

# 1 *Inviting - inspiring - evangelical*

---

## 2 The Understanding of Mission of the

### 3 Evangelical Church of Westphalia

#### 4 facing the challenges of the 21st century

5  
6 *Easter 2021*

7 *With these theses, developed in a working group of members of the Standing Committee on World*  
8 *Mission, Ecumenism and Global Responsibility and the Standing Theological Committee, we give an*  
9 *account of our understanding of mission. We ask about current religious-cultural challenges and*  
10 *social developments, clarify the mandate of the mission given to us by God in dialogue with*  
11 *ecumenical partners and draw conclusions for the process of intercultural development of our church.*

#### 12 13 I.

#### 14 **God's mission**

15 Mission is the "heartbeat of the church".<sup>1</sup> We are commissioned to show people "the truth and  
16 beauty of the Christian message" (EKD Synod Leipzig 1999).

17 As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia we know that we are involved in God's mission (*missio Dei*).  
18 God commissions and sends us. This mission is valid in ecumenical solidarity in our own Westphalian  
19 context as well as in the fellowship with our partner churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin  
20 America. "Learning from one another worldwide is important for our church's understanding of  
21 mission today."<sup>2</sup>

22 We gratefully receive ideas for mission from global Christianity, put across by our partner churches as  
23 well as by the many new churches that have arisen here through migration. At the same time, in our  
24 society we increasingly encounter people of other religions and people to whom faith means nothing  
25 or who fundamentally reject religions. This situation challenges us to ask about the attractiveness  
26 and the special message that we as a Protestant regional church in Germany have for our fellow  
27 human beings in the pluralistic society of the 21st century.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, Mission und Evangelisation, in: E. Jüngel, Ganz werden. Theologische Erörterungen V, Tübingen 2003, 115-136, 116.

<sup>2</sup> Mission Statement of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, in: Glauben aus gutem Grund, June 2006.

29 **Thesis 1**

30

31 **Mission proceeds from the triune God (*missio Dei*). God comes into the world in the Son and the**  
32 **Spirit. People were sent out on God's mission in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.**  
33 **We are also part of this mission. The church invites people to trust the word of God and to join**  
34 **God's church.**

35

36 Christian mission did not begin with the mission activities of the Christian churches, but with God's  
37 own self. God calls the Lord's *"the earth and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it"* (Ps  
38 24:1 - NRSV). God gifted human beings with specific abilities and entrusted them with a special role  
39 in relation to their fellow creatures, to cultivate the earth and care for creation. (Gen 1:28; 2:15)

40 But humans often fail to carry out their specific mission. In the Bible there are many stories telling of  
41 God's various attempts to prepare a way back for humans. We can say that it is God's own mission to  
42 convince people to turn back to God, to live with God. In this mission, God sent prophets to the  
43 people of Israel. In the same mission, God sent Jesus Christ, God's Son. In John's Gospel, Jesus says,  
44 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not*  
45 *perish but may have eternal life"* (John 3:16).<sup>3</sup> And he adds, *"God did not send the Son into the world*  
46 *to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (John 3:17).

47 The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit as announced by the Son, *"When the Advocate comes,*  
48 *whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify*  
49 *on my behalf"* (John 15:26).

50 So the core of Christian mission lies in the divine Self, who sent the Son and the Spirit to humanity,  
51 turning to the world that has turned away from God, and is lost without reconnection to God.

52 Like the term "mission", the term "evangelisation" is rooted in the Bible. While "mission" means the  
53 broader "being sent out", "evangelisation" refers more specifically to witnessing to the gospel of  
54 Jesus Christ. This task is explicitly expressed at the end of Matthew's Gospel: *"Go therefore and make*  
55 *disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and*  
56 *teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to*  
57 *the end of the age."*

58 As a Protestant church, we see it as our mission to spread the Word of God. We preach and invite  
59 people to trust the Word of God and join a congregation. We invite people to our services and create  
60 inspiring opportunities to encounter the fullness and beauty of the biblical message.

61

62 Credible communication of the gospel takes place both through individuals and in the public  
63 presentation of positions with a Christian profile. This also includes credible action by the church as  
64 an institution and the ability to live in the spirit of basic Christian convictions and to assume  
65 responsibility in society and the world.

66

---

<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: the Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (1989).

