

Good News For All

Version 091204

The Great Commission is boundless and embraces all levels - locally, nationally and internationally. Mission is also about collaboration and reciprocity. "The Worldwide Church" – drawing on approaches, experiences and inspiration arising out of churches in every part of the world – has a shared responsibility for this Commission. These perspectives permeate "Good News For All".

"Good News For All" is building on the Constitution of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (MCCS). Experiences from work over recent years, rooted in the goals and visions and programmes for action, have also been incorporated. After revision of earlier versions, the present document was adopted in November 2009 by the MCCS Church Board as a joint policy for national and international mission work. The document also has an influence on all other MCCS policies.

Background

As a Church, the MCCS is a community of autonomous congregations, which through their faith in Jesus Christ are united with one another. The MCCS has its roots in the Early Church and the Church Fathers, in the mission work of the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden and in the Reformation. The MCCS is part of the Church of Christ.

The MCCS was born out of the revival movement in the 19th century. "Where is it written?" was the question people asked themselves when reading the Bible and when looking for the answers, they found the God who loves the whole world. God's unchangeable love and humanity's need for reconciliation were in the centre of faith. A passionate commitment to the Commission – to mission – to reach people far away and near with the love of God became a tangible outcome from their Bible reading. Ministerial training and mission in other countries were two important issues at the foundation of the MCCS, as was the understanding of the Church, of the Holy Communion and the nature of atonement.

Since its foundation in 1878, many people, when reading the Bible, have asked the same question "Where is it written?" and when looking for the answer they have found the same loving God. The commitment to mission has remained, but the forms have changed when new experiences and new knowledge have been added.

Theological foundation

The deepest roots of mission are to be found in the narrative of the Creation in which God

declared "that all that he had made was very good"¹. Good relationships, *shalom*, prevailed between God, humankind and the whole world. God commissioned people to make use of and safeguard all these good things. When humans failed, God initiated a new creation with the purpose of re-establishing *shalom*. Mission is thus at its deepest level God's own activity – "Missio Dei".

Mission means becoming part of God's own activity. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"². Mission is therefore not a task among other tasks, it means as a church being sent by Jesus. In mission the Church becomes distinct, visible, and active, in the same way as God in Jesus Christ was distinct, visible and active.

Jesus Christ has been sent into the world by the Father through the Spirit. In all ages, Christ sends his disciples with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Through this sending, or mission, the Church is created and renewed as the body of Christ in the world:

- Through evangelization she witnesses to Christ,
- Through diaconal work she ministers to people and the whole of creation,
- Through fellowship people are being restored and encouraged to make use of their manifold gifts.

This concept of mission is modelled in Christ as a humble servant and is carried out in the power of love.³

A Whole Gospel

Evangelization, diaconal work and fellowship are inseparable expressions of this mission. Witnessing is linked with actions making the message clear and visible. Acts of love in their turn point to the Good News, the Gospel. The Christian fellowship is in itself both testimony and an act of love.

Evangelization

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"⁴. God loves all people and wants to heal and restore the relationship with everybody. A person having discovered God's love through Jesus wants to share it with others. The Good News is shared openly and with respect for other people's opinions and faith in every culture and in every age.

Therefore the congregation wishes

- to show the way to faith in Jesus Christ and invite to a living relationship with him in the Church and share in the mission of the whole Church to give the Good News to all nations.⁵

¹ Genesis 1:31

² John 20:21

³ From The Foundation and Contents of Faith

⁴ John 3:16

⁵ From the Order of the Congregation

Diaconal work

Jesus addressed people's needs, asking them, "What do you want me to do for you?"⁶ Diaconal work, the ministry of love, seeks to express the love of God in action, following the pattern of Jesus, so that people are restored and may live a life of human worth. Diaconal work also means being a prophetic voice in society, defending justice, freedom, democracy and human rights. In other words interpreting the meaning of faith in relation to other social systems and living a Christian social commitment.

The ministry of love is carried out for the sake of the individual, with no ulterior motives.

Therefore the congregation wishes

- to be present in everyday life, in working life and in society, to defend the equal value of everyone, to safeguard justice and expose injustice, to encourage engagement in society, to contribute to the equal distribution of the world's resources and to accept responsibility and stewardship for God's creation.⁷

Fellowship

"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation", says Paul⁸. The Christian fellowship welcomes every individual affirming his/her unique personality, his/her gifts intended for everyone. This fellowship therefore holds a diversity of people with different interpretations and traditions as well as different practical expressions of faith.

