

# 30 Sent to Do Whatever We Can

*“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”  
(1 Corinthians 12:7)*

July 24, 2002 in Sipesville, Pennsylvania, was another hot and muggy day. At 8:50 p.m., nine men working the second shift in the two-year-old Black Wolf Coal Company’s Quecreek Mine broke through into the Saxman Mine, which they thought was 300 feet from where they were mining. The maps they were using were outdated. Usually this was not a problem; but the mine they broke into held an unseen danger—water. Groundwater had filled the cavern. When the wall was breached, 50 to 60 million gallons of water began to pour into the Quecreek Mine, trapping the nine men working the late shift 240 feet below the surface.

Over the next 77 hours, the story of their rescue would capture the attention and the heart of the nation. Over the span of that time, we got to know the miners personally.

Their story of how they survived was inspiring. Huddled in the darkness, 240 feet below surface, these men supported each other. They used their body heat to warm each other in the subsurface cold. They would place the coldest among them in the center to provide him with extra warmth. They encouraged each other with their words when one became down or anxious. They were committed to each other, even to the point of binding themselves together with rope so that nothing could separate them from each other. At first I thought, “What a great example of the church.” Nine men huddled together in the darkness, supporting each other, while binding

themselves to stick together no matter what might come.

Later, I would re-think my first impression of this. Viewing the church as those huddled beneath the surface is, indeed, the way many see the church. The church then becomes nothing more than a place of refuge where people gather to support each other, waiting to be rescued—helpless in the growing darkness of the world. It is, to say the least, a weak and tepid view that does little to inspire joy or enthusiasm.

Speaking at a conference, my District President, John Brunner, helped me to see it from a different perspective as he offered his own keen perception of this same incident. Consider if you will, the church from the view of those who are above the surface, sent to do whatever they can to rescue those beneath. This is a much more exciting and true picture of what the “one holy Christian and apostolic Church” is to be.

Consider some of the details of this story from the view of those on top. There had never been an approach such as they were attempting—the rock was too hard to get through as quickly as necessary. Rock of this density could take weeks and months to drill through. But someone knew of a special compressor in the area that would make the drilling easier. A man was contacted in Hamburg, New York, for permission to use it. But soon the drill bit broke, and they had to send for a replacement from Roanoke,

Virginia. While waiting, they were not idle. There was urgency to their task. Using satellite technology, a local man with a global positioning system (GPS), was able to pinpoint the miners' exact location. Strategy sessions were held, and resources were gathered from all locations. Gathering local knowledge and resources as well as imported resources, they devised an approach that had never been tried before. Geology, mechanical engineering, medical technology and space science, as well as other disciplines, were joined together for the sole purpose of saving these nine men. Much of this planning took place while they waited for the new drill bit to arrive. As they worked and waited, they understood it was very possible that the chance of getting to the miners in time was slim. None of this caused them to waver in their effort.

Can you see the parallels between this story and that of the Church? It is a much healthier and dynamic picture of the Church. The "one holy Christian and apostolic Church" is a team sent out by Christ with an urgent mission: People are trapped—trapped in bondage to sin, burdened with guilt, and facing unknown fears. They live out their lives in darkness, helpless and unable to save themselves. Time is short. The work of bringing to them the life-saving message of Jesus requires our best and most coordinated effort as the *one* holy Christian and apostolic Church. We cannot sit idly by. Nor can we be deterred when we think that the chances are slim. Christ sends us out, empowered and gifted by His Spirit, for the sake of those who are lost. There is no time for casual onlookers or those who merely want to talk about the mission. It is a mission that will demand the use of every resource we can imagine. It is a mission that requires the unity of a team in approaching the task. We are told in Scripture:

*"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"*  
(1 Corinthians 12:6).

The Spirit has gifted each and every one of us with various spiritual gifts and abilities.

These gifts are given to us for the common good. God expects that we will use them to serve and bless His Church. When we do not use the gifts that God has given us, the work of the entire team is diminished. It may seem at times that what we are trying to accomplish is impossible. Not enough time. Not enough resources. Not enough knowledge or experience as to how to get it done. Yet lives are at stake—eternally. We are sent to do whatever we can in order for people trapped in sin to know the freedom that Christ offers. Christ who sends us will not allow us to be without the resources. I agree with J. Hudson Taylor who said, "Depend upon it—God's work done in God's way will never lack supplies" (p. 101).

