

THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD

We believe Christians should be servants in their relationships with God and others.

Jesus defined his own ministry in words from the prophet Isaiah, "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 NIV). This is also our mission.

Jesus chose the image of a servant to describe the lifestyle of his followers. The Greek word used was *diakonos*, which means "servant," or "minister." It is also the root of the word "deacon."

Jesus set the example himself, being God's obedient servant. He reminded his disciples that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28 NIV). In the upper room Christ washed his disciples' feet and told them "the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him" (John 13:16 KJV).

In the early church, persons were set apart for special ministries, including teachers, preachers, apostles, and deacons. Every person had his "ministry" according to his spiritual gifts. No ministry was insignificant. Christ teaches that even ministry to the least of his brothers is ministry to him (Matthew 25:34-40). That service is to the destitute and those in physical, social, and spiritual need. James warned that without the works of a servant, faith is dead (James 2:14 -18).

One special ministry given to all Christians is the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation of the world to God and of persons to each other is the purpose for which Christ came. We are charged with carrying on the work of Christ as agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18 -19).

In Luke 10:26-37, Jesus affirmed the importance of the Old Testament teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18 NIV). Paul also saw this as the summary of commandments dealing with human relationships (Romans 13:8-10).

Servant hood includes responsibility for others. Paul said it is some- times necessary to modify our actions for the sake of those who are weaker (1 Corinthians 10:23 -33). Peter cautioned to use Christian freedom wisely (1 Peter 2:13 -17).

We believe Christians have a primary obligation to be a witness to the Good News.

All Christians enjoy the benefits of the priesthood of believers. They can and should make intercession to God through Christ, their High Priest, on behalf of themselves and

others. Christ has made us "priests to serve his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6 NIV). All the people of God—lay persons and clergy—have the right and responsibility to minister for God, remembering that "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20 RSV).

As God's special envoys, we are representatives of the Kingdom of God and messengers of the Good News that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 KJV). Jesus' compassion offered people an opportunity to discover new life. We must "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9 RSV).

We are to witness for Christ by the words of our mouth and every action of our lives as we show the indwelling Christ living and working through us (Philippians 2:15; Colossians 3:17). All that we do is to be done to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Each individual is created in the image of God. Because "we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, and wrong. ... slaves to passions" (Titus 3:3 TEV), we do not condemn those who still are. All persons should be viewed as potential believers (John 4:3-26). Our attitude should be that of hating the sin but loving the sinners, as we seek to affirm their worth and value to God, and to persuade them to abandon their sin and turn to Christ.

We believe Christians have a responsibility to society.

Jesus said his followers were to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13 -16). In order to reflect the light of Christ in the world, Christians must be aware of what is taking place in society, affirming those things which are beneficial, and denouncing those things which tear down. The sin and failure of the nation must be exposed if there is to be healing in the land. This was the message God sent through the prophets.

Each individual Christian, each local congregation, and each organization within the church must, after much prayer, decide where it fits in

God's plan and what Christ would have it do. The way in which God can use us is limited only by our lack of imagination, or our refusal to serve.

We believe the Christian has a dual citizenship.

The people of God live in the world but are not to be of the world in motives, desires, or actions (John 17:14). They are directed not to conform to this world, but to lead

transformed lives in honor of Christ (Romans 12:1-2). "The Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit in those who belong to the world" (1 John 4:4 TEV).

As Christians we are called to be good citizens. Paul advised, "Every-one must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1 NIV).

When the will of society and the will of God come into direct, unresolvable conflict, we should do all within legal limits to change man's laws. If this is not possible, like the apostles before us, we have no choice but to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). This is in accord with the teaching of Jesus to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17 NIV) and to "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28 KJV). Civil disobedience is never a course to be embarked upon lightly, but only when necessary in order to be obedient to God.

To obey God's laws may require us to accept persecution for the cause of Christ. Jesus said, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39 NIV). Meekness is not weakness. Jesus calls us to reflect his extraordinary courage: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 NIV).

As we seek to serve God, our guiding principle must be to let God's love flow through us to society. We may take only such action as will bring honor to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.