

**KEYNOTE SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED AT  
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ST. NICHOLAS GREEK ORTHODOX CULTURAL CENTER  
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**The Challenges of Cross Cultural Mission Work**

With thankfulness to His Eminence, NICHOLAS, Metropolitan of Detroit for his blessing to address you this evening, I greet you all in the name of the Risen Christ.

Protopresbyters, Presbyters, Hieromonks, Reverend Deacons, Readers, Chanters, Fr. Martin, Mr. Argue, Fr. Chad and Mr. Crossin as well as honourable Members of the Board of Directors of the Orthodox Mission Center, Friends of the Orthodox Mission projects and Faithful of the region who have travelled here to share in the programs of this multiple day event,

CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRISTOS ANESTI! CHRISTOS VOSKRESE!

It wasn't too long ago that we celebrated the glorious Resurrection of Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And, as part of this celebration, many of us spent the early morning hours greeting one another in as many languages as possible, shouting with great joy the message of the Resurrection. In Traverse City, as I am sure happened at many of your churches, we celebrated the Agape Vespers, and as part of that celebration we lined up our parishioners like so many little wooden soldiers across the solea so that they could read the Gospel announcement of the Resurrection in as many languages as we had people that could read them. Forget the fact that there was no one in our congregation that could really understand Latin, or French, or German, or even Greek or any of the number of myriad languages that could be used. Somehow it wasn't important that anyone could understand what we were saying; just the fact that it was being said seemed sufficient. In a very dynamic sense, this announcement of the Resurrection in as many languages as possible creates a concrete testimony to the universality of the message of the Resurrection to Mankind. Truly, geography, demographics, time, era, culture and the very many other determinants of our way of life seem to pale in importance in front of the overwhelmingly joyous message of the Resurrection. Surely, everyone should be interested in, benefit from, and be affected by this good news to humanity; at least that is our hope. But someone must take this message to these people—many of whom have never heard of the Gospel of Jesus Christ or have an incomplete or warped understanding of the message of Salvation. These people who take on this responsibility to deliver this message we call "missionaries."

In order to begin our discussion, it is important that we have a clear sense of what we mean when we say "mission" work or use the term "missionary." Fr. Martin, in his paper entitled "Defining Missions" writes, "Missiologists define 'missions' as the crossing of cultural and (most often) geographic boundaries in order

to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, making disciples and relating to the whole need of humankind, both spiritual and physical.” He goes on to say in his paper, “Three important dimensions of this definition are:

1. The crossing of cultural barriers
2. The movement out of one’s own particular place and
3. Proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples.”

Fr. Martin clearly emphasizes the importance of understanding mission as something totally “other” than what we may have grown to accept as the concept of missionary work. In quoting the work of R. Winter In the 2005 issue of Mission Frontiers, Fr. Martin writes, “This is a fact: if you can already speak the language and understand the culture...you are native, not a missionary. If you can’t speak the language and have to learn the culture where you are, then you are no longer a ‘native’ in that situation, but a missionary who faces cross-cultural barriers of communication.”

Based upon our accepted definition, there are significant cultural considerations that impact our ability to preach the Gospel. But, in addition to these cultural issues, there is a second dimension that requires our attention; that is the humanitarian factor. I have read, and have found it to be my own personal experience, that (as Fr. Martin points out), “In many countries where Christianity is a minority religion, social services are minimal and human suffering is great.” Philanthropic work in South Africa was a necessary antecedent to the actual preaching of the Gospel. It worked concurrently with the Gospel message by concretely demonstrating Christian charity while addressing real-life humanitarian concerns so that those receiving catechesis could be free to “hear” the message of salvation. I learned that it is impossible for one to expect mal-nourished, sick and diseased people lacking adequate housing to want to sit and listen to one talk about the good news of the Gospel through a translator. This is a case of “this and that”, not “this or that.”

You cannot imagine the level of poverty and need that exists there; and this is one of the most economically secure countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Imagine what it must be like in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mocambique, and other well-known African states. Our first order of business, before even thinking of catechetical lessons, etc., was to address some of the humanitarian issues with which we were faced. This required money, resources and cooperation between traditional governmental and non-governmental organisations. We partnered with the South African government as well as the governments of Greece and Cyprus. Coupled with this we used resources from the business community and other service providers to establish feeding programs, clothing distribution, and health clinic services—all on a very limited scale restrained by our resources.

