

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.

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Mission Today Conference – Thesis 8

Rev Barry Hughes, Church of Scotland

Good afternoon everybody – I bring you greetings from St. Mark's Church, Stirling, Scotland.

St. Mark's is designated as a 'Priority Area' congregation in the Church of Scotland – in other words, it is situated in one of the poorest parishes in Scotland, in area of the city of Stirling called Raploch. In Raploch there is high unemployment, low life expectancy (compared to other areas of Scotland), drugs problems and low educational achievement. Our mission at St. Mark's is to be at the heart of the Community – physically, spiritually and pastorally.

In Scotland, church attendance has dropped dramatically in the last 30 years. At St. Mark's we have been looking for "new forms of being a church and of proclamation, in addition to the tried and true ones, in order to deliver the message of God's free grace to all people" (Thesis 8). In Scotland we have been talking a lot about "Church without walls" and "Fresh expressions of church". One of the principal ways we have done this at St. Mark's is in our family service every 2 weeks at Sainsbury's (Sainsbury's is one of the largest supermarket chains in the UK). We call this "St. Mark's @ Sainsbury's".

The local Sainsbury's – situated just a few hundred metres from the Church building – offers us the use of one of their staff rooms once every 2 weeks. We

invite local families – many of whom would never attend Sunday morning Church – to join us at these gatherings. For the first hour, we share games, songs, prayer, crafts and other activities, all based around a particular Bible story – adults and children all take part. We then move into the restaurant at the supermarket where we all share a meal together – provided by Sainsbury's and paid for by St. Mark's Church. Sharing food together has always been an important part of Christian fellowship, starting of course with the Last Supper, and this is an important part of our gathering. This is especially true because some families may struggle to put food on the table every evening, so anything we can do to help is appreciated. Around 25 – 30 people attend our St. Mark's @ Sainsbury's. This is special way for us to share the Gospel with people who do not come to 'church', in a different setting.

St. Mark's @ Sainsbury's is just one way we at St. Mark's reach out into the community. Our building is not just the 'Church' – it is home to many organisations and groups in Raploch, including a women's recovery café, Alcoholics Anonymous, Scouts, a group for adults with reading difficulties and others. We welcome and support all these groups in Jesus' name, and aim to share God's love with them all. We spend time at the school, the community centre, the local café, and other places where people gather.

So my interest in this topic, Thesis 8, is to discuss how we can take God's message into our communities, without waiting for our communities to come to us. "Go and make disciples of all nations".