67

## II.

68

### The challenge of modern society:

69

### Protestant as one voice among many

70 The Evangelical Church of Westphalia is convinced that all denominations and religions can and  
71 should contribute to positive change in society. In advocating for more justice and the protection of  
72 life support systems, it naturally works with communities of other faiths or with people who have no  
73 religion.

74

#### Thesis 2

76 **The religious and ideological pluralism in our society and in its digital social networks presents our**  
77 **church with a double task and gives it the opportunity (1) to affirm diversity and religious freedom**  
78 **and at the same time to contribute and strengthen its own Protestant profile, (2) to join people of**  
79 **other religions and worldviews in standing up for integration, participation and a sustainable**  
80 **development of society and (3) to facilitate an engaging impact of Christian faith on society and the**  
81 **world.**

82

83 The positive appreciation of denominational, religious and ideological diversity in Westphalia  
84 includes a respectful regard for the freedom of other religious and ideological certainties. We must  
85 resist any kind of coercion in matters of conscience, and of faith or religious belief. Like all churches  
86 and religious communities, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia is challenged to work towards a  
87 flourishing and constructive living together in society.

88 Every person should have the opportunity to live in freedom and autonomy according to his or her  
89 religious or philosophical convictions, to represent them publicly within the framework of the laws  
90 that apply to everyone, and to be able to change them if necessary. We as a Protestant church are  
91 grateful - especially against the background of a problematic history of the churches in Europe - that  
92 this is guaranteed for all in Germany, and we advocate for the worldwide commitment to religious  
93 freedom as a core human right. Everyone should be free to decide which religion to follow, if any.

94 In a special way we hear about the plight and persecution of Christians worldwide, pray for them and  
95 support their churches. We also call on German politicians to outlaw this form of human rights  
96 violation, not only with regard to Christians as the most persecuted religious community in the  
97 world, but also with regard to all those persecuted on the basis of their religion or belief.

98 At the same time as contributing to positive change in society, our church is challenged to contribute  
99 and develop its own Protestant profile – not in face of pluralism, but in a context of religious and  
100 ideological diversity. Respect and religious freedom apply even when the truth of one's own faith is  
101 questioned. That leads to a permanent tension - indissoluble in pluralism - because the truth of faith  
102 is always bound to a person's life and perspective, as is every religious truth. It is a truth of life that  
103 proves itself in the person's individual and community life and that seeks to be appropriated  
104 individually. It remains the concern and task of each and every member, as well as of the entire  
105 Evangelical Church of Westphalia, to make this truth comprehensible and appealing, inviting and  
106 inspiring in the multifaceted public discourse and in conversation with our fellow human beings.

107 Increasing digitalization is adding to social pluralism. Religious and Christian questions and topics are  
108 discussed in different places and individually. Church pronouncements rarely meet with a response  
109 here. For missional work in the digital space, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia faces the task of  
110 recruiting people in its own ranks who are at home in social networks and at the same time have a  
111 desire to engage in discussions on Christian or religious topics as authentic persons. It is important to  
112 train them, accompany them pastorally and provide them with a pool of topics, positions and  
113 arguments.

114

115

### III.

116

#### Inspiring Pilgrimage Community:

117

#### Learning from each other in a global perspective

#### 118 Thesis 3

119 **As a learning and pilgrimage community we are on the move ecumenically with many churches -**  
120 **within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European**  
121 **Churches, the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and especially with the**  
122 **member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and the Association of Christian**  
123 **Churches (ACK). In encounters, in common life and celebration we are connected and gift each**  
124 **other mutual inspiration. This solidarity forms the global and ecumenical resonance space for our**  
125 **missional work.**

126

127 When it comes to the topic of "mission", the Evangelical Church of Westphalia is on the move with  
128 churches with which it has close ties. It has learned a great deal about mission especially from the  
129 churches that were once founded by German mission societies. But sharing with Protestant partner  
130 churches abroad, which bear witness to their faith as a social or denominational minority, is likewise  
131 extremely stimulating and fruitful.<sup>4</sup>

132 With their different experiences and social and cultural contexts, they all form the global and  
133 ecumenical resonance space for the question of how the Evangelical Church of Westphalia  
134 understands its mission. Most formative for this self-understanding is probably the membership of  
135 the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in the United Evangelical Mission (UEM).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The EKvW is connected with a number of different churches around the world. These include the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the United States of America and the Evangelical Church on the Rio de la Plata (IERP) in Argentina and Paraguay. Intensive relations also exist with the Church of Scotland, the Waldensian and Methodist Church in Italy, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Transylvania, Romania, the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Hungary, the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Belarus Orthodox Church. In addition, it has ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Church, various Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, Protestant Free Churches and Pentecostal Churches - not to forget the international congregations belonging to the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia.

