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## Introduction to This Issue

# Reciprocating Mission

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The dynamics of Christian mission in the twenty-first century have attained new levels both of complexity and creative potential. The complexities include enormous shifts in how we understand the directionality of Christian mission. Already since many decades the paradigm for mission has changed from being one-directional—from North to South and East—and become multi-directional, what here is meant by “reciprocating mission.” The accompaniment model has provided one significant impetus toward mutuality in mission, as we have become more intentional about the sharing of gifts among all partners. The accompaniment model has begun to dismantle approaches to mission from previous generations that contributed to dependency relationships between the “givers” and “receivers” of mission.

The potential of reciprocating mission involves new affirmation of the multifaceted transformation process in which we are involved through all interactions in Christian mission. Post-colonial discourses insist on the active agency of those once considered dependent. Moreover, the migration of Christian people from the South and East into the countries and communities of the North means that new immigrant and refugee communities are transforming the shape of Christianity across the United States and in Europe. We are receiving original faith articulations, neighborliness, and practices of evangelizing as gifts for the revitalization of the church in our local contexts. Reciprocating mission involves an exchange of gifts leading to unprecedented hybridity in the shape of the Christian witness in our time. The articles in this issue provide distinctive perspectives on multiple facets of reciprocating mission.

**Javier Alanis** characterizes borderland ethics as ethics *sin fronteras* or without borders, arguing that neighbor love is expressed as justice agency in the liminal spaces of the U.S.- Mexico “third space” borderlands. The author provides several definitions of liminal space, such as a threshold for sacred encounter with the immigrant asylum seeker. The theological claim is that pastoral agents are *Imago Dei* to the immigrant who in turn reflect the *Imago Dei* as the immigrant Christ of the church. The article presents an ethical framework for these theological and ethical claims and contends that conscience-bearing ethics takes the form of love and justice advocacy on behalf of the immigrant.

**Daniel Dei** probes manifestations of theological contextualization in Africa from pre-colonial through colonial and post-colonial times up to the present and compares it with biblical antecedents. While theological contextualization in Africa has assumed differ-

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ent models throughout its various historical periods, the objective ought to be consonance with the Bible. Accordingly, we must seek to articulate the self-revelation of God in different cultures using contextualizing cues that are appropriate and natural to the comprehensive worldview of recipients and in a manner that maintains unflinching fidelity to the unchanging content of God’s self-revelation found in the Bible.

**David Thang Moe** examines the intercultural renaissance of World Christianity through twin forces: 1) the shift of Christianity to the Global South as a world religion beyond the West, and 2) the coming of Southern Christians to the Global North as pilgrims and refugees. The author explores hospitality, otherness, border-crossing, marginality, majority, and liberation as the contextual and conceptual issues for the new hermeneutics of intercultural theology in the multicultural context of World Christianity.

**Jim Harries** argues that language policies are partly responsible for today’s global economic inequalities and unbalanced dependencies. Carefully considered efforts by colonizers at proscribing the spread of European languages (especially English) have failed and left a severe dependency problem. Cultural gaps disappear when a single language from the host context is uniformly used for intercultural communication at conferences. Being constrained to the use of European languages is like a painful open wound with which Africa has had to live but is a challenge the enterprise of Christian mission should bypass. Linguistic confusion should not deceive the mission community into thinking that the day of cross-cultural Christian mission is past.

**Eun Ae Lee** demonstrates how *han* is a key for understanding Korean culture. *Han* was introduced to Western academics by Korean Minjung Theology as a part of Korean studies from political, economic, social, and cultural perspectives. Here *han* is examined from an indigenous Korean woman’s perspective, who was prohibited political, economic, and social activities by the patriarchy. The *han* of indigenous Korean women made them strong enough to survive through patience, and by embracing their own situation

and that of their families. The *han* of indigenous Korean women is not the feeling of revenge as defined by Minjung theologians. It is embracing love which sublimates suffering.

