

The Missional Church
NWIBA Pastors Roundtable
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“The church is influenced by the world around her, and called to influence the world in which she exists.”

“The more one focuses on one’s own living, the less one is concerned about giving life to others.”

“The real tragedy is not that churches are dying, but that churches have lost their reason to live.”

“If those who prepare for leadership are looking for a safe place, who will lead the church into dangerous places?”

*“The Church became a fortress from the world, rather than the hope for the world” - **Erwin McManus***

Intro: In general, the evangelical church in America finds itself in a very different place than it used to be 20, 30, 40 years ago. You see, even when I began ministry in the early nineties, and even more in years previous, the church enjoyed a privilege place in our culture. Many people went to church...it was the socially expected and accepted thing to do...the social norms were that “good people went to church.” In general, people looked up to and respected the church...politicians and government officials wanted the church on their side. The church was at the center of public life and churches grew without a whole lot of effort. In general, that world no longer exists.

So the church that used to be so effective in ministering to a Christendom culture that no longer exists now finds itself struggling to relate now that the cultural sands have shifted.

Someone has said that the church is like Rip Van Winkle waking up from a twenty-year nap...we are living in the same country, but it's a completely different world...we don't recognize it...we don't know how to operate in it.

And in some ways, the fault lies with the church, for while culture became increasingly non-Christian, the church failed to adapt to this important shift. The church continued to operate under the false assumption that the language and behavioral norms of Christianity made sense to the broader culture. Sadly, because of its inability, and often unwillingness, to adapt to its surroundings, the church lost its point of contact with culture, and with that, its voice and influence.

There was this British missionary by the name of Lesslie Newbigin. He went to India around 1950. There he was involved with a church living "in mission" in a very non-Christian culture. He served there 30 years and then he returned to England and discovered that the church in England now too existed in a now-Christian society...but it had not adapted to its new situation. He found that the church still ran its ministries assuming that a stream of cultural Christians/ traditional-moral people would simply show up at their services. He found that the church may have still had evangelism as a program of the church, but they had not reformatted how they did worship, discipleship, community, and service so as to engage with the now non-Christianized culture around it. He would write one of the groundbreaking books on missional thinking called "The Foolishness of the Greeks."

So what is the missional church...what does it mean to be missional? The way I'm going to develop this is first to look at

What is the Church; then, look at some definitions of the missional church; then to look at its theological underpinnings; then look at some characteristics of the missional church; and finally some practical application.

I. What is the Church?

Before we can really begin the discussion about the “missional church” we need to answer the question, *what is the church?*

The word for church in the N-T is *ecclesia* which literally means *assembly*. Nowhere in Scripture does it command us to “go to church”, but it does in Hebrews 10:25 tell us not to stop “assembling together” and much of the New Testament assumes the gathering of believers to fellowship, learn, worship, and serve.

As Pastors/Elders we are admonished by Luke (Paul speaking) to “*Be shepherds of the church of god...*” (**Acts 20:28**), but what does that mean? It is all too easy for us, steeped in building and programmatic centric Christianity to view the church as an institution or a place to go to get...rather than seeing the church as the *people of God*. Therefore, much of our strategizing centers on program instead of people...on the place of gathering rather than the gathering...because the church is not a place, *but a gathering of individuals into a community to be equipped for the sake of the mission*. So much of our assimilation structures and programs are designed around an internal church building centric ecclesiology...that is, everything is individual and internally centered, and as a result the church has forgotten its mission to the world.

II. What is the Missional Church?

Intro: Now this word is thrown around so much today that it has become cliché – its become a buzzword for churches that are cool, hip, contemporary, cutting-edge. So you have people and churches using the word missional who don't have a clue as to what it means. Let me start defining the term by sharing what it is not. Being missional is not:

- **A Church Program** – *“Oh we have a visitation program, we are a missional church.”* No, not necessarily.
- **A Mission Minded Church** – *“Oh we support missions and we give to the Cooperative Program and we go on mission trips etc, we must be a missional church.”* Just because you are mission minded or even mission active to some degree, does not mean that you are missional.
- **A Church Strategy** - Being missional is not another church fad that has just come along. It's not another strategy in the long list of strategies like traditional, contemporary, purpose driven, seeker sensitive, seeker driven that have come along. In fact there are traditional churches that are missional; there are contemporary churches that are missional; there are seeker churches that are missional etc.
- **An Identity that Makes Authenticity** – That is, just because you call your church missional does not make it so. Listen; there are churches that have bought into this because they see it as the latest fad to come down the pike. They see it as hip, cool, and contemporary. But they are not missional. There are other churches that don't even know what the word means, and they are

missional because they have taken God's mission seriously.

To answer what the missional church is, I'm going to give you some definitions from some people who have been at the forefront of relating the church to the 21st century.