<sup>5</sup> As a member of the United Evangelical Mission - Communion of Churches in Three Continents (UEM), the EKvW is closely connected with 17 churches in Asia, 15 churches in Africa and with five churches in Germany as well as the v. Bodelschwingschen Stiftungen Bethel.

136 The great success of the missionaries sent by the UEM in the late 19th century and at the beginning  
137 of the 20th century was based, for example in Tanzania, on the fact that they succeeded in  
138 combining indigenous traditions with an invitation to the Christian faith without pushing either side  
139 to give up its identity. This created a space for possible and necessary change.

140

#### 141 **Thesis 4**

142 **Mission happens - especially in critical reappraisal of its eventful history – in a dialogical and**  
143 **participatory manner, in partnership and on an equal footing. Only this way do people encounter**  
144 **each other as protagonists of their own lives, and this is the only way for genuine encounters and**  
145 **conversations to take place.**

146

147 Mission in a global setting today unites churches of different contexts in their common mission to  
148 communicate to people the liberating power of faith. This also requires a critical reappraisal of the  
149 eventful history of mission. The history of the UEM was also a continuation of the history of  
150 European Christianity in Africa and Asia. Increasing sensitivity for the consequences of colonialism  
151 shed light on this narrow Eurocentric view, too. Intercultural discourses also revealed latent power  
152 relations and the limited possibilities of the colonized population to speak for themselves.

153 For our common mission today it is essential to address, name and reappraise the oppression caused  
154 by supremacy and injustice, and violations of human dignity caused by discrimination and exclusion.  
155 From this can grow the healing power to understand the deep inner connection between joint  
156 missional proclamation and a corresponding practice of solidarity in life, and to take responsibility  
157 together for the just shaping of sustainable life together in church and society today.

158 At the same time, our common history of mission also reveals intercultural "third spaces"<sup>6</sup> in which  
159 the different cultures meet. These spaces enable mutual questioning and translation, in which  
160 "hybrid cultures" emerge, offering all participants a new, common potential for development. These  
161 hybrid cultures open up new spaces in which people, as subjects of their own way of life, meet each  
162 other freely and openly as equal partners in the common mission – in a dialogical and participatory  
163 manner, in partnership and on an equal footing.

164 The Evangelical Church of Westphalia<sup>7</sup> gladly takes up the various attitudes and approaches to  
165 mission in its renewed understanding of mission. In the spirit of the declaration of the 1999 EKD  
166 Synod, it is concerned to put "the theme of faith and the missionary task in first place" and to give  
167 "space to a variety of ways and approaches". It is interested in cooperation and mutual  
168 complementation of these different ways and approaches.

---

<sup>6</sup> H. K. Bhabha: The location of culture, 1994. The central terms there are called in the original "hybrid third space", "in-between-spaces" or also "interstitial passage", op. cit. , 1-2, 5.

<sup>7</sup> On the typology of different approaches to mission see D. J. Bosch, Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, New York 1991. Fundamental to the current consensus in the understanding of mission among churches worldwide is the theological policy statement of the World Council of Churches (WCC) adopted in 2013 at its Assembly in Busan: Together towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes (<https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>).

169 For the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, mission today takes place in symmetrical relationships of  
170 people who encounter each other as autonomous persons, that is, in a genuine conversation.  
171 Christians, congregations and the church as a whole live together with others and strangers  
172 (conviviality).<sup>8</sup> It is about a living, learning and celebrating community in specific historical, cultural  
173 and geographical contexts. Here encounters arise that lead to people understanding themselves  
174 better because they seek to understand one another.

175 Mission can only take place in the awareness of entering into contact and conversation with people  
176 who are regarded as in charge of their own existence and life story. Hence conversation is the first  
177 and most appropriate form of mission in the sense of verbal communication of the gospel.

178 For the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, the issue of mission today arises less in connection with  
179 distant countries than with the people who live in Westphalia. How does a Protestant regional  
180 church enter into conversation about faith and religious experiences in general, about the quest for  
181 God and meaning, about the truths of life and hopes, with people who do not attend Christian  
182 services and church events, who are far removed from the Christian faith or who cannot relate to it?  
183 The current transformation of our own society into a multi- and transcultural reality offers the  
184 opportunity for the Evangelical Church of Westphalia to seek and hold a free conversation with such  
185 people about the Christian faith in the context of living together in today's society. There are many  
186 opportunities and points of contact for this. It is important to interest and involve people, inviting  
187 them - in all freedom - to make up their own minds about what the church has to offer.

