

Shatin Anglican Church World Mission and the Local Church

This paper, prepared by the Shatin Church Committee, outlines Shatin Anglican Church's (STC) view on world mission and its role. We call for a broader definition of mission to encompass works of creation care, justice, compassion ministries as well as evangelism and teaching ministries. We resolve to commit to God's missions and this paper outlines the ways in which STC will express its commitment. It concludes with a few criteria that STC might use in selecting its mission partners.

Changing Definition of Mission

The shape of world mission has been changing. Jesus said: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*" (Mat 28: 18-19). Therefore Jesus' disciples have gone to all corners of the earth to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In the 21st century, however, cross-cultural mission no longer has to involve 'going' out of our homes. Big cities are populated with people of all nationalities. London is reported to have people from 270 nations who speak 300 different languages. According to the recent Hong Kong census data, although 93.6 percent of Hong Kong population is ethnically Chinese, there are over 452,000 Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis and other minorities who make up the rest of the city. Consequently, there are ample opportunities to engage in cross cultural mission right here on the steps of Hong Kong.

We must also note the impact of technology in cross-cultural missions. People in the remotest parts of Africa are reachable through mobile phones, and the internet has connected much of the world in an unprecedented fashion. On 4th October 2012, Facebook reported its one billionth user. If it were a country, it would be the third biggest in the world after China and India. Even the countries that are mostly closed to gospel work now have access to the Bible, sermons and other Christian resources through the internet. Therefore 'going' has taken on a different sort of significance in the digital age.

But most importantly, we (at STC) want to re-examine the definition of mission because the world has been reached in a variety of ways in the past two centuries. At the start of the 20th century, only 10 percent of the world's Christians lived outside of Europe, N. America, Australia and New Zealand. But at the start of the 21st century, at least 70 percent of the world's Christians live in the non-Western world. For example, Nigeria alone has more Anglicans than all the Anglicans worshipping in Britain, Europe and North America combined. More people worship in church every Sunday in China than in all of Western Europe. There are ten times more Assemblies of God members in Latin America than in the United States. In this context, it no longer makes sense to distinguish 'home' field from the 'mission' field, especially since it fails to recognize the maturity of the churches in these parts of the world.

There are still 'unreached' people groups in the world. In what has come to be known as the 10/40 window, the area of N. Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude, there are still approximately 8,623 distinct people groups without ready access to the gospel. Reaching them, we feel, must still be a priority, for "*how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?*" (Romans 10:14-15a). Although there are means of reaching the people in the 10/40 window without physically being there, we believe the local church has a crucial role in sending missionaries, and in planting and strengthening churches there.

In addition, Hong Kong is blessed in its geographical and cultural proximity to the vast unreached people groups in rural parts of China, India, Indonesia and others in the 10/40 window. And the church here must be praying and encouraging missionaries to reach these areas through all means.

So while we note the need for 'going' into the unreached parts of the world, we recognize that much of the world has been 'reached', and what is necessary now is strengthening of the local churches in all parts of the world. The paradigm of 'mission' in the 21st century world has to involve 'partnership' rather than 'pioneering' and we must encourage the Church to go beyond evangelism and teach people to live out the whole of the gospel.

The Great Commission and Holistic Mission

We believe that the Great Commission has always been bigger than 'going' and reaching the unreached. The goal of the Great Commission is 'to make disciples of all nations', not merely to convert and leave them. It has to encompass the ministries of discipleship, creation care, justice and mercy, for these have always been the mission of God for God's people.