Having said these things, I would like to suggest that we focus on three important things for this evening while using the cross cultural consideration as a platform for our discussion.

- First, that there is a definite place for—and lack of resources being allocated to—the work of missionary evangelism within the context of the Orthodox Church located in North America.
- Second, that in order for the Church to be a healthy, functioning organization, there must be room made to extend and expedite the dissemination of the Gospel message throughout the world—beyond our own borders.

- Third, God, who is the ultimate “missionary,” will provide the necessary wherewithal for us to fulfill items one and two if we make a step toward actively placing ourselves behind this work.

By this time, you may be wondering why I have been chosen to address you this evening. I must confess before all of you that I am a bit of an “unwitting” missionary. Between the years 1997 and 2002 I worked as a missionary priest in the Republic of South Africa under the omophorion of Archbishop Ioannis of Johannesburg and Pretoria of blessed memory and the current Archbishop of Johannesburg, H. E. Seraphim. I travelled to South Africa from the US after being a priest 10 years, serving in Central Pennsylvania under the omophorion of H. E. Kyrill of blessed memory. At the invitation of H. B. Petros VII of thrice blessed memory my orders were transferred to the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa and I was asked to take up a position in what I would call an “European” church in downtown Johannesburg. It was an English-language community named for St. Nicholas of Japan, a nineteenth century Russian Orthodox priest serving the Russian consulate staff in Japan. What is unique about St. Nicholas is that, while his original assignment was to the consulate staff and Russian émigrés in Japan, he ultimately expanded his work to the Japanese themselves being the father of the Orthodox Church in Japan. He was responsible for the conversions of a number of Samerai that ultimately lead to the blood of many martyrs to make the ground there fertile for the growth of the Church. The significance of being assigned to a community with this patron was not lost on me.

To continue, the community in Johannesburg was started by a number of forward thinking South African Orthodox Christians who recognised that there was a real need to make the Church open and available to the greater community and also to reach out to indigenous South African people. St. Nicholas Church was one of the first fully English language communities in the country and had a real emphasis on ministering to people using English and reaching out to the black population. Certainly we were the first “integrated” Orthodox Church as we had services which were attended by both whites and many blacks; something that had not developed in the other Orthodox parishes of the country at the time. These were heady times in South Africa, three years after the first democratic all-race election that allowed for the peaceful transfer of power from the apartheid DeKlerk government to the Mandella government. Barriers between races were coming down and there were real opportunities for the Church to actively promote the Gospel outside of its own ethnic ghetto.

My invitation to go to South Africa was as a result of a vacancy at the St. Nicholas Church and not so much a result of any burning desire on my part to be “a missionary.” In many ways, serving at St. Nicholas was very much like serving a local church here; everyone spoke English, usually in addition to several other languages, culturally they were very much akin to an environment in which I was used to operating, and the people had a good grounding in the Orthodox Faith. Where my life got much more complicated was when H. E. IOANNIS of Johannesburg of blessed memory assigned me to work in a missionary endeavour, first in the Soshanguve township outside of Pretoria, and then in several other settlements named Denilton, Mamelode and ultimately Alexandra, Hillbrow, Bertrams and Soweto (outside of Johannesburg). At this point I would say I started my education in what it was to truly be a “missionary.” I worked along-side Archimandrite Michael Visvisnis of Pretoria, Deacon George Cocotos of Johannesburg, and laymen

Ireneus and Cathy MacDonald of Johannesburg and Val and Stephen Hayes of Pretoria. I did this work while fulfilling my assignment as proistamenos at St. Nicholas Church.

The first thing I learned was that the primary language of the native people with whom I would be working was not necessarily English. I had been operating under the false understanding that “everyone” in South Africa spoke English. What I learned is that, while most people in South Africa may have various degrees of understanding of English, that is not necessarily the lingua franca and that our first challenge was to try and develop a way of communication that was understandable to Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu speaking people as well as those that spoke Afrikaans—let alone English speakers. There are actually eleven “national” languages in South Africa, which significantly complicated my efforts there. Moreover, I only was fluent in one of those eleven languages, English. And, unlike most languages, trying to learn a native language would take years of study and practice; years that I didn’t feel I had available to me. One couldn’t take a Berlitz course in Zulu—there was no Rosetta Stone; college level courses (if available at all) were out of the question due to the number of years of study that would be required and their expense.