## 188 Thesis 5

189 **As our church moves towards intercultural development and participates in God's mission, our**  
190 **mandate is to communicate in an inviting and clear manner what we believe and stand for: the**  
191 **communication of the gospel of God's diverse, colourful grace. It embraces the diversity of life**  
192 **projects and ways of living in today's society.**

193 The society in which the Evangelical Church of Westphalia exists is shaped by the presence of many  
194 fellow human beings who, either themselves or their families and forebears, came to Westphalia  
195 from other countries and other cultures. Many of them often had no historical experience of  
196 Protestant Christianity at all and, now too, have little opportunity for encounter. The Evangelical  
197 Church of Westphalia has frequently kept its core message and the spiritual centre of its existence  
198 inside its church premises. In this respect, its members have not perceived those fellow Westphalians  
199 who do not attend its services and events as people like themselves who are also bothered by  
200 religious questions and searching, and who also have spiritual experiences worth talking about. Self-  
201 critically, we regret when our communication of the gospel of God's manifold, colourful grace (1  
202 Peter 4:10) has not always been successful in the past, especially towards people from other  
203 cultures, countries and religions.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Theo Sundermeier, Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute, in: W. Huber/D. Ritschl/Th. Sundermeier (eds.), Ökumenische Existenz heute (Munich, 1986), 49-100.

204 Around the world, millions of people and co-created nature suffer from depths of violence, injustice  
205 and exploitation. God's mission increasingly opens our eyes to recognizing the poor and oppressed as  
206 agents of their own spiritual, political and communal well-being. In the cross of Christ, God makes  
207 the divine Self vulnerable, and the spiritual power of the Risen Lord frees us to perceive God's  
208 "*mission from the margins*" and to be transformed by it.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in communicating the gospel,  
209 we are called to embody God's unconditional love in both our words and our actions.

210

## 211 **Thesis 6**

212 **In our bonds with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) we experience the partnership and**  
213 **fellowship of churches from Africa, Asia and Europe on an equal footing. It shows us opportunities**  
214 **for intercultural development in which it is possible to combine diverse traditions with an**  
215 **invitation to Christian faith in such a way that all sides preserve their sense of identity.**

216

217 From the very beginning, the UEM was internationally oriented and therefore always very well  
218 informed about the life situations of people in distant parts of the world. In the "United in Mission"  
219 (UiM) process launched in 1978, the UEM was the first German mission society to transform itself  
220 into an international communion of churches in three continents for the purpose of joint missional  
221 action by its members. Its new constitution came into effect at the first General Assembly in 1996. It  
222 guarantees equal rights and participation of all members in the governing bodies and decision-  
223 making processes, as well as with regard to the assets of the former German mission society, which  
224 are jointly owned on an entirely international basis. All the members contribute to the financing of  
225 their common mission, each according to their capacities.

226 "Together these churches shall proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of all people and shall  
227 face the challenges of present-day mission. In a world torn apart, they commit themselves to remain  
228 members of the one Body of Christ and therefore to grow together into a worshipping, learning and  
229 serving community; share gifts, insights and responsibilities; call all people to repentance and new  
230 life; bear witness to the Kingdom of God in striving for justice, peace and the integrity of creation."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> cf. World Council of Churches, *Together for Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Contexts*, adopted by the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, South Korea, 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>. Here we refer explicitly to section 107: "We affirm that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all. Marginalized [...] people have a special gift to discern what news is good for them and what news is bad for their endangered life. In order to commit ourselves to God's life-giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what serves life-giving and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity, and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins."

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). *Communion of Churches in Three Continents*, of 27 September 2018, § 2 (2 b-c).

231 Living, learning, celebrating and praying together within the UEM community takes place through  
232 partnership programmes, North-South and South-North staff exchanges, living for a while in  
233 ecumenical communities, international meetings and long-term training at venues in Africa, Asia and  
234 Europe. A method of Global Learning in Ecumenical Perspective (GLEP) has been developed in recent  
235 years. Missional life and work in the spirit of GLEP takes place in a setting of diversity. Challenges,  
236 opportunities and issues are identified together, with plans and projects of holistic mission and  
237 evangelisation being likewise devised jointly in the respective contexts. This enables intercultural  
238 developments in which it is possible to combine diverse traditions with an invitation to Christian faith  
239 in such a way that all sides can preserve their identity and continue to develop it with mutual  
240 respect.