Those resources are available within the gifted community of His Body and in the world that surrounds us. An example of this is seen in the 1500's. Martin Luther often ranks in the top five of the most influential people over the last 1000 years. Understand, though, that his effectiveness is due to the work and timing of the Spirit. Forty-five years before Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church, a German named Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press. This allowed books, formerly copied one at a time by monks, to be printed in mass. Luther's teachings and others to follow were spread throughout Europe because of God's use and timing with this invention. "God's work done in God's way will never lack supplies." Isn't it ironic that we now stand at the threshold of our mission with a technological invention as significant today as Gutenberg's printing press was in the 1500's? Like the teams that worked together for the rescue of the nine miners, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church must also work as one, employing as many resources as are available to us for the rescue of lost souls.

LC-MS President, Gerald Kieschnick, has laid out a vision before us that expresses this so well:

“We in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have ONE Mission—to seek lost people for Christ! We proclaim ONE Message—that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world! We do so as ONE People—united by God’s love in Jesus Christ.”

There are many things that can divide us within our own church. There are, however, many more things that unite us.

There is at least one other insight to be gained from the Quecreek Mine. Let me share with you the words of John Brunner:

“Yet with all the advanced technology and equipment, the people who could provide the best advice were those who had been in those same mines before, especially those who had just escaped. They could tell the rescuers what the conditions were like and how best to reach those at risk. Geology, mechanical engineering, medical technology, space science and several other disciplines were all applied. But knowing what the miners were experiencing and what they needed in order to survive long enough to be saved was critical. The only ones who really knew were the ones who themselves had been most recently in the dark.”

We who walk in the faith and have been in the church for a while forget what it is like to be lost and living in despair. I wonder how the church might be blessed to simply sit down with those who are recent converts and talk with them about what life is like now compared to their life without Christ. It may be that some will say, “I don’t know anyone who recently was lost.” This is very possible, because our circles can become so narrow at times. Then we need to do whatever we can to find some and speak with them. If we do not have the people we need to rescue the lost, we need to find them. If we do not have the resources, we need to ask for them. In the book of 1 Chronicles, this verse is recorded:

“. . . men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. . .” (12:32). The church of today needs in its mission those who understand the times and what the church should do in light of it.

The mission before us is too large and too demanding for any one Christian or church to go it alone. Whatever we can. There are resources around us. Just as the rescue of the nine miners utilized many disciplines, can we do any less when it comes to matters eternal? How could your church partner with other churches in the community? How could you partner in the support of missionaries with the LC-MS World Missions department? Whatever we can. “I believe in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church.” How can we place more emphasis on that word “one” in our efforts rather than the separate efforts of many churches? One Message! One Mission! One People!

All of this is not to suggest that we can save anyone. Only by the effort and work of the Holy Spirit does one come to the faith. None of us can talk someone into the faith or reason them into the faith. This is His work. Mine is to present the opportunity for that Word to have its way with them. Paul said,

*“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15).*

Jesus has given me a command. He has given you the same command. It is a mission that demands that we do whatever we can to reach the lost. If we do not, then people around us and people we love will spend an eternity in hell.

Did you catch the pictures of the final moments when the nine miners made it to the surface? Did you see how grimy and dirty

they were? Did you happen to catch how grimy and dirty the rescuers were? I will bet you, though, that to those nine, those who were standing above pulling the cage up to the surface had the most beautiful feet they had ever laid their eyes on.

**Prayer:** Father, you did whatever you could to win me back. You were even willing to give up your own Son. I ask that you move us to love others as you have loved us so that we too are willing to do whatever we can to reach others in your name. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** In what way could you join with other Christians in your congregation or your community to reach out in service to others in the name of Christ?

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Corinthians 12

**From the Book of Concord:** “Therefore, if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must always firmly and rigidly insist that, like the proclamation of repentance, so the promise of the gospel is *universalis*, that is, it pertains to all people (Luke 24[:47]). Therefore, Christ commanded preaching ‘repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations.’ ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ for it (John 3[:16]). Christ has taken away the sins of the world (John 1[:29]); his flesh was given ‘for the life of the world’ (John 6[:51]); his blood is ‘the atoning sacrifice for . . . the whole world’ (1 John 1[:7; 2:2]). Christ said, ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11[:28]). ‘God has imprisoned all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all’ (Rom. 11[:32]). ‘The Lord does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance’ (2 Peter 3[:9]). He is ‘Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him’ (Rom. 10[:12]). ‘Righteousness’ comes ‘through faith in Christ’ to all and ‘for all who believe’ (Rom. 3[:22]). ‘This is the will of the Father, that all who . . . believe in Christ shall have eternal life’ (John 6[:39, 40]). Therefore, Christ commanded that the promise of the gospel must be proclaimed to all those to whom repentance is preached (Luke 24[:47]; Mark 16[:15])” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI: Election, p. 645.28).