

# RECREATING AND CREATING CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER

No congregation without a mission –  
No mission without a congregation

## The IECLB Missionary Action Plan

Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB)  
(Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil)

# Presentation

Paradoxically, in this globalized and computerized world, many forces tend to isolate, marginalize and exclude. This presents itself at the personal, group, national and international levels. The disintegrating powers threaten or even impede human dignity, justice, peace and the balance of all of creation.

Confronted with this challenge there are innumerable socio-political, economic, cultural and religious offers and proposals for action. In this multifaceted society the religious offers also compete amongst themselves. In this reality the IECLB needs to define its role and its reason for existence. At the beginning of a new century and millennium let us not permit ourselves to be overtaken by resignation in the face of a supposed end of the world. On the contrary, enlivened and encouraged by Christ who says *Go make disciples ... that you may have life ... in abundance*, we are launching the IECLB Missionary Action Plan. Its title **Recreating and creating congregations together** points to the ...

## General goal:

**To recreate and revive congregations in the IECLB, through the Gospel, in word, sacrament, prayer and communion, aiming at mission done through living out solidary sharing as well as aiming at mission that goes beyond social, economic, cultural, racial, religious, national, age and gender boundaries. In this mission we come together as brothers and sisters with all the congregations, the synods, the work sectors and entities of the IECLB, with all the Christian churches as well as with governmental and nongovernmental organizations that are committed to this divine mandate. In these dynamics of recreating community we want to create new congregations that are characterized as missionary congregations.**

Due to this general goal the slogan affirms:

**No congregation without a mission – No mission without a congregation!**

In this way the Plano de Ação Missionária da IECLB (PAMI) (IECLB Missionary Action Plan) aims at encouraging and equipping the congregations, the synods, the entities and the work sectors of the IECLB to help in their elaboration of their respective missionary action plans. Perceiving a strategic plan in Jesus' life and action aimed at his mission to promote life with dignity, we are also challenged to work out strategic plans on all levels. To help with this chapters 5 and 6 of the PAMI offer orientation

and practical resources. The speech "Creating and recreating congregations", given at the Mission Forum is annexed in chapter 8.

All missionary projects, no matter how contextualized they may be at the congregational, synodical, entity or work sector level, are to be recognized and valued as part of this IECLB Missionary Action Plan. They are inspired by it and they contribute to it. United in Christ we unite efforts so that ...  
*you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:31).*

The current PAMI is a product of a true joining of efforts that involved the grass roots of the IECLB, as well as the national and international partners. Important help was given by Enos Heidemann with reference to the idea of using the symbol of Luther's rose as a guiding element for the whole plan. In the elaboration of the main points and of the script (items 5 and 6) we were able to make use of Sérgio Seeländer's valuable resources. Cerise Pahl cooperated with her creativity in the diagramming and the confection of the organization chart. These contributions among others, were received and worked on by the systematization committee, whose members were Ani Cheila Fick Kummer, Enos Heidemann, Oneide Bobsin, Walter Altmann and Günther K. F. Wehrmann. I praise God who made this *creating and recreating together* possible throughout almost a year, and I thank all the sisters and brothers who cooperated in one way or another.

I pray that God may strongly blow the Holy Spirit upon us and unite us as the IECLB in God's mission in the world.

Porto Alegre, Advent of 2000

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huberto Kirchheim', written over a white background.

Huberto Kirchheim  
Pastor President

# ***Recreating and creating congregations together***

**No congregation without a mission.**

**No mission without a congregation!**

**There is no church without congregations -**

**However, a church is more than the sum of the congregations!**

## **1 - Introduction**

Motivated by the new decentralized structure, the Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB) (The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil) is reclaiming the importance of the **congregation as the target and the instrument of God's mission.**

Our congregations are already the fruit of God's mission. For them to become more mission oriented, attracting and reaching out to people through their witnessing, through solidary and fraternal living and through transcending boundaries, they need evangelistic/missionary reawakening. They need to be evangelized so that the faith, which works through love (Gal 5: 6c), may be awakened and fed. The Holy Spirit produces repentance, conversion and sanctification. These miracles take place, according to the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII, through the preaching of the word (Rom 10:17) and through the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. According to Acts 2:42 they also happen through the gathering of the congregation, through sharing and prayer.

**Any and all missionary activity in the IECLB, therefore, is founded on living out an Evangelical-Lutheran spirituality and aims at recreating and creating congregations. This is why the slogan affirms: *No congregation without a mission – No mission without a congregation!***

For the congregation to recognize, welcome and carry out mission, God has granted different specific ministries. In the IECLB we have recognized catechetics, diaconal work, missionary work and pastoral work as ministries that together form the ecclesiastical ministry. All of them, as well as the work sectors, the institutions and the entities come from the congregation and have the congregation as its target. They give mission the goal of promoting the life that God wants lived out in it and through it. The missionary challenges are greater than those that can be taken on individually by one person, one congregation, parish or synod or even by one church. That is why we are invited to *recreate and create congregations together.*

In this recreating and creating the Holy Spirit makes us *go about all the cities and villages ..., see the afflicted and exhausted multitudes as sheep without a pastor ... teaching ..., preaching ... and curing ...* (Mt 9:35,36). We are thereby reminded of

the multitude of excluded and crucified people of today and we are sent out to them.

Our journey as a congregation and as a church as a whole is one of following Jesus Christ himself, and, therefore, it still takes place under the cross (Mt 16:24) and not in glory, preventing us from boasting. However, the victory of Christ over death and all its powers, even though they still kill, already fills us with hope, joy and a passion for life. It is new life that God recreates and creates in the congregation and through it, today in the form of concrete signs and at the end of times definitively and in completeness.

Some of this mystery is symbolized in **Martin Luther's rose**, the symbol of the Lutherans the world over.

This rose, "an emblem" of the Lutheran theology, is made up of 5 elements: the black cross, the red heart, the five white petals, the blue background and the golden ring. Each part has its meaning:

**The black cross**, in the center of the emblem, reminds us that in Jesus, God himself comes to us, sacrificing his life and overcoming the power of death on our behalf, so that *all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life* (Jn 3:16).



The black cross, encompassed by the **red heart**, means that Christ is at the center of the life of the congregation and the church. He is the most important. Based on him all other things and people receive their due places and value. The heart reminds us that it is through faith that we are justified. The color red symbolizes the love that is given and shared. Just as Christ loved us, so his followers love each other. Just as Christ served his people, so they serve each other, each *according to the gift that they received* (Gal 6:2). We follow the Crucified, trusting that the cross does not kill, but instead, keeps us alive.

The **five white petals** point out that through faith, acting in favor of justice and peace, we have joy, consolation and peace with God, with ourselves and with each other. This is what the color white symbolizes.

The **blue background** reminds us of the sky and points to God's faithfulness. In Christ God came to save us and to unite us in community. Christ reigns ever since

the Ascension. As of Pentecost he creates, sends out and guides his church and going in front of it, he opens the way. This the foundation of our hope.

The **golden ring** reminds us of gold, the most precious metal. It symbolizes all that God has given us, as of now, through faith in the form of signs: pardon, communion, hope, a meaning in life, daily bread ... It also points to what we will be given in eternity: endless joy, fulfillment of all our needs and desires. Then we will see face to face, that in which we have believed.

Just as the rose was created in a beautiful and orderly way, the church is also motivated to creatively invest in the elaboration of its plan of missionary action. Inspired by the symbol of Luther's rose, we elaborated a deductive and participative mission plan. Beginning from the center its circular form alludes to subsequent rings such as those produced on the surface of a lake when a stone is thrown in it.

**All true mission in the Church begins with the cross of Christ, and, with the force of the cross itself, the mission expands to the ends of the earth.**

As we develop the *IECLB Missionary Action Plan* we will begin methodologically from the center of Luther's rose. Passing through the different rings, we will note their interconnection and their interdependence.. We will see that the last ring, in truth, is unlimited as it points out to eternity itself.

## **2 - Luther's Rose - *The IECLB Missionary Action Plan***

### **2.1 - Cross = Christ is the starting point and the point of arrival for the missionary congregation**

*"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*(1 Cor 1:18)

Jesus, who was born in a manger in Bethlehem, who lived in Palestine planting signs of eternity through his teaching, preaching and curing, who was crucified, resurrected and lifted to heaven on our behalf, is the



**Christ for us. He is the true Son of God and true man in the image of God.** In him we have pardon and new life in peace with God, with ourselves, with each other and with the environment.