**Our first cultural roadblock** to preaching the Gospel to the people was, indeed, *language*. We desperately needed people to assist in the translation of services and other liturgical texts; translations from Greek to English and then from English into any number of languages depending upon where we were working. We also required translation services on an on-going basis to be able to ensure that the Gospel message was being taught and received in an effective and understandable way. Translation services were expensive and not readily available. And the fact is we had very little money available to purchase these services. Some services were provided at the hands of private individuals, whose English skills were a bit dubious. Others came through the University system which tended to be cumbersome and pricey. We required these translations “now, now” as they say. We needed them yesterday as the lack of available understandable material immensely slowed down our effectiveness.

Language was an immense hurdle for us corporately and for me personally. While all of our catechesis was conducted in English, it was becoming apparent that there were oft-times many misunderstandings and incomplete comprehension of what it was that we were trying to get across. The lack of resources was truly frustrating and (most times) dangerous.

But there was more. On top of the language issue, there were native cultural issues. The second thing I learned was that the indigenous South Africans had a way of looking at and understanding life with which I was totally unfamiliar. Our **second major cultural roadblock** had to do with *ethics, morals and behaviours* that were the norm and accepted by African society but in opposition to accepted Christian convention. How should the Church react to these things? How should I react to these things as a representative of the Church?

I was privileged to work in the Free State of South Africa, a region south of my posting in Gauteng Province. One of the laymen working with me there was Danie Steyn. Danie is an Afrikaaner, son of a farmer and himself very involved in the farming culture. As a farmer Danie worked very closely with Zulu

people having learned the language as a boy and quite fluent in its use. Around the Pascha season Danie was addressing a gathering of farm workers and was telling them the story of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. He gave a most excellent account of these events and his audience was visibly enthralled by his story telling as they nodded their heads in agreement. At the conclusion of the talk, Danie asked the people if they understood what he had told them. They said, "Yes", although they failed to see how this was such a special or wonderful story. The local sangoma (witchdoctor) also raises people from the dead at night and these zombies go about the village avenging themselves on those who had done them harm. They believed that they could pay the witchdoctor to animate a dead person. While the language was clear enough, it seems as though the cultural milieu had created some difficulties in comprehension.

On another occasion I recall receiving a phone call one evening from one of our newly baptized adults; we'll call him Johannes. He lived in one of the townships north of Pretoria. He expressed a sincere desire to be a priest and had already been calling himself my "deacon." I had come to know him reasonably well as he had worked with me as a translator off and on throughout my first year there. In any event, Johannes phones me and says, "Father, I have great news! I too am to become a father!" I told Johannes, "I know. We'll try to get you a bursary to travel to the seminary in Nairobi, and when you complete your studies you will be a Father, too." He replied, "No, Father, you don't understand; I'm going to have a baby!" I responded, "That's great! Congratulations! I didn't realise that you are married; you and your wife must be very happy." He replied, "Father, I am not married and I don't know whether I'll marry this one or not." We ended our conversation and I turned to my wife and stared at her in disbelief. What I hadn't realised is that for native Africans in Johannes' culture it was normal for males to impregnate women before marriage to "test" them. Only after the woman proved to be fertile would the male make a decision about marriage. The government had already identified that it was this type of behaviour that was contributing to the AIDS pandemic in South Africa—but because it was culturally conditioned felt powerless to address it. Where does one go with this? What a dilemma! My "deacon" couldn't understand why this out-of-wedlock child would be a problem for a cleric.

Truly, **our third cultural roadblock** had to do with race. The Orthodox Church was being painted by many at the time as "the white man's church." Our work was being vilified by some as a sort of cultural genocide where we were trying to continue the colonisation of Africans by drawing them into the white man's form of worship of the white man's god. We were supposedly trying to teach the Africans how to be Greeks or Russians instead of allowing them to maintain their culture and marry the religion to it. Around me I watched mosques and Islamic health clinics popping up, funded by Saudi and Iranian oil money, marketing themselves as the truly "African" expression of religion. Meanwhile, my people worshipped in tin shacks or mud buildings that were no bigger than a small bedroom. We were battling to provide even the most primitive outreach to ease some of the suffering of the people so that they could be open to even hearing what we had to say about the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

**Our fourth cultural roadblock** had to do with *the worship itself*. On top of the issues of language, social mores and race, there was the issue of the utilisation of music and artistic expression within the context of traditional Orthodox worship. Our music, our way of worship, which proved to be so foreign to the

indigenous people of South Africa—was a stumbling block; perhaps more for us than for them. And more than that, their music and their way of worship that was so foreign to our experience of Orthodoxy also got in the way of our progress. Was it important that they use the same hymns that we use? Should there be drums and dancing in the church as was their custom? What about our beautiful hymnography? Where does cutting the ethnicity from the Church affect the theology and the methodology of our approach to God?