For example the apostle Paul spent years in discipling the churches he planted, prayed over them and wrote letters to help the young believers grow in their faith. The early church didn't just focus on going out, but engaged in works of compassion and justice as well. They looked after the widows and the orphans, and Paul collected gifts from Macedonia to contribute to the relief work in Jerusalem. We could argue through the early Christian history that the greatest works of evangelism were done through works of compassion. For example, in the third century, as a vast number of people started to die and move out of great cities of the Roman Empire because of a serious epidemic, many Christians stayed in the plague-laden cities to look after the sick. Dionysius of Alexandria recorded, "*Most of the Christians in our city showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of others. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending their every need,*

helping and comforting them — and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pain.” Although they didn’t intend to ‘convert’ the pagans through their works, people came to Christ in large numbers because they were moved by their Christ-like compassion.

It is for such works God calls and redeems His people. People are called to be part of the Church, so that through the Church they are baptized, taught and disciplined so that they may be agents that engage in God’s bigger purpose for the whole world. Paul succinctly summarizes God’s mission in his letter to the Ephesians: “*And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the time will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ*” (1:9-10). The purview is much bigger than personal salvation or even the salvation of every human being. It has in mind the whole creation, *all* things in heaven and on earth, including the environment, animal world, human cultures and civilizations, as well as our work and family life.

The Biblical story reveals the mystery of his will to bring into salvation all that have fallen, and to bring everything under the lordship of Christ. Christ didn’t die and rise again so that we could escape from this fallen world to heaven after our death. God created the world and plans to redeem the fallen world and populate it with people and creatures that live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact, the Great Commission itself starts with the affirmation of the authority of Christ over all things: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Mat 28:16a). Accordingly, Christ’s Lordship over the whole world has to govern our view of mission.

Our vision of mission, then, is holistic. It of course includes the command to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ but it also entails ‘teaching them to obey everything’ that Christ has commanded us. In other words, it includes evangelism, but also the command to teach and disciple people to live out ‘everything’ else that God commanded us to do.

Five Marks of Mission

We believe the best way to summarize the whole mission of God for God’s people is through the articulation made by the Anglican Communion in 1984. The Anglican Church published a declaration on ‘Five Marks of Mission’: **Evangelism, Teaching, Compassion, Justice and Creation Care.**

Evangelism is the first step in the disciple-making process. It seeks to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to our families, friends, neighbors and to all who have yet to hear the gospel. We must preach the gospel whether in Hong Kong or in the 10/40 window. We also recognize, however, that evangelism is one aspect of mission, not the whole.

As the imperative in the Great Commission is to 'make disciples', the teaching and discipling ministry of the church is recognized as an integral part of God's mission. We look to the example of Paul, who not only preached the gospel wherever he went, but stayed and taught the believers to grow as followers of Jesus. He spent "...years in Ephesus teaching and training the believers" and was able to declare to them, "*For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.*" (Acts 20:27). Furthermore, he wrote letters to encourage them not only to engage in ministry of evangelism, but to live out their lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ. He was concerned to "*present everyone perfect in Christ*" (Col 1:28) by teaching the *whole* mission of God.

Paul spent his life teaching, because he believed that God's people are saved for a purpose. God's people are chosen to not only carry out the ministry of sharing the gospel, but also the ministry of justice and compassion. The call for God's people to be just and compassionate goes back to the Old Testament. Moses instructed God's people to defend "*...the cause of the fatherless and the widow...*" and love "*... the alien*" and give them "*food and clothing...*" (Deut 10:12-13, 17-18). This call to be active in bringing justice and compassion into the world is echoed throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps, most famously, Micah reprimanded the unjust and callous Israelites saying, "*What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8).

In the New Testament, Jesus too rebukes God's people for not carrying out such ministries, calling the ministry of justice and compassion 'weightier matters of the law': "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of law - justice and mercy and faithfulness*" (Matt 23:23 ESV). Christians are to preserve and transform this world by being the salt and light. We recognize this is more than a call to convert others, but also to advocate for God's justice and mercy especially to the vulnerable and the marginalized. We want to state in no uncertain terms that the ministry of justice and compassion is a part of God's mission.

