

## *Inviting - inspiring - evangelical*

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

Partly as a result of the increasing flow of refugees into Europe from 2015 onward, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia saw itself challenged to deal intensively with the topic of migration. And it was agreed relatively quickly: We don't need new books and essays for this, but sensitivity, perception, loving acceptance and reception of strangers, and good communication at all levels. That is why this main digital template was presented and adopted at Synod 2018: "I have been a stranger and you have welcomed me." - Church and Migration:⇒ <https://kircheundmigration.ekvw.de/> ⇒ <https://churchandmigration.ekvw.de/>

However, it also became clear at that time that a comprehensible summary of how we understand and want to fulfill mission in our church today would be helpful. Therefore, at the next regional synod in 2019, the church leadership was asked to describe our church's understanding of mission:

"The Regional Synod asks the church leadership to develop proposals for promoting intercultural development at all levels and in all areas, including the current structural processes, and to present them to the Regional Synod. This includes specifying **our regional church's understanding of mission.** “

For this purpose, the church leadership then establishes its own working group consisting of members of the Theological and Ecumenical Committees:

- [Rev. Dr. Peter Böhlemann](#) (Director IAFW), Theological Committee
- [General Secretary Rev. Volker Martin Dally](#) (VEM)
- [Carmen Damerow](#) ( Ecumenical Department)
- [Steven Edwards](#), Ecumenism Committee
- [Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans](#), Ecumenism Committee
- [Rev. Andreas Hahn](#) (igm), Theological Committee
- [Prof. Dr. Traugott Jähnichen](#) (church management), Theological Committee (chair), Ecumenism Committee, co-chair of joint WG
- [Rev. Mike Lee](#) (International Convention of Churches), Ecumenism Committee (guest).
- [OKR Dr. Ulrich Möller](#) (Church Management, Ecumenism Department), Ecumenism Committee
- [Rev. Annette Muhr-Nelson](#) (Director MÖWe), Ecumenism Committee
- [Rev. Ingo Nesperke](#) (Head igm), Ecumenism Committee
- [Annette Salomo](#) (church management), chair of the joint WG, Ecumenism Committee (chair)

The result is now available in the form of 8 theses with some explanations in draft form for consideration by the synod and is entitled: "Inviting - Inspiring - Evangelical. The understanding of mission of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in view of the challenges of the 21st century". The text is 14 pages long. The condensed theses are printed again individually at the end. (p.15f)

With these theses we ask about the current religious-cultural challenges and social developments, clarify the mission of the mission given to us by God in dialogue with ecumenical partners, and draw conclusions for the process of intercultural development of our church. (cf. lines 6-11)

## I. GOD'S MISSION



And this learning movement takes place in ecumenical fellowship with people all over the globe, in the world and in society, as a communion of journey with our brother and sister churches and partner churches, and as a communion of life in our own church and with local people. The term "community" perhaps makes it clear that we want to learn from each other as well as live and communicate with each other in a credible way.

## I. God's mission

But it all begins with the mission of God, who takes his church in, commissions it, sends it and also accompanies it. (17-18)

God's mission becomes the heartbeat of a church that shines from the beauty of the Christian message itself. (15f)

Such a church perceives the communion of ways with other churches and communities and wants to learn from them. (23-24). At the same time, it is aware that the Christian faith cannot claim absoluteness in the postmodern world. (24-26) Nevertheless, she is also aware of the charisma and self-evidence of her message. (26-29)

**Thesis 1:** It is not *their* mission, not their self-evidence or even their conjured up public relevance, not *they are* the subject, but it is the mission of the triune God, who takes his people and in Christ also his church into this event.

As the **creator** of the "earth and all that is in it" (Ps 24:1), he commissions people to preserve his diverse creation and to live together in peace and justice. (40-44) But because people fail again and again, God sends individuals and finally his own Son to persuade them to turn back to him.

In **Christ**, God becomes man to liberate humanity. God incarnate becomes a man among men in order to make his love and assistance known to them. (45-53)

## I. GOD'S MISSION

And Christ commissions his disciples and, following them, his church as a learning community to bear witness to the message of God's free grace in all the world (Mt 28:19f).

In this, we understand "mission" more as our "being sent out" by God and "evangelism" more as our witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ. (60-62)

But in order for this to succeed, God promises his church through Christ **spiritual power** and authority to forgive (54-59) and to live and speak in a credible manner. (71-74)

The mission of the Triune God thus takes us into His diverse world, sends us to His people and lovingly accompanies us in Christ. It empowers us spiritually for the credible witness of his Gospel.