Justified by grace through faith we express evangelical values through our personal, family, community and social life. In practicing diaconia (= service to promote life with dignity) the signs of the Kingdom of God are made concrete, in the expectation of the redemption of the whole of creation. (Rom 8:22-23)

**Only through Christ, only through Christ's grace, only through faith** in Christ are we saved and able to promote signs of salvation. This is duly and sufficiently witnessed **only through the Bible**, which we read with Christ as our starting point and with eyes and hearts on him. These four "onlys" are the foundation of the Lutheran faith explained in the Lutheran confessional writings and in the normative documents of the IECLB.

## **2. 2 - Heart = What moves the evangelized and missionary congregation?**

*"... for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."* (Lk 6:45c)

The heart symbolizes the vital central point of each person. Without it pulsating we are not able to live. At each step we are maintained by the love of God. What is the meaning of our life? **What pulsates in our heart?** What moves the congregation? It is important that in our planning we be able to answer these questions.



The cross, at the center of the heart, symbolizes a passionate God. He looks "downward" with mercy. He sees the multitudes of poor, marginalized, excluded, lost people. He hears the cries of his people and decodes the groans of his agonized creation. This God leaves heaven and beds down in reality in order to transform it.

The cross, without the crucified, reminds us of the victory of life over all the powers of death. This is why it impels and exhorts us, personally and congregationally, to not conform ourselves with the state of things in the ecclesiastical and political life.

**The resurrected Christ frees us from conformity and resignation and empowers us to act and resist courageously.**

**Where are we?** This question points us toward the context in which the congregation finds itself, with the goal of discovering the political, social and cultural conditionings to which it is submitted.

**A - How do we see our congregation/church?** (Analysis of the internal environment):

**a) What aspects of the congregational life are encouraging?** What are her good points? We can mention for instance: people willing to work; the physical space; projects that are working...

Here it is important to identify the joys and motivating forces in the life of the congregation/church!

**b) What aspects of the congregational life are worrisome?** What are the internal weaknesses that can undermine the work of the institution? What are the restrictive forces that make us sad?

**B - How do we see the context of the congregation?** (Analysis of the external environment):

**a) Threats:** Are there threats to the congregation, synod, church that can complicate our mission? We can note for instance: individualism, relativization of values and guidelines; fragmentation; shunting faith to the private sphere; subordination of the gospel to culture and to ethnicity and to other elements that make the mission of the congregation difficult.

**b) Opportunities:** What are the current or potential situations that can contribute, to a relevant degree and for a long time, to carrying out the mission? Examples: Recapturing the meaning of affection in the midst of a modernity that is dominated by rationality (greeters at the doors of the churches and meeting halls; liturgical gestures and symbols, such as the imposition of hands, hugs, candles, elements to taste, see and hear); a greater professional diversification with formal training.

What gaps are there and how can they be filled?

**C - How do we see the greater context:** ((Analysis of the macro-tendencies):

Obs.: It is important to observe the ambivalence of all the following identified elements, that is, perceive in which way each aspect represents a threat and in what way it can serve as an opportunity for mission.

a) Technological scientific revolution: computer sciences; biotechnology; telecommunication; alternative energy; ecology; ...



b) Society of knowledge: increase in the speed with which new knowledge is developing; continuing education; agility and flexibility to analyze and redefine; contextualization;...

c) Economic and political globalization: transnationalization; economic blocks; mobility of capital; companies without nations; redefinition of the role of the State; urbanization; lack of perspective for the small farmer as well as for the micro and medium businesses: ...

d) Emergence of new values: need for quality of life; demanding consumers; ecological awareness; ethics; relativization of religious and cultural values and guidelines; the rise in religiosity, personal fulfillment; competitiveness; exclusions; violence; ...

e) New models for work relationships: reduction of the work day; leisure time or boredom; unemployment; capabilities for new administrations; adaptation; changes; new technologies; outsourcing; ...

These among many others, are phenomena that provide new resources and possibilities, but also generate discrimination, violence, injustice and exclusions. In this many faceted reality, God carries out his mission in the congregation and through it. In the midst of this micro and macro context the church gains relevance in proportion to how it places itself at the side of people in crisis, in need or at risk, promoting new life.

It is important to remember, however, that God does not act only through the congregation/church. God also acts through civil institutions such as: the family, school, governmental and nongovernmental institutions.

**It is up to us therefore, to value, motivate, challenge and support all initiatives that promote life with dignity. In this broad sense we affirm:**

***No congregation without a mission – No mission without a congregation!***

## **2.3 - White rose petals = How to recreate and create missionary congregations together?**

*"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. " (Col 3:17)*

All that we do in our private, professional, social, political, congregational and church life will be a grateful response to God's love, will be in the end, dedicated to him. This is the rational, logical worship that results from the mercies of God, of which Paul talks about in Rom 12:1. Based on 1 Pet 2:9, Luther called this "holy service" **the universal priesthood of all believers** and affirmed that as of our

baptism we are ordained priests and priestesses. Taking on this condition, we live in community and are living witnesses of God's mission, through our way of living and through practicing loving our neighbor, as well as through overcoming boundaries, such as cultural, religious and geographical boundaries.

**Thus, reviewing the general goal of the IECLB Plan of Missionary Action, we remember that all the specific ministries, work sectors, educational training institutions and diaconal service are only justified when they start with this goal and are directed toward it.**

Such a plan demands planning in the different service areas on the congregational, parish, synodical and national levels. Steps 2.1 and 2.2, previously emphasized, are guidelines for all levels, although they have specific connotations depending on the respective level. This is also true for the following steps.

The five rose petals help us distinguish the different areas and facets of this service, even though they are interrelated and complement each other. Only the totality of the five petals forms and reveals the beauty of the rose and, implicitly, that of recreating and creating congregations together!

*(Petals) - Evangelization, Diaconia and Accompaniment, Training, Mission and Ecumene, Administration*

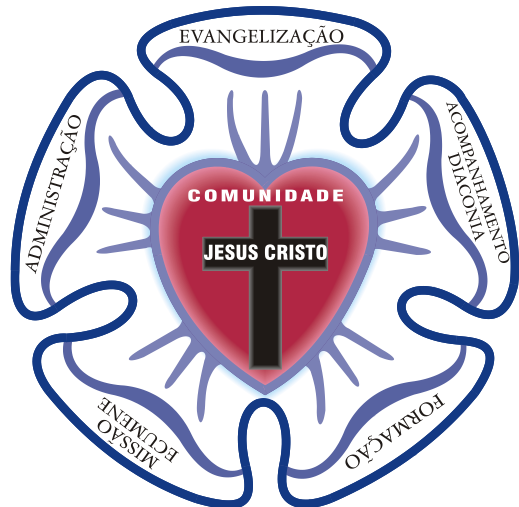
*(Heart) - Congregation*

*(Cross) - Jesus Christ*

### **Petal A - Evangelization and revival**

We do not have to start from base zero. For the Holy Spirit has already acted before us, creating and recreating the congregation to which we belong. It needs air to breath and bread to eat. Both are granted to us when we persevere *in the doctrine of the apostles and in communion, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers* (Acts 2:42). These are the pillars of the Christian life in community. They characterize the Evangelical-Lutheran spirituality.

Evangelization makes this daily meal possible, as well as revives what is dormant, put aside, excluded or not yet reached.



**Through daily conversion and repentance, the congregation is evangelized by the Holy Spirit, so that it may be a permanently renewed and perfected instrument of God's mission in the world.**

In this way it takes on and experiences baptism as a gift that commits it to God's mission. It becomes an instrument of this mission in the following ways: through the joyful and unfearing announcement of the love and will of God; through fraternal and solidary living; through the practice of loving one's neighbor (diaconia) and of citizenship, as well as through the practice of prayer and through overcoming any internal and external boundaries that try to limit the action of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and in the world.

**Evangelization aims at physical, material, spiritual, emotional, social, political and environmental well-being. It is holistic and aims at peace and justice in the broadest sense of the word (= shalom).**

In the midst of the multireligious marketplace, the evangelical witness indicates the path and the guideline based on justification through grace and faith which is translated into experiencing gratuitousness. In this way it contributes to our "uniqueness" as Lutherans.

This revival, *recreating congregations*, encompasses all facets of congregational life, including the life of worship. Toward this end it is urgent that there be a liturgical contextualization both in its forms of singing, rhythm and instrumental music, as well as in its contents and time schedules. The culture and the social life of the context must be permitted to have a live and authentic expression in accordance with the confessional and universal parameters of Christian worship. The congregation has the right and the duty to actively participate in the worship celebration.

### **Petal B - Accompaniment and Diaconia (service)**

Because the congregation lives solely by the goodness and mercy of God it is challenged to practice loving one's neighbor. It rejoices with those who are rejoicing and cries with those who are crying. It shares with those who have nothing. It is sensitive and solidary with people and groups who are in situations of crisis, need or risk. It denounces the causes that generate non-life and witnesses to God's desires for his creation. Thus **the congregation practices diaconia in the prophetic perspective**. This means service that promotes life for all people, not limiting itself to its own members, but including all people in need, regardless of gender, age, color, creed, social or cultural level.

