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Please direct queries to  
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What will the future of missions in the LCMS look like in the future? Rev. Dr. Jack Preus says it will be a lot more collaborative.

# THE FUTURE OF MISSION IN THE LCMS: COLLABORATION

by Jack Preus

I WANT TO THANK the planners of this event, Bart Day and others. It's good that we're here, putting our heads together to discuss what it means to do missions in a context that is very different from the days when our current mission model was devised. Second, I want to thank you for inviting me to participate. It's an honor to be included among such a great group of church leaders. And finally, I want to thank Al Collver for his presentation. It's a pleasure to provide a brief response.

I need to say right off that I'm not a missionary and never have been, at least in the traditional sense of the word. When I graduated from the seminary, I thought I would be called into the mission field because I was fluent in Spanish and Portuguese. I had majored in Latin American studies at university. I expected my first call would be to Venezuela or someplace like that. Instead, it was to Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. I guess the Lord had other ideas in mind. So, I'm not a missionary. Nor am I or ever have been an official church-relations liaison, an official representative of the Synod in international affairs.

But I have had extensive international experience, having visited some 60 countries, and I have been given the privilege of viewing the mission enterprise from a slightly different perspective: as one who for decades has "come alongside" of those directly involved in the mission enterprise as a partner. Starting at Concordia Seminary, continuing through my experiences at Concordia Irvine and now increasingly through my involvement in a very significant ramp-up of international collaboration at

Bethesda, I have had deep interest in things international for more than four decades.

As I mentioned, we're doing missions today in a different context. In fact, in some respects it's a new world. You know this better than I, but we're going to have to learn how to change and adapt. The future of missions in

the LCMS, in my opinion, is going to look different. It's going to look a lot more collaborative. So, what's changed? Well, a lot. But a couple of changes I think have been most compelling and will require adaptation.

The first thing is the shifting voice of world confessional Lutheranism and as a result the shifting theological and political alliances. Thank God for the LCMS and our other International Lutheran Council partners. The voice of authentic Lutheran theology continues to be heard. But it seems clear that in the future the center from which that voice comes may be in a different place. There are now more Lutherans in Africa than in the U.S. In fact, there are more

Lutherans in just two countries in Africa (Ethiopia and Tanzania) than there are in North America. There are still more nominal Lutherans in Europe than in Africa, but the decline in Europe, both in numbers and in Lutheran identity, is stunning. There can be no question about this: The center of world Lutheranism in the future is shifting. This requires a greater sense of respect and collaboration than in the past.

Another difference is that members of our churches today are no longer content to sit back and let the professionals go "to the ends of the earth" in order to

This desire for greater, more direct involvement [by church members in mission work] is both understandable and, I think, largely wholesome. But it has often resulted in confusion and chaos when it has been the result of poor or no communication.

spread the Gospel. Nor are they willing just to send checks to the church headquarters so that the Synod can do mission work in their stead. They want to get directly involved. They want hands-on experiences. This has led to a proliferation of mission societies and short-term mission trips and activities. This desire for greater, more direct involvement is both understandable and, I think, largely wholesome. But it has often resulted in confusion and chaos when it has been the result of poor or no communication. We can all tell horror stories about unilateral and unadvised activities that have been carried out “in the name of the LCMS.” You all know this better than I do.

So, the future of missions in the LCMS is going to be different. I can say with a fair amount of confidence what that future is going to look like because we’ve been given a glimpse of it. Bethesda Lutheran Communities — working in partnership with the LCMS’s Office of International Missions, the Wisconsin South District of the LCMS and the English District of the LCMS — have forged a new model for mission partnership. This initiative is characterized by shared governance and strategic planning, mutual decision-making, clear communication and skin in the game. I’m speaking about the Dominican Republic Lutheran Mission.

There are two aspects or circles of support surrounding the mission:

1. The Management Team, which I’ll say more about in a minute, and
2. The larger circle of international support partners, including several congregations in the U.S., the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina.

