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How is mission understood in the IERP (Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata) and how is it carried out in the context of Latin America? What does mission mean in a world broken down and fractured in the social struggles of our time?

By Rev. Leonardo Schindler

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Mission is from God, it is born in the heart of God, is at work in history and is aimed at making it possible, by grace and for the glory of God, that all may have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

The church is given the privilege, the grace to participate in God's mission.

It is Jesus Christ who tells us: "Go therefore to the nations of all nations and make them my disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. For my part I will be with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 19-20).

To this sending received from the Lord, the Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata responds with fear and trembling, in obedience and faithfulness.

In the founding statutes, in the various areas of pastoral work, diaconal and catechetical tasks of the past and present, in the commitment of lay people, pastors and deacons, there is a responsible response – with all imperfections and fragilities - to the missionary mandate we have received.

Today it is a challenge for the churches in Latin America and especially in the Rio de la Plata region to fulfill God's Great Commission and bear witness in the midst of very complex social structures.

- Social inequalities resulting from increased poverty and concentration of wealth
- Increase in social, political, institutional, gender and sexist violence
- Food and housing insecurity
- Unemployment and precarization by job insecurity
- Extactivist mining and deterioration of nature
- Political manipulation of information and the media

Another aspect present in Latin America (and also in Europe) is the growing public incidence of fascist groups which, using the discontent and fear present in part of the population, install (through slogans of high emotional impact) violent discourses and practices that repudiate politics and democracy, ignore the value and contributions of science (as dangerous as this is in the context of a pandemic) as well as the rights of minorities. Their actions have no other aim than to break the social structure and install economic and social models in which personal interests are imposed on collective needs.

But this super-individualistic model, far from being a solution, becomes a problem, as it places the responsibility for one's own development, success and failure completely on every individual. In turn the degree of recognition and acceptance depends solely on the individual performance and work. This means an enormous burden and excessive demand, the consequence of which is not infrequently illnesses such as stress, anxiety, burn-out syndromes, etc.

It is not the system which excludes that is questioned, but rather the one who is excluded.

It must be added that the COVID 19 pandemic, has exacerbated already existing grievances. It is a system in which the result of prosperity is health and the result of poverty disease. It is time to understand that no one is saved alone and that we need each other without any distinction.

In this framework, the Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata summarizes the Lord's missionary mandate in four points:

- 1) **Proclamation of the Gospel:** We understand that we are called to share again and again, wherever necessary and appropriate, the proclamation of God's unconditional love manifested in Christ Jesus through whom we receive acceptance, forgiveness and new life. This proclamation becomes Good News for those who struggle to survive and also for those who are searching for the sense of their lives.

This proclamation cannot be restricted to the communities that belong to the church anyway but must go beyond. It is essential that we become a public witness in which we can be instruments in the service of a better society, with more humane and ecological values. As Protestant Christians we have much to contribute and it is our responsibility to do so.

2) **Prophetic Proclamation:** In solidarity with those who carry the same cross as Christ by enduring oppression and mistreatment, we understand that we are called to denounce the oppressive powers that are contrary to God's will, which is life, and indeed life in abundance. That means, among other things:

- Call for justice (gender, climate, economy)
- Commitment to the defense and promotion of human rights and the concern for nature
- Proclamation of the Kingdom of God that began in Christ Jesus and for which we have hope

Diaconal action: If we proclaim God's unconditional love; if we cry out for justice and long for a more human and more ecological world, then we are also called to act in this way. It is impossible to think of mission without including concrete actions of service and charity, as fruits of faith and as obedience to Christ.

Building hospitable, inclusive and caring communities: There are too many divisions and conflicts in the world. There are too many people in need of care. Doors and borders need to be opened without restriction or prejudice. It is time change the world to a world where all people have a place as well as a space of communion and care. Churches are called by the Lord to build communities that respond to the love we have received from Him and therefore are hospitable, inclusive and provide care to all people without distinction.

Finally, I have a request: We know well what our mission is and where it originates. Over the years we have developed different tasks to fulfill them responsibly and we have planned the missionary aspects for the future. However, the current pandemic and the acceleration of technological development have raised questions for which we do not currently have adequate answers. The pandemic and the technological acceleration have created modes of socialization that combine face-to-face and virtual encounters. This phenomenon is new, but it is important to keep it in mind, especially for the churches, for whom the experience of faith in the context of gatherings of believers is a central concept of ecclesiology. What will the community of the future look like and what will be the institutional impact of this new socialization? What impact will they have on the congregational life of the churches?

In our Latin America there are many other situations that need to be addressed urgently, but this is one aspect that should not be neglected.

May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and strength to fulfill the Lord's mission that He has given us. May it be so.

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