To cap off these four cultural concerns was the complicated problem of syncretism. As we conducted our catechesis there was a pronounced problem with persons synthesizing Orthodoxy with their own hodge-podge of ancestor worship, superstition and catechesis conducted by other religious groups received before we showed up. Catechumens continued to consult fortune tellers and sangomas (witch doctors) to solve their problems. The slaughtering of goats to bring luck during the new year—It was difficult to make people understand that embracing Christianity meant that this other stuff had to go; there was no need for it now and consulting “spirits” was just not on.

Any one of these concerns by itself would be daunting. But taken together they created a complicated and convoluted “soup” that often left us wondering what to do and which way to turn. These were not concerns to be taken up as some type of academic exercise at a seminary debate in liturgics class; these were real-life concerns as we were attempting to bring the Orthodox Faith to people that had never been exposed to it—or whose greatest exposure to the Faith was in washing dishes in a restaurant of someone who was Orthodox and seeing the icons placed there to ward off evil. Together with our Metropolitan we tried to arrive at answers that would make the Faith accessible but also true to its origins and purpose.

While battling with these real-life practical issues of mission work, I also found myself struggling as a white priest amongst a black population to overcome their lack of trust, their suspicion, and their prejudice based upon many, many years of injustice, oppression and bad handling under the apartheid government. During the apartheid years the Orthodox Church had not distinguished itself as a champion of human rights but rather remained silent in its ethnic ghetto. The Church therefore had a bit of reputation among some of the people as a silent partner to what had happened during those years. The reasons for this silence are many and quite complicated but the end result was certainly a factor that had an affect upon my ability to perform mission work there.

My wife and two teen aged children had accompanied me to Africa for this work. They were trying to live out there life in the midst of this. My kids went through their adolescent years there. In some ways it was a beneficial experience and in others they paid a very high price for my missionary activity. That weighed on my heart very heavily at times.

Frankly, there were many times that I felt alone and forgotten. I felt overwhelmed. I felt ill prepared and not even close to equal to the task that stood in front of me. What I wouldn't have given to feel the support that comes from an affiliation with an organisation like the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. At that time, my work was fully funded by my own congregation at St. Nicholas and friends of St. Nicholas. Dr. Azar Jamine

our community president, as well as others on our board, whole-heartedly supported the mission work and the integration of indigenous Africans into our community. I also received incalculable assistance from Mrs. Dionysia Fotiadis who helped me to interface with the Greek Orthodox hierarchy as well as the Ambassador of Greece, the Consul General of Greece and the Consul General of Cyprus who were assisting later on as our mission work gained traction.

My sense of isolation from America and my own culture was lessened by the graciousness of a priest that I had befriended immediately prior to my departure for South Africa 1997. Thankfully, I received communiqués and letters of support from Fr. Michael Michelapoulos. Recently of blessed memory and former pastor of Annunciation Church in Vestal, New York, Fr. Michael, who himself worked as a missionary in the Amazon and throughout Brazil before his coming to the United States, knew exactly what it was I was facing—he had lived a good portion of his life as a young man in that very same furnace of purification. Between his letters of encouragement and care packages that came from his parish, my family and I were consoled in our work.

You can't imagine the relief that one feels when there is a connexion with a group of people that value and affirm what you are doing and stand behind you supporting you not just with their money, but with their prayers. While it is six years since I left South Africa to take up ministry here in the United States again, I know from talking to my friends and co-workers still in South Africa that there is still much to be done and still an immense lack of resource. And while I am happy to report to you that the OCMC has over the past several years been quite active in the very missions in which I worked and helped to establish—especially in Soshanguve outside of Pretoria but also in the urban center of Johannesburg—much remains to be done there.

