

“LCMS Two-Kingdom Urban Missional Engagement: General Congregational Motivations, Expectations, and Guiding Principles”

Christian participation in the public realm is shaped by the prophetic stance. It means waiting for God in history, solitude and reflective action, attentiveness, and then availability for acting when the fitting time has come to fill the opening God has given. . . . All the human goods we long for—true freedom, equality, and especially community—are unreachable in our fallen history. They are tragic ideals. They are realizable only in God’s kingdom, which will come when God wills it. But these values are present proleptically in our history. We are called to strive for them in the way I outlined above.”¹

An LCMS engagement is Dynamic, Two-Kingdom Differentiated for the sake of Mission.

Establish Your Ears in the Neighborhood: Demonstrate that you are a listening presence. Contextualization is always a “street sport.”

- Prayer walks of the neighborhood develop a commitment to listen to the community and to pray for its welfare.
- Meet and Greet the businesses in the area as a normal part of being a part of the community, with the added twist of sharing with the people that you pray for their blessing regularly as you offer your card for more concrete prayer requests as you get to know your neighbors more concretely.
- Offer your church facilities as a place for the Community place in times of crisis, demonstrating hospitality as a natural extension of Christ’s love to the community.
- Hear both sides, both cries. Be a listening presence in the middle of real pain.
- Resist overarching narratives (General Statistics don’t prove/disprove what actually happens in a particular place and time.)
- Avoid the politicization of issues and concerns, if possible.
- Ask, “Who is most vulnerable at this moment?” and protect the vulnerable.
- For any action: Learn, know, and *then* respond with a left-hand kingdom voice.
- Find Ways To Demonstrate to the Community That the Congregation Is in This Place for the Community: Cone’s Call To Hear the Unheard, See the Unseen Because God Is Always Concerned about People, Places.

Know the Particular Issues of Your Particular Neighbor: Avoid generalities if at all possible.

- Seek to engage particular issues from a perspective of the common shared humanity, rooted in the created dignity of the image of God.
- Learn and teach the congregation to engage public issues with a left-hand kingdom language that incorporates the language of politics, sociology, psychology, and science in service to the moral position being argued on behalf of all.
- Always maintain the tension of “Speaking the truth in love” . . . seeking the truth for the sake of the community, or the people to be served.

¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 168–69.

Honor the Structures of God’s Left-Hand Kingdom Engagement: Learn what is in place that serves the neighborhood.

- Demonstrate a Reformation restraint towards public involvement that honors God’s activity for the sake of the community through various public vocations that He has established. (Rom. 13)
- Undergird Sphere Sovereignty – Become aware and intimately acquainted with the public structures in the neighborhood, police stations, social service agencies, hospitals, schools etc. Define their sphere of influence in the community and seek ways for the Church to be a blessing to their work.
- Subsidiarity – honor the hierarchy of accountability in public discussions concerning the individual, the family, and the state as it relates to public issues.
- Prioritize “person, family, community, then State, Nation” in terms solutions (Sowell structures) . . . from the biblical wisdom of the family as the foundational structure of society. Don’t immediately ramp up the “coercive” power solution of the state unless it is to curb violence and maintain civil order.
- Be able to engage these structures on their terms, left-hand kingdom language, for the sake of possible concrete solutions to community issues.
- Remember that such an engagement is always with a sense of hope even in the temporal realm because God is at work. It is also focused in its hope, valuing the vocations and even the neighbors God sends into our communities and lives!

Know the Uniqueness of the American Lutheran Experience: In general, and, specifically your congregation.

- Be prepared to deal with racial failures/bigotries that caricature the Church in the neighborhood
- Be prepared to relate our unique perspectives to issues of powerlessness, bigotry, as it relates to cultural tensions in assimilation and the faithfulness to sharing the Gospel.
- Be transparent concerning our theology as believers who are 100% sinners and saints, prepared to speak of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves sinners without exception of differentiation.

Be Committed To Move beyond LCMS Ethnocentrism: Note the tension of the sociological and missional perspective of this reality.

- Constantly Temper the Temptation towards security (which can lead to ethnocentrism and bigotry), makes our “form” of the Good News is the Good News
- Communicate the uniqueness of the Lutheran Confession of Jesus and His Gospel and be able to differentiate that from our particular ethnic encasement of His message in service to the neighborhood one serves.

Seek What the Church and the Community Have in Common: Create resources, partnership, educational opportunities that engage community issues from a biblical, *Imago Dei* perspective that seeks to bless.

- With a renewed commitment to the city, the LCMS could gather various voices, in coalitions of people groups possessing a similar constrained worldview who seek to engage the issues of the community.
- With limited resources and limited opportunities, make the best of any similar concerns and resources that the church and the community have in common.
 - i.e. quality education and the Lutheran emphasis on education, Put our educational system to work again in the city (parental choice).
 - i.e. Family disintegration and the Church's emphasis on strong families, good parenting,.
 - i.e. – *Imago Dei* issues centering on issues of human dignity, the value of work, the disciplines of virtue, and the freedom to serve reflecting of a healthy self- image.
- Offer left-hand kingdom oriented classes (World view classes), that bless both congregant and community, concerning issues like virtue, discipline, citizenship, from a Two-Kingdom perspective.
- In public issues share what's common. Speak a common language of morality, or ethical expectations, limitations etc. For the sake of the whole community with the motivation of love that comes from the Gospel of Jesus in one's life

Be Prepared for Public Caricature and Ressentiment: No matter how faithful and humble your ecclesial, public engagement is, be prepared for false caricatures.

- Overcome them with prayer and with a persevering love,
- Maintain a left-hand kingdom attention in the church of the concrete issues in the neighborhood
- Learn to engage community issues with left-hand kingdom speak, as an engaging, encouraging, even challenging voice in the city for the city.

Accept the Tension of Differentiation: Maintain a “trade-offs” view of temporal, concrete community engagement, not an ultimate-solutions view.

- Always be mindful of the tension that exists between temporal and eternal liberation, keeping in mind that such tension ultimately demonstrates an authentic, loving engaging (temporal blessing) for the sake of the gospel.
- Be aware of the short term and long term effects of any/all of your actions before acting.
- Be aware that “taking sides” in an issue before knowing what is going on, can conflate the message of the Church with the message of one side of a community debate.
- In any temporal issue . . . remember it is God who has structures, morals, and authorities in charge to deal with such things . . . In the American context . . . the citizen is one of those authorities.
- Ultimately strive to proclaim liberation that actually liberates . . . both in the left-hand kingdom and in the right-hand kingdom of God's work in the world! That's Matt. 22:21, Rom. 13; and Gal. 5.

Remember the Ultimate Purpose of All Community Engagement: The opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those God brings into one's life.

- Earn the right to share that Message by engaging the above, and Be prepared to hurt with people, cry with people, laugh with people when temporal issues seem pre-eminent and outside of our grasp. Such frustration actually leads people to ask, "Is there more than this, can this be all there is?" In some ways, the church needs to be prepared to come alongside the community, not always to solve issues, or to be a Savior, but to be a fellow, broken sinner who is willing to walk with another until they see Jesus.
- Speak the Truth, in Love to others the way that Jesus Christ has spoken and served you.

In all things, a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement is anything but static, even though it may not always be policy-driven.