The worship service is a central expression of fellowship in the Church. It is related both to God's longing for fellowship with all humanity and to the sending, the mission. The meal of fellowship, the Holy Communion, leads us into a deeper relationship with Jesus himself and with all of humanity on earth. The fact that the bread shared is sufficient for everybody is a sign of the justice that God has in store for us.

Therefore the congregation wishes

- to embody a fellowship which is open for everyone, and to be an instrument of reconciliation in the neighbourhood and in the whole of God's world.⁹

A Whole Human Being in a Whole World

The Great Commission concerns the whole world. The Gospel has a message for people living in the locality of the Church as well as people in a variety of contexts in Sweden and in other parts of the world. The aim is to reach everybody, regardless of where they live.

The Great Commission – to preach the Good News about the Kingdom of God in word and in deed – is

⁶ Mark 10:51

⁷ From the Order of the Congregation

⁸ 1 Cor 14:26

⁹ From the Order of the Congregation

boundless. The sending is linked to the promise of Christ's presence to the very end of the age.¹⁰

The Great Commission also concerns the healing of the world. It is a question of restoration and healing of God's creation. This can be expressed through the vision of *shalom*, peace; shalom between God and humans; shalom between people, animals and nature; shalom within every individual. As stewards of the creation we are all called to work for a sustainable development and for global justice.

God has created heaven and earth, cosmos... Human beings are created in the image of God, but are themselves also part of the creation. All humanity has a unique responsibility to be God's co-workers and stewards.¹¹

A Whole Church

The Great Commission is universal; it is not limited to a small minority. In the national and world-wide ecumenical fellowship resources and needs are being shared. One's own faith grows when one shares it, when one encounters other people's thoughts and when one is faced with new challenges. Through the work of the MCCS several Churches have been established around the world. The MCCS wants to continue sharing this fellowship, collaborating with these now autonomous Churches.

In the encounters made when involved with mission work with other Churches, societies and cultures, one's own understanding of the richness and diversity of the Good News is enhanced. In that meeting one's own faith and responsibility are expanded.¹²

The historical commitment of the MCCS to mission commits it to continued relations with the Churches born out of the mission work. The fellowship between autonomous Churches in different parts of the world challenges us to reciprocity in intercession and to the sharing of experiences and resources.¹³

Areas of Work

MCCS' holistic view of mission constitutes the basis for the chosen areas of work which are interdependent.

Training and Development

For the Church to be relevant there is a continuing need for work with analysis, strategies and development of methods. The MCCS therefore wants to work with issues related to the role of the

¹⁰ From the Foundation and Contents of Faith

¹¹ From the Foundation and Contents of Faith

¹² From the Order of the Congregation

¹³ From the Order of the Church

Church in a multicultural and multi-faith world. Continuing work with the development of worship is important, as well as the development of confirmation training and other spheres of work. In order to carry out this work in a competent way, the M CCS wants to offer inclusive training in various forms for lay people and for elected representatives.

Evangelization

Everywhere there are people who need to hear the Gospel, the Good News about the love of God. Evangelization can be carried out in different ways, for example through preaching, Bible translation as well as activities relating to music or sports. Planting churches, especially in areas with a weak Christian presence, is an important part of the process of evangelization. In Sweden this work is mainly an M CCS responsibility, together with other national Churches, but in other countries the main responsibility resides with the sister churches and partnerships, but M CCS can provide support.

Congregational support and Discipleship

Church development is a consequence of evangelization and church planting. The M CCS congregations, as well as their sister churches, can support each other when it comes to growth, deepening, worship, music and other areas. During certain periods the congregations may receive help through mentors or receive support for a fresh beginning. At an international level, the M CCS' task might be to support training and theological research in order to help the Sister Churches to build up their own body of pastors and evangelists. It could also be a question of collaboration for the creation of functioning organizations.

Strengthening of the Civil Society

The M CCS wants to be engaged in the life of work and to collaborate with other participants within that sphere, within culture and politics and to be a clear voice in matters relating to, for example, human rights, HIV/aids and sustainable development. The promotion of non-violence, peace and reconciliation, environmental concerns, medical and health care and support for self-employment, all these are significant aspects of this work. The M CCS wants to strengthen marginalized people and groups so that they themselves might change society. It is not primarily a question of relieving the needs, but of addressing the causes of the problems. The M CCS also wants to protect all people's right to their own identity and culture, to combat ethnic conflicts and to end segregation. This also applies to minorities and indigenous populations living in Sweden.