I have spoken to you a great deal about mission work in South Africa this evening. That makes sense to me because I really don't have first hand experience of mission work in other places. And, I don't believe that it is my place to present myself as some kind of "expert" in missions to you by quoting academic papers and sociological texts. However, I don't want this talk to be understood as a plea for help merely in the mission field in South Africa although I am sure that my former Metropolitan would be very pleased with me if this were, indeed, the outcome of this talk. No, I think that what I want to help us see is that while these things happened to me while serving in South Africa, they can most likely be seen in operation in any one of the other mission stations in which the Church is active today. While each situation is a bit unique, there is a commonality to all of it.

Having said this, we are brought to the three major points with which I would like to leave you this evening.

**First**, there is a definite place for—and lack of resource being allocated to—the work of missionary evangelism within the context of the Orthodox Church located in North America. As Americans, I believe that we have allowed ourselves to be totally pre-occupied with evangelizing our own country and somehow believing that this constitutes our contribution towards the fulfillment of the great commission. However, I would maintain that while we should be doing the one, we should not be doing it to the exclusion of the

other. It isn't a question of "this or that" but rather "this and that, as well." The fullness of what it means to be "Church" and the "Body of Christ" implies that we must be active in both spheres not just in one to the exclusion of the other. International missionary outreach is an essential part of what it is to be "the Church." And without it, we find ourselves to be a poor witness and only a shadow of what Christ has called us to be.

H. E. Augoustinos of Florina in his book entitled "Follow Me" decries the state of the Church of Greece in the mid 1980s largely because it had lost the missionary component of its identity. He writes, "Our beloved homeland bears the name Orthodox—the only Orthodox kingdom in the world, as many like to boast. But if we judge with depth and not only by appearance, we find such ignorance among our people, such faithlessness and corruption, such superstition and aversion." He goes on to say, "The faithful, conscientious Orthodox who labour and toil for their Faith are the minority—they are constantly being frozen and decimated. Fragrant flowers can bloom once more in this land to germinate and reflower the high trees of faith and virtue, in the shadow of which peoples and nations can find rest of soul. Greeks can again become a missionary people. To do this, we need missionary souls, men and women." While H. E. Augoustinos is writing about Greece, some of the salient points listed here could easily be applied to our own situation here in the US.

As we look at the somewhat distressing state of Orthodoxy in America, we are tempted to adopt a "charity begins at home" mentality. We tend to see this problem of foreign mission work as a discretionary consideration rather than an imperative. Identifying clergy to go overseas to work; in a way sacrificing the services of clergy to work overseas, sending valuable dollars overseas to progress mission work and provide humanitarian relief, these all seem a bit foolish in light of our own problems with shortages of clergy, churches that can't pay their bills because the people have disappeared and the myriad of other problems that afflict our communities in the US. And I suppose that this is where one must come back to our original understanding of mission especially as it relates to the great commission. Our Lord's command to "Go and make disciples of all nations..." is just that, a command.

Blessed Theophylact in his commentary on this passage tells us, "Because it is not sufficient only to be baptized, but one must labour to do good after baptism, Christ then says, 'Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; not just two or three but all of my commandments.'" He writes further, "Let us tremble then, brethren, when we realise that if even one thing is lacking in us, we are not perfect servants of Christ for we are required to keep all of the commandments. See the Lord's words contain these two essentials of Christianity: theology and active virtue. For by saying that it is necessary to baptize in the name of the Trinity, He handed down to us theology. And by saying that it is also necessary to teach the keeping of the commandments, He guides us in the way of active virtue.

Truly, this verse from the Gospel of St. Matthew is not presented as a conditional statement and not even one based upon what I would term "readiness." It is not framed within the context of preparedness as, "Once you get your own place settled, or when you have enough money, or when you are comfortable, then, go and teach all nations." Rather, Our Lord presupposes that we will step off in obedience

recognizing that it is through our obedience that we open the spigot of God's grace and resource to meet the needs of the project that lies before us. I would posit that the very survival and health of the Church here is intimately tied to our response to the missionary work of the Church on an international and inter-cultural level.

**Second** it is quite clear that *in order for the Church to be a healthy, functioning organization true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there must be room made to extend and expedite the dissemination of the Gospel as expressed in the Orthodox manner throughout the world—beyond our own borders and packaged in ways that people can understand.* “Go and make disciples of all nations...” Jesus emphasizes in the Gospel of St. John, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” And again, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.” Our love for God is demonstrated through our obedience—not by our lip service. Truly, our survival—no, more than that—our ability to thrive as the Church here in America, is contingent upon our faithfulness to God's command that we “Go and make disciples of all nations...” and not limited to teaching our own.