241

## 242 **Thesis 7**

243 **The congregations belonging to the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia**  
244 **inspire us through their lively worship services, their lived spirituality and, not least, through their**  
245 **focus on mission. Ecumenical encounters call for intercultural "in-between spaces" that shed light**  
246 **on cultural narrow-mindedness and also reflect the multifaceted richness of Christian witness.**

247

248 When it comes to the intercultural development of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we have  
249 inspiring places for discussion and experience in the international congregations, which are  
250 increasingly to be found in the conurbations but also in remote regions.

251 Many of these congregations have emerged from global migration. Some of them use our church  
252 facilities as places of worship. The congregations united in the International Church Convention of  
253 Rhineland-Westphalia see themselves as part of the Body of Christ and have agreed on cooperating  
254 ecumenically.

255 Basically, they continue that which has characterized Christianity from the beginning, namely  
256 transformative inculturation processes. Some international congregations maintain the traditions of  
257 their countries and churches of origin or even see themselves as their mission base. Others have  
258 members from a variety of churches of origin, of different cultures and denominations, which  
259 determines the identity of the respective congregation in Germany. A third group, often influenced  
260 by the generations born here, sees itself at the same time as indigenous, international and  
261 interdenominational, and moves in intercultural "in-between spaces". Furthermore, the second  
262 generation of the migration congregations often belongs to the over-40s generation and thus  
263 possibly offers entry points for reaching out to the very generations that are often missing in our  
264 church.

265 Finally, Westphalia has a very large group of ethnic German migrants from Russia, some of whom  
266 belong to the Evangelical Church and some of whom have formed their own congregations. The  
267 Farsi-speaking Christians are a special case. As a rule, they have found a home in German regional  
268 churches. Faith courses are offered for people who have come to Westphalia in growing numbers  
269 from Iran recent years and have been baptised here; a Persian-speaking pastor has been employed  
270 to help them integrate into the existing local congregations.

271 Many of the international congregations are small in number and are held together by common  
272 migration stories, experiences and life situations. Christian faith is a central component of personal  
273 identity for them, and becomes an important identifying factor especially in the diaspora.

274 Intercultural encounters challenge us to define constructive relationships and do contextual  
275 theology. The liveliness of intercultural worship services, the lived spirituality of their members, the  
276 expression of emotions, the ability to talk about faith, and the hearty welcome given by the  
277 congregation undoubtedly become ecumenical enrichments of our own parish and church practice  
278 and make it possible, despite some differences, to be church together.

279 Successful Christian intercultural encounters create interstitial passages that go beyond historically  
280 developed and institutional structures. They can help to reveal our cultural and traditional limitations  
281 and at the same time facilitate the path into Western pluralism for congregations with a history of  
282 migration. Each one can strengthen their own profile, and the multifaceted nature of the gospel  
283 comes out clearly. Essential elements in these processes of encounter are mutual appreciation and  
284 our own readiness to change.

285

286

#### IV.

287

#### Encouragement:

288

#### Asking questions about God in the world and with people

289 For our partner churches in the global South, mission is a natural thing to do. We too faced the  
290 question of how mission and proclaiming the gospel can take place in Westphalia. Precisely our  
291 pluralistic society offers the opportunity to enter into conversation with people who are  
292 uninterested, sceptical or even critical of the Christian faith.

293 Although mission has been understood as a mission of the whole church and has also found its way  
294 into church constitutions, people are often hesitant about putting it into practice.

295 In a lecture to the 1999 EKD Synod, Eberhard Jüngel described this discrepancy between aspiration  
296 and reality as follows: "If the church had a heart, a heart that still beat, then evangelization and  
297 mission would determine the rhythm of the church's heart to a great extent. ... But if mission and  
298 evangelization are not, or do not again become, the business of the whole church, then something is  
299 wrong with the church's heartbeat."

