in Asia, 15 churches in Africa and with 5 churches in Germany as well as the v. Bodelschwingschen Stiftungen Bethel.

147 **Thesis 4**

148 **Mission takes place - especially in critical reappraisal of its eventful history - dialogically and partic-**
149 **ipatory, in partnership and on an equal footing. Only in this way do people encounter each other**
150 **as subjects of their own lives, only in this way do genuine encounters and conversations take**
151 **place.**

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153 Mission in the global horizon today unites churches of different contexts in their common mission to
154 bring the liberating power of faith to people. This also requires a critical reappraisal of the eventful
155 history of mission. The history of the UEM was also a continuation of the history of European Christi-
156 anity in Africa and Asia. With increasing awareness of the consequences of colonialism, this Eurocen-
157 tric narrow view also became clear. Intercultural discourses also revealed latent power relations and
158 the limited possibilities of the colonized population to speak for themselves.

159 For the common mission today, it is essential to look together at, name and work through oppression
160 caused by supremacy and injustice and violations of human dignity caused by discrimination and ex-
161 clusion. From this can grow the healing power to understand the deep inner connection between
162 common missionary proclamation and a corresponding practice of solidarity in life, and to take re-
163 sponsibility together for the just shaping of sustainable coexistence in church and society today.

164 At the same time, the common mission history also makes intercultural "third spaces" visible⁶, in
165 which the different cultures meet, spaces that enable mutual questioning and translation, in which
166 "hybrid cultures" emerge with new, common development possibilities for all participants. They
167 open up new spaces in which people, as subjects of their own way of life, meet each other freely and
168 openly as equal partners in the common mission - dialogically and participatory, in partnership and
169 on an equal footing.

170 The Evangelical Church of Westphalia ⁷gladly incorporates the various impulses and concepts of mis-
171 sion into its renewed understanding of mission. In the spirit of the declaration of the EKD Synod
172 1999, it is concerned to put "the theme of faith and the missionary task first" and to give "space to a
173 variety of ways and concepts". It is interested in cooperation and mutual complementation of these
174 different ways and concepts.

⁶ H. K. Bhabha: The location of culture, 1994. The central terms there are originally called "*hybrid third space*" or "*in-between-spaces*" or "*interstitial passage*," op. cit. , 1-2, 5.

⁷ For a typification of different mission concepts see D. J. Bosch, Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, New York 1991 (German translation: D. J. Bosch, Mission in Transition. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, 2012). Fundamental to the current consensus in the understanding of mission among churches worldwide is the theological policy statement of the World Council of Churches (WCC) adopted in 2013 at its assembly in Busan: Together toward Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes (<https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>).

For the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, mission today takes place in symmetrical relationships of people who encounter each other as subjects, that is, in a genuine conversation. Christians, congregations and the church as a whole live together with others and strangers (conviviality)⁸. It is about a living, learning and celebrating community in specific historical, cultural and geographical contexts. Here, encounters occur that lead to people understanding themselves better because they seek to understand one another.

Mission can only take place in the awareness of entering into contact and conversation with people who are regarded as subjects of their own existence and biography. The first and most appropriate form of mission in the sense of verbal communication of the gospel is then conversation.

For the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, the issue of mission today arises less with regard to distant countries than with regard to the people who live in Westphalia. How does a Protestant regional church enter into a conversation about faith and religious experiences in general, about the search for God and meaning, about truths of life and hopes with people who do not participate in Christian services and church events, who are far removed from the Christian faith or who cannot relate to it? The current transformation of our own society into a multicultural reality offers the opportunity for the Evangelical Church of Westphalia to seek and conduct a free conversation with these people about the Christian faith in the context of living together in today's society. There are many opportunities and points of contact for this. It is important to invite, interest and involve people - in all freedom to make up their own minds about what the church has to offer.