Diaconal action does not aim at "winning over" people from other churches to our church. This would be practicing proselytism. However, there is an increasing number of people who are lost and are seeking a meaning for their lives.

The congregation's serving is ruled and made possible by the love of God revealed in Christ. Because the heart is filled and overflowing with the love of God, the mouth needs to speak at the opportune time, especially when asked about the reason for the unconditional service. With joy we open the doors of our own congregation so that people who are not part of it, who are attracted to it by its witness may interact with us. It is up to us to welcome them affectionately and fraternally. In this way **diaconal action is also an integral part of the mission and decidedly contributes to recreate and create congregations.**

Diaconal action transcends internal and external boundaries. It is ecumenically united and cooperates, whenever possible, with governmental and nongovernmental organizations in order to promote justice through curing social ills. In this way the church is politically active.

**Digression:**

*Based on strategic planning carried out by the Diaconal Department of the IECLB, an operational plan is in the implantation, respectively elaboration stage. Based on the needs and possibilities of the synods, this plan aims at making consulting services accessible for training, organizing and elaborating plans of diaconal action at the synodical level in the following areas: street children; persons with disabilities; elderly people; accompaniment of people who are terminally ill; interpersonal relationships with the workers in hospitals and nursing homes; multipliers in the area of diaconia. This plan will be annexed or integrated in due time to the IECLB Missionary Action Plan.*

### **Petal C - Mission and Ecumene (unity)**

The congregation is evangelized with the goal of it *being sent out as missionary*. This does not stop at the horizon of the tower of its own church. Beginning with the *go unto all nations* (Mt 28:19), **the sending out implies transcending ecclesiastical, religious and cultural boundaries as well as ethnic, racial, social and economic, gender and age, including geographic boundaries.** As to this last statement it is worth remembering that the step of transcending boundaries to which we have already become accustomed, cannot wait until we have resolved all the internal problems. If this were possible, we would need to wait until eternity.

Even though we have so many internal challenges to confront, we risk supporting, for example, a certain mission front in Northern or Northeastern Brazil; we maintain mission fronts in indigenous areas; we send a diaconal worker to Mozambique, a professor to the United States; we carry out exchange programs with church workers from churches outside our country.

There are national and international challenges that surpass our small strength. **Based on Christ's prayer *that all may be one*** (Jn 17:21), **we are propelled to unite ourselves with other churches to promote a more just life,** for example,

in terms of agrarian reform, a more just distribution of income and the preservation of the environment, on a national and world level. Because of this we are part of the Grupo de Trabalho Missionário Evangélico (GTME) (Evangelical Missionary Work Group), of the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) (Commission on Ministry for the Landless); of the Conselho Nacional de Igrejas Cristãs (CONIC) (National Council of Christian Churches); of the Conselho Latino-Americano de Igrejas (CLAI) (the Latin American Council of Churches); the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC) ... Aside from this we support nongovernmental entities in their struggles to gain and keep a watch on the human rights issue.

**Lutheran theology makes it possible for us to have a maximum of ecumenical openness.** At the same time it impels us to contribute, humbly and with conviction, with the gospel that God justifies those who are not deserving. This good news frees one from all vain attempts to save oneself. It unites us in the search for new communion – in sharing and serving, aiming toward a new, more just and humane socioeconomic order on the national and international level.

### **Petal D - Training and education**

The general goal of *recreating and creating congregations together* demands church workers that assimilate and interiorize the vision of shared ministry. It does not consist solely of partnership and cooperation among the missionary, diaconal, catechetical and pastoral ministries. Its goal, above all else, is that these recognize and carry out their instrumentation and multiplier role.

Church workers should not only prioritize their capacity to carry out well their specific task of their respective ministry. Before this they should prioritize the vocation, training and accompaniment of lay collaborators so that these men and women may take on certain tasks of the respective specific ministry. In this way **church workers become teachers at the congregational, parish and synodical levels.** Together with these, in teams and in partnership, they work in the congregation aiming at strengthening the universal priesthood of believers having as their goal missionary service (Eph 4: 11-12).

In this way **training and education are at the service of mission, of accompaniment and of diaconia as well as of evangelization and revival.**

Internal vocation (personal and individual) as well as external vocation on the part of the congregation, parish, synod or church (depending who is responsible) are part of the calling. Training, certification and spiritual and professional accompaniment in terms of continuing education take place in its name and under its responsibility.

Because of the general goal of *recreating and creating congregations together* it is indispensable that already in the training stage, **the studies be related with living together in a congregation**, that is, there should be the practice of the "vita communis" spirituality.

It is precisely in this relationship that a necessary and healthy "passion for the cause" is awakened and re-nurtured, between church workers as well as between these and lay collaborators.

#### **Digression:**

*The Church Council formed a Commission on Training and Education. It operates within the following 4 thematic blocks: 1. Formal Education; 2. Training of church workers; 3. Leadership Training; 4. Personnel Planning. The four blocks have already carried out pre-consultations aiming at proposing an educational policy for the IECLB. This will be annexed or integrated in due time into the IECLB Missionary Action Plan.*

#### **Petal E - Administration and structure**

We consciously designated the fifth petal of the rose to administrative and structural aspects. In this way we are not saying that these are the least significant areas in the church. The image of the rose teaches us that all the petals are equally important. Each one in its place contributes to maintaining the whole. Only the whole set of the five petals forms the harmonious and perfect beauty of the rose.

Consequently, administration and structure have no meaning in and of themselves. There is, however, the temptation for them to become self sufficient. The same danger presents itself to any of the facets of mission.

Administration and structure exist because God is a God of coordination, integration, sharing and cooperation. Therefore they exist to **serve the mission of the congregation**.

This task is not limited to maintaining the patrimony, but above all, consists in promoting life. Any institution or ecclesiastical entity comes from the congregation and is turned toward it.

Promoting life for all, especially where life is being threatened or even lacking, demands human and financial resources. Since the Bible talks of money **we are not ashamed to relate faith with money**. On the contrary, we are making up for a long time omission and propagate offering in gratitude, spontaneity, generosity and

proportionality. **We challenge each member to contribute according to their possibilities and to what their heart proposes** (see 2 Co 8 and 9).

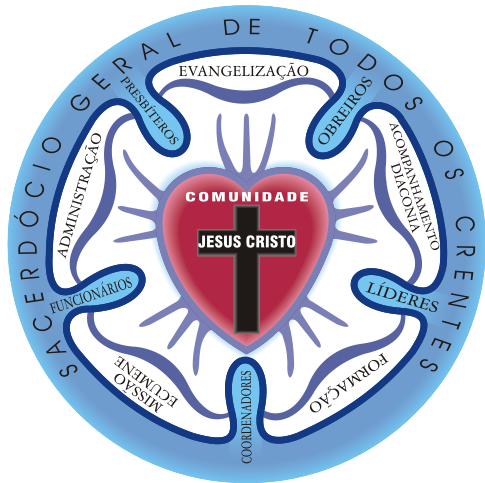
As a result of this same spirit of dividing and sharing, **we put into practice internal and external partnerships**. A congregation or parish divides resources with another one that is in need and distant. A synod jointly supports a certain missionary challenge that another one alone would be unable to take on. Through the synod and the IECLB we structure partnerships with churches and entities outside the country to provide support for self-help. In this way we avoid creating dependencies, and we stimulate mobilizing internal resources, aiming at self-maintenance.

## 2.4 - Blue background = Through whom does God recreate and create a missionary congregation?

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I ; send me!'" (Isa 6:8)*

The resurrected Christ said to his followers: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (Jn 20: 21-22)*

We have already pointed out that, as of our baptism we are ordained priests and priestesses, a task that in faith we take on with freedom and joy. We receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may participate in this universal priesthood of all believers, in the **missionary congregation**.



## **The congregation is the target and the instrument of God's mission.**

In order for it to be made aware of its condition as the body of Christ and for it to embrace its role as an instrument of God's mission, God grants gifts and institutes specific ministries. These ministries enriched by lay collaborators have, above all, the role of equipping for mission so that *"your light may shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* (Mt 5:16)

With this intent **congregations, parishes, synods and the church as a whole will elaborate and carry out their missionary action plans based on the general goal and directed toward it.**

The following specific responsibilities are to be observed:

**It is the responsibility of the congregations to:** carry out mission within its bounds (see the IECLB Constitution, Art. 11). It is important that it be carried out through experiencing life in a solidary and therapeutic community, as well as through transcending social, cultural, religious, ethnic, age and gender boundaries.