Our Memorandum of Agreement says that the goal of the Dominican Republic Lutheran Mission (DRLM) is to “plant and grow a confessional, Gospel-proclaiming, independent, national Lutheran Church in the Dominican Republic that ministers to and equips for service all those loved by God in Jesus Christ, including people who have developmental disabilities or other special needs and their families.”

It describes the relationship between the partner organizations, which we call Managing Partners, the other partners and the DRLM by outlining criteria for the selection of Managing Partners, mutual objectives, individual responsibilities, commitments and partnership duration. We have two criteria for the selection potential partners:

1. Managing Partners will have a history of positive support for international mission efforts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
2. Current Managing Partners will select new members according to the needs of the mission. We did that just this past year by inviting the English District to join, which it has done, and we were privileged to welcome it into this partnership earlier this year.

The objectives of this DRLM partnership are to:

1. Serve as instruments in God’s hands to fulfill His mission of salvation to people in the Dominican Republic.
2. Work cooperatively in a unified, efficient and strategic way to advance the DRLM.
3. Support the DRLM through prayer, finances and other resource development.
4. Provide supporters and the church-at-large with information and reports concerning God’s mission in the Dominican Republic.
5. Partner in carrying out both mission and mercy ministry in the Dominican Republic.

According to our agreement, the Managing Partners support the DRLM by:

1. Providing financial support, staff or service to the mission field equivalent of at least \$30,000 annually.
2. Providing expertise and non-financial support for the development and implementation of any project in the Dominican Republic as appropriate.
3. Soliciting funding for projects in support of this partnership.
4. Publicizing the mission effort so that others in the LCMS can join in praying for and supporting the outreach of the DRLM.
5. Providing one representative to serve on the DRLM Managing Partner board.
6. Working with the Office of International Mission to evaluate annually the effectiveness of the mission team.
7. Performing an annual review of this agreement.
8. Regularly reviewing financial reports.

So, that's how we structure ourselves. This is clearly a different way of way of doing missions, and I think it's better. Some of you have had direct involvement in this project and can attest to the same. John Wille, Ted Krey, Dave Stechholz, Barb Below, Randy Golter, you've been there.

From Bethesda's perspective, this is a very fulfilling way to contribute to the mission of the LCMS. The commitment this mission has made to including people who have been marginalized because of their developmental disabilities has been stellar. From the very beginning, the mission and emerging Lutheran church in the Dominican Republic has had a strong commitment to helping the least of the least. Let me tell you about the six young people we rescued from the government-run institution in Santiago. We first visited them several years ago before I joined Bethesda. The children, who had a variety of disabilities, lived in filth and were severely neglected. All were medicated and many were restrained. One young boy was even kept in a cage as a way of controlling his behavior.

Our response was two-fold. First, we asked the institution to identify six children whom we would remove to a group home. They chose some of the children with the most severe disabilities, including the boy whom they had caged. Within a couple of months, all the children were off medications. All but one became

ambulatory. Their behaviors improved to the point that five of the six are now attending school. Their condition improved dramatically with loving and professional care. The other thing we did was to provide training for all the staff at the institution. As a result, the place is now peaceful, calm and clean, and the condition of all the children has improved significantly.

We have seen miracles from God. From the perspective of a Recognized Service Organization (RSO), this direct involvement in what we might call a governance role is very engaging. Our commitment is strong because we have been allowed to sit at the table in a meaningful way. I think we have developed a model that could be

Our commitment is strong because we have been allowed to sit at the table in a meaningful way.

implemented in many other places, as Ted Krey is trying to do throughout Latin America. It's a model that is characterized by shared governance and strategic planning; respect for the necessary role of LCMS Office of International Mission and also respect for the RSO; mutual decision

making; clear, frequent communication; two annual meetings in the Dominican Republic and strong financial commitment. For these reasons, I believe that this model is to a large extent the future of missions in the LCMS. Thank you.

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*The Rev. Dr. Jack Preus is executive vice president of Mission Advancement at Bethesda Lutheran Homes, Watertown, Wisc.*