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193

194 Thesis 5

**195 On the path of intercultural development of our church and in participating in God's mission, it is
196 our mission to communicate invitingly and clearly what we believe in and stand for: the communi-
197 cation of the gospel of God's diverse, colorful grace (1 Peter 4:10). It embraces the diversity of life
198 concepts and ways of life in today's society.**

The society in which the Evangelical Church of Westphalia exists is shaped by the presence of many fellow human beings who themselves or whose families and ancestors came to Westphalia from other countries and other cultures. For them, there was and is often no historical experience with evangelical Christianity and hardly any opportunities for encounter. The Evangelical Church of Westphalia has often kept its core message and the spiritual center of its existence in its church rooms and, in this respect, has not perceived those fellow human beings in Westphalia who do not participate in its services and events as fellow human beings who are also driven by religious questions and search movements and who have their spiritual experiences about which it is worthwhile to enter into conversation. Self-critically, we regret if our communication of the Gospel, especially to people from other cultures, countries and religions, has not always been successful in the past.

For the shaping of further intercultural development, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia can draw on a variety of experiences. This will be illustrated by two inspiring international reference points: the United Evangelical Mission (Thesis 6) and the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia (Thesis 7).

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⁸ Cf. Th. Sundermeier, Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute, in: W. Huber/D. Ritschl/Th. Sundermeier (eds.), Ökumenische Existenz heute, Munich 1986, 49-100.

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215 **Thesis 6**

216 **In the Communion of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) we experience partnership and equal**
217 **fellow-ship of churches from Africa, Asia and Europe. It shows us possibilities of intercultural**
218 **develop-ments, in which it is possible to combine diverse traditions with an invitation to Christian**
219 **faith in such a way that all sides preserve their self-understanding.**

220

221 From the very beginning, the UEM was internationally oriented and therefore always very well in-
222 formed about the life situations of people in distant parts of the world. In the "United in Mission"
223 (UiM) process, which began in 1978, the UEM was the first German mission society to transform it-
224 self into an international fellowship of churches in three continents with the purpose of joint mis-
225 sionary action by its members. Its new constitution came into force at the first General Assembly in
226 1996. It guarantees equal rights and participation of all members in the organs and decision-making
227 processes as well as with regard to the fully internationally communitized assets of the former Ger-
228 man mission society. All members contribute to the financing of the common mission according to
229 their respective possibilities.

230 "Together they proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of all people and face the present missionary
231 challenges. In a world torn apart, they want to remain members of the one body of Christ and there-
232 fore grow together into a worshipping, learning and serving community, sharing gifts, insights and
233 responsibilities, calling all people to conversion and new life, witnessing to the kingdom of God in ad-
234 vocacy for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. "⁹

235 Living, learning, celebrating and praying together within the UEM community takes place through
236 partnership programs, North-South and South-North staff exchanges, temporary ecumenical living
237 communities, international meetings and long-term training at meeting sites in Africa, Asia and Eu-
238 rope. In recent years, a concept of *Global Learning in Ecumenical Perspective* (GLEP) has been devel-
239 oped. Missionary life and work in the sense of GLEP unfolds in a setting of diversity. In the respective
240 contexts, challenges and opportunities, themes, concepts and projects of holistic mission and evan-
241 gelism are identified and developed together. This enables intercultural developments in which it is
242 possible to combine diverse traditions with an invitation to Christian faith in such a way that all sides
243 can preserve their identity and develop it further with mutual respect.

244

245 **Thesis 7**

246 **The congregations united in the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia inspire**
247 **us with their lively worship services, their lived spirituality and not least with their missionary ori-**
248 **entation. For ecumenical encounters, intercultural "in-between spaces" are necessary, which un-**
249 **cover cultural constrictions and also reflect the multifaceted richness of the Christian witness.**

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⁹ Statutes of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). Fellowship of Churches in Three Continents, dated September 27, 2018, § 2 (2 b-c).

251 For the intercultural development of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we have inspiring places
252 for discussion and experience in the international congregations that are increasingly found in metro-
253 politan areas, but also in remote regions.

254 Many of these congregations have emerged from global migration. In part, they use our regional
255 church facilities as places of worship. The congregations united in the International Church Conven-
256 tion of Rhineland-Westphalia see themselves as part of the body of Christ and have agreed to coop-
257 erate ecumenically.