**It is the responsibility of the synods to:** gather together and exchange missionary experiences among the congregations and encourage them. Toward this end they invest in continuous training for the church workers and training for congregational leaders. It is up to them to promote missionary actions within their area and practice intersynodical and international partnership. It is also their responsibility to monitor and care for the confessionality within their area ( see IECLB Constitution, Art. 19 and 23).

**It is the responsibility of the institutions and sectors to:** train church workers within the profile that corresponds with the Share Ministry facing the challenge of recreating and creating Evangelical Lutheran congregations; provide assistance, advise, primarily for the synods and the presidency in their motivating and equipping task.

**It is up to the IECLB as a whole to:** gather and exchange missionary experiences from the bases. Motivate and equip the bases for their missionary task within and



beyond their boundaries. Take on the representation of the church in the national and international ecumenical spaces. Promote and administer internal and external partnerships, exchanging financial and human resources.

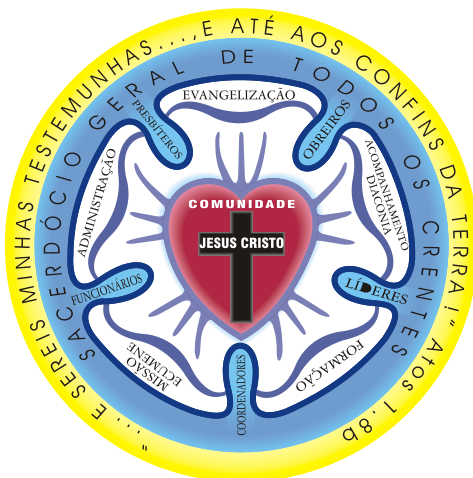
Let us remember the IECLB Constitution, Art. 30 and 36, and the documents *IECLB at the door of the new millennium* and *IECLB within the religious pluralism*. These documents can help in recognizing and embracing the tasks of planning mission on the different levels as well as the responsibilities of monitoring and caring for the contextualization and confessionality. In this task the presidency will be advised by the Permanent National Commission on Mission (to be formed).

**Any and all missionary planning, on whatever level, begins with the needs and possibilities of the people at the grass roots levels and is aimed at them. This planning will be motivated and guided by the general goals spelled out in the IECLB Missionary Plan of Action.**

Thus, following these guidelines, it is indispensable that the congregation, the parish, the synod, the department, the work sector and the whole of the IECLB develop their own strategic planning for mission with objective and concrete goals for the next years.

## 2.5 - Gold ring = To where are we sent?

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28: 19,20)*



**God's mission begins in the congregation, passes through the church and reaches "to the ends of the earth."** (Act 1: 8)

The revival of the congregation from the perspective of qualitative and quantitative growth aiming at transcending every boundary, that is, gender, age, ethnicity, race, nation, culture, religion, social and economic level is implied.

Our journey takes place under the cross which is simultaneously the symbol of suffering and of victory. We are on the path between Pentecost and the *"new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."* (2 Pet 3:13)

Eternity has already broken forth in a very special way in the coming of Christ. It continues to shoot forth its rays in every sign of new life that God makes possible through our *recreating and creating congregations together*. In this Christ himself fulfills his promise: *"I am with you to the end of the age."*

Our journey is inspired by eternity and is aimed at eternity. That is why the symbol of the golden ring at its external and internal margins could be open, flowing and unlimited.

### **3 - Concrete proposals**

3.1 - That each congregation, parish and synod be inspired and guided by the IECLB Missionary Action Plan in its evaluation, adaptation or elaboration of the strategic planning of its own missionary project. In this way the IECLB Missionary Action Plan will become the connecting link between the different and multiple missionary initiatives within and outside the IECLB circles.

3.2 - Identify all the churches and ecclesiastical buildings with the symbol of the IECLB. On the synodical level the suggestion is to make standardized illuminated panels.

3.3 - Place inviting and indicative signs with the symbol of the IECLB and the place, days and times of congregational gatherings at strategic points in each neighborhood, city and metropolis. At the synodical level it is suggested that standardized signs be manufactured.

3.4 - In order for a congregation/parish to be quickly identified as belonging to the IECLB in phone books, outdoors and similar places, the suggestion is to place the initials IECLB before the specific name - for example: IECLB - Evangelical Congregation of ...

3.5 - In the strategic planning consider the provision of resources to acquire land to build a church and/or community center in areas of population growth and retreat centers in easily accessible areas.

3.6 - Make possible the concrete presence of the IECLB in all Brazilian capitals as well as in cities of more than 200,000 inhabitants and in strategic places.

3.7 - Broaden the network of chaplaincies in hospital, military, school, penitentiary and other institutions.

3.8 - On Pentecost Sunday celebrate in all the congregations of the IECLB, *Mission Day* and designate the offerings to the Mission Fund of the IECLB.

3.9 - Create permanent mission groups on the parish, synodical and churchwide levels, with the goal of exchanging missionary experiences and evaluating the respective strategic plans, aiming at encouraging mission.

3.10 - Strengthen, intensify and create internal investment funds on the synodical and national levels for congregations that are being formed, working toward self-maintenance. Toward this end we count on the proposal of the Gustaf Adolf Werk which foments mutual help within and among the congregations and we give it full support.

3.11 - Promote the practice of internal partnerships and sponsorship of parishes that are in the process of being formed and of other missionary projects.

3.12 - Encourage synods to develop through the IECLB missionary projects with external partnerships with the goal of ecumenically exchanging experiences and human and financial resources. In the beginning such projects will be conceived for

a predetermined time, aiming at self maintenance, and also getting feedback from the ecumenical learning process.

3.13 - Intensify and broaden the training of the lay collaborators for all missionary challenges within the parish and synodical areas. Give special emphasis to training collaborating people in the areas of work with children and young people, giving value to the human and didactic resources that the synods, the Catechetics Department and the National Department on Youth Issues of the IECLB have available.

3.14 - Intensify and broaden the initiatives in continuing theological practical education for church workers, taking advantage of the services of the Ecumenical Institute for Graduate Studies (IEPG) of EST and of the Center for Theological Education of MEUC (CETEOL), as well as intensify and broaden the training of the lay collaborators valuing the experiences of the Department of Extension of EST, of the Music Institute (IM) of EST, of the Pastoral and Mission Center (CPM), of the Basic Course in the Faith (CBF), of the Course of the Bible for Life (CBV) in the Vale do Itajaí Synod, of the Popular Lutheran Theology Course in the Uruguay Synod and other similar initiatives.

3.15 - Encourage the exchange of missionary, diaconal and church worker and lay training experiences between the synods as well with the partners from outside the country.

3.16 - Create conditions, perhaps in the form of a research project, to gather together and systematize already existing programs for training lay persons, in order to multiply them. Based on this collection, systematization and multiplication service a new correspondence course could be projected that would fill the gaps in lay leadership training.

3.17 - Invest in improving communications on all levels.

3.18 - Intensify the missionary presence of the IECLB in the mass media on all levels.

3.19 - Seek human and financial resources to stimulate, accompany and monitor the process of putting into practice the IECLB Missionary Action Plan.

**Obs.: All these proposals result from the Evangelical-Lutheran spirituality which they want to serve.**

## **Specific challenges for congregational life**

1. - Create conditions to open the churches in all the congregations on all Sundays.
2. - Create groups of people to visit the sick, the disabled, those in mourning, those withdrawn from the congregation, those imprisoned and liturgical teams in all the congregations.
3. - Work annually on the relationship between faith and money, and its correlation with time and gifts in all the congregations.

Specific challenges for the IECLB in the next seven years

Any strategic missionary planning needs to set goals that are viable and are able to be demanded and evaluated aiming at qualitative and quantitative growth. Toward this end we audaciously propose:

- 1 - that the average member participation in any one sector of congregational work grow from 5-10% to 15-20%;
- 2 - that in a time frame of seven years no pastor should have an area of responsibility of more than 1000 baptized persons;
- 3 - that the synods establish goals of presence and qualitative actions that result in an annual quantitative growth of around 5% throughout the next seven years.

## **4 - List of some existing resources for missionary planning**

4.1 - Synodical missionary planning projects already elaborated or being elaborated should be shared.

4.2 - Basic Course in the Faith (CBF) and Course on the Bible for Life (CBV) - available at the Vale do Itajaí Synod.

4.3 - Course in Lutheran Popular Theology - available at the Uruguay Synod.

4.4 - Study and training material - elaborated by the Work Group on Religious Movements - available at the Escola Superior de Teologia (EST).

4.6 - Ministry and Mission Center in Curitiba, PR

4.7 - Theological Training Center (CETEOL) of the Missão Evangélica União Cristã (Evangelical Mission Christian Union) MEUC in Mato Preto, SC

4.8 - PAGANELLI, Pastor Arno. *Missão e edificação de comunidade - Reflexões, sugestões e propostas.* (Printed sheets - 40 pp)

## **5 - Highlight of main points**

➔ CHRIST IS THE STARTING POINT AND THE POINT OF ARRIVAL OF THE MISSIONARY CONGREGATION. Justified by grace, through faith we express the evangelical values through our personal, family, congregational and social life.

