

Navigating the Globe

A P.L.A.N. for Global Mission



“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 commissioned the apostles to think differently about mission without Jesus physically by their side. This global mission was probably impossible for them to comprehend. Their ministry had not taken them very far, and now they were looking to the ends of the earth.

Today we have received the same command. We no longer think of it as an insurmountable task because we have greater access to the world through books, the media, instant news and new social media that allows us to develop personal relationships with global partners. We no longer leave our global mission ministry to missionaries who leave home for years to go to parts unknown.

Our culture has a fascination with seeing the world. Over the last three decades, travel abroad has increased and has replaced domestic vacations for many Americans. Likewise over the last two decades, travel and exchanges among Christians from all over the world have increased. Hundreds of groups travel each year for work or educational trips. Also our congregations and churchwide offices have experienced an increasing presence of Christians from abroad.¹

Most of the global interactions practiced among Women of the ELCA are through church-to-church or companion synod

¹ Although the clearest reported numbers come from U.S.-based organizations and researchers, the phenomenon has been equally noted in Canada and the United Kingdom. Refer to Abram Huyser Honig, “Study Questions Whether Short-Term Missions Make a Difference,” Christianity Today, posted 6/20/05. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/125.12.0.html (accessed February 4, 2008).

relationships. However, there is a rise in individuals and single congregations forging connections with groups of Christians in other parts of the world based on interest, crisis or need.

But is travel all there is to the mission? Navigating the globe geographically is only a small part of global mission. Yes, the command suggests there will be movement—but to where? Today we have the means to get to the ends of the earth, but what are we to do once we get there? There is a **Purpose, Language, Approach** and a way to **Navigate** the mission described in Acts 1:8.

A P.L.A.N.

Each of the four sections—Purpose, Language, Approach and Navigate—contains some commentary, biblical references with questions and directions for connecting the P.L.A.N. Once completed, this P.L.A.N. will give participants a new tool for viewing and navigating their participation in global mission.

Purpose

Travel to see the world and all its great wonders is just that. It can be accomplished without ever engaging in a meaningful way the people or culture of the places on the journey. Those living out the mission in Acts 1:8 may never achieve it simply by travel itself.

Hearing and obeying the command in Acts 1:8 calls us to first receive the Holy Spirit, who gives power to our purpose. That purpose is to serve as a witness to what God is up to in the life of the world. The territory to be covered is specific and is mentioned in detail because it is important to navigating our assignment today. There is a progression to the work. However, we often try to reverse the order or run ahead of God’s plan. When we move too quickly, we run the risk of showing others what we can do for God rather than telling how *God* is at work in our lives. This way of operating may feel odd to us. But when we follow the plan of walking the journey

with the Holy Spirit, we gain power and support. That power and support starts at home and has a greater capacity for advancing when we go out. Our participation in God’s global mission must start here at home because we are part of the world, and only we can tell how God is at work in *this* part of it.

Being clear in our purpose is crucial before we take a step. It is important to look at the full picture in order to fully embrace the purpose of the mission. The command to go in Acts 1:8 comes at the end of the conversation that begins in verse 4 with the first command: “Do not leave Jerusalem....” Without the benefit of the verses before and after the familiar command, the purpose is about destination.

Read Acts 1:4–10. Read it aloud several times. Encourage the group to hear it rather than follow along. Take some time to explore first thoughts, reflections and reactions to what was just heard.

How to Use This Resource

This resource was designed for individual study as well as group settings. It should take about 60 minutes. You are encouraged to use this resource as the first in a series of conversations. Expand it by allowing further time for reflection and discussion of each section.

You will need newsprint and markers for group work. Each participant will need a Bible, a pen and paper. You may wish to provide each participant a copy of this resource. It might also be helpful to have maps, globes and artifacts visible to set the atmosphere for global thinking.