258 Basically, they continue what has characterized Christianity from the beginning, namely transforma-
259 tive inculturation processes. Some international congregations maintain the traditions of their coun-
260 tries and churches of origin or even see themselves as their missionary bases. For others, the cultural
261 and denominational imprint from their congregations of origin is different, which determines the
262 identity of the respective congregation. A third group, often influenced by the generations already
263 born here, sees itself as native, international and interdenominational at the same time and moves in
264 intercultural intermediate spaces. Moreover, the second generation of migration congregations of-
265 ten belongs to the generation of the over-40s and thus possibly offers points of contact to reach pre-
266 cisely those generations that are often missing in our church.

267 Finally, there is the very large group of Russian-German repatriates, especially in Westphalia, some of
268 whom belong to the regional church and some of whom form their own congregations. The Farsi-
269 speaking Christians are a special case: As a rule, they have found a home in the regional churches.
270 For Persian-speaking people, who have increasingly come to Westphalia in recent years and have
271 been baptized here, faith courses are offered, and a Persian-speaking pastor has been hired to help
272 them integrate into the existing local congregations.

273 Many of the international communities are small in number and are held together by common mi-
274 gration stories, experiences and life situations. For them, Christian faith is a central component of
275 personal identity, which becomes an important identification factor, especially in the diaspora.

276 Intercultural encounters challenge us to constructive relationship determinations and contextual the-
277 ologizing. The liveliness of worship services, the lived spirituality of members, the expression of emo-
278 tions, the ability to talk about faith, and cordiality can undoubtedly become ecumenical enrichments
279 of one's own congregational and church practice and make it possible to be church together despite
280 some differences.

281 Successful Christian-intercultural encounters create ecclesiological interstices that go beyond histori-
282 cally developed and institutional structures. They can help to uncover one's own cultural and tradi-
283 tional constrictions and at the same time facilitate the way into Western pluralism for congregations
284 with a history of migration. Their own profile can be strengthened, and it becomes apparent that the
285 gospel is multifaceted. Mutual appreciation and the willingness to change oneself in these encounter
286 processes are indispensable.

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IV.

289

Encouragement:

290

Asking for God in the world and with people

291 For our partner churches in the global South, mission is a matter of course. We, too, are faced with
292 the question of how mission and the proclamation of the Gospel can take place in Westphalia. Our
293 pluralistic society in particular offers the opportunity to enter into conversation with people who are
294 disinterested, skeptical or even critical of the Christian faith.

295 Although mission has been understood as a mission of the whole church and has also found its way
296 into the church constitutions, there is often a hesitant attitude when it comes to practical implemen-
297 tation.

298 This discrepancy between aspiration and reality was described by Eberhard Jüngel in 1999 in a lec-
299 ture at the EKD Synod as follows: "If the church had a heart, a heart that still beat, then evangelism
300 and mission would determine the rhythm of the church's heart to a great extent. ... But if mission
301 and evangelism is not a matter for the whole church, or is becoming one again, then something is
302 wrong with the heartbeat of the church. "

303 What does it take to make this heart beat?

304

Thesis 8

306 **The missionary mandate of the church obliges and encourages us to an inviting communication of**
307 **the Gospel. In listening, praying, and celebrating together, we set out ready to change and engage -**
308 **especially in dialogue with people of other religions and worldviews. We want to show what we**
309 **love and to understand what sustains us.**

310

1. listening

312 As a church of the Word, we live from God's Word. This is revealed in Bible reading, in worship and
313 preaching. But listening to God is much more. What God says to us today, how God speaks to people,
314 is not clear. It requires first and foremost an attitude of listening. Encouraging listening means open-
315 ing up spiritual spaces, making church buildings available for meditation and prayer, encouraging lis-
316 tening in public spaces, bringing people into contact with the sacred. This should precede all speak-
317 ing, all communication of the Gospel. Therefore, the encouragement to listen to God's voice is at the
318 beginning.

319 In order to be heard, we must also listen and perceive very precisely what is currently occupying peo-
320 ple's minds, where they are asking existential questions, seeking companionship, consolation and in-
321 terpretive perspectives, asking about God and placing expectations on religion, Christianity, the
322 church, the community.