➔ Recover the importance of the congregation as the TARGET and the INSTRUMENT of God's mission.

➔ What moves us as a congregation? It is important that we know how to answer this question. Seeing and feeling our neighbor is knowing whether s/he is included or excluded from our/my company.

➔ How do we see our congregation/church? What is working well? For whom is it working well? Whose opinion is it - of the one who is analyzing or of the one who is analyzed? Are there people willing to unite forces or is it always the same half a dozen? Is there adequate physical space?

➔ Threats? Individualism; weakening of values and guidelines; fragmentation; narrowing faith to personal issues, including financial (theology of "prosperity"); subordination of the gospel to the culture and ethnicity and other elements that make the congregation's mission difficult.

→ Opportunities? Satisfaction of being a part of a very cohesive but open group; recovery of affection among the people; greater availability of personal and professional qualifications, including the training of other brothers and sisters; greater value given to "being together as brothers and sisters," without emphasizing criticisms or differences but reinforcing fraternal love; seeking a better quality of life together; support for seeking employment that is compatible with the available qualifications; broaden the range of available qualifications.

→ The congregation's goal is to carry out the mission of promoting life that God wants to fulfill in it and through it. In order for the congregation to become more missionary it needs evangelistic/missionary revival.

→ Evangelization includes and seeks to concretize the physical, material, spiritual, emotional, social, political and environmental well-being.

→ The missionary congregation becomes sensitive to and solidary with people and groups who are in situations of crisis, need and risk. Just as Christ loved us, so also do his followers love each other. Just as he served them, they serve each other, each one according to the gift that they received.

→ Church workers together with lay collaborators on the congregational, parish and synod levels are involved in a continuous process of teaching, learning and living out the evangelical faith of the Lutheran confession. This permits each one to understand what we are and how we are, what we are doing and what we are seeking.

→ The missionary challenges are greater than those that can be handled individually by one person, congregation, parish or synod.

→ The goal to *Recreating and creating congregations together* will be reached through the interaction of various structures on the national level, that mutually support each other.

## **6 - Outline for the elaboration of strategic planning in congregations and synods based on the *IECLB Missionary Action Plan***

Remembering the **general goal**:

**Recreating and creating congregations together** so that there is **no congregation without a mission and no mission without a congregation!**

"Congregations, parishes, synods and the church as a whole will elaborate and carry out their missionary action plans based on the general goal and working toward it." (Text that is in the reference document)

Define the work field observing the following aspects:

- 1. Evangelization and revival**
- 2. Accompaniment and diaconia**
- 3. Mission and ecumene (unity)**
- 4. Training and education**
- 5. Administration and structure**

The following designated responsibilities will be observed:

**THE CONGREGATIONS/PARISHES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

**- carrying out mission**

- through living in solidary community
- (define the understanding of what a solidary community is to the members, within the area of the congregation)
- through living in therapeutic community
- (define what therapeutic community means, especially as refers to issues of spiritual, emotional, physical and social health as well as dealing with support for concrete actions of assisting members who are feeling abandoned and rejected)
- through transcending;
  - -social boundaries
  - (not permitting that distinctions be made among members or visitors and others as to economic, cultural and other differences)
  - cultural boundaries



- (trying to find a common language that will bring people closer and make them feel as comfortable as if they were at home)
- religious boundaries
- (not creating differences among brothers and sisters in Christ - who confess Christ as Lord, Savior and the only mediator between the human being and the Triune God)
- -ethnic boundaries
- (that differences not be made between people due to their origins or color)
- age boundaries
- (observe that there be an understanding among people even with great age differences, and that there be the possibility of open and frank dialogue among them based on love)
- gender boundaries
- (it makes no difference if the people are men or women, the congregation needs to understand and attend to the clearly defined specific needs of its members)

### **THE SYNODS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

- gathering together and exchanging the missionary experiences of the congregations and encourage them

(gather up and schematize the data, the information and the sources where this information is available; establish a system of exchanging information and communication among the congregations. Create a data base about the experiences and making it available to the other congregations of the synod)

- invest in resources

(financial, material, human resources, resources of time and knowledge from within the congregation itself and/or from outside)

- invest in the continuing education of church workers and congregational leaders

(in the creation of material or systems that can continually be updated, seeking continued improvement in issues of faith and service to others; including identifying

the potential leaders that have not yet been recognized by the congregations and encourage them to present themselves to serve the latter.

- promote missionary actions within its area
- monitor the missionary actions
- oversee the confessionality

### **Strategic orientations**

Based on these elements the congregations, as well as the synods should carry out meetings to evaluate and delineate their plans of action. This involves the definition of:

- goals to be reached
- in what time span
- involving what resources
- which would be sought/available where
- and with whom

For each objective or quantified goal a sensitivity analysis should be done involving:

- threats, risks of not working
- reasons that could cause it not to work
- actions to prevent or correct these reasons
- openness to new opportunities to involve more people in the work
- openness to opportunities to make ourselves better known and more respected places where we live
- what would be lacking for it to work?

## **7 - A concluding word**

As pointed out by the IECLB Missionary Action Plan itself, it is up to the church to "gather together and exchange missionary experiences from the bases. To

motivate and equip these (bases) for their missionary task within and beyond their boundaries...

Although God's mission is entrusted to the congregation, the success of the planning and carrying out of the missionary action depends above all on the breath of the Holy Spirit. However, it uses the earnest strivings of all the congregational strengths. The structure of the IECLB, with its institutions is there to serve this. Therefore we are dealing with **recreating and creating congregations together** so that there will be **No congregation without a mission and No mission without a congregation!**

## **8 - Annex**

Speech proffered by Pastor President Hubert Kirchheim on the theme *Creating and recreating congregations together* at the Forum on Mission in Rodeio 12/ SC, on May 30, 2000.

### **Creating and recreating congregations together**

#### **8.1 Preliminary observations**

The reports from the synods and the entities about their missionary projects point to different contexts where *creating and recreating congregations together* is happening. They also reflect a lot of confidence and hope in the Lord of the harvest. We perceive that he has already acted where we arrived. He created congregation before we (arrived) and integrated us in it. If this had not been so we would not be gathered here.

These projects show us how we still have congregations set in the club mentality – where a person pays like a club member to have certain rights and privileges; or set in the consumer mentality – where a person goes to the meetings as one would go to a supermarket, consuming what is of interest, or even seeking to satisfy one's hunger and thirst for welcome, acceptance and orientation. These synodical projects also express a firm desire to invest in training on all levels and in different ways, so that the congregations may become more mission oriented in the broad sense of the term.

We could finish here saying: *Well, let's go to it! Each synod have at it in its own way.* However this way of *each one on their own and God for all* would not convince anyone who loves the IECLB and is concerned with the

efficacy of its mission. This is why the proposed theme – *Creating and recreating congregations together* – challenges us to work in cooperation and unite forces and resources. We are aware that dividing forces damages the efficacy of our missionary action.

We also know that in a country such as ours, with a geographic extension of continental size, mission cannot have only one form of expression if it wants to do justice to a context characterized by many facets. On the contrary, each congregation and parish needs to plan its presence and missionary action within its context. It needs to do this based on its specific reality seen in the light of the gospel and in the perspective of the Lutheran confessionality. This missionary action plan of the congregation is shared in the respective synod aiming at defining a greater goal common to all the congregations of the synod. This greater and common goal unites, interconnects and fructifies the different missionary plans of the congregations. In this way the synod becomes concrete, that is, walking the same path together, valuing local peculiarities.

The same process is happening, in this forum, at a national level. We start with the synodical missionary action plans. We perceive their peculiarities and what they have in common. And now we are seeking a goal that is greater and broader than a missionary challenge at the congregational or synodical level. We are seeking a goal, a project, a vision that is so great and broad that it can take in the missionary initiatives from all the congregations and all the synods of the IECLB; a project so important that it captivates the congregational, parish and synodical leaderships to such a point that they find themselves in it and identify themselves with it, promoting it in their respective levels of life and activity. This would be the walking together at the national level. This planning from bottom up is the new component to which the new IECLB Constitution guided by the vision of Shared Ministry challenges us.

We dream of a project that is similar to that vision of the body that Paul designed in 1 Cor 12. Many members – different in form, expression and function – are incorporated in the same body. Each one in its proper place, carrying out its task, this is important for the body to be beautiful and function in a harmonious and efficient way. No one excludes the other nor do they exclude themselves just for being different. They all have the necessary self esteem and value each other mutually in their importance and their cooperative and complementary role. They are under the same general coordination that we call the brain or the heart. Yes, I dream of a church where each congregation is aware its own importance and values

the other in its complementary role, under the *central command* which is Jesus Christ.

