

Christ Lutheran Church Mission Study

Theological Foundations

The church is founded through the love of God in Christ Jesus mediated through the means of the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Through those means, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens those in the communion of saints through the gift of faith. That faith in God's love toward humanity and the world is active in works of love towards God, fellow members of the communion of saints and the neighbor. Faith active in works of love is expansive. Through use of the means of grace and the "mutual conversation and consolation of the saints", faith in God's love towards humanity is ever being perfected in the human love to God, neighbor and the world. That love of God, neighbor, and the world is love in incompleteness, yet one in hope for its full revelation in the coming of the Kingdom of God. And this is the purpose of the church and its ministry, namely, to increase among persons the love of God and neighbor in response to the overflowing generosity and mercy of divine love: "Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Our mission will bear whatever fruit the Spirit wishes. "We may expect, however, in light of God's redemption of the world in Jesus Christ, that both we and our neighbors will grow to know and love God more deeply; that both we and our neighbors will find company and celebration in both joy and sadness; and that both we and our neighbors will enact a greater concern for the common good to the praise and glory of God" [*CELC Mission Statement*]. And, to that end, the increase of the love of God, neighbor, and world remains the purpose and hope of our preaching of the Gospel, our worship (or service of God), of all church organization and activity, of all ministry.

The love of neighbor is reflected in the CELC Mission Statement: "Continually refreshed by the fountain of God's love in Christ Jesus, we of the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church are sent by the Holy Spirit to direct that flow into the lives of our neighbors so that they too might be refreshed." What is that love of neighbor? It involves at least the following attitudes and actions: rejoicing and reverence in the otherness of the other, gratitude/thankfulness, loyalty to the other and the others' cause. Minimally, it involves care, mutual conversation, and consolation of the neighbor, be he/she/they in the communion of saints or not. It is and seeks knowledge of the neighbor in reverence and the fear of respecting the other. And that love seeks to upbuild both itself and the well-being of its objects. Love seeks to pursue both its ultimate goals and proximate goals for the sake of the pursuit and advancement of its ultimate goals.

The upbuilding of the congregation is always already implicated by its very nature and action in the upbuilding of the church and its mission, the increase of the love of God and neighbor. The promotion of love's upbuilding involves the question of the ordering of its love so that the church as the body of Christ is strengthened not for the sake of itself alone, but for the sake of ones' fellow neighbors both 'within' and 'outside' the communion of saints. Its fellowship in worship leads to the celebration, enjoyment, and promotion of its fellowship with one another and the extension of that fellowship in invitation to, action towards, and recognition of the neighbor.