

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

Evangelism, an important part of God's mission

We are often confused about the relation between mission and evangelism. The word *mission* comes from the Greek for "sending," and *evangelism* from "good news" or "public messenger of good news."

God is at work in our troubled and broken world. This is the good news that we share through evangelism!

What is God doing in this world where many forms of evil seem to be out of control? God sent his Son and his Holy Spirit and now sends the church into the world as an instrument of God's mission to save the lost. God is bringing to completion the reality that was revealed in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, namely God's reign of life, love, justice and peace in our world. While this reign seems to be hidden, it is present in the world like yeast, light and salt.

Jesus defined the mission of God's reign: "The Spirit of the Lord ... anointed me to *bring good news* to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19).

It is therefore clear that God's complete mission activity includes three essential areas: evangelism, compassionate service, and social justice. Jesus practiced and continuously blended together all three. Each is a distinct and necessary part of God's mission. If any area is neglected, the church's mission is reduced to less than what our Lord came to accomplish in this world

Evangelism entails our task to be God's messengers, our compassion shows our willingness to serve as Jesus did and our plea for social and political justice forms part of our prophetic calling in the world and in our communities.

All evangelism is mission, but not all mission is evangelism

God's mission for us speaks about God's purpose for his church and impacts on our total lifestyle. Our lives are often the first "Bible" that many unbelievers will read. Respect and compassion, being made attractive by our humility, make our evangelistic outreach more than feasible, it makes it possible to be believed by those we witness to. Building the church through conversion and discipleship is the intention of evangelism, while service and justice seek to promote the values of God's reign in the world in which we are called to serve the Lord.

Sharing the good news is every Christian's responsibility

Every person in the world has the right to hear and respond to God's complete, sufficient offer of grace in Christ. Sharing this gospel or good news will forever remain the responsibility of every Christian, every local congregation and the church of the Lord as a whole. Christians in every country around the globe have the privilege of joyfully sharing the good news of the gospel of grace with friends, relatives and colleagues.

Although we know that salvation is a gift of grace that God freely gives, he chooses to communicate and offer it through his human agents, the followers of Jesus Christ. We simply take advantage of opportunities to express and explain our personal faith in Jesus Christ. Living our lives as his disciples, yes, living according to the news we bring, is part of our evangelistic calling. Then we leave the results of our obedient outreach to God's Holy Spirit.

Only God calls, sends and saves people. (See Romans 10). Trying to judge who is saved and who is lost, remains inappropriate for mere humans who cannot judge the hearts of others. God only will be the judge of that. The final judgement on who will share eternity with God is only God's decision. The important question we have to find an answer to, is not who is "truly saved", but "am I truly a faithful witness" of God's saving grace?

Evangelism is invitational.

Jesus came into the world as a gift of God's grace. Some people "did not accept him. But to all who *received* him, who *believed* in his name, he *gave* power to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). God offers the free gift of salvation, but never forces people to accept it. God invites a response. When we share our faith and invite others to accept Christ as we invite them to pray with us, to read certain literature, or attend our Bible study or church service, we have to allow them also to accept or reject God's loving grace.

Repentance is part of the process.

Repentance is our response to God's call on our lives as it recognises sins of attitudes, words, actions and priorities and confirms our resolve to change. Such recognition and change can come in a moment, as it did for the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2) and for the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), but, more importantly - it lasts a lifetime. Evangelism is a process that not only calls people to conversion, but also to discipleship, incorporation into the church community, and to participation in God's mission.

Not only do we evangelise as we share and invite others to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ, *but we too are continually evangelised* as we hear afresh the gospel of grace and respond to its challenges. For the sake of its call to evangelise, the continuing conversion of the church of Christ remains essential.

In conclusion:

Many people we know are searching for meaning and are hurting. They are simply waiting to be invited to become part of Christ's faith community. While not all will accept our invitations, we will find that people are more spiritually hungry and open to receive our invitations than we are ready to extend them. Most people realise that they are missing the most crucial and important appointment of their lives - the one they have with God, once they have met and experienced those people who responded to God's call on their lives and were changed by the gracious work of his Spirit!

Who did you invite to meet with God lately?