If we look back over salvation history, we see that God is most active and most demonstrative of His care when we are least capable of doing anything but are prepared to step off with faith to execute His will. The Church has always functioned best in the face of what appear to be insurmountable odds. Where must I begin to highlight the many poorly prepared people who have had a massive impact in the salvation of Mankind by the exercise of God's grace; the worst possible choices to effect and implement God's plan of salvation with respect to their CV: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, right down to the twelve Apostles and to their descendants of our own day? Many of these giants of the Faith recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures and Tradition of the Church were old men—deep into what our society would consider retirement age. We would have given up on them—yet it was when they became obedient to God and looked beyond their own limitations that they truly made contributions to the human condition and our trek towards salvation and the coming of the Messiah.

My own life is a perfect example of one who is totally inept, unskilled and lacking the academic credentials and background to be able to do anything of value. In my estimation, there is no reason that I should have been chosen to speak to you this evening let alone do the work that I am currently doing in Northwestern Michigan; planting a church in Traverse City isn't much like anything I'd done in South Africa, or anywhere else for that matter. Having been ordained a priest at age thirty, I celebrated my fortieth year just before arriving in South Africa; I went there not knowing the language, didn't know the culture, and really didn't realise that I was going to be called to be a missionary by my bishop. And having just celebrated my fiftieth birthday in June of 2007 I was placed in Traverse City in July to raise a community there. Truly, God takes our willingness to be obedient and He provides what is lacking in order to make His plan successful.

Any accomplishment anywhere is not because of anything that we do short of our obedience and cooperation; but because of God's incalculable grace and immense power. We provide the willing heart and obedience; God provides the locomotion.

**Finally: God, who is the ultimate “missionary,” will provide the necessary wherewithal for us to fulfill items one and two if we make a step toward actively placing ourselves behind this work.** You are all here because you have some kind of interest in the missionary work of the Church. Some of you may not have even realised that the Orthodox Church does missionary work. You read in your local newspaper of young people from some of your Protestant neighbors taking summer missionary trips to places like Haiti, or Honduras to build churches or clinics and perhaps you wonder in your own mind, “Why don’t we do that?” The fact is, “We do!” We do have international mission trips for youth; We do have international missionaries who sacrifice the comforts of home to go to foreign countries. These people learn new languages, struggle with real-life poverty and life and death issues of sickness, malnutrition and pandemic diseases; They expose themselves and their families to all kinds of threats, instabilities and uncertainties. We do have a mechanism in place to support the work of the Church as pertains to these missions and yes, all of this requires **YOUR** involvement.

I suspect that the reason I was asked to be here tonight is to be nothing more than a voice to you of those that are planted in mission fields around the world asking for your help, your prayers and your support. I speak from my own personal experience in a place far away. I am here to testify to the difficulty of that type of life and the positive effects of having even a small amount of support from people back home. And I am here to testify from my own personal experience of the immense blessing and sense of exhilaration that comes from being on the leading edge of the Gospel proclamation in the trenches and backwaters of the world.

This isn’t about money. This is about YOU and the significant contribution you can make in supporting our overseas missionaries by YOUR PRAYERS. Those prayers are what open the hearts of people to Gospel. Those prayers are the support of missionaries who put their lives in harms way, take immense risks and continue to place themselves in opposition to the prevailing culture so that the Gospel may be revealed to a world that desperately needs to hear it. Those prayers are what support our missionaries in their loneliness and sense of isolation. When you come to church, do you think to light a candle for our missions? When you pray, do you think to remember those who have been forgotten because they are not here—because they are toiling away in another country? When consider acts of charity and mercy, do you ever call to mind those labourers who do so much with so little? Unless the Church becomes militantly “missionary” in our approach, we are doomed because we will in no way be fulfilling God’s command and wish for us as the Church.

The fields are ripe for the harvest. There is much work to be done. Will you stand idly by and let others struggle and suffer alone and without your help? Or will you choose to take your rightful place shoulder-to-shoulder with those who have committed their lives to this important task? My prayer for all of us tonight is that we re-dedicate ourselves to this important work of the Church. My prayer for all of us tonight is that we make a personal commitment to take seriously the needs of our missionaries in the field. My prayer for all of us tonight is that we make a decision to work out our own salvation through the efforts that we expend in assisting in this God-ordained work. Where do you see yourself? Where will you stand? Where will you be counted?