



# Seize the Day

## Missional Opportunities Post-Covid

*Nelson Okanya*

*Mission is an activity that transforms reality.*

—David Bosch

One of the great opportunities the current crisis has given the church is to once again ask the purpose questions:

Why does the church exist in the first place?

What difference does it make in the world?

Mennonite mission historian Wilbert Shenk writes insightfully about these questions: “The church is true to its nature—and thus possesses integrity—when it understands itself to be God’s missionary presence in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the question of missional opportunities must be preceded by the question of missional identity.

In *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, Dean Flemming writes, “Mission involves both who we are and what we do.”<sup>2</sup> The true identity of God’s people is essential if we are to live out our calling in the world.

In Scripture, God historically called a people, saying, “You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6a). God designated this priestly kingdom a “treasured possession” (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). The God who called this priestly kingdom also established a covenant with the community, and the stipulations of that covenant were to form and guide their living. It all begins with God as the initiator; therefore, the called people are God’s people on a mission for God. The church is molded after this initial covenant community, a community that God liberated from the Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:9-10). In the same way, the church is a covenant community that is created by the Holy Spirit to serve as God’s agents, embodying God’s liberation from the bondage of sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ.

This church calls the repentant and gathers them into a new world-transforming community for nurture and sending into the world as God’s missionary presence. What is essential is the essence of that community and not the form that covenant community takes.



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Ross Thomas Bender articulates this in *The People of God*. “The structures through which that peoplehood becomes visible in history are secondary; they do not carry in themselves a line of descent from one generation to the next. God’s call must be heard ever anew and the response of each generation must fully be its own.”<sup>3</sup> Each Christian community must discern how God might be calling them to be God’s missionary presence in their context.

So, then, how might God be calling the church today in our crisis-defined world? From my vantage point, here are a few opportunities to consider as your congregation lives out your purpose as God’s presence in the world.

1. **Urbanization.** According to the United Nations, the world’s population living in cities is expected to increase to 66 percent by 2050. This must not be construed to mean following the old model of urban people as

1. *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 45.

2. *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 14.

3. *The People of God: A Mennonite Interpretation of the Free Church Tradition* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1971), 137.

the subject of mission, but rather should inspire new opportunities especially in terms of population concentration and people movement.

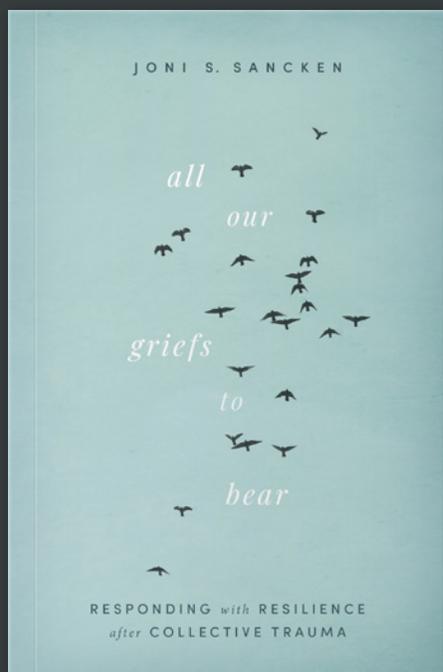
2. **Globalization.** Integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations and its key agents—information technology and ease of transportation—has revolutionized the world and altered its functioning. Just about anyone can easily connect online to anywhere around the globe, an unprecedented opportunity for engaging the globe.
3. **Missions from the Majority World.** The days of a benefactor approach to missionary witness where the Western church was the subject of mission while the rest of the world, urban and poor communities, was object to mission are long past. Reciprocity and partnership in mission are growing, and the church must adapt and thrive in God's missionary witness.
4. **Pluralism and secularization.** Belief that all religions are equally true and good and lead to God/

heaven is on the rise, even within the church. North Americans increasingly identify as atheist, agnostic, or spiritual but not religious. The church's narrative of hope that God's redemptive mission is made real in the world through Jesus ought to be a viable narrative amid the competition (Acts 17).

5. **Ineffective leadership.** Most of the world's pain is caused by poor and ineffective leadership. Underneath the surface, visible problems—including poverty, injustice, violence, greed, and human subjugation—are caused by ill-suited or ill-prepared leaders who fail to deliver promised outcomes. Jesus' model of serving leadership is an answer to this dire situation.
6. **Congregational sending.** Mission agencies are increasingly taking on more of a role of advising, resourcing, and screening and equipping workers, rather than primarily sending workers and giving ongoing worker care and program oversight.



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