300 What does it take to make this heart beat?

301

#### Thesis 8

303 **The church's mandate to engage in mission commits and encourages us to communicate the gospel**  
304 **in an inviting way. In listening, praying, celebrating together, we set out ready to change and to**  
305 **engage - especially in dialogue with people of all generations, other religions and worldviews. We**  
306 **want to show what we love and understand what sustains us.**

307

308 **1. Listening**

309 As a church of the word, we live from God's Word. This is revealed in Bible reading, worship and  
310 preaching. But listening to God is much more. What God is saying to us today, how God speaks to  
311 people, is not immediately clear. It requires, first and foremost, an attitude of listening. Encouraging  
312 listening means opening up spiritual spaces, making church buildings available for meditation and  
313 prayer, encouraging listening in the public sphere, bringing people into contact with the sacred. This  
314 should precede all speaking, all communication of the gospel. That is we start with the  
315 encouragement to listen to God's voice.

316 In order to be heard, we must also listen and discern very precisely what people are currently  
317 concerned about, where they ask existential questions, seek accompaniment, consolation and  
318 prospects of interpretation, ask about God and have expectations of religion, Christianity, the church,  
319 the community.

320 Becoming a listening church does not mean withdrawing, but, rather, turning to those around us,  
321 placing ourselves at the side of those who are marginalized, immigrants, long-established, the  
322 educated, young, old – quietly feeling how they feel, enduring their questions and complaints. A  
323 listening church is a pastoral and supportive church. It exposes itself to contradictions and suffering  
324 and so bears witness to the Christian message of overcoming suffering through the cross and  
325 resurrection of Christ.

326 In listening, the church seizes the opportunity to pause and reflect. This way it is preserved from rash  
327 attempts at interpretation and activism. Listening can become quality silence that has a more lasting  
328 effect than many an announcement.

329 Listening also means turning away from a model of mission where there is a direct line from the  
330 church to the missionaries; listening perceives the agency of the other person in shaping their life.

331

332 **2. Praying**

333 A listening church is also a praying church. It invites us to practice a spiritual attitude that creates  
334 gaps in time and space in order to seek God in silence and to wait for God's voice. It brings before  
335 God what it has heard in turning to its fellow human beings – in intercession and thanksgiving. In its  
336 intercessions, it brings to God's ears the questions it has heard, the physical and spiritual need it has  
337 perceived, and the spiritual emptiness. A listening church thanks God for the people it has been able  
338 to listen to - and also for what it has been able to discern in them in terms of faith, love and hope.

339

340 **3. Talking**

341 People who are indifferent to faith often show no need to talk about religion and may feel more  
342 threatened by the churches' need to communicate. A missional attitude sees all people in the light of  
343 what Christ has done for them and for us, but is also aware that how they respond is up to the Holy  
344 Spirit and people's freedom of choice. Because all discernment is limited, witness to faith always  
345 happens as dialogue, in a learning community with both religiously committed and distanced people.  
346 To quote Fulbert Steffensky: "Mission is showing who you are and what you love. "

347 Telling of faith experiences lends itself as a way of talking about God. Telling a story helps us to  
348 interpret and digest it. It is therefore a form of non-unilateral confession. Ideally, this can lead to  
349 contact or even an interweaving of God's story in my life with the life story of other people. In this  
350 way, the Bible is also a book of stories.

351

#### 352 **4. Celebrating**

353 The most visible signs of our Christian-based society are weekends with Sunday rest, the church  
354 festivals and feast days in the course of the year, and the rites of passage that a person can make use  
355 of at the decisive stages of their life. Here the church can reach out to people in a special way,  
356 inviting them to be touched by the gospel and to place themselves under God's blessing. We hold  
357 services of worship and blessing in order to celebrate the fullness of life and to rejoice in the beauty  
358 of creation and the richness of the earth, to let the hope of the message of the resurrection shine  
359 through and to promise courage and confidence for coping with everyday life. The presence of Christ  
360 is celebrated in baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church festivals are highlights in the year.

361 Festivals and celebrations exist in all cultures and religions. They seem to be made for getting to  
362 know each other. Hospitality is a special characteristic of many religions, and so it makes sense to  
363 invite interested individuals and also communities of other faiths in the district or neighbourhood to  
364 one's own celebrations. Jointly organised district festivals create informal opportunities for different  
365 groups to meet in the social space; in an open atmosphere they can make contacts, exchange  
366 information or simply get to know each other.

367

#### 368 **5. Setting out**

369 In our society it is difficult for us to speak about our own faith and to put vital questions, experiences  
370 and doubts into words. Missional action also consists in refraining from giving clear and simple  
371 answers, as are often demanded today. Christian faith should flow into dealing, and living, with  
372 complex or oppressive problems and experiences.