- **Ed Stetzer** - *A missional church responds to the sending commands of Jesus by becoming an incarnational, indigenous, and intentional Gospel presence in its context. When Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,' (John 20:21) that was not to a select group of cross-cultural missionaries. Instead, that was a commission to you, our churches and me. We have a sender (Jesus), a message (the Gospel), and a people to whom we are sent (real people in culture). It is worth the effort to go beyond our personal preferences and to proclaim a faithful Gospel in whatever context we find ourselves. That's missional."*
- **Darrin Patrick** - *Jesus of Nazareth came on a mission. He was not looking for the well, the found, or the righteous. His mission was not about starting a ministry that would produce programs to be consumed by nice, attractive, middle-class, white, suburban, couples with 2.5 kids. It wasn't a country club with nice, painted, iron gates that Jesus inaugurated. It was a church that Jesus founded with its calling to storm the gates of hell. The church he founded was not a place for people to get fed and fat, but a place to be equipped and sent. Church is not a building or destination, but a people who are on*

mission: to join the Savior in seeking and saving those who are lost."

- **Rick Meigs** - *"Jesus told us to go into all the world and be his ambassadors, but many churches today have inadvertently changed the "go and be" command to a "come and see" appeal. We have grown attached to buildings, programs, staff and a wide variety of goods and services designed to attract and entertain people.*

"Missional is a helpful term used to describe what happens when you and I replace the "come to us" invitations with a "go to them" life. A life where "the way of Jesus" informs and radically transforms our existence to one wholly focused on sacrificially living for him and others and where we adopt a missionary stance in relation to our culture. It speaks of the very nature of the Jesus follower."

Conclusion: I like his last sentence. ***It speaks of the very nature of the Jesus follower.*** Being missional is nothing more or less than living out the nature of a Christ-Follower. It is all of God's people taking on the mentality of a missionary right where we are. So the church is not just a group of redeemed people who gather together periodically, but at the very core of the church is this idea of being sent. That nature is derived from God Himself. God is on mission in the world and we are to join with Him on that mission.

III. What is the Theological Basis of the Missional Church?

The theological basis for the missional mandate is rooted in

the nature of God. God is on mission in the world and the church is to join him on that mission. A distinguishing characteristic of God is that of *sender*. Stetzer makes the connection between God's sending nature and the church's mission:

“Missionary identity is rooted in the triune and “sending” God. The fact that God is a sender is connected with the very existence of the church. The fact that Jesus was the “sent one” is the most fundamental identification of Jesus. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Because of our identity in Christ, we are to continue the mission of Jesus: “There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world.”

Missional theology is deeply rooted in the Latin phrase, *missio dei* (the mission of God). David J. Bosch writes in his classic work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*:

“Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”

The sending that started with Adam and Eve and made its way to Noah, then to Abraham and later to Moses and then

to the Prophets – then to John Baptist and then culminated in the Lord Jesus being sent to die for our sins – and then to the Holy Spirit – has now made its way to the church – that is you and I. Listen to what Jesus said:

“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

(John 20:21) (ESV)

The moment that a person is born-again by the Spirit, they are sent...sent-ness is packed into their spiritual DNA.

IV. The Characteristics of the Missional Church

A. The Missional Church is Not Merely a “Missions Minded” Church

- Missional is not the same as “missions-minded,” though they are both important and related.
- A missions-minded church is one that cares about missions around the world. It gives to missions, it goes on mission trips, it’s involved in cross-cultural missions.
- Missional churches, however, know the mission field is here—now. They realize they need not only to support missions; they need to be missionaries where they are.
- Ex. – WCHBC – Missions minded, but not missional.

B. The Missional Church is Theologically Grounded

- A true missional church does not give in the old adage that says theology divides and mission unites.
- The true missional church realizes that any healthy mission is theologically and biblically grounded.
- With the missional church, any emphasis toward mission not grounded in solid theology and biblical foundations will inevitably lead toward a social gospel.
- Because the relationship between "the world" and "the church" can be difficult to navigate, a missional church absolutely must be grounded in the authority of the inerrant and inspired Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Indeed, the Scriptures provide the foundation for and inform all God-honoring mission work.
- Theology and mission must be linked together.

C. The Missional Church has a Missionary Mindset

- The missional church movement realizes that we are no longer chaplains to a Christian culture. We must be a missionary people in our own land.
- Every congregation needs to be cross-cultural missionaries to its own community.
- We must shift away from the mindset that the church is a provider of religious services to Christian consumers to the shaper of an apostolic people on a mission to a fallen world.
- A missional church expects every member to be a missionary to the people they come into contact with (family, friends, co-workers, etc).

- Therefore, a missional church spends a large amount of time and resources equipping members through Bible study, community groups, worship services and forums so that they can engage their specific contexts with the Gospel.
- The mantra of the missional church is not only that *every member is a minister*, but also *every member is a missionary*.

D. The Missional Church has a Long Distant Horizon, not a Quick Fix Approach

- The missional church approach is not an easy answer approach. It is not a quick fix approach. It is more concerned about the long term than the short term. It is as concerned about process as product.
- The missional church is not primarily driven by pragmatism, but about changing a culture...which takes time.
- The missional church is not numbers driven for the short term, but is trying to make a paradigm shift that will build a healthier metric for the long term.