Toward this end, we seek together the conditions, the presuppositions, the resources and means for such an endeavor. We do not need to start from nothing. Because we have affirmed and confirmed basic elements of consensus, which I will next, bring to memory in summary.

**8.2 Consensus already arrived at** the presidential gathering with the synod pastors and presidents in the synod councils in March of 1999. Based on the respective minutes, in item 6, I will share the main elements over which there was general consensus:

- the mission is God's
- it happens in certain contexts;
- God creates, recreates and sends out the congregation as the instrument of God's mission through shared ministry;
- this mission presupposes the training of church workers and lay collaborators based on the ecclesiastical conception already conceived in the normative documents of the IECLB, especially in the new Constitution, explained in the document *IECLB às portas do novo milênio* (IECLB at the door of the new millennium). These documents draw out the definitions of our being a Lutheran church, inspired by the vision of shared ministry;
- mission demands a spirituality that relates the posture of prayer with the work of participative planning, aiming at creating a more welcoming, participative and therapeutic congregation.
- this mission implies a liturgical renewal based on our context within universal and confessional reference points;
- this mission also embraces deepening the relationship between faith and time, faith and gifts and faith and money.

I understand that these are central elements that still need to be enriched, complemented and more deeply examined in the light of the document *IECLB at the door of the new millennium* as well the document about *Shared Ministry* and the *IECLB Constitution* itself.

I intend to focus on each of these elements, highlighting some of the implications that I judge are important at this moment. I also will show the practical consequences resulting from these elements looking toward recreating and creating congregations together.

**8.2.1 – God is Lord of the mission**, not the leaders nor the church workers of the congregation. Our talk and our posture however, frequently say the opposite, for example when one says: *I did the worship service*; when one defines: *worship is when the congregation gathers together with God*; or when the service is transformed into a *show*. This talk and practice places the human being at the center and God becomes simply a means or an object, losing the role as protagonist.

Where the human being places him/herself in the center of the mission, I see all sorts of contentions and burnout, such as: competition among the church workers; struggle for power among themselves and between them and lay leaders; desperate and sometimes awkward attempts to attend to the people's expectations in detriment to the challenges presented by the gospel itself and by the confessional identity; crisis of confessional and ecclesiastical identity.

The confession that *God is Lord of the mission*, however, reminds us that the church exists because of God who manifests Godself as creator, savior and one who consoles. It is God that created it, maintains it and will guide it to the blessed end – even though it may seem that the evidence is contrary to this. This confession encourages the troubled soul that despairs when faced with so many adversities.

At the same time this confession frees us from the compulsion of needing to be big, the best and always successful. Although these can be important means that the Holy Spirit can use, God's mission does not depend on them. The history of the people of God frequently testifies that God walks with God's people acting even in the midst of its weakness and insignificance.

### **8.2.2 – Mission takes place in certain contexts**

God values and considers the concrete situation of God's people and makes history while walking with them. Therefore the mission of the church cannot ignore the time, the place and the reality in the broad sense of the term, that is, the life reality in its cultural, religious, social and political dimensions. Our predecessors insisted precisely in the contextualization of mission when they called themselves *The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil*.

The Bible is a faith witness about this God who makes history through people and natural happenings. The Bible is based on concrete life and directs itself into it with the intention of promoting new life, especially for those who most lack it. When we read the Holy Scriptures and interpret

them, we take seriously its historical insertion - ours as members of the IECLB in the year 2000, as well as that of the Bible which took nothing less than approximately 1000 years to be written.

Considering preaching, it is important that we be aware of these contextual conditionings. Because our God is that one that became human in a specific place, time and situation, thus valuing and considering our contextual conditionings. As Lutheran Christians, therefore, we do not delude ourselves making believe that there can be an objective and non-contextual reading of the Bible. This would be a fundamentalist reading. On the contrary we are free to take on historic conditioning, our own as well as that of the Bible. We ask what the message of a certain text from that period is for our reality. It does not matter if we start with the current time and go to the text or start from the text and go to current reality. It is indispensable, however, to be aware of the historical conditionings of the text as well as of myself as the reader. The Bible always begins with concrete life and directs itself into that life with a determined transforming intention. It is necessary therefore, that the text in its context from the past be related with the current context so that we may *hear the voice of God today*, as the Catholic theologian Carlos Mesters always says.

With relation to the current context it is important that we look with both eyes and listen with both ears, illuminated and sharpened by the witness of the Gospel. According to Karl Barth, a Swiss theologian during the resistance to Hitler, we should have the Bible open in one hand and the newspaper open in the other, simultaneously.

As Lutherans we learn to read the whole Bible based on Christ and looking toward Christ. As a key to reading the Bible Luther recommends *all that moves to Christ*. And what is that if not promote life for those who do not have it nor deserve it and much less, are able to pay for it, that is justification by grace and faith! This is the guiding spirit with which to read the Bible in its context either of then or the current context.

About the current reality the synodical reports have already reflected many important elements that, with Oneide's help, have been systematized. I just want to note and focus on some aspects looking at our *creating and recreating congregations together*.

The importance of the social, economic and political situation imposes itself with such force that one cannot ignore it. Let us remember for example, unemployment, a bad distribution of income, isolation, loneliness and the oppression of people, groups and nations. These and many other

manifestations of injustice, marginalization and exclusion are intensifying in spite of or even because of the so called neoliberal globalization. These conditionings among others, worsen the dependency and impoverishment of the majority of the Brazilian people and consequently of the members of the IECLB.

Aside from this there is a struggle going on between ideas, philosophies, cosmovisions, social systems. On the theoretical level they distinguish themselves among different periods, for example, feudalism, modernity and postmodernity. It is not possible for me, at this moment, to adequately explain them. However, since I am concerned about identifying well the context in which we wish to carry out mission, I need to focus on some aspects of these three ways of seeing the world. The first is rooted in the rural area while the other two are localized more in the urban areas. Although they are distinct in their ways of seeing, thinking and acting, it seems that in Brazil these three confront themselves simultaneously.

We perceive this struggle in many ways, such as, for example, in the field of agrarian policies we have the interests of the big landowners confronting with those of the MST (Landless Movement); at the level of labor policies there is the contrast of the easy approval of the salary increase for public servants and the embarrassing discussion about the inhuman minimum wage; we perceive this struggle when the small farmer needs to confront IBAMA (Brazilian Institute for Environmental Support) to cut a tree for his own use while the government wants to authorize the exploitation of 60% of the Amazonian forest even though the whole world knows that this will imply devastation and a threat to the ecological balance of the national and planetary environment.

There are still those who place unrestrained trust in science, technology and in the progress guided by human reason. In this view of the modern period everything seemed doable as long as one used adequate means, the so called know-how. In this way also the kingdom of heaven would be constructed using adequate strategy, used by duly converted people either for the communist ideology or for the neoliberal capitalist ideology or even for the fundamentalist religious ideology. They postulated absolutes and unnegotiable principles that would infallibly lead to a world without classes and without problems, or at least to a better world.

Today, however, a growing number of people critically view the absolutist pretensions of modernity. In the midst of all the progress they also perceive the calamitous effects of nuclear science that, if not used and kept responsibly, will contaminate all that lives. One fears the people who deal



in an uncommitted way with biogenetics, being able to create a being that will devour its maker. Certain religious movements, that in the name of creating the kingdom of God, manipulate, tyrannize or exclude everything and all who oppose them represent a real danger. It is unnecessary to also talk of the air and water pollution caused by exploiting, greedy and unscrupulous people. If these are the fruits of the absolutes that reason produces, then it is necessary to distrust all absolutes.

As a consequence of this, there seems to no longer be any rules or guidelines that have any authority to organize or control life in society, not even God. All authority is inflated and no longer has value or meaning. This spirit of the postmodern period characterizes ever more people, mainly the young ones. Either the person accepts the game of cruel competition, throwing him/herself into a limitless activism and becomes a winner. Or sooner or late, the person tires out, resigns in apathy and inertia or even descends into depression. Since a person cannot withstand living without rest and leisure, without communion and meaning, they seek to anesthetize the pain through chemical drugs or seek esoteric and religious ecstatic sensations and emotions. Since reason is exhausted in all senses, they try to satisfy their hunger and thirst for life through feeling, touching, tasting and smelling. Only with difficulty will a person of the post modern era to be understood by someone who still lives in the modern era and counts on values, principles and absolutes. This is one of the reasons that characterizes the conflicts between generations.