373 The offers of the Fresh X movement are contextual and milieu-oriented, with the ambition to address  
374 religiously distanced people and to share life with them. Here new places of encounter with the  
375 Christian faith are sought and found.

376 In the social networks, a scene has developed in recent years that discusses religious issues. What is  
377 special about these formats is that they are independent of denominational affiliation, official  
378 church, membership, origin or other factors. In podcasts and on Instagram channels, the actors  
379 comment on everyday matters and social issues, and bring their personal religiously based  
380 interpretations into the conversation. The personal references are more important in these  
381 encounters than ultimate explanations.

382 For the church to set out into the digital expanse, it also needs the courage to be imperfect. The  
383 discussion about the question of a digital ecclesiology is still in its infancy. Digital formats offer many  
384 and varied formats for a lively communication of the gospel. It is therefore very welcome that a start  
385 is now being made on developing a strategy of "church in digital spaces".

386

387 **6. Engaging and being changed**

388 Our partner churches that have emerged from mission, as well as the congregations of the  
389 International Convention of Churches, encourage us to stand up for mission and to break new  
390 ground. Together we are learning what it means to be included in God's mission (*missio Dei*). We  
391 understand it as our task to bring the gospel to the people. But this happens in different ways and  
392 with different voices.

393 In the context of intercultural encounter, we see, for example, that Asian and African congregations  
394 remain vital through worship services and discipleship programmes. New free churches in other  
395 cultural milieus concentrate their work on worship services and encounters in small groups. Here the  
396 Evangelical Church can learn to emphasize the aspect of lively celebration and living experience in  
397 worship services in contrast to a rather stiff liturgy. The experience of successful trans- and cross-  
398 cultural encounters in art, music and sport can encourage us to have such experiences in the  
399 religious field as well. From global ecumenism comes Bible-sharing, which makes it possible to  
400 connect hermeneutical approaches from different cultures in a participatory way. From a mission  
401 point of view, it would certainly be helpful to develop cross-milieu and intercultural programmes.

402 Concern for the future and working to combating climate change, commitment to justice, peace and  
403 a sustainable lifestyle – these topics unite many different social groups and milieus. Taking  
404 committed action on vital future and justice-based issues is also a strong concern for the Evangelical  
405 Church of Westphalia, arising directly from its theological convictions. The joint commitment and  
406 cooperation of church and civil society groups and initiatives leads to cross-milieu encounters that  
407 spur a strong desire for change. This should also have an impact on institutional church structures.

408

409 **7. Show what we love and understand what sustains us (encourage dialogue)**

410 In order to make an effective contribution to a peaceful and just society, it is advisable for Protestant  
411 church parishes to cooperate with local congregations and religious communities of other  
412 denominations. This requires knowledge of the cultural and religious backgrounds of the respective  
413 partners. Conversations and encounters create an atmosphere of trust, which is the basic  
414 prerequisite for any dialogue.

415 Dialogue, in its original sense, describes the official meeting of representatives of different religious  
416 communities. Mutual hospitality, bringing greetings at high festivals, as well as regular gatherings  
417 and dialogue events should therefore not only be left to a few experts, but should be included on the  
418 agenda of all presbyteries, district synod boards and other church governing bodies up to and  
419 including the church leadership.

420 All participants should adopt an attitude of interest and respect. Interreligious dialogue means  
421 bringing one's own religious beliefs into conversation with those of other faiths. In the process,  
422 unifying elements can be discovered in basic religious attitudes that go beyond mere understanding.  
423 That someone feels the desire to accept the other faith is not impossible. But that is not the aim of  
424 interreligious dialogue.

425 The fact that interreligious dialogue does not pursue the goal of conversion applies in a special way  
426 to the encounter with Judaism. As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia we know that we have a  
427 sibling bond with our Jewish fellow citizens. Article 1 of the Church Constitution refers to the triune  
428 God, "who makes the Church and Israel together his witnesses and heirs of his promise".

429 In the face of a horrific history of guilt on the part of the churches and Christianity against our Jewish  
430 brothers and sisters in faith, we are still filled with deep shame today. We are all the more grateful  
431 for the many initiatives and discussion forums with Jewish communities and people in Westphalia, in  
432 which we as a Protestant church can come more and more to understand ourselves as being  
433 together the people of God. We resolutely condemn any form of anti-Semitism and do our utmost to  
434 ensure that Jewish people can live and witness to their faith side by side with us, without  
435 discrimination and fear.

