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**Mission statement**  
of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church  
in Württemberg



**Evangelische Landeskirche**  
in Württemberg



## INTRODUCTION

Looking East and West, North and South reveals that the concept of mission is evolving globally. New approaches and ideas are being explored, discussed and implemented across various contexts. Considering this shift, the Committee for Mission, Ecumenism, and Development of the synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg, along with different groups involved within the church, has revisited the notion of mission in recent years.

At the summer session of the synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg in 2024, the following document was adopted by a significant majority. We encourage discussions with our partners and partner churches about it, as this reflects the [Württemberg church's approach to mission](#). We are eager to hear your perspectives and learn more about your points of view.

## UNDERSTANDING AND LIVING MISSION AS A CHURCH – REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT DISCUSSION

As Christians, based on the biblical witness, we look to the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21), which is already among us but not yet fully expressed. Jesus Christ promises abundant life (John 10:10b), a life in God's shalom (Micah 4:1-4 inter alia). That means peace and justice for all people and the whole world.

To start with, let's be clear: [we live in a pluralist, multireligious and increasingly secular society](#). The membership of the established churches in Germany and Europe is declining. The centre of gravity of world Christianity has shifted to the Global South, which is where at least two thirds of all Christians now live. Migration is changing the church landscape in Germany, too, and the number of International Congregations is growing. We experience this as enriching and learn from one another how we can take our faith into society. [Yet we note that not many migrants find their way into our congregations](#).

While Württemberg society is growing more and more international and intercultural, mainline Protestant congregations apparently find it hard to gain new members and to open up to people with other backgrounds or languages. [It is the church's mission to communicate the gospel](#), to therefore find its place in the world and a diverse society, and to strengthen the church's intercultural skills.

Mission is a fundamental part of the church's mandate (Matthew 28:16ff; Mark 16:15): God reaches out to human beings to start a relationship. God turns toward us in creation, in sending his Son Jesus Christ into our world and in the workings of the Holy Spirit. Mission is always God's mission. God's actions precede human action. The church has a share in this divine movement. It participates in the [missio Dei](#) (John 20:21) and hence is part of God's turning toward the world. "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14). In this spirit, mission is really the "heartbeat" of the church (Eberhard Jüngel).

Whereas in a secular environment, e.g. in business language, the term "mission" is positively connotated, many people associate the concept of mission in the religious context with an over-bearing, ambivalent



attitude. They link it with colonial structures, racism, exploitation and, to this day, with a power divide also in our context, and consequently regard it as something to be overcome.

That is why some voices, even in mission agencies, argue for refraining from using the term “mission” altogether. We take these questions seriously. They challenge us and prompt us to revisit our understanding of mission together.<sup>1</sup>

The basis of our reflections is the “Mission Respect” process that was started in 2011.<sup>2</sup> “The document published in 2011 was a surprise, not only because of its brevity but, above all, because it was drawn up by three organisations which, in the past, seemed to be more divided than united regarding the topics of mission and Christian witness: the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID).”<sup>3</sup> This process was then continued in Germany.<sup>4</sup>

The mission conferences of past years have continued to highlight the fact that present-day mission activity should take place in partnership and on an equal footing, and not as a “one-way street”.<sup>5</sup> Mission no longer happens from North to South, but in mutual relations and hence everywhere (it is “multifocal”).

The World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018 underlined that mission always also has a transforming character, changing the actors themselves as they follow Jesus (“transforming discipleship”) and at the same time changing the world.

We think of mission as  
worldwide,  
respectful,  
holistic and  
based on solidarity.

This will be explained in more detail below.





## WORLDWIDE

Mission embraces the whole world and knows no bounds. It is characteristic of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg that it has a long tradition of commitment to mission activity: **Christians are connected with their local congregations. At the same time, they have – for many years – been involved in missionary work all over the world**, on other continents or in Germany. This happens with great personal dedication at all levels of the church in Württemberg, such as local congregations or church districts, and in many individual projects and initiatives.

**The church is always part of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.** We regard this as a field for learning and widening our own faith and the self-understanding of the church. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg has worked closely for years not only with its own mission agency (Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, EMS) but also with the many different mission organisations making up the Württemberg Association for World Mission (WAW).

