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INTRODUCTION

Mitzi J. Budde and Don Thorsen

Understanding mission is perhaps the best path to unity. Mission is central to the church's existence as well as to its ministries. Emil Brunner said, "The Church exists by mission, just as the fire exists by burning."¹ In addition to the cruciality of mission, Jesus wanted his followers to be unified. He prayed that "they may be one" (John 17:11), and this unity extends to all dimensions of their witness to Jesus and to the Gospel.

Mission is transformational in both personal and social dimensions of life. The implications are that the church has a prophetic vocation in the world, a calling to be an agent of renewal within the wider community of humanity that inhabits the world, without the world becoming coextensive with the church. The church is to be "in" the world without being "of" the world. What is the mission of the church in relation to and even in community with the rest of humanity?

This book focuses on the topic of "unity in mission." We investigate various aspects of the church's mission: serving the purpose of God as a gift given to the world in order that all may believe; proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed; reconciling all things to God and to one another through Jesus Christ, transforming the world; caring for those suffering and in need, suffering on their behalf; and advocating on behalf of the poor, needy, and marginalized. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the church seeks faithfully to proclaim and live the love of God for all, and to fulfill in unison Jesus' mission for the salvation and renewal of the world, to the glory of God.

APPROACH TO UNITY IN MISSION

Over a four-year period, members of the Faith and Order Commission met to study the nature of mission and how it may serve to unite Christians and churches. Although Faith and Order represents a Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), its participants include representatives from member churches of the NCC as well as nonmembers. Faith and Order includes representatives from Catholic and Orthodox Churches, European-born Protestant and American-born Protestant Churches, Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches. To be sure, the breadth and variety of discussion about ministry traditions in Faith and Order can be remarkable. Yet, the mutual desire for unity in mission brings about dialogue, understanding, appreciation, and cooperation that transcend their differences.

The Faith and Order Study Group was entitled Unity in Mission, and its work was co-chaired by Mitzi J. Budde and Don Thorsen. In the spring of 2008, the Study Group began its four-year (or quadrennium) project of presenting papers about the approach to Christian mission representative of their respective church traditions. In sharing with one another, participants distilled areas of agreement as well as disagreement with regard to how a growing unity in mission contributes to visible Christian unity as well as to loving service to God and others.

It is difficult to describe how inspiring and convicting it is to hear about the manner in which churches go about Christian mission and ministry. Successes as well as failures all contribute to a more mature and useable approach to church life. Not only differences in church traditions, but differences in ethnicity and gender, language and culture contributed to the work of the Study Group.

Diversity in mission is not in and of itself problematic. The apostle Paul used the analogy of the body of Christ to describe the church (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-16). He understood that, by the grace of God, it is the diversity of Christians within churches that overall help make the church successful. All *parts--or* Christians- within churches contribute their particular gifts, talents, and skills so that the *whole* of its mission might be fulfilled to the glory

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of God. Likewise, God uses the diversity of churches in helping them successfully fulfill God's will throughout the entire world.

THEMES OF UNITY IN MISSION

As the Study Group met, several unifying themes or motifs emerged as group members presented papers to one another. They represented various aspects of their work toward visible Christian unity and how the particular search for unity in mission shaped around central themes. They included themes of journey, pilgrimage, and accompaniment that emphasize the dynamic, emergent processes involved with both mission and unity. For example, in many papers, a common theme was how we are journeying as churches as well as individual Christians. For some contributors, the concept of journey or pilgrimage is a strong theme; for others, not so much. But it serves as a leitmotif that undergirds the entire book. Other themes that arose included the use of story, witness, or other accounts from members' personal and ecclesial contexts. Almost every chapter in the book includes stories that help readers focus upon the challenges as well as the opportunities for Christians to minister broadly and effectively in churches, and how their stories may serve to unite one another in mission. Overall, the book is a work of narrative theology, rather than analytical or systematic theology. Unity in mission is a huge, complex issue. In response to this complexity, we sought to bring out new approaches and new voices through story and through the conceptualizing of experience.

The Study Group intentionally wanted to show the variety of ways to approach unity in mission. Members did not attempt to formulate one way that might ring true for all our traditions, or to seek the development of a unified consensus statement. Yet, we saw the need to recover ways of thinking that preserves and makes manifest a unity of mission through ecumenical cooperation.

FINDING UNITY IN MISSION

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UNITY AND MISSION

A Pilgrimage of Accompaniment

John T. Ford

VIA CRUCIS

On Good Friday afternoon on New Hampshire Avenue in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, thousands of people participate in the annual *via crucis*, "the way of the cross," a processional reenactment of the final steps of Jesus' carrying his cross along the *Via Dolorosa* "the Street of Sorrow," "the Way of Suffering," the "Route of Pain"- winding through the streets of Jerusalem that Jesus walked on his way to his crucifixion on Golgotha¹. An example of *religiosidad popular*- *popular* religious devotion² - this dramatization of the "execution walk" of Jesus dates back to the time of St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century, with roots that go back centuries earlier.³

At the time of St. Francis, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was expensive, difficult, and dangerous. For those who could not afford a journey to a distant land, replicas of the sacred sites in the Holy Land were built at various locations in Europe and Russia.⁴ Yet, visiting these shrines was not always easy or convenient. St. Francis introduced the Stations of the Cross⁵ so that people could reenact the final journey of Christ close to home in their local churches. While the Stations were a new devotion, the dramatization of the final steps of Jesus paralleled other types of medieval religious the *atre*: *las posadas*, "the inns," which reenact the search of Joseph and Mary for lodging on their journey to Bethlehem; *las pastorelas*, "the visit of the shepherds" to the newborn Jesus; *los tres reyes*, the search of "the three kings" for the newborn king.⁶ Processions that sym-