These different and even antagonistic ideas, philosophies and cosmovisions are not restricted exclusively to certain age groups nor geographic areas nor certain social, cultural or religious groups. On the contrary they permeate all these areas and are mixed within them, even within the same person.

Our current context is truly multifaceted. And the great challenge for our mission is whether the proposal of the evangelical faith of the Lutheran confession has or has not some relevant contribution to make.

### **8.2.3 - God creates, recreates and sends out the congregation...**

God frees us from anonymity and isolation. God calls Abraham and promises him descendants that will make him into a great nation, the people of God, assembly, congregation and church. Thus a great arch is extended. It begins with God, goes through Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Israel, Jesus, the apostles, congregations that unite into a church, that walks between Pentecost and points to the second coming of Christ. The

church comes from God and God is its target. The church lives in a congregation and is walking with other congregations. This is what the word synod means = *syn-hodós* = walking together. According to Acts 9:2, the first Christians were also called *those who are of the way*.

The visible sign of belonging to the universal people of God is baptism. In baptism God offers God's unconditional love, with everything that we need to live happily, die with hope and resurrect to eternal life. This undeserved love wants to be accepted, embraced and lived out in faith that acts in love.

The truth is that this living in faith passes through hits and misses, actions of love and nonlove. The misses and nonlove manifest themselves in the form of fights and separations even among churches, when they absolutize their part of the recognition of the truth. Just as in married life it is necessary to recognize and confess one's guilt, so also this is necessary in the church. Only the couple who lives in pardon is able to convince others, in a world tired of having to appear successful. In the same way also, the witness of the Christian churches will only have convincing strength when confession and forgiveness of guilt are practiced in them and among them.

Faced with this realist view of human existence there are those who appeal to moral efforts in order to do good works with the goal of reaching heaven, like climbing a ladder to get there. This is the path self-salvation that leads people to despair as Luther confesses when he sings the hymn "Dear Christians, one and all rejoice" according to the LBW 299: 3 *My own good works all came to naught ... My fears increased till sheer despair Left only death to by my share; The pangs of hell I suffered.*

In the study of the Bible, especially in the letter to the Romans, he rediscovered the good news: God himself sees our lost situation and takes action. He himself comes, in Jesus, his beloved Son and shares, gives and sacrifices himself. In Christ's resurrection he gives the victory of life over the powers of death. This Christ lives and makes live. By the Holy Spirit he frees us from vain attempts at any self salvation and makes us embrace in faith the love and mercy of God. In this way God justifies those who are undeserving and who cannot pay.

This good news is one of our most precious legacies as Lutherans. It is balsam for the tired people on the paths of justification by works. In this way new communion arises with God, with others and with oneself in the sense of self-acceptance. A congregation of people justified by grace and faith rises up.

As grace-filled people and in answer to God's love we practice loving our neighbor. Touched by the grace of God they practice concrete signs of grace filled lives, for example: welcoming excluded people, pardon and reconciliation, support for the unemployed, homeless, landless; sharing and cures. In a concrete way new life should be created and recreated on all spheres, that is, in the family, congregation, school, profession and politics. Thus serving one another, *each one according to the gift that they received, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God* we fulfill, according to 1 Pet 4:10, *the law of Christ*. And according to 1 Pet 2: 9, this serving is called the *universal priesthood of all believers*. In this way God makes the congregation a missionary congregation simply by its way of living. Because of its different way of living it stands out in the context, it is noticed and registered as *a city built on a hill* (Mt 5:14).

So that the congregation recognizes its condition of universal priesthood and embraces its mission, God granted specific ministries. This is based on, for example, Eph 4 and duly explained in the document *Shared Ministry* which guides the new Constitution and the text of *IECLB at the door of the new millennium*. In this view on ministry I wish to highlight its role as equipper, and the fact that lay collaborators actively participate in the respective specific ministries. These with their specific tasks, make up the ecclesiastical ministry.

These are some elements that characterize the IECLB congregation. It is a visible church. This is how it identifies itself in a world so lacking in grace. However, at this point it is still too hidden, as in the times when it was not permitted to have a temple and bell. Why is this? Do we Lutherans lack self-esteem? If that is the case, there is no reason for it. Because, putting modesty aside, we have a truly liberating message in this world full of exclusions. Based on justification by grace and faith which results in Christian freedom, we have the conditions to advise the scientists and the legislators to help make ethical decisions in their borderline situations, such as on the issue of biogenetics. This is not about stimulating a doubtful pride, but I encourage us to humbly become aware of the gifts with which God has entrusted us. The Evangelical-Lutheran attitude is one of working and serving with these talents so that the results multiply the substance, following the example of the parable of the talents (Mt 25: 14-30). I believe this could be the healthy Lutheran self-esteem.

**8.2.4 - Mission is the proclamation of the Word**, based on the confessional foundation. It happens in the form of service, witness and discipleship. We are therefore, aware of our contextualized way of reading

and witnessing the Bible. We take our own cultural, social and confessional historicity as well as the historicity of the Bible seriously. We believe that the Holy Spirit inspired its authors and we pray that it will also inspire us in the task of understanding the message in that situation to put it into our days.

We take equally seriously the fact that God has *a thousand ways to save*, as is sung in the hymn *Minha alma entoia um hino* (My soul sings a hymn) (HPD (Hymns of the People of God) 257:3). Just as Jesus summed up his testimony *going through Galilee* and respectively *through the cities and villages, teaching, preaching and curing* (see Mt 4:23; 9:35), so is the witness of Matthew's church and consequently ours duly characterized.

1) We are not only responsible for maintaining an attitude of *come to our temple*, as important as this invitation may be because of celebrating God's communion with God's people; however, more importantly, we are challenged to get out of the four walls of our secure house and go into the streets and alleys where the *sheep without a pastor* are found.

2) Witnessing is not only preaching. Of equal importance is teaching, be it parents teaching a child to walk and pray, or a teacher teaching a child to read and write so that s/he may recognize and assume Christian citizenship.

3) The practical action of loving one's neighbor liberates and cures. It is an integral part of the witness. For it would be blasphemy to tell a starving person *one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*, even though it is written in Mt 4:4. Toward this end there are innumerable social and diaconal service projects that happen through the initiative of congregations, synods and the *Serviço de Projetos de Desenvolvimento (SPD)* (Service for Development Projects) of the IECLB. They are services that fascinate and impress many people.

However, it seems that in certain situations we have difficulty talking with enthusiasm and conviction about what the motivation that leads us to practice loving our neighbor. Could it be that we are embarrassed to invite outsiders to participate in our congregation or church? A missionary congregation invites through being, acting and also through speaking. It lives out the faith, in word and action and witnesses to it through speaking of what the heart is full of, inviting and welcoming. Teaching, preaching and curing form an inseparable unit, like a tripod. If one of the three legs breaks, it all falls, no matter what leg is broken. In the IECLB we also suffer the temptation to accentuate one part to such an extent that the other one or two succumb. That is why it is necessary to take care that there be a

good balance between the existing ministries. Otherwise we will be giving a bad testimony, or even not testifying at all.

When we talk about discipleship we remember the disciples that followed Jesus throughout Palestine. Walking, they shared with him the mission of teaching, preaching and curing. The first listeners therefore were the disciples themselves. This attitude of learning should also be ours. Not only in the beginning of the Christian life but all during life. This discipleship does not happen under the sign of success and glory. On the contrary the path of the church is characterized by discipleship under the sign of the cross. Based on Mk 8:34 the famous theologian Bonhoeffer reminds us of this through his martyrdom in the concentration camps. In the 70's the IECLB remembered this constant learning in the faith when it conceived the vision of the Permanent Catechumenate.

**8.2.5** - Precisely this vision of the Permanent Catechumenate helps us to understand learning in the faith as a process of **continual training and education**. The IECLB has invested, decisively, in training church workers since the creation of the Theological Seminary, now the Escola Superior de Teologia (EST) (Higher School of Theology). It supported the diaconal training in Lagoa Serra Pelada and São Leopoldo. Since then it has recognized the missionary training of the Centro de Ensino Teológico (Center for Theological Education) of MEUC in Mato Preto and at the Centro de Pastoral e Missão (Center for Ministry and Mission) in Curitiba. Besides this, it values educational establishments such as the Escola Agrícola Teófilo Otoni (Agricultural School of Teófilo Otoni). The Evangelical vision of discipleship, the Lutheran People's Ministry, the vision of the Permanent Catechumenate as well as of the Shared Ministry have effectively contributed to the development of innumerable initiatives in lay leadership training. With gratitude to God I note here that there are so many that it would be impossible to mention all of them.

The awareness that lay collaborators are not just mere "fill-ins" when the church worker is laid up, but that they are effective participants in the respective ministries, has been growing throughout the last 30 years. The initiatives in leadership training have their strength in the local involvement and actions. In general terms however, it seems that a greater exchange of experiences and didactic proposals could mean enrichment, improvement and economy of human, didactic and financial resources. Something similar also applies to the training of church workers as well as to continued education.