323 Becoming a listening church does not mean withdrawal, but rather turning to one's fellow human be-
324 ings, placing oneself at the side of the marginalized, the strangers, the long-established, the edu-
325 cated, the young, the old, silently feeling how they feel, enduring their questions and complaints. A
326 listening church is a pastoral and solidary church. It exposes itself to contradictions and suffering,
327 thus witnessing to the Christian message of overcoming suffering through the cross and resurrection
328 of Christ.

329 In listening, the church seizes the opportunity to pause and reflect. In this way, it is protected from
330 hasty attempts at interpretation and actionism. Listening can become a qualified silence that has a
331 more lasting effect than many an announcement.

332 In listening, it also comes to a turning away from a model of mission that runs unilinearly from the
333 church to the missionaries, and perceives the other person as his or her own subject in shaping his or
334 her life.

335

336 **2. praying**

337 A listening church is also a praying church. It invites people to practice a spiritual attitude that cre-
338 ates empty spaces in time and space in order to seek God in silence and wait for his voice. It brings
339 before God what it has heard in turning to its fellow human beings - in intercession and
340 thanksgiving. It brings the questions it has heard, the perceived physical and spiritual need and
341 spiritual emptiness to God's ears in its intercessions. A listening church thanks God for the fellow
342 human beings to whom it was allowed to listen - and also for what it was able to perceive in them in
343 terms of faith, love and hope.

344

345 **3. talking**

346 People who are indifferent to faith often show no need to talk about religion and may feel more
347 threatened by the churches' need to communicate. A missional attitude sees all people in the light of
348 what Christ has done for them and for us, but is also aware that how they respond is a matter for the
349 Holy Spirit and for people's freedom of choice. Because all discernment is limited, witness to faith al-
350 ways happens dialogically in a learning community with religiously committed and detached people,
351 in the spirit of Fulbert Steffensky: "Mission is showing who you are and what you love. "

352 As a way of talking about God, the narration of faith experiences lends itself. In storytelling, interpre-
353 tation and processing take place. It is therefore a form of confession that is not one-sided. Ideally,
354 this can lead to contact or even an interweaving of God's story in my life with the life story of other
355 people. In this way, the Bible is also a book of stories over long stretches.

356

357 **4. celebrating**

358 The weekend with Sunday rest, the church feast days and holidays in the course of the year, and the
359 rituals that a person can call upon at the decisive stages of his or her life are the most visible signs of
360 our Christian-based society. Here, the church can reach out to people in a special way, inviting them
361 to be touched by the gospel and to place themselves under God's blessing. Celebrating the fullness of
362 life and rejoicing in the beauty of creation and the richness of the earth, letting the hope of the mes-
363 sage of the resurrection shine and promising courage and confidence for coping with everyday life is
364 the purpose of church services and blessing celebrations. In baptism and the Lord's Supper, the pres-
365 ence of Christ is celebrated. The church festivals are the highlight of the year.

366 Festivals and celebrations exist in all cultures and religions. They are made for getting to know each
367 other. Hospitality is a special characteristic of many religions, and so it makes sense to invite inter-
368 ested individuals and communities of other faiths in the district or neighborhood to one's own cele-
369 brations. Jointly organized neighborhood festivals create informal opportunities for different groups
370 in the social space to meet, and in an open atmosphere contacts can be made, information ex-
371 changed or simply acquaintances made.

372

373 **5. setting out**

374 It is difficult for us in our society to talk about our own faith and to put existential questions, experi-
375 ences and doubts into words. Missionary action also consists in renouncing clear and simple answers,
376 as they are often demanded today. Christian faith should flow in as a help to deal with complex or
377 oppressive problem situations and experiences and to live.

378 The offers of the Fresh X movement are contextual and milieu-oriented, with the claim to address
379 religiously distanced people and to share life with them. Here, new places of encounter are sought
380 and found outside the churches.