WORLDWIDE



## RESPECTFUL

Mission means [showing esteem for other cultures and traditions](#). Other religious beliefs are respected. Encountering constantly challenges us to examine our own self-understanding and to reflect on our own claim to truth. [We promote structures based on equal rights](#) in order to guarantee a dialogue in which the two sides both give and receive, and to reduce existing power divides. This also includes engaging with postcolonial studies. It is imperative [to critically work through the past](#) and to continue the decolonisation of structures.

In the cooperation with partner churches in other countries and the International Convention of Christian Congregations in Württemberg [we understand ourselves as a learning community](#) that also embraces mission here at the local level. It is the job of mission to get young people, particularly, enthusiastic about faith. The international Volunteer and Exchange Programmes in the One World play an essential role here, along with intercultural educational work with children and young people organised by churches and mission agencies. This also includes critical and constructive dialogue and sharing.

RESPECTFUL

Mission is no longer understood as a one-sided North-South movement – it also involves South-North encounters, i.e. “mission reverse”, and “South-South exchange”. Mission does not happen in isolation, from one church, but in cooperation between churches and in matured relations based on equal rights. These include ecumenical and inter-religious contacts and networks. Mission takes place in “transforming discipleship” and repeatedly challenges us to gain new insights.

The partnerships between our church in Württemberg and churches in eastern Europe also bring us into contact with East-West relations within Europe. These relations raise many different issues and challenges when it comes to interacting respectfully with other cultures, traditions and experiences.

In dialogue with our partner churches in the diaspora, and with Orthodox Churches, we have travelling companions for a stretch of the way, in view of the huge challenges involved in relations between East and West.



RESPECTFUL



## HOLISTIC

Mission means witnessing, through words and actions, to God's loving care for the whole of creation and the Good News of Jesus Christ and confessing our own faith. This Good News is about God's saving and liberating action in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 3:16). It is life-changing power that works in the world and opens the horizon of eternity.

This witness takes place in a holistic sense, involving every aspect of human life. It covers proclamation of the gospel and pastoral care, education and teaching, medical services and diaconal ministries.

Standing up for people deprived of their rights goes hand-in-hand with engagement for peace, justice and creation care. These activities are inextricably linked.

HOLISTIC



## SOLIDARITY-BASED

Mission means living out the gospel holistically and sustainably in what we say and do and passing it on in a credible way. Mission always takes place contextually and, at the same time, in the awareness that we are in a global community. Mission includes [giving a voice to persons who are disadvantaged, discriminated against and socially marginalised](#).

In this context a change of perspective is necessary to show that people “on the margins of society” are themselves agents of mission with their own gifts, which must be recognized and taken seriously.<sup>6</sup> Hence [mission always means listening and learning from the experiences of others](#). Sharing in God’s mission also involves surprises and trusting that God can also encounter humans where they do not expect or intend it, as God’s mission is not at our disposal.

We advocate for a community founded on [equal rights for all people](#). Yet the church does not exist for itself but in order that God’s Kingdom may come and God’s will be done (Matt 6:10).

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the thinking of the Anglican Church at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>.
- <sup>2</sup> The document “Christian Witness in a Multireligious World. Recommendations for Conduct” was adopted by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). See <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>
- <sup>3</sup> Claudia Jahnel, Mission und Respekt, in the conference documentation Michael Biehl/Klaus Vellguth (Ed.), Christliches Zeugnis in ökumenischer Weite. Konvergenzen und Divergenzen als Bereicherung des Missionsverständnisses, Meckenheim 2016, pp.13-18, here p.13, see <https://www.missio-hilft.de/missio/informieren/wofuer-wir-uns-einsetzen/zeitgemaesses-missionsverstaendnis/missio-hilft-mission-respekt-christliches-zeugnis-in-oekumenischer-weite-berlin-2016.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> Facilitated by the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) and missio - International Catholic Mission Agency it was also cosponsored by the Council of Christian Churches in Germany and the German Evangelical Alliance <https://www.missio-hilft.de/informieren/wie-wir-mission-verstehen/misionrespekt/>
- <sup>5</sup> “Mission from the margins” (10th WCC Assembly, 2013, Busan/Korea).
- <sup>6</sup> “Marginalized people have God-given gifts (...) Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.” Together towards life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, Kreta 2012/Busan 2013, para. 39), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>

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