436

437

## V.

438

### Mandate

439 **As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we are sent to the people of our society as part of God's**  
440 **mission (*missio Dei*), to bear witness in our words and actions to God's love made human in Christ,**  
441 **and to his accompanying presence as the one Word of God. In view of the increasing**  
442 **denominational, religious and cultural diversity, we face the challenge to develop new forms of**  
443 **being church and of proclamation alongside the tried and tested ones. Christ, through the power of**  
444 **the Holy Spirit, commissions and empowers us to bring the message of God's free grace to all**  
445 **people (Barmen VI). The Evangelical Church of Westphalia accepts this challenge in ecumenical**  
446 **solidarity.**

447  
448  
449  
450  
  
451  
452  
  
453  
  
454  
455  
456  
457  
458  
  
459  
  
460  
461  
462  
463  
464  
465  
  
466  
  
467  
468  
469  
470  
471  
472  
473  
  
474  
  
475  
476  
477  
478  
479

## *Inviting - inspiring - evangelical*

### Theses on the Understanding of Mission in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in Face of the Challenges of the 21st Century - (DRAFT)

---

Mission is the "heartbeat of the church" (Eberhard Jüngel). We are commissioned to show people "the truth and beauty of the Christian message" (EKD Synod Leipzig 1999).

#### Thesis 1

**Mission proceeds from the triune God (*missio Dei*). God comes into the world in the Son and the Spirit. People were sent out on God's mission in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We are also part of this mission. The church invites people to trust the word of God and to join God's church.**

#### Thesis 2

**The religious and ideological pluralism in our society and in its digital social networks presents our church with a double task and gives it the opportunity (1) to affirm diversity and religious freedom *and* at the same time to contribute and strengthen its own Protestant profile, (2) to join people of other religions and worldviews in standing up for integration, participation *and* a sustainable development of society and (3) to facilitate an engaging impact of Christian faith on society and the world.**

#### Thesis 3

**As a learning and pilgrimage community we are on the move ecumenically with many churches - within the framework of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches, the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and especially with the member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and the Association of Christian Churches (ACK). In encounters, in common life and celebration we are connected and gift each other mutual inspiration. This solidarity forms the global and ecumenical resonance space for our missional work.**

#### Thesis 4

**Mission happens - especially in critical reappraisal of its eventful history – in a dialogical and participatory manner, in partnership and on an equal footing. Only this way do people encounter each other as protagonists of their own lives, and this is the only way for genuine encounters and conversations to take place.**

480 **Thesis 5**

481 **As our church moves towards intercultural development and participates in God's mission, our**  
482 **mandate is to communicate in an inviting and clear manner what we believe and stand for: the**  
483 **communication of the gospel of God's diverse, colourful grace. It embraces the diversity of life**  
484 **projects and ways of living in today's society.**

485 **Thesis 6**

486 **In our bonds with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) we experience the partnership and**  
487 **fellowship of churches from Africa, Asia and Europe on an equal footing. It shows us opportunities**  
488 **for intercultural development in which it is possible to combine diverse traditions with an**  
489 **invitation to Christian faith in such a way that all sides preserve their sense of identity.**

490 **Thesis 7**

491 **The congregations belonging to the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia**  
492 **inspire us through their lively worship services, their lived spirituality and, not least, through their**  
493 **focus on mission. Ecumenical encounters call for intercultural "in-between spaces" that shed light**  
494 **on cultural narrow-mindedness and also reflect the multifaceted richness of Christian witness.**

495 **Thesis 8**

496 **The church's mandate to engage in mission commits and encourages us to communicate the gospel**  
497 **in an inviting way. In listening, praying, celebrating together, we set out ready to change and to**  
498 **engage – especially in dialogue with people of all generations, other religions and worldviews. We**  
499 **want to show what we love and understand what sustains us.**

500 **As the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, we are sent to the people of our society as part of God's**  
501 **mission (*missio Dei*), to bear witness in our words and actions to God's love made human in Christ,**  
502 **and to his accompanying presence as the one Word of God. In view of the increasing**  
503 **denominational, religious and cultural diversity, we face the challenge to develop new forms of**  
504 **being church and of proclamation alongside the tried and tested ones. Christ, through the power of**  
505 **the Holy Spirit, commissions and empowers us to bring the message of God's free grace to all**  
506 **people (Barmen VI). The Evangelical Church of Westphalia accepts this challenge in ecumenical**  
507 **solidarity.**