Whether studying in a group or alone, begin and end with prayer. Allow time for participants to reflect on the questions before beginning the discussion. If you break your larger group into small groups for discussion, limit these to three or four participants. Make sure there is time for the full group to hear a few thoughts from each of the small groups at the end of your time together.

For additional global education resources, visit www.elca.org and click on Global Mission at the bottom left of the screen. At the bottom right of the Global Mission page, click on “resources for global engagement.”

DISCUSS:

Where is your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria? Why is the order important?

How are you to get to the end of the earth?

Your next step is to examine to what you are being called. Each journey² (whether encounters in your neighborhood or traveling thousands of miles) begins with articulating the purpose for the journey.

DISCUSS:

How will it advance the mission?

How will it benefit your ministry and the ministry of your host? Write down those benefits.

American culture is a part of who we are. When it comes to mission, we must begin to practice seeing the world with new eyes. We will need to learn and practice a new language and behaviors that are compatible to the mission.

Language

American culture is tough to define and articulate. It is full of imagery: melting pot, super power and first world, to identify a few. We have an unwritten assumption that everyone desires to live here. We don't often talk about how the language of our culture affects our behavior. But we must take a look often so that we don't build a vocabulary and actions that build barriers to the mission.

Here are three examples of the power of the language of culture that distorts mission:

1. **Suspicion of the "other"** from viewing other parts of the world as "foreign." Synonyms for foreign such as "barbaric," "overseas," "immigrant" or "alien" cultivate a cultural language of "us and them." Suspicion builds over time. And "us and them" becomes "right and wrong," which in turn affects how we view others and the mission.
2. **Diminishment of the "other"** comes from comparing apples and oranges. For example, a delegation from small town Lutherville says it is traveling to Africa. Lutherville is a small town and is not comparable to the entire continent of Africa, which is home to 53 countries. This shortcut of not learning detailed geography over time diminishes the vastness, diversity and culture of the many countries that comprise one word, Africa.
3. **Marginalization of the "other"** comes from viewing the global community in an either/or fashion, for example, first world nations or third world countries, developed nations or developing nations. When we use this language, global mission can become synonymous with poverty, people of color, women and children. Then people, their home and churches become service projects—not sisters and brothers in Christ. The situations, conditions or circumstances that affect the lives of members of the body of Christ are not who we are. These conditions don't automatically mean they need things or help.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Give the group a moment to gather their first thoughts, reflections and reactions.

DISCUSS:

Using the description of the body in verses 12-26, describe your connection with others in your congregation, your congregation's connection with other congregations in your community, your congregation's connection with your synod, your synod's connection with the ELCA, your synod's connection with your companion church and so on. Use newsprint to record this exercise. This exercise can be done in full group or in small groups reporting back to the full group. Or it may be done by assigning each small group one area of connection to present back to the full group.

2 Journey means passage or progress from one stage to another: the life of a disciple. It encompasses all that happens along the way—feelings, learnings, people, place, transformations, connections. Because the mission is not about destinations each experience is referred to as a journey rather than trip.

Paul compared the body of Christ to the human body to give the church at Corinth a new understanding of its purpose and language. Paul's description gives room to envision how all fit into God's plan—from the individual to the global Christian community. In each scenario, different gifts and assignments must work together. The church will not advance and grow if we equate what one has with what one is called to do.

Approach

The method we use or the steps we take in setting about a task are crucial to receiving the expected outcome. If you approach a flat tire with a shovel, accomplishing the task will be difficult.

Acts 1:8 implies that this work is to be done in partnership (Jesus was speaking to the apostles), and the outcome is to multiply the efforts. Jesus led by example as he walked with his disciples during his ministry. We are called to walk together with God's people near and far. We are part of the world. Disciples connected around the world are stronger together than alone. The command in Acts 1:8 is the assignment to disciples all over the globe, and the strategy is to learn and support each other as we do the work.

This approach is called *accompaniment*. The ELCA Global Mission unit defines accompaniment as: *Walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality*. The Emmaus road story in Luke 24 creates a framework for the accompaniment theology of mission. Mission is a journey, and this mission is always taken with companions.