381 In the social networks, a scene has developed in recent years that discusses religious issues. What is
382 special about these formats is that they are independent of denominational affiliation, official
383 church, membership, origin, or anything else. In podcasts and on Instagram channels, the actors
384 comment on everyday and social issues and bring their personal religiously based interpretations into
385 the conversation. In these encounters, personal references are more important than conclusive ex-
386 planations.

387 Setting out into the digital expanse also requires the church to have the courage to be imperfect. The
388 discussion about the question of a digital ecclesiology is still in its infancy. The possibilities that digital
389 formats offer for lively communication of the gospel are manifold. It is therefore very welcome that a
390 start is now being made on developing a strategy of "church in digital spaces".

391

392 **6. Becoming engaged and transformed**

393 Our partner churches that have emerged from mission, as well as the congregations of the Interna-
394 tional Covenant of Churches, encourage us to stand by mission and to break new ground. Together
395 we learn what it means to be included in God's mission (*missio Dei*). We see it as our task to bring
396 the Gospel to the people. But this happens in different ways and with different voices.

397 In the context of intercultural encounter, for example, we see Korean and African congregations sta-
398 bilizing themselves through worship services and discipleship programs. Free church start-ups in
399 other cultural milieus focus their work on celebrating worship and meeting in small groups. Here the
400 national church can learn to emphasize the aspect of lively celebration and living experience in wor-
401 ship services as opposed to a rather stiff liturgical celebration. In this context, the experience that
402 trans- and cross-cultural encounters succeed in art, music and sports can encourage people to have
403 such experiences in the religious sphere as well. Bible sharing originates from global ecumenism and
404 makes it possible to connect culturally conditioned different hermeneutical approaches in a partici-
405 patory way. From a missionary point of view, it would certainly be helpful to develop cross-milieu
406 and intercultural programs.

407 Concern for the future and commitment to combating climate change, justice, peace and a sustaina-
408 ble lifestyle unites many different social groups and milieus. Committed action on issues of the future
409 and justice is also a strong concern for the Protestant Church, stemming directly from its theological
410 convictions. In the joint commitment and cooperation of church and civil society groups and initia-
411 tives, cross-milieu encounters arise from which the desire for change emanates. This should have an
412 impact all the way into institutional church structures.

413

414 **7. showing what we love and understanding what sustains us (encouragement to dialogue).**

415 In order to make an effective contribution to a peaceful and just society, it is advisable for Protestant
416 church congregations to cooperate with local congregations and religious communities of other de-
417 nominations. This requires knowledge of the cultural and religious backgrounds of the respective
418 partners. Discussions and encounters create an atmosphere of trust, which is a basic prerequisite for
419 any dialogue.

420 Dialogue originally describes the official meeting of representatives of different religious communi-
421 ties. Mutual hospitality, the bringing of greetings at the high festivals, as well as regular meetings and
422 dialogue events should therefore not be left to a few experts, but should be included in the agenda
423 of all presbyteries, district synodal boards and other church-leading bodies up to the church leader-
424 ship.

425 All participants should adopt an attitude of interest and respect. Interreligious dialogue means bring-
426 ing one's own beliefs into conversation with those of other faiths. In the process, it is possible to go
427 beyond mere understanding and discover unifying factors in basic religious attitudes. That someone
428 feels the desire to accept the other faith is not impossible. But interreligious dialogue does not aim at
429 that.

430 The fact that interreligious dialogue does not pursue the goal of conversion applies in a special way
431 to the encounter with Judaism. As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we know that we have a
432 brotherly bond with our Jewish fellow citizens. Article 1 of the Church Constitution refers to the tri-
433 une God, "who makes the Church and Israel together his witnesses and heirs of his promise.

434 In view of the horrific history of guilt of the churches and Christianity against our Jewish brothers and
435 sisters in faith, we are still filled with deep shame today. We are all the more grateful for the many
436 initiatives and discussion forums with Jewish communities and people in Westphalia, in which we as
437 a Protestant church can learn more and more to understand ourselves together as the people of
438 God. We resolutely condemn any form of anti-Semitism and do our utmost to ensure that Jewish
439 people can live and witness to their faith together with us without discrimination and fear.

440

441

V.