Finally, we want to recognize our stewardship over the earth as an aspect of the mission of God. Jesus is the Lord of all creation who created and sustains all things together in him (Col 1:16-17). At the creation, God gave the command for people to "rule over" God's world (Gen. 1:26-28) and to "work" and "take care" of Eden (Gen 2:15). We recognize that when humanity fell from grace, the creation fell with it and is groaning for the day of full redemption. And God's plan included the redemption of the whole world, when the earth will be created anew (Isa 65:17-25) without the scars of sin and, will be liberated from the bondage of decay (Romans 8:18-21). Until then, Christians are given the mandate to lead the world in taking care of the earth that God has entrusted to us.

We see, then, God's mission for the whole world is much more expansive than salvation of individuals. God brings us to himself for a purpose - to go out and make disciples, to

teach them to carry out justice and compassion and to care for the world. We believe that our definition of 'mission' has to change to encompass these five marks of mission.

Role of the Local Church in God's Mission

We then pause to ask, 'What is the role of the local church in carrying out God's mission?' We begin by recognizing that no one local church can directly and simultaneously engage in all five forms of mission.

At the same time, however, God has gifted *the Church* to carry out all five forms of mission, for "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ*" (1 Cor 12:12). God has called certain people and organizations to focus on specific ministries. There are para-church organizations like *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* that explicitly engage in advocacy for the persecuted church and *Christian Action* that seeks to show God's mercy and compassion for the poor. There are Christian organizations like *A Rocha* that are leading Christians and others in caring for the environment as well.

Therefore, we believe the local church must partner with Christian organizations and people who are uniquely gifted in carrying out different aspects of God's mission. The form of such partnership vary, but we believe such partnership implies prayer and financial support for these organizations.

Beyond partnership with other Christians and organizations, we believe the local church plays a unique role in world mission through its evangelism and teaching ministries.

Each church has to engage in local evangelism and call people to live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In a multi-cultural society like Hong Kong, we believe the word 'local' carries more than geographical connotations. For a Cantonese-speaking church, 'local' means the Cantonese-speaking community in the area. For an English-speaking church, 'local' must mean the English-speaking population in the area. All local churches have to be outward looking, continuing to reach out to non-believers.

In addition to calling people to be reconciled to Christ, the local church has the crucial role in equipping people to live out their lives under Christ's lordship. Abraham Kuyper famously said, "*there is not a single inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'*" Kuyper affirmed that God's sovereignty lies over every sphere of human existence including our family and work life. If Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord over all things, then family and work life have to reflect God's mission for God's people as well.

The church must equip the parents to teach their children to love Christ but also encourage its members to go to their schools, offices, work sites...etc. with the aim of bringing God's justice and mercy and to promote loving stewardship over God's creation there. The local church has the role of teaching people to live out Christ's mission in

every sphere of their lives.

Role of Shatin Anglican Church in God's Mission

In the light of these thoughts, we believe that the role of Shatin Anglican Church in God's Mission is fourfold:

Shatin Anglican Church commits itself to:

1. evangelism and teaching ministry to the English-speaking people in Hong Kong;
2. encouraging its members to be mindful of the unreached especially in the 10/40 window, to partner with the church and the missionaries already there and to send missionaries to the unreached.
3. exhorting and encouraging its members to carry out all five marks of mission in every part of their lives, especially in the workplace; and
4. partnering with other Christian organizations especially through prayer and giving 15% of its non-designated income to support its mission partners through 'the World Mission Fund' (formerly 'tithed to missions').

World Mission Fund - Partnership Selection Criteria

1. We value work among the unreached whether in Hong Kong or overseas (especially in the 10/40 window).
2. We seek to support all five forms of mission work.
3. We seek to support those who have received and discerned their call and have been sent out from Shatin Church.
4. We value ministries that equip and train Christian leaders.
5. We value partnership with ministries that are church-based or which support the work of local churches.
6. We will consider the financial need and integrity of the agency and will value partnership with those for whom our contribution will make a difference.