



DYNAMIC GOSPEL  
NEW EUROPE

CONVERSATION  
AND GATHERING

# November Conversation



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# Welcome

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November is here and with it a fresh set of materials for the Lausanne Europe Impact Groups.

What does it mean to follow Jesus in 21st Century Europe? This question lies behind all the material in this month's Conversation for the focus of all the articles is discipleship.

We will look at it from three different perspectives. Mark Greene asks if we are really following Jesus' strategy of equipping his disciples to minister in their everyday contexts. Israel Olofinjana suggests some things we might learn about discipleship from the experience of suffering and loss of Majority World Christians. And Jay Eastman challenges us to make an impact in our communities through making disciples. All the materials can be found below. Please read these before you come together as an Impact Group.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at [conversation@lausanneeurope.org](mailto:conversation@lausanneeurope.org)

And if you are just starting your Impact Group, or are confused about what they are about, then check out the introduction pages to the [Conversation](#) and [Impact Groups](#) to find out more.

# Instructions

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## 1. Introductions and Prayer

Give time for everyone to introduce themselves if this is your first Impact Group. Ask someone to pray that God would speak to us as we meet together.

## 2. Reaching Europe – Jesus’ Strategy for Today?

By making converts and not disciples we are not equipping or empowering 98% of God’s people for mission in 95% of their waking lives. We need to bridge the sacred-secular divide to enable whole-life discipleship.

1. Why do you think Jesus put so much emphasis on nurturing rich, personal, developmental relationships with a small number of people? Why have so many churches not followed his lead?
2. Do you think whole-life disciple-making is the key to long-term sustainable mission in your context? Why or

why not? Can you give any examples from churches or theological colleges that emphasise this?

3. The quote by Dorothy Sayers suggests that the church in the UK at the time was offering a one-tenth Gospel. What is the scope of the Gospel that is offered to non-believers in your context?

## 3. Discipleship in a Context of Suffering and Loss

There is much that we can learn as Europeans from Majority World Christians when it comes to discipleship. Their experience of suffering and loss has developed a resilient theology that is a challenge and rebuke to many patterns of Christian discipleship in Europe.

1. If it is the case that “Covid-19 has exposed that life is indeed temporal and that suffering and pain are real”, what kind of discipleship is required for this sort of context?

2. What did you learn from the article about the Theology of Suffering of Majority World Christians? And how might your church or organisation more actively engage and invite voices from the Majority World?
3. What changes might we need to make to our discipleship programmes or paradigms if we take more seriously the call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him?

#### **4. Transforming Communities: Making an Impact through Making Disciples**

This month in the discipleship track, we look at how knowing and growing in Christ not only transforms us and our churches and organisations, but our surrounding communities as well.

Jay Eastman's article is very much a call to action so the questions below invite an active response. How you use these questions will depend on your group. You may be able to discuss them together or you may choose to discuss the article more generally and challenge everyone to reflect on these questions for themselves, or for their church or organization, after the Impact Group session.

1. Where have you seen Christ's redeeming power at work in your life in the last month or two? How could this be good news for someone else?
2. How can you, your church, or your organisation be light to your community? What next step can you take to express God's love in action by serving and sharing life and faith?
3. What would your community look like if the vision in this article became reality? What would change? What would the impact be?

#### **5. Prayer**

Always make sure that you leave enough time to pray together every time you meet. Here are the prayer points for this month's Conversation:

1. Pray that we may be empowered to respond wholeheartedly to the call of Jesus - to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow Him in every part of our lives (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give each of us a new urgency and a new commitment to understand

discipleship through the lens of Jesus' humility, suffering and loss. Pray too for wisdom to find creative ways to do discipleship in these Covid times.

3. Pray that we might understand that discipleship goes beyond "soul winning" and ask God for clarity on what He is already doing in our community, including our daily work surroundings.
4. Pray that we may seek to partner with the Holy Spirit as we become the hands, feet, and mouth of Jesus to those around us every day of the week.

## **6. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation**

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below.

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# Reaching Europe - Jesus' Strategy for Today?

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By Mark Greene

[Go to the article online](#)

Was Jesus right about the way to do mission? That's the question.

Across Europe, across the Western nations, we've been looking for ways to reach our nations with the gospel of Jesus. We've seen two decades of extraordinary creativity. Our music is more varied, our graphics more compelling, our Bible translations more attuned to the cultures we're in, and the audiences we're trying to reach. We've experimented with new forms of church - in all kinds of locations, using all kinds of different ways of gathering and ministering. Wonderful. And we've seen an extraordinary range of compelling and very effective social action initiatives. Brilliant.

