



SENT INTO THE WORLD

A statement adopted by the Fifth General Convention
of The American Lutheran Church, October 1970

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(Adopted by the Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 21-27, 1970, on recommendation of the Commission on Research and Social Action, with which the General Convention Committee concurred, "as a word of comment and counsel to the members of The American Lutheran Church.")

The General Convention Committee concurs with the Commission on Research and Social Action in its comment and concern as well as its challenge to commitment in the statement "Sent into the World."

We acknowledge that a careful delineation of the problems and a study of their complexities sharpens the sense of Christian responsibility. We also acknowledge the freedom and hope of the Gospel which enables the people of God to demonstrate their faith in word and deed, and therefore commend this statement of the Commission to the church.

1. The Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church takes to heart its theme, Sent into the World. It is a call to plan and to do, to talk and to act upon its implications.

2. As we look at the world of which we are a part and into which we are sent, our feelings are mixed. We see much that is good, wholesome, and positive. We see many evidences of people working with, helping, and befriending one another. We see how useful, effective, and adaptable are many of the agencies and institutions of our society. We see many constructive changes in the attitudes, expectations, and actions of people. We thank God for the many blessings we enjoy as a people, a nation, and a church.

3. Yet our hearts also are heavy. We see tensions, conflicts, and problems that reach into every area of life. We feel some of the same anguish of spirit which caused the Savior to weep over the city of Jerusalem. What sensitive soul can help but feel anguish over certain trends, currents, and movements in our nation? What person, knowing that he is sent into the world can be silent and do nothing when people are hurt or suffer, when anarchy threatens, when people perish for lack of vision, when men make their own gods and worship that which they have created? In the conviction that recognition of problems gives opportunity for correction, we single out a number of negative elements in American life. They deserve attention and appropriate action by each of the levels of organization of The American Lutheran Church, beginning with the members of our congregations.

The Wide Range of Our Concerns

4. In the lives of many persons we note the growing reliance on drugs in all strata of society, the greed which preys on selfish desires and sinful pride, the abuse of sexuality, and the massive alienation which isolates so many persons from social participation and social responsibility.

5. In American family life we note the prevalence of divorce and desertion, the plight of the lonely, the elderly, and the handicapped, and the unfulfilled struggles to identify the rights and the roles of men, women, and youth in family and community.

6. In our communities we note the arson, bombings, murders, and other violence, the resistance to authority, the growing use of repressive laws and policies, the gap between well-intended legislation and its effective implementation, the decaying inner cities and the dying rural communities, and the unfulfilled drive for recognition and self-determination by racial and ethnic groups in our midst.

7. In the economic sphere we note the tragedy of poverty and hunger at home and abroad, the continuing inflation, rising unemployment, the helplessness of people who lack effective political or economic power, and the increasing pollution and deterioration of our natural environment.

8. In our national life we note not merely continuing but indeed hardening racism and racial tensions, manifest injustices and double standards of justice, a broken confidence in either the willingness or the ability of our social institutions to meet the needs of people, the difficulties of dealing with dissent and disruption, and the difficulties our governments have in using their powers either effectively or appropriately.

9. On the international scene we note the continuing scourge of war, whether declared or undeclared, whether hot or cold, the arms race and the related reliance upon military might to settle disputes between nations, the expanding influence of authoritarian ideologies and regimes of the left and the right, the imbalances of power and wealth among the nations, and the lagging enthusiasm for working with the younger nations of the world to help assure their viability, development, and vitality.

10. In our life within the church we note dissension concerning the source and the nature of its authority, concerning the role of the church in society, concerning the usefulness of organization and structures, as well as problems of trust and understanding between clergy and laity.

11. Everywhere we see the fruits of sin, man's rebellion against God, man's dehumanizing of brother man, man's estrangement from himself, man's exploitation of his environment. Yet men yearn for freedom, for peace, for justice, for the right to have a say in the decisions that affect their own destinies. Man's urgent need at this hour of history is his need to find his true humanity, grounded in a right relationship with God. For such a time as this we of the church are sent into the world. Our mission is that expressed in the Gospel.

The Foundation of Our Concern

12. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not call His church from the world, but sends His church into the world. The conflicts and tensions of the world challenge the church to become its true self, the people of God sent into the world to speak and to live within the activity of God. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to speak and demonstrate the word of grace and reconciliation to the world's essential despair. Sending the church

into the world is a part of God's ongoing movement in the world. The church is a sign to the world that God seeks to redeem and to help the world with its tensions and conflicts.

13. The world always lives in the tension of God's judgment and grace. Either to pronounce final judgment on the world and turn away from its predicament, or to see the world as redeeming itself through its own efforts is to misunderstand God's relation to the world. The church, as sent into the world, embraces the tension of judgment which condemns and grace which gives freedom.

14. The life of the church, shaped by the Gospel, witnesses to God's love and God's reconciling action in the world. Nothing in the world is neutral or irrelevant to the Gospel. The Gospel does not abandon some dimensions of life and speak to others. It addresses the whole world of relationships: personal, family, community, economic, national, and international. The Gospel addresses the whole creation and invites the whole creation into a new community with God. This is the Gospel with which the church is sent into the world.

The Concern for Our Mission

15. This Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church calls the whole of The American Lutheran Church to searching self-examination. How do our deeds square with our words? When the world looks at us and our activities, what does it see? Have we, too, undergone an erosion of honesty and credibility so that we are no longer the light that guides or the salt that heals? What do we define as our mission? How serious are we about that which we see as our mission? What time and attention do we give to study of the Scriptures, seeking God's direction and leadership? Where shall we apply the resources and energies God has given us? What do we see when we view ourselves in the mirror of Matthew 23, our Lord's jarring words to the religious establishment of that era?

16. It is not easy to accept the responsibility of being sent. In our human nature we prefer to send, not to be sent. We prefer to give orders, not to be under orders. We prefer to be principals, not agents. Yet in such a secondary role the church finds its primary mission. It is sent into the world by Jesus Christ. It is to the whole of His task that the church is committed. Jesus Christ came into the world because God loves the world, with all its tensions, conflicts, problems, and sin. He offers salvation, reconciliation, and a more abundant life to whomsoever will accept them. God's purpose is not to condemn but to save the world through faith in His only Son (John 3:17, 18). Faithful to this vision we indeed are ready to be sent into the world.

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