In certain situations, like war and natural catastrophes, the M CCS may be called upon to accept other tasks within other fields of work. When these situations occur in areas in which the M CCS has deep and close relations with a Church, it is justified to offer humanitarian support. This is an expression not only of mutuality, but is also justified by the fact that there are already functional structures and developed contacts there.

Fundamental Values

The M CCS wants its mission work to be characterized by the following values:

Democracy

All those associated with a church activity should be given the opportunity to partake in it and to influence it through democratic ways of working. In decision making and in the carrying out of an activity, the majority groups always have a responsibility for the minority groups. The M CCS wishes to support and develop democratic forms of work by strengthening people's competence, identity, commitment and self-esteem. The M CCS also wants to analyze different power structures and protest against oppression.

Ecumenism

The joint task of all Churches is to hand on the Gospel. Therefore divisions and competition weaken both the message and one's own life. The M CCS wants ecumenism to impact on planning, strategy and growing collaboration when there are churches from several denominations working in the same place or several Sister Churches in one country.

Ecumenism is related to mission, to the sending out into the world. The foundation of unity lies in the unity of God as Father, Son and Spirit. Ecumenism means a movement towards unity between different Churches and local congregations. Through the unity of the Christians, the world will believe and understand that God has sent Jesus Christ in his love for all people.¹⁴

Equality

Every human being is unique and of ultimate value, irrespective of ethnic background, sexual disposition, gender, social status or age. Throughout all its work, the M CCS wants to be influenced by this insight. In close collaboration with equmenia¹⁵, the M CCS wants to put special focus on the perspective of children. Together with other Churches within the Christian Council of Sweden, the M CCS also wants to work actively with the issue pertaining to equality between the sexes.

Learning

In order to develop one needs constant personal reflection and ongoing evaluation. Through an open and critical attitude the M CCS wants to remain a learning organization with special emphasis on analysis and strategy.

¹⁴ From the Foundation and Contents of Faith

¹⁵ For more information about "equmenia" see below p. 13

Environmental Responsibility

Humans were given a responsibility by the Creator to cultivate and to safeguard the creation. In the Great Commission in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gives us the assignment to preach the good news to all creation.¹⁶ Therefore the care of creation is part of the Great Commission. In its work the M CCS seeks to find ways leading to an ecological balance and a sustainable society.

Diversity

Humankind presents a diversity of cultures, traditions, faith systems, and ethnic groups. The M CCS wants to be enriched by this diversity, create meeting-places between different groups and work for wholeness, belonging and fellowship.

Justice

Everyone has the right to have his/her basic needs satisfied. In order to make that possible people must be able to influence their own situation. The M CCS wants to work for justice with a special emphasis on problems concerning the oppression of minorities, poverty, ill-health, issues pertaining to HIV/aids, lack of education and other obstacles to the development of countries and individuals.

Accessibility

Physical, psychological, social and other obstacles limit people's opportunities to participate fully. The M CCS wants to work to overcome these obstacles, making it possible for everybody to take an active part in society and in worship and church life.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is about sharing the Christian faith so that individuals, congregations and Churches in the mutuality of their encounter enrich the faith of each other in a way that has theological and practical implications. In reciprocity with its sister churches, the M CCS wants to give and take encouragement and support in worship, church development, prayer and praise, for the work in Sweden and in other countries.

The fellowship between autonomous Churches in different parts of the world challenges us to reciprocity in intercession and in the sharing of experiences and resources.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mark 16:15

¹⁷ From the Order of the Church

An Inclusive Church

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*¹⁸ When Jesus read these words from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, he claimed that they were about himself and his mission. In the following of Jesus, the M CCS wants to embrace these words for itself and its mission.

In all countries there are poor people, prisoners, blind and oppressed: poor in resources and rights, prisoners of injustice and destructive patterns, blind to the reality and its possibilities, oppressed by regimes and systems. This goes for all of us, not only "the others".

The M CCS wants to make it possible for people to be reached by the Good News, to be liberated, to recover their sight and to be free. Every person needs to hear the Good News, be empowered and have the opportunity to take charge of and accept responsibility for his/her own life. A discerning analysis of the world around us belongs to the important tools available.

The poor

(good news to the poor)

Materially poor people live in conditions restricting them in various ways. The M CCS wants to contribute to the improvement of the economic and social situation of the individual but also to combat poverty through analysis and by influencing public opinion. It has to be acknowledged that material riches do not guarantee a happy life. The consumer society puts the individual himself/herself in the centre. The M CCS wants to put our fellow human beings in the centre showing that a life of giving to others can add meaning and purpose to our living.