And in almost every European nation, and in mine, we've seen two decades of decline. Is there a flaw in our approach?

In 2010, at the third Lausanne Congress for World Evangelisation, I suggested that the overall mission strategy of the evangelical church worldwide was this:

"To recruit the people of God to give up some of their leisure time to support the mission initiatives of church-paid workers."

Now pretty much everyone in the hall that day agreed that that was the strategy in their country.

The implication of that strategy is that 98% of God's people, those not in church-paid work, are not being empowered for mission and discipleship in 95% of their waking lives - to minister in the places they usually go

among the people they usually meet in their Monday to Saturday lives.

Or to put it another way, overall we seek to make converts, we seek to make church members... but we are not necessarily seeking to make disciples, people equipped to live and share the way of Jesus in their everyday contexts at this time. As Bishop Graham Cray, author of *Mission-Shaped Church*, one of the UK's leading missional thinkers put it, "Churches have to realize that the core of their calling is to be disciple-making communities, whatever else they do." It is not at all clear that disciple-making – in Jesus' rich, holistic, intentional, relational way – is at the core of very many of our communities. Still, 'Make disciples' was not only Jesus's praxis, it was the mission strategy he gave us. Was he right? And have we been operating as if he was?

There are all kinds of forces that have militated against taking Jesus' strategy seriously. There's been the pervasiveness and power of the sacred-secular divide, and there's the sheer difficulty of changing a church culture that has historically been so focused on the 'church gathered' as opposed to the 'church gathered and scattered'.

But there is a deeper and more alarming reason for the relative dearth in whole-life disciple-making. After all, what we do, reflects what we believe. Our praxis reflects our ethos. The failure to really honour the everyday missional vocation of all believers is a sobering indicator that we have inadvertently been operating with a partial gospel. Is not the whole earth the Lord's? Did not Jesus come to reconcile all things to himself through his blood shed on the cross? Is there any place where a disciple of Jesus is not his ambassador? Is there any task that cannot be done in his name and for his glory? The good news is not only that we have been saved from our sin, but that we have been saved for a high purpose. Dorothy Sayers, the British writer and apologist, put it powerfully in a famous essay on work:

In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious or at least uninterested in religion.... But is it astonishing? How can



anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?

Her point was not just about work. Her point was about the gospel. And it applies today. The overall failure to teach a biblical view of work and to understand work as a context for discipleship and mission is part of a wider failure to offer a whole-life gospel to believers and non-believers. No wonder people are not gripped by the gospel. The gospel we have presented rarely includes any compelling vision for Monday to Sunday life in God's world, for the adventure of being part of God's purposes in our ordinary daily lives - wherever we are.

Now, it is precisely such a holistic vision that younger people in particular are yearning for - a way of living that is marked by authenticity, that engages them in a cause bigger than themselves, that seeks justice for all, and health for the planet, and a sense of identity and security that does not depend on their social media status. They don't want an 'evenings and Sunday' gospel, any more than they just want to live for the weekends. Why would they? Yes, Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, to pay the price for our sin, to make a way to the Father but he

also gave his life to have life abundant, and join him in God's mission - his will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.

Of course, Lausanne's origins as a movement lie in just such a holistic vision of the implications of the gospel. Our pioneer-thinkers, Samuel Escobar, Rene Padilla, Ron Sider and John Stott raised a banner for 'integral mission' but whilst that has led to the transformation of the evangelical church's engagement with social action on behalf of the poor, we have not yet seen a decisive shift towards the robust discipling of all God's people for their daily calling in the world. For example, we rightly honour those who help the poor out of poverty, but we are less likely to acknowledge the people who create the jobs, or write the policies, that prevent people becoming poor in the first place. We have a way to go.

And it is that shift we at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) have been working towards for the last twenty years. And we have, in our circles, seen a change. Working with individuals, church leaders, and with denominational leaders, we can now point to churches where people think that everyday ministry is normal, where no one has to tell them to pray for the people they meet in the places they usually go to,

where the majority of people would know that what they do in field and factory, office and home can be done for God.

We have learned a great deal and it is now the case, in the UK at least, that whole-discipleship is firmly on the agenda in a wide range of streams - 32 of the 43 dioceses of the Church of England, for example, signed up to be part of Setting God's People Free, an initiative designed to help churches disciple all God's people for all of life.