This makes mission a multidimensional and circulating event, it is **inviting, inspiring and evangelical!** All parts and theses of our small design can be represented in this three-dimensional and circular space:



- I. The first part of the mission of the Triune God and His Church as a foundation and introduction. (13-74)
- II. The second part, describing the ambivalence of diversity and uniqueness of our mission in society. (76-129)
- III. In the third part, we set out on a common journey with our brothers and sisters in faith. (131-311)
- IV. And in the fourth part we are encouraged - to live together in freedom and responsibility before God and man. (313-473)
- V. Part five concludes and summarizes by once again mentioning our mission, the Missio Dei, and thus ends up, as it were, circularly back at the beginning. (475-483)

## II. The Challenge of Modern Society: Evangelical as One Voice Among Many (76-129)

**Thesis 2:** In this part and the second thesis, the major problem area, respectively the ambivalence of our missionary task is mentioned. (83-89)

On the one hand, we say yes with full conviction to a plural society, to the diversity of religions and certainties, and we want to work together with all people for peace, justice and the integrity of creation. (91-103)

On the other hand, we also want to show and showcase our evangelical profile in this colorful concert, taking a stand when brothers and sisters in faith are in need or freedom is threatened. (104-119)

This desire for friendly recognizability naturally also refers to a fair and free discourse of our faith in the digital and social networks. (120-129)

## III. Inspiring Way Community: Learning from Each Other in Global Perspective (131-311)

**Thesis 3 (134-140):** As a learning and journey community we are ecumenically on the way with many churches - within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and especially with the member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and in the International Convention of Churches of the Rhineland and Westphalia (ICRC), but - and this could perhaps also be added to the text - also in the Association of Christian Churches (ACK) and the Evangelical Alliance. (134-155)

**Thesis 4 (158-161):** Mission today takes place in dialogue or trialogue, participatory and equal. But it is also aware of its guilty history and works through it. Symmetrical conversations of people meeting and living together as subjects (conviviality) have taken the place of an appropriating or colonialist one-way mission. (158-209)

**Thesis 5 (211-216):** This equal communication of the gospel of God's diverse and colorful grace (1 Peter 4:10: *Serve one another as good stewards of God's diverse grace!* In the past, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia <sup>1</sup>has not infrequently remained too much in its own rooms and milieus and has not taken enough notice of seekers and questioners beyond the usual circles. (211-231)

For the shaping of further intercultural development, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia can draw on a variety of experiences. **Thesis 6** illustrates this with the cooperation with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM/UEM) (233-265) and **Thesis 7** with the inspiring intercultural encounters in the International Church Convention Rhineland-Westphalia. (267-305)

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<sup>1</sup> ἕκαστος καθὼς ἔλαβεν χάρισμα εἰς ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸ διακονοῦντες ὡς καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι ποικίλης χάριτος θεοῦ. (1 Pet 4:10 NA28).

## IV. Encouragement: Asking for God in the world and with people (313-473)

The penultimate part then deals with the question of implementation. How can mission and evangelism succeed in such a way that the heart of the church beats calmly and its life is wholesome?

**Thesis 8 (329-333)** Inviting communication succeeds in listening, praying, celebrating and living together. We want to show what we love and understand what sustains us.

This is done through 7 encouragements:

- (1) In **listening to** God's voice, in opening church spaces, people come into contact with the sacred. In silence and compassion we become pastoral and solidary church. (335-357)
- (2) In **praying**, we turn away from ourselves toward God and our neighbors. (359-366)
- (3) In **speaking**, we show who we are and tell of what we love. (368-380)
- (4) Cultures and milieus meet in common **celebration**. (382-398)
- (5) Mission is always associated with **setting out**. This need by no means be understood only geographically, but also means breaking out of habits, quick answers and traditional patterns, and the willingness to engage with something new. This requires the courage to be imperfect. (400-419)
- (6) A missionary approach to life also means **working together** with others for justice and peace and **allowing oneself** to be **changed in the** encounter with others. (421-444)
- (7) The *encouragement to dialogue* in the seventh encouragement is to be done by **showing what we love and understanding what** sustains us. And this can happen through local community cooperation, hospitable encounters of religions, and respectful interreligious dialogue. Respectful means inviting and credible, but not with the goal of conversion. This applies in principle, but especially in living together with our Jewish brothers and sisters. (446-473)



## V. Order (475-483)

God created us and sent us into the world. And because he cares about how we treat each other and his creation, because he loves us, he came down in his Son, who lived and taught liberation from the bondage of sin. God became man and has commissioned us through his Son and empowered us through his Spirit to learn and share together how his love and freedom can be lived out in our world. The diverse society and our ecumenical learning and journey community also open us to new forms and challenges.

*The mission of the church, in which its freedom is based, consists in delivering the message of God's free grace to all the people in the place of Christ and thus in the service of his own word and work through preaching and sacrament. (Barmen VI)*

*Peter Böhlemann, 14.05.2021*