The prisoners

(freedom for prisoners)

Many people are in prison, some are prisoners of drug abuse; others are victims of oppressive systems of an economic, racist, sexist or a colonial kind. The M CCS wants to draw attention to and change these structures in order to pave the way for justice, liberation and human solidarity.

The blind

(recovery of sight for the blind)

Working for the recovery of sight for the blind could be a matter of giving support to people who are literally blind, through medical and health care. But blindness can also be a lack of consciousness and of knowledge about the situation in one's own society and one's own life situation. The M CCS wants to work in order to raise the level of awareness of unjust structures

¹⁸ Luke 4:18-19

among people, but above all, of their own resources to effectively influence their situation themselves.

The oppressed

(release the oppressed)

Many people are oppressed and marginalized. The MCCA wants to work towards their integration in society so that they can make their voice heard through democratic means. The most marginalized groups should receive support to become visible, both for their own sake and for the sake of society.

The ministry of the whole people of God and particular ministries

A fundamental thought in the MCCA is that all Christians have the task to witness to their faith and to minister to their fellow human beings. The life of the congregations is to a large extent maintained by volunteers. In order to strengthen the task of everybody some individuals are ordained for special ministries as deacons or ministers or are sent out as missionaries.

Deacons

The MCCA ordains deacons to demonstrate the calling of the congregation in the world. The deacon follows developments in society and helps to keep alive the calling of the congregation. The deacon also has personal contact with people who have been afflicted in various ways and intercedes for them.

The deacon is Christ's servant in the congregation with the task of expressing the church's calling to service in the world. Through participation in society and with special regard to the distress of the individual, the deacon establishes a connection between the worship and the ministry of service within the life of the Church and the world around it.¹⁹

Ministers

The MCCA ordains ministers to be leaders of the congregations, to preach the word of God and to administer the sacraments. The minister also works with pastoral care and spiritual guidance; he/she is responsible for all the life of worship and she/he officiates at significant moments in people's lives. The minister is also called upon to pray for the congregation and other people and to work ecumenically.

The minister is Christ's servant in the congregation and in society with a task to gather and

¹⁹ From the Order of the Congregation

to build up the body of Christ, to preach the Word, to administer the sacraments, to provide pastoral care and to guide the life of the congregation in worship and in mission.²⁰

Missionaries

The task of the missionary is to serve in partnership with another Church or to work in new areas, sent out by the M CCS. Here the universal task of the Church becomes visible. The missionary is not any longer only a person sent to other countries. Missionaries can also be received from other countries.

A missionary is commissioned to be sent out through the laying on of hands and prayer. At the commencement of every new period of work missionaries are sent out, as well as those who offer to enter the work for a shorter period of time. They are received by the Church which has called them as partners according to the partnership agreement, or they accomplish their assignment in the country to which they have been sent. In the same way the M CCS receives missionaries from other Churches.²¹

Particular ministries

Apart from the above mentioned ministries, there are many other ministries which are important for the M CCS centralized work such as M CCS President, district superintendents, musicians, evangelists and deacons and chaplains within medical care, criminal care and at the universities. In the local congregations there are many people engaged with music, child and youth work, administration, caretaking, etc.

Church musicians are in charge of the musical life of the congregation. Music is part of the worship and brings the message of the gospel to deeper levels of people's lives. Church musicians may work with different age groups and many different styles of music depending on their own specific competence. Music has a prominent place in the outreach of the congregation with groups meeting on a regular basis.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*²²

Youth leaders support the work among children and young people in the congregation. Their work is often led by a youth council and addresses different age groups. Apart from being leaders, these youth leaders often become important role models and dialogue partners for young people. These ministries are often a good starting point for young people wanting to explore different

²⁰ From the Order of the Congregation

²¹ From the Order of the Church

²² Col 3:16

ways of serving within the church.

Trainees and volunteers

Together with the sister churches the M CCS and equmenia send out and receive young people every year as trainees for short periods. This traineeship aims at giving young people a chance to test their calling and to gain experience of international partnership.

Young people wishing to do voluntary work somewhere else may become volunteers. A volunteer is a person who, without remuneration, offers his/her services in a congregation in Sweden or in a sister church for a period of up to twelve months.

Allocation of responsibility and Collaboration

The M CCS works for the visible unity of the Church locally, nationally and internationally. These three aspects of the work make up an integrated whole.

Congregations

The Great Commission is rooted in the congregations and is also the main task of the congregation. It is principally carried out locally, but also jointly via the districts and the national organization, and in reciprocity together with other Churches. This is done to create equality and endurance within a long term perspective.