But we are under no illusions. Culture change takes time, not least because the sacred-secular divide has pervaded evangelical culture like pink dye in a white wash, or vinegar in a fruit salad. It affects everything - individuals' lives, church culture, theological education, what we see in the Bible, who we honour in the church, what we pray for in the world. It affects our small groups, our songs, our Sunday school curriculum, our preaching, our pastoral care. On the other hand, the great commission was not a suggestion, but a command from the King of the Universe. So, how we live that command out, how we help others live it, how we, as a movement, allow that command to pervade our thinking and action in all our specialist areas and in all our different cultures, and how we learn from

one another along the way, that's a conversation we at LICC yearn to be part of.

# Discipleship in a Context of Suffering and Loss

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By Israel Olofinjana

[Go to the article online](#)

This article [1] explores the relationship between mission and suffering with a particular focus on how we disciple people during and post COVID-19. The pandemic has been on a global scale, affecting at the time of writing 213 countries, causing multiple deaths, loss of community, loss of jobs, increased mental health problems, and heightened anxiety and fear. It has brought unparalleled suffering to millions of people around the world and therefore asks the question, how can the church respond to this global suffering? Perhaps more succinctly, how should the church do mission in a context of suffering and loss?

In addition, COVID-19 has also affected every area of life, including politics, health, medicine, business, education,

sports, entertainment industries, media, and of course the church! If COVID-19, with its consequences, has affected how we view the world in every endeavour of life that will last for a while, has it then inspired a new paradigm that requires a new model of discipleship and mission?

This article therefore argues using Jesus' model of discipleship of suffering and sacrifice, proposing the need to engage Majority World theologies whose experience of historic and contemporary suffering is a ready template to use. This ready template of suffering is an essential ingredient in decolonizing Western models of discipleship and mission.[2]

## **Suffering and sacrifice: hallmarks of whole-life discipleship**

The crucial question I have been wrestling with is, if Jesus' way of life includes suffering and sacrifice, how can our whole-life discipleship revolve around these concepts? We want to be followers of Jesus but only when it is convenient or when we are benefitting from the relationship. However, Jesus' imperative calling to his disciples was: if anyone wants to follow him, they must deny themselves and carry their cross (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Denying ourselves in a consumeristic, materialistic, and individualistic society would involve suffering and carrying the cross and would mean we are ready to sacrifice to the point of death for the sake of God's kingdom.

The implication of this is that if our discipleship programmes and events do not prepare Christians to understand and live with suffering and sacrifice, they will only follow Jesus when all is going well. The result is that when things get really tough, they will walk out on God. On the other hand, if we follow Jesus as the only lifestyle and not as an optional lifestyle when it is convenient and comfortable, we put every part of our mind, will, and

emotions and all aspects of our lives—job, family, education, hobbies, finances—before God to use as he pleases and whenever he calls us.

After Jesus gave some serious teaching about what it means to believe and follow him, many of the Jews left him. Then he asked the disciples one important question, 'Do you also wish to go away?' (John 6: 67 NRSV). Peter's answer to that question is very important for our discipleship today. He said to Jesus, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life' (John 6:68 NRSV). Peter's answer is conditioned by the understanding that following Jesus even when it is rough and difficult is not an optional lifestyle, but that his very own survival depends on it. The narrative changes when we see discipleship not as some form of alternative lifestyle but knowing that our very survival depends on it.

## **A new paradigm: a new model of discipleship**

As mentioned earlier, COVID-19 and its consequences are reframing how we view reality, changing and challenging everything we know. This change is not only going to be for months but with many current projections, for years to come. This is not necessarily the new replacing the old

and totally discarding the old, but a new paradigm, a new understanding of our existential reality.

David Bosch, following the paradigm theory of Thomas Kuhn, noted the various paradigm shifts in theology and mission during the different eras of Christianity: primitive Christianity, the Patristic period, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the ecumenical era. [3] Modern theology and mission rooted in the Enlightenment traditions have for so long shaped our discipleship model. The result is a discipleship model that is dichotomized and influenced by the myth of progress, a pattern of discipleship that compartmentalizes our lives so that Christianity appears to be relevant on Sunday but not on Monday to Friday at the workplace. In addition, the consumer feature of modern/postmodern life has shaped our discipleship with the idea of options, progress, and greed.

While the emerging church of the postmodern context with the model of discipleship premised on whole life and expressed through missional communities[4] has challenged this previous model of discipleship, it has not however been completely deconstructed. This is where Michael Stroope's penetrating analysis of the language of

mission as problematic because of its lack of use in the biblical text and its link to conquest and colonialism is very useful.[5] While not abandoning the language of mission yet, Stroope's thesis allows us to decolonize mission and discipleship. However, a key missing ingredient in this decolonization process is an outsider's perspective that is not shaped by an Enlightenment worldview. This is where the insights of some of the Majority World Christians are needed on discipleship and mission.