**Chrysostom Frank** affirms that in the face a looming ecological crisis, all Christians are called to act to preserve creation. To do this well, ecumenical thinking is needed. Lutherans and Byzantine Christians may find commonality in their diverse theological traditions that can bring them together in a new “Eco-Reformation” for our day. A variety of Lutheran accents find deep resonances within the Eastern Christian tradition. Being able to see and identify these gifts of Lutheranism to the universal church can enable us not only to draw closer to one another but also empower us in the struggle to preserve creation.

**Yung Suk Kim** describes how Jesus taught a variety of parables that cover many issues of his time. One prevalent issue is regarding justice. But the concept of justice is not monolithic. In first-century Palestine, Jesus faced many kinds of justice issues and told various parables to address them. It is important to identify different types of justice in his parables, because otherwise we may lose his point and misrepresent him. This article explores different types of justice addressed in Jesus’ parables.

**Craig L. Nesson** explores how the legacy of Wilhelm Loehe incorporated disparate dimensions: liturgical worship and passion for mission, confessional orthodoxy and pietistic devotion, evangelical proclamation and diaconal service, theological imagination and pragmatic skills in administration. After Christendom, revitalizing the Christian movement involves implementing Luther’s universal priesthood by equipping the baptized for ministries in the arenas of daily life. As Phyllis Tickle proposed, the shape of emerging Christianity will be hybrid at the confluence of four streams: liturgical sensibility, social justice activism, personal spiritual vitality, and solid biblical-theological grounding. The future is *mestizo* as we claim hybridity as a gift, which celebrates diversity and builds new strengths beyond the impasse of binary categories.

In *Listening to Immigrant Voices* **Ismael Calderón** points out that no human being decides where to be born or has a defined roadmap. Faith experiences affect how we face the future and socioeconomic conditions shape our existence. This article explores what it means to be (or not to be) Lutheran and an immigrant far from your own land.

In the *Currents Focus* feature **Victor I. Vieth** examines both the concept of the Lutheran practice of confession as found in the Book of Concord and contemporary Lutheran writings on receiving a confession about child abuse. Holy Scripture, particularly

the words of Jesus and the writings of Paul, take priority over any church tradition of keeping the confidence of a penitent in a case of child abuse. A faithful reading of the words of Jesus necessitates reporting abuse to the authorities to protect the child. Reporting is also in the best interests of offenders, many of whom will be unable to reform without civil and criminal justice interventions, especially because some use the confessional as a divine license to continue hurting children.

**Barbara K. Lundblad**, Editor of *Preaching Helps* and member of Proclaim, has assembled a powerful set of lectionary reflections to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the ELCA Social Statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.” That statement and its implementing recommendations opened the possibility for partnered gay and lesbian people to be ordained. Before that statement gay and lesbian people seeking ordination were required to be celibate. (Note: At that time the language of the ELCA statement did not name Bisexual and Transgender people.) Since 2009 over 340 LGBTQ people have been ordained or are now in seminary. These pastors and deacons are serving in congregations, on seminary faculties, as ELCA churchwide staff, in social justice organizations, and as synodical bishops. Some of them were ordained “irregularly” through the Extraordinary Candidacy Project before the ELCA changed its policies. They have now been reinstated as pastors and deacons in this church. Some of them were called to congregations that were expected to close. (What did they have to lose?!) To the surprise of many, these congregations began to flourish and grow.

LGBTQ pastors and deacons have brought amazing gifts to the church. Seminarians preparing for ministry will bring their gifts as well. Without these LGBTQ leaders the ELCA would have 340 congregations waiting for a pastor. In the *Preaching Helps* section of this issue, the writers are all members of Proclaim, an organization for LGBTQ people willing to be public about who they are. Many of them have written for *Preaching Helps* in the past. We are grateful to each of them for their insights, their wisdom, and their faithfulness to Christ’s church. Lundblad’s introductory article, “Ten Years Ago—The Day the ELCA Opened the Door to LGBTQ Pastors,” provides perspective on this year of remembrance and celebration. Reciprocating mission is unfolding in the church in amazing new ways as we receive the gifts of our LGBTQ colleagues.

*Kathleen D. Billman and Craig L. Nesson, Issue Co-Editors*

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