In the last years we are rediscovering our responsibility in training teachers for the public schools. The creation of the Ecumenical Institute for Graduate Studies, the recognition of the Escola Superior de Teologia by the Ministry of Culture and Education, the projects for creating Lutheran colleges, such as in Joinville, Curitiba, Três de Maio and Ivoti, mark a new beginning in our mission on the educational level. In the same way I want to register initiatives taking place in the reflection, awareness raising and support to Lutheran politicians. These are concrete signs of investment in the universal priesthood of all believers. They need a greater coordination and intensification. They need to be broadened to include the areas of ethics in medicine and biogenetics. Perspectives for action are opened up in these areas that can only be confronted at an ecumenical level and in cooperation with other organizations concerned with the preservation of creation and the promotion of life. Certainly we could and should give an important contribution based on the Lutheran theology of justification by grace and faith to orientate and put a new dimension on the social, economic, cultural and religious market.

In this way we are emphasizing the broadness of the missionary challenge in training and education. This challenge consists of raising the awareness and equipping the congregation and society of their dignity and responsibility, aimed at Christian citizenship and respectively at its universal priesthood of all believers. The church workers, in their congregational circles, participate in this same mission and prioritize training lay collaborators, having as their goal to put into practice this awareness raising and equipping task. With this in mind pre-consultations are being carried out in the areas of Formal Education, Leadership Training; Church Worker Training, Personnel Planning.

**8.2.6 - This mission demands a spirituality** that distinguishes and shows an attitude of prayer with the work of participative planning. We are dealing with a change in mentality that goes beyond our understanding and our doing, without eliminating it. Let us recall Phil 2:12-13, where Paul warns us to invest all our efforts in our salvation, *with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*. This dialectic between divine works and human works cannot be diluted on either side. If I recall correctly, it was Luther who said: *We need to pray with such force as if everything depended on God and we need to work with such dedication as if everything depended on our efforts*. In this way we give God first and last place and we take on our responsibility to study, plan, carry out and reevaluate our missionary presence and action.

Every missionary project should aim at creating congregations. For it is in the congregation and through it that the Holy Spirit creates faith, gathers people together and makes them brothers and sisters. It is in and through the congregation that the Holy Spirit welcomes, accepts, forgives and cures. This is mission through living. Mission makes the congregation look beyond its horizons and makes it transcend social, cultural, religious, racial and national boundaries. In this sense, we have initiatives that take in single mothers, persons with disabilities or with the HIV virus, recuperation centers for chemically dependent people, or even sponsorship of a parish in the Transamazon area or of a church worker in Mozambique. This is mission done through *getting out of the secure house*, that is, *mission done through "go ye!"* *Mission through living out* and *mission through transcending boundaries* are two faces of the same coin. They cannot be separated. They walk hand in hand.

In my point of view we do not need to discuss much as relates to the definitions of the terms, evangelization and mission. It is enough to remember that in ancient times evangelization referred to awakening and reviving dormant members, aiming at mission through life example and through *go ye*. One also talked about internal and external mission, the latter also implied transcending geographical boundaries. These geographical limits hardly exist anymore today. It is important therefore to recapture the two dimensions of the internal revival aiming at transcending cultural, social, religious and national boundaries.

The signs of transcending boundaries are still small and few. We are still too accustomed to receiving resources from outside. These, however are not tending to increase but on the contrary, they are already diminishing, and so we will have less conditions to maintain certain missionary projects for medium to long term periods, and we will be much less able to embrace new challenges that are in front of us.

Confronted with this we need to reevaluate our missionary priorities. Our slogan categorically affirms: *No mission without a congregation and no congregation without a mission!* This should make us question whether our projects were really aimed at creating missionary congregations. Today we are being questioned as to whether it is responsible to maintain a certain project when, after 10 or 15 years of support from the outside, it has still not attained financial autonomy. Are we adequately counting on our own resources such as sponsorships and internal partnerships? The reciprocal relationships would certainly gain in intensity and mutual commitment. This would revert back into a blessing for the donating congregation as well as for the receiving missionary field. The latter, through the new forms of

congregational life that it is practicing, could enrich and challenge the traditional congregation and facilitate its opening up to people from outside its circles.

**8.2.7 - Mission implies liturgical renewal.** God became a person in a specific time and place. God took on the form of the context and within it manifested the mystery of the eternal. Consequently the liturgy also needs to be contextualize based on and within the universal paradigms of Christian worship within the Lutheran comprehension. Precisely Christian freedom, the fruit of justification by grace and faith, opens up for us a broad field for liturgical creativity. It expresses itself in understandable language, music and rhythms that have to do with people's feelings, communication resources that also reach the other senses other than the auditory one. Being that God is the center, the starting point and the arrival point of a Christian worship service and that in it he incarnates in a palpable way, the congregational members can and should have active participation.

The pastoral ministry has the role of presiding over the congregational action. In this presiding there must be the commitment to the Lutheran confessionality, to avoid the perversion and alienation of the liturgy. Toward this end it is good to remember the document *IECLB no pluralismo religioso* (IECLB in the religious pluralism) which is now being printed and which will give some definitions and orientations. The next Forum on Liturgy will elaborate a proposal of liturgical guidelines, to be evaluated by the XXII Church Assembly.

**8.2.8 - Mission demands a deepening of the relationship between faith and life.** Just as we need to teach how to read the Bible based on life and for life, so also we need to learn and teach how to relate faith with all the spheres of life. All the commandments are summarized in the first commandment. God presents Godself to us as that being who freed, frees and will free us from slavery to freedom, from the landless state to a dignified life on one's own land, from non-life and death to life. This is the why God is the only one worthy to have first and last place in our lives. We are free and motivated to *fear and love God above all else*. Based on this, all things and all people will receive their due place and value.

-From this results dedicating time to God. Today time seems to be more precious than money. Where this is taught and recognized in a congregation, the members will have time to read the daily devotional and the Bible; time to participate in the congregational meetings. The one who has time for God will have time for others and for themselves.



- It is equally important to teach how to relate faith with the gifts. God distributed among the members of the congregation all the gifts necessary for God's mission, both for mission by life example and for mission through transcending boundaries. The vision of the shared ministry seeks to free us from the mentality of *Jack knows and does it all*, aiming at cooperation and complementation in a multidisciplinary team.

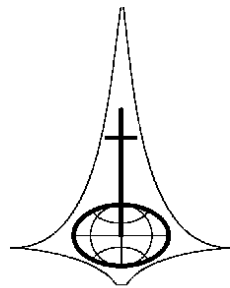
- Where God is the Liberating Lord, God is also Lord over goods and money. This liberation seems to be the most difficult, and as with all conversions, needs to happen daily. Relating faith and money is an expression of Christian freedom. This should be the subject of group studies and of preaching in worship services and above all, the subject of the conversations in the regular visitation to the homes of members. Talking about tithing should not induce us into a legalistic mentality of a Pharisee who ignores the relativity of the offering. To the contrary it is important that we prioritize the proportionality, the spontaneity and grateful generosity of the contribution, propagated in 2 Cor 8 and 9.

The more we work seriously with this issue of the relationship between faith and money, the more we will grow not only in the joy of giving, contributing and sharing, but also in a more evangelical salary policy orientated much more by needs. As a consequence of this the congregations will participate with more joy and motivation in the synod, national and even foreign missionary tasks, thus reducing the central budget.

**8.3 - To conclude** this exercise of refocusing and deepening the consensus that we have already reached, I see that we have sufficient foundations, goals and resources to pray together: *Spirit, pour out the divine force; light in us the flame of Pentecostal faith*, that is, the faith of Pentecost that transcends boundaries; *make us announce*, in words and actions of solidarity and sharing, *to the world your splendor, that we may give witness to your salvation, Lord* (HPD 76:6). Do not permit us to hide behind theoretical discussions, as the scribe tried to do when he asked *Who is my neighbor?* Free us from all ties, that we may plan missionary congregations within the limits of the IECLB as well as outside of its boundaries. May it be so!



**Presidência da IECLB**  
**Caixa Postal 2876**  
**90001-970 PORTO ALEGRE, RS-Brasil**  
**e-mail: presidencia@ieclb.org.br**  
**tel.: (51) 2213433 fax: (51) 225 7244**



***"Those who know what  
they are seeking and  
where they want to get  
to, find the right paths  
and way to proceed."***

(Thiago de Melo)

Systematization committee: Ani Cheila Fick Kummer, Enos Heidemann, Oneide Bobsin, Walter Altmann and Günter K.F. Wehrmann.

Porto Alegre, from June to November of 2000.