A crucial question then is, if the coronavirus has exposed that life is indeed temporal and that suffering and pain are real, what sort of disciples do we need to disciple others in this context?

The ideas of suffering and sacrifice are relative. The suffering of Majority World Christians who are refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants will be very different from that of white middle-class European Christians. I am not advocating that Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans have a monopoly on pain and trauma. What I am highlighting is the fact that the histories of some Majority World (Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean) countries demonstrate that certain regions of the world have suffered from systemic and institutional



injustices like the slave-trade, indentured servitude, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Therefore, this makes Majority World Christians accustomed to suffering and pain. In addition, the legacies of these institutional injustices continue in the lives of so many people from the Majority World. A recent example is the disproportional representation of Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) people at the frontline services in the UK that has led to the deaths of many BAME people during the pandemic. While the coronavirus affects everyone whether you are rich or poor, white or black, it has become obvious from the data of the Office of National Statistics and Public Health England that it poses more of a risk to poorer communities including BAME people.[6]

### **Perspectives of Majority World theologies on whole-life discipleship**

Having argued that people from the Majority World appear to suffer more due to systemic and structural issues in our unjust world, this then provides a ready template for the global church to learn from Majority World theologies about discipleship models rooted in suffering and sacrifice caused by social economic inequality. Many of these contextual theologies originate

in the context of loss and pain. An example will be Liberation Theology which was developed in the socio-economic poverty context of Latin America as the Catholic church responded to side with the poor and the marginalized.[7]

In the African context, Black Theology emerged in Southern Africa to challenge the systemic injustice caused by the apartheid regime. African political theology that was developed elsewhere on the continent also has something to offer in terms of the theology of lament. A prime example is the work of the Roman Catholic Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole who, in his book, speaks of the evil and trauma of the recent conflict in Congo and the need to know how to lament.[8] If there is one thing common to these theologies, it is that they take the suffering of the poor and the oppressed as their hermeneutical lens, and therefore their understanding of discipleship is rooted in Jesus' humility and sacrifice and how that shaped his ministry praxis.

Majority World Christians who have relocated to Europe or North America through various migratory factors come with this notion and experience of discipleship. Diaspora Christians therefore understand from first-hand

experience that whole-life discipleship entails different kinds of suffering and demands sacrifice. If the church is going to do discipleship and mission well in this coronavirus climate, we need to grasp Jesus' understanding of suffering and sacrifice. Part of that mission will mean using the notion in Liberation Theology of intentionally responding in solidarity with the poor who are more affected during this crisis.

Several Western para-church organizations and mission agencies are already engaged in whole-life discipleship, but what I think is missing are the Majority World voices in these conversations and organizations. I am well aware of so many who have not engaged properly with the views of Majority World theologians in their whole-life discipleship programmes or employed staff from the Majority World in their organizations. It seems to me that in the current and post-coronavirus climate, it will become important to consolidate our resources and find pragmatic ways of partnering so that our discipleship activities can be enriched by the experiences of Majority World Christians, including those in the diaspora in the West. What could be more exciting than hearing the voices of African theologians or Latin American theologians in our Western

apologetics, missional church conversations, and whole-life discipleship training?[9]

## **Concluding remarks**

This brief article has been about exploring the opportunities and challenges of the new context that COVID-19 presents us and how we respond as people of faith. I have particularly considered Jesus' suffering and sacrifice as hallmarks of whole-life discipleship needed in understanding the pain and loss caused by COVID-19. These characteristics of discipleship are strongly advocated in Majority World theologies because of their experiences of socio-economic injustices. I have suggested that the global church can learn from Majority World Christians in understanding a model of whole-life discipleship rooted in liminality and humility. For this to happen, we need an equal partnership that engages the voices of Majority World theologians in the Western whole-life discipleship movement.

## **Endnotes**

1. A preliminary version of this paper was first published in May 2020 as an article on the Hope 15:13 website, <https://hope1513.com/2020/05/06/>

[coronavirus-a-new-paradigm-for-discipleship-and-mission-by-rev-israel-oluwole-olofinjana/](#)