Read Luke 24:13-53. Read it aloud several times. Again, encourage the group to hear it rather than follow along. Take a few moments so that individuals can collect their thoughts and reactions before entering the discussion.

DISCUSS:

What did you hear that was new?

Spend some time with verse 31. To what have our eyes been opened? What has been missing in your current approach to global mission?

Accompaniment is: Walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.

Another part to this approach is found in verse 35. It takes the full community's involvement to complete the work.

The two traveling the road had an encounter. But until they reported the events, the experience was no different from their everyday walk along that road. Jesus didn't need an answer to the question, "What things?" asked in verse 19. But it pushed the travelers to say, to speak, to give witness to what they knew. Their partners, the 11 disciples, are no different than our partners (family, friends, congregation, synod and churchwide) who need to receive our report (our witness) so that we come that much closer to the mission.

This approach values mutuality and accountability. When these values are ignored and we plan in isolation, we run the risk of burdening the host and sometimes the sender. Often this leads to duplication of efforts and projects that do not match the needs of the host. The mission becomes focused on providing services that are more about us.

Navigate

Actual travel is only a small part of global mission. Applying the accompaniment approach helps set the course for navigating our mission journey into relationships with other disciples. Using this navigating approach gives a clear vision of a common goal, mutual support and multiplied efforts.

Relationships are central. One-to-one encounters, delegation visits and pilgrimages may serve as the



beginning of a relationship; but these approaches cannot sustain or advance the common mission as described in Acts 1:8.

Read 1Thessalonians 3:6-13. Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica is a map to the early church approach of navigating the mission. Three partners in this mutual relationship are needed to advance the good news: a sending community, travelers and a host community.

Verse 6 indicates that Timothy was the traveler. However, in that same verse we find that in previous times there was a different traveling community. The Thessalonians hosted Timothy on this journey. Paul and the leadership of the church were the sending community.

Three actions of the community are involved in global mission: sending, hosting and traveling. Just as a three-legged stool cannot stand if any of the legs are missing, the action you take will not be complete if one of these actions is missing. The sending community has responsibilities to the travelers and the host—to accept the invitation, prepare and support, send, pray and receive the report upon the travelers’ return. The host community also has responsibilities to the senders and travelers—to prepare, welcome and show hospitality, listen and receive the travelers’ witness, and share their witness. The traveler has responsibilities to the host and senders to be a good guest, to be open to being a witness, to listen, and to prepare to bring back an accurate report upon returning.

Today the whole world is on the move—people being displaced from their homeland due to natural and human-made disasters and political and economic crises. Part of our global work is to host the travelers: to prepare, welcome and show hospitality,

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listen and receive the travelers’ witness, and share our witness with those who now make their new home among us.

Like a global positioning system, sometimes we have to stop and “recalculate” where we are. This recalculating helps us assess where we have been and what we have done. It allows us to take a critical look at how our actions have advanced the mission while also seeing what and who is missing. This self-analysis gives us time with the Holy Spirit to examine our motives and how they line up with the instructions given in Acts 1:8.

GROUP EXERCISE

This exercise is helpful before planning a journey to host, send or travel.

1. **Share the three highlights of your ideal short-term mission trip with your group.**
2. **Next each one choose to represent the sending, traveling or hosting community.**
3. **Now find the other sending, traveling and hosting representatives.**
4. **Take two minutes to make a list of the expectations, needs, hopes and gifts the community brings to the planning and preparation and of life together after the mission is completed.**

Be ready to reflect with the full group.

Did you know?

Women of the ELCA resources, such as this one, are available free to individuals, small groups, and congregations. Covering a variety of topics, we are bringing Lutheran perspectives and new voices to issues that matter. By making a donation to Women of the ELCA, you will help us continue and expand this important educational ministry. Give online at womenoftheelca.org or mail to Women of the ELCA, ELCA Gift Processing Center, P.O. Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116-8009.