E. The Missional Church is Gospel Centered

- An obvious flaw of Christendom is that it promoted a lifestyle of Christianity that was easily separated from a true encounter with and understanding of the Gospel of Jesus.
- Some of the decline in SBC membership and attendance over the last several years has been this...we are losing the cultural Christian.
- Christendom (cultural Christianity) could only *reform* culture; the Gospel alone can *transform* culture.

- A Gospel-centered church's ministry cannot be separated from the person of Jesus, nor can its mission be defined or performed apart from the Gospel.
- A missional church embraces God's call to be a sender of missionaries to its own culture.

F. The Missional Church is willing to Boldly Adapt its Methodology

- A missional church is willing to boldly adapt its methodology, while holding firmly to the core truth of its message, in order to participate in God's transformation and redemption of culture (Luke 7:34; Acts 16:20-21).
- Note the distinction: the *method* does not drive the *message*; rather the message propels the method.
- In other words, the solid, unchanging foundation of the Gospel renders the method of communication flexible, so long as that method does not contradict the Gospel.
- Again, as a missionary we were always looking for ways to adapt our methodology in order to better communicate the gospel.
- There wasn't the strong ties to methodology that kept us from being adaptable to change.

G. The Missional Church is Kingdom Focused

- For the missional church, the end is not the church...it's not its attendance, its finances, its worship events etc...
- Rather the church is the means to an end...the end being Kingdom advance through Christ and Him

crucified.

H. The Missional Church will seek to Contextualize the Gospel

- Another way to put this is that the missional church is indigenous. They have taken root in the soil and reflect, to some degree, the culture of their community.
- Being missional means we are very much in the world and engaged in culture but are not conforming to the world.
- An indigenous church looks different in Kingsport, TN than it does in the Hobart, IN.
- We as Southern Baptist, usually don't have problems with this when it comes to international churches...we rejoice in an African church worshipping to African music, in African dress and with African enthusiasm...
- But we sometimes expect all our domestic churches (especially our Anglo churches) to be uniform and conform to outdated and an idealic church culture that is not indigenous to the world in which they operate.
- But negotiables such as worship style, evangelism methods, attire, service times, locations and other man-made customs are determined by their effectiveness in a specific cultural context.

I. The Missional Church has a God Centered Mission, Rather than a Church Centered Mission

- A church-centered mission mentality has led to the

professional pastor philosophy where pastors are hired to meet the needs of their members and develop strategies that will grow the church.

- So under the church-centered mission mentality the church becomes the purveyor of religious goods and services and its members---the "sales team"---are expected to identify and bring in prospective customers.
- Most of the evangelism in SBC churches has been this methodology...*come to church*
- The more programs and amenities the church has, the more value it has to offer; success is measured more by numerical rather than spiritual growth.
- But the missional church with a God-centered mission mentality is one in which the church serves as God's instrument, sent into the world to both work for and bear witness to what *God* is doing in the world (not what the church is doing in the world for God).
- Being missional means we see the church not as a place we go only on Sundays, but as something we are throughout the week

J. The Missional Church Emphasizes Incarnational Ministry, Not Merely Attractional Methods

- Incarnational ministry is more important than merely attractional methods and models.
- The church is on the move in the community and the attraction becomes more than our worship services, preaching and ministries (although those are still important) but the chief attraction has to become Christ and authentic Christian community and especially as the church is in the community.

- Missional churches are deeply entrenched in their communities. The church is not focused only on its facility, but is focused on living, demonstrating and offering biblical community to a lost world.

K. The Missional Church will Emphasize Loyalty to the Bible and Mission over Denominational Brand

- Though many postmodern missional churches connect with their denomination, some prefer not to use the name in their public identity or if they do, they don't push their denominational loyalty hard.
- They believe they can be loyal to the nature, the doctrine and purpose of the denomination without the label or without excessive denominational promotion.
- They are more likely to see denominational identity as a hindrance in evangelistic dialogue, but important in discipleship after the initial commitment to Christ.

L. The Missional Church Focuses on Comprehensive Discipleship, Not Just Gaining Converts

- Salvation is holistic and comprehensive. The focus is on changed lives, homes, and communities.
- Rather than an emphasis on church membership and becoming good church members, the emphasis is on becoming a Christ follower and missionary in the world.
- The Christ follower is a disciple on mission with God. The disciple is a missionary.
- The missional church emphasizes multiplication of disciples and churches not a linear approach to discipleship.

- Disciple making is missionary making. Every believer should be a missionary in the context where God has placed him or her.
- Believers are called to be and should be missionaries from the very beginning.

M. The Missional Church Serves its Community

- Being missional means we serve our communities, and that we build relationships with the people in them, rather than seeing them as evangelistic targets.
- The missional church understands that operating in a world that no longer respects the church that we must love people with the gospel as well as love people with the gospel...we have to share the gospel in deed and word.

Conclusion: The church is “missionary by nature.” The church is the “pilgrim” church. The church is the people of God on mission. The church is sent and sending. Everyone is a missionary. Mission is not a function of the church; it is the purpose of the church. The church is “servant.”