2. I am using decolonizing mission in the sense that Western thoughts have shaped for years and therefore colonized our understanding of mission. Decolonizing mission means looking at how Majority World Christians understand discipleship and mission.
3. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology and Mission*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 187-92.
4. Missional communities as defined by the Gospel and Culture network are communities called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God. The distinctive characteristic of such is that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains them. See Darrell L Guder (ed), *Missional Church: A Vision for the sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 142.
5. Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (London, Apollos an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2017).
6. Discrimination on the front line of the coronavirus outbreak may be a factor in disproportionate BAME deaths among NHS staff, accessed 14 May 2020, <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-05-13/discrimination-frontline-coronavirus-covid19-black-minority-ethnic-bame-deaths-nhs-racism/>.
7. See as an example, Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1974).
8. Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017). See also Cathy Ross, 'Lament and Hope', accessed 6 May 2020, <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/lament-and-hope-cathy-ross-anvil-vol-34-issue-1/>
9. Editor's note: See article by Stian Sørli Eriksen, entitled 'Immigrant Majority Church in the West', in July 2019 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis* <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2019-07/immigrant-majority-church-relations-west>

# Transforming Communities: Making an Impact through Making Disciples

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By Jay Eastman

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This article serves as a call to action, for us as Christ-followers to imitate Him through seeing those in all kinds of physical, emotional, relational and spiritual need around us, and engaging with them to provide comfort and healing. Discipleship is not only about lessons learned but very much about steps taken in faith and shared with others. If our disciple-making lacks an outward vision for our community and desire to share the bread of life we enjoy, then we miss a large part of the gift we've been given.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created*

*through him and for him. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1.15-20, ESV)*

Here we see God's mission making peace through the cross for the whole world. This includes the dense city blocks, sprawling suburbs, familiar towns and open countryside in which you and I live. There is not one place or people on earth that Christ didn't shed His blood for, in order to redeem them from sin and bring them into peace with a holy God. Christ is the visible earthly expression of God's majesty and fullness made known to us through the incarnation. We carry that expression in us as His

ambassadors who are made righteous through His sacrifice.

How do we then carry this fullness and pass along the best news anyone has ever heard? As we follow and pursue Jesus; He leads us to cross paths with many image-bearers of God who are pursuing various dead-end roads. Some hectically pursue worldly success, others are hopelessly lost, still others wander in despair and are considering giving up, and then there are some who are so hurt, harassed and helpless that they're unable to take any step whatsoever.

As ambassadors of Christ, we have one message to all fellow sufferers of the Fall - a light has come into the world and the darkness has not prevailed against it. However, this message often falls on ears blocked by deception and doubt, as well as pain and pride.

In order to break through such resistant spiritual deafness and blindness, we must embody and practice what Christ showed us perfectly: love in action. Love and action alone are inspiring - from epic poems to modern films we see tales full of truly heroic efforts and undying affection. However, the pinnacle of both are found in Christ's

willingness to lay down His life for us who scorned Him. As we get to know Him more, and become more like Him through discipleship, we take on His character and choose to lay down our comforts, conveniences and trinkets for the needy neighbors, busy colleagues, and cantankerous community members we see daily.

"But Jay, I don't love these people," exclaimed a lady in our core team a few years ago as we laid out the vision for a new church plant - we are a group who love God and seek to be a "plus" for our neighborhood. She paused and went on to say, "But I know God really does love them and He's put me here to share that love with them. My love isn't enough, but His love IS." **This is where we see the connection between disciple-making and serving a community beyond the church walls most clearly - when we lean into God in faith and clearly see our own lack of love. We are grasped by His grace to grow in love that we haven't earned. We gain access to the God-given capacity to share that same love with others by joining them where they are, often outside the body of Christ. This often looks like giving practical and personal comfort, ministering to them deeply in**



**compassion, and pointing them to the one who can heal and redeem all.**

As stated above, this article serves as a call to action - to sound an alarm for the majority of us Christians who meet regularly to read Scripture, pray, discuss and produce genuine spiritual fruit in His Spirit. If we are not sharing that precious fruit of a redeemed life with God's children outside the discipleship group or church, then beloved, we are amiss.

Let's instead envision the following scenario: a vibrant group of growing disciple-makers in each local community across Europe, actively pursuing Jesus and then sharing the power of a transformed life through loving action. Neighbors, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances who receive fellowship, needed assistance, peace, wise counsel and coming to know Christ.

This means that even those in your community who do not believe in Jesus can see and express the value you add to the neighborhood. In other words, if you and your group/ church were to cease to be, you would be sorely missed. The goal is for everyone in your area to know they can get real relief or be referred on to an expert for the genuine

problems in their lives, regardless of whether they belong to the church or not.

We envision the Kingdom of Christ in its people, and that the grace and peace they receive are practically and relationally demonstrated through meeting the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the community. That love and action cojoin to become a lamp radiating the Light that has indeed come into the world, and together witness powerfully that the darkness has NOT overcome it.