As a Church, the M CCS is a fellowship of congregations proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and therefore together strive to fulfil their shared calling, to the honour of God, the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.²³

The congregation is a partaker in the M CCS immense work of mission.²⁴

Coordination

The M CCS is divided into seven geographical, and one non-territorial, districts. These districts are democratically built up through the congregations forming them. The M CCS has one representative, the district superintendent, who works together with the district board and the district co-workers.

The annual Church Conference is the highest decision-making body within the M CCS. Here

²³ From the M CCS Constitution

²⁴ From the Order of the Congregation

congregations come together to elect the Church Board and other bodies, to call people to different ministries, to decide about the plan of action and the budget of the coming year and to give recommendations to the congregations. In the Conference ministers and deacons are ordained. Missionaries are also commissioned during the Conference.

The Church Board plans and leads the M CCS work together with the district superintendents in accordance with the decisions taken by the Church Conference.²⁵

The Mission Department at the M CCS office is responsible for the coordination of mission work in Sweden and in other countries, and for development aid work. Working parties are nominated, responsible for a geographic region or for a special field of work.²³

Missionary tasks in Sweden comprise evangelization and church growth, diaconal work, church and society, music, training/education and development issues as well as different forms of pioneer work. At an international level, the task consists of following up international contacts taken by the congregations and the districts, coordinating international contacts with partner churches, taking the responsibility for the joint mission and development work, enabling exchange, arranging meeting places between congregations in Sweden and partner churches, as well as organizing the training of missionaries.

A further task is to provide information about the conditions in Sweden and in other countries in order to encourage intercession for and giving towards the mission work. The joint work in relation to mission works towards a mutual enrichment of the national and the international work.

Partnership Agreements

In order to reach a long term perspective in the international work, the M CCS has arrived at agreements and settlements in relation to collaboration in mission with Churches in other countries and ecumenical agreements with other Churches in Sweden.

International Development Aid Cooperation

The M CCS has development aid cooperation with Churches in other countries. This cooperation is marked by reciprocity in learning and experiences. It is based on profound friendship and long-lasting relations built up over a long period of time. Coordination of mission commitments of congregations and districts is also organized.

Subsidies transmitted from the governmental aid authority SIDA, via the SMC to the M CCS, are channelled to projects run by sister churches in collaboration with the M CCS. The M CCS and its congregations are responsible for a percentage-related contribution to these projects. A special policy has been drawn up for SIDA-financed contributions run by M CCS congregations.

²⁵From the Order of the Church

Adult education (Folkhögskolor) and the Stockholm School of Theology

The MCCA is responsible for four adult education institutions – Härnösands Folkhögskola, Karlskoga Folkhögskola, Lidingö Folkhögskola and Södra Vätterbygdens Folkhögskola in Jönköping. Through its work in adult education, the MCCA wishes to offer possibilities of training, education and personal development and to stimulate involvement with social issues, with voluntary activities and existential questions. These schools are therefore attempting to offer an environment for intellectual pursuit and cultural development in basic issues pertaining to MCCA and SMU.

Together with the Swedish Baptist Union and the Methodist Church of Sweden, the MCCA is also responsible for the Stockholm School of Theology. The most important part of this task is to give theological training, especially to future ministers. The course in Human Rights is closely connected with the ideology and traditions of the denominations. Another task for the Stockholm School of Theology is to undertake research within the two main areas mentioned.

Widened Swedish and international collaboration

The MCCA collaborates with ecumenical bodies and organizations in Sweden and at an international level.²⁶ This collaboration facilitates information and lobbying in relation to authorities, media and international actors. In this respect, Diakonia is an important partner.

Equmenia

Equmenia is a joint organization for the national youth sections of the Methodist Church (MKU), the Swedish Baptist Union (SBUF) and the MCCA (SMU). The main goal of equmenia is to reach children and young people with the gospel, based in the creedal affirmation of faith: Jesus Christ is the Lord.

With its national work equmenia wishes to create a feeling of belonging. Equmenia seeks to engender a spirit of diversity and wants to be a living and attractive movement in which children and young people may feel at home and find a clear Christian identity.

The purpose of the international work of equmenia is to create and encourage international work in order to make visible the unity of the Church of Christ. Equmenia wants to strengthen the international involvement, promote international collaboration, fellowship and exchange and work for international solidarity and justice.

²⁶ The national ecumenical bodies are: The Christian Council of Sweden (SKR) and The Swedish Mission Council (SMC).

The international ones are: The World Council of Churches (WCC), The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), The International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC).

Together, equmenia and the MCCS constitute a unit, even though tasks and priorities may vary within the two organizations.