442

Mission

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As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we are sent to the people of our society in the horizon of

444

God's mission (*missio Dei*) to bear witness in word and deed to God's love made person in Christ

445

and to his accompanying presence. In view of the increasing denominational, religious and cultural

446

diversity, the challenge arises to develop new forms of being church and of proclamation, in addi-

447

tion to the tried and tested ones, in order to convey the message of God's free grace to all people

448

(Barmen VI). The Evangelical Church of Westphalia accepts this challenge in ecumenical solidarity.

449

450 *Inviting - inspiring - evangelical*
451 *Theses on the understanding of mission of the Evangelical Church of Westphali-*
452 *ain view of*
453 *the challenges of the 21st century - (DRAFT)*

454 Mission is the "heartbeat of the church" (Eberhard Jüngel). We are commissioned to show
455 people "the truth and beauty of the Christian message" (EKD Synod Leipzig 1999).

456 **Thesis 1**

457 Mission starts from the triune God (*missio Dei*). God comes into the world in his Son and his
458 Spirit. In God's mission, both in the Old and in the New Testament, there were people who
459 were sent by him. We are also part of this mission. The church invites people to trust in the
460 word of God and to join his church.

461 At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus puts it this way: "Go therefore and teach all na-
462 tions, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching
463 them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to
464 the end of the age." (Mt 28, 19f - Luther Bible 2017)

465 **Thesis 2**

466 The religious and ideological pluralism in our society and in its digital social networks presents
467 our church with a double task and gives it the opportunity: to affirm diversity and religious
468 freedom *and* at the same time to contribute and strengthen its own evangelical profile, to
469 stand up together with people of other religions and ideologies for integration, participation
470 and sustainable development of society, *and to* let the Christian faith have an inviting effect
471 on society and the world.

472 **Thesis 3**

473 As a learning and journey community, we are ecumenically on the move with many churches
474 - within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European
475 Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and especially with the
476 member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). In encounters, in common life and
477 celebrations we are connected and give each other mutual impulses. This connectedness
478 forms the global and ecumenical resonance space for our missionary work.

479 **Thesis 4**

480 Mission takes place - especially in critical reappraisal of its eventful history - dialogically and
481 participatory, in partnership and on an equal footing. Only in this way do people encounter
482 each other as subjects of their own lives, only in this way do genuine encounters and conver-
483 sations take place.

484 **Thesis 5**

485 On the path of intercultural development of our church and in participating in God's mission,
486 it is our mission to communicate invitingly and clearly what we believe in and stand for: the
487 communication of the gospel of God's diverse, colorful grace (1 Peter 4:10). It embraces the
488 diversity of life concepts and ways of life in today's society.

489 **Thesis 6**

490 In the unity of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) we experience partnership and equal
491 fellowship of churches from Africa, Asia and Europe. It shows us possibilities of intercultural
492 developments, in which it is possible to combine diverse traditions with an invitation to Chris-
493 tian faith in such a way that all sides preserve their self-understanding.

494 **Thesis 7**

495 The congregations united in the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia in-
496 spire us with their lively worship services, their lived spirituality and not least with their mis-
497 sionary orientation. For ecumenical encounters, intercultural "in-between spaces" are neces-
498 sary, which uncover cultural constrictions and also reflect the multifaceted richness of the
499 Christian witness.

500 **Thesis 8**

501 The missionary mandate of the church obliges and encourages us to an inviting communica-
502 tion of the Gospel. In listening, praying, and celebrating together, we set out ready to change
503 and engage - especially in dialogue with people of other religions and worldviews. We want
504 to show what we love and understand what sustains us.

505 As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we are sent to the people of our society in the hori-
506 zon of God's mission, to bear witness in word and deed to God's love made person in Christ
507 and to his accompanying presence. In view of the increasing denominational, religious and
508 cultural diversity, the challenge arises to develop new forms of being a church and of procla-
509 mation, in addition to the tried and true ones, in order to deliver the message of God's free
510 grace to all people (Barmen VI). The Evangelical Church of Westphalia accepts this challenge
511 in ecumenical solidarity.