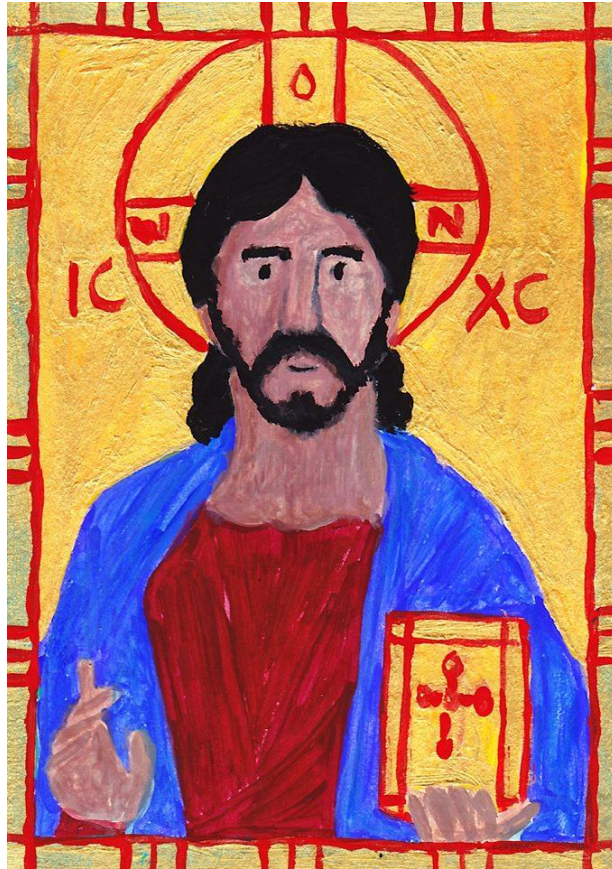


Insights on Being a Missional Church

A Collection of Readings to Ponder



(Icon of Jesus Christ by John Stuart)

This collection of short readings, initially compiled by Brian for a presbytery consultation on being a missional church convened in 2011, is offered here to “provoke ... love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24b) in the service of Jesus Christ’s mission of SHALOM throughout all of creation. How to play this melody with resonance and resilience is the focus of the conversations that co-create Brentwood Presbyterian Church, one conversation after another. We trust this little collection might stimulate similar conversations in your church.

Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Eerdmans, 1989), p.223

Newbigin identifies six characteristics of a missional community:

1. it practices corporate praise, thanksgiving, gratitude, and grace;
2. it declares truth that challenges the reigning plausibility structure
3. it establishes relationships within a local neighbourhood
4. it encourages mutual service in the priesthood of all believers
5. it expects mutual responsibility rather than individualism
6. it nurtures hope and a re-imagined vision of the future

Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Baker, 2009), pp.38-39

[Roxburgh and Boren resist defining the missional church and argue for this refusal on the basis of a biblical approach to dealing with the kingdom of God.]

Jesus' words point, open, and suggest rather than conclude or define. This idea of the kingdom of God is filled with imprecision that can't be pinned down; it invites us to risk entering a world we may not be able to control or manipulate for our own needs (like going through the wardrobe into Narnia). This may be frustrating; it may create consternation in those demanding precision; but it invites us to risk having our imaginations invaded by the God who is endlessly elusive. These descriptions of the kingdom (most of the Bible is like this) are not like our modern imagination, whereby we want everything clear, precise, and packaged into simple, abstract ideas we can control and manage ...

The implications for the missional conversation are clear. We have to become willing (like little children) to enter the strange world of the Bible. Unless we learn to do this, we will continue to read Scripture as a book filled with clear, simple definitions. The thing about definitions is that we use them to provide clarity that, in turn, has the potential for giving us control over the world. Definitions can be used to design strategies and implement plans that leave us in control, which is precisely what the God of Scriptures will not let us do. As we become willing to enter a new way of reading Scripture, we discover that the meaning of missional is more like the kingdom of God than any dictionary definition.

Peter Steinke, "There Once Was a World," *Alban Weekly*, Nov 15, 2010

Churches need to remember that no handbook is available on freelancing mission. Only by going out, being there, and seeing from a fresh angle will the process lead to learning. Discovering how to respond to shifts and changes is the learning. Self-confidence is a byproduct. But growth is in the struggle, the push, and the journey.

Gary V Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living* (Chalice Press, 2008), p.113

In his life and teachings, Jesus introduced us to the idea that his reign, the kingdom of God, is not just a spiritual notion encouraging us to get people into heaven. It is a current reality. It is not quite attained, but it is a taste of what might be. We, as followers of Jesus, are called to live out those possibilities of godly reign incarnationally and communally. The call is to build a church community that is more engaged and active in the world as well as in the sacred task of community building within the church.

Christ came to announce and demonstrate the present and coming kingdom of God. Under God's reign in Christ, the whole world was and is being redeemed. "The church's mission," Robert Webber therefore states, "is to be the presence of the kingdom." Newbigin wrote, "In every culture Jesus is introduced as one who bursts upon the culture's models with the power of the wholly new fact that God reigns over the whole world through Jesus Christ."

The church becomes both an instrument and sign of what God wants to do in this kingdom that Jesus brought to earth. The purpose of the church and its mission is to incarnationally point to what it might look like when a community of people becomes alive under God's reign. By "missioning," the church is making visible to each member, to the church community, and to the world that God's people are at work.

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

God is about a big purpose in and for the whole of creation. The church has been called into life to be both the means of this mission and a foretaste of where God is inviting all creation to go. Just as its Lord is a mission-shaped God, so the community of God's people exists, not for themselves but for the sake of the work. Mission is therefore not a program or a project some people in the church do from time to time (as in "mission trip," mission budget," and so on); the church's very nature is to be God's missionary people. We use the word *missional* to mark this big difference. Mission is not about a project or a budget, or a one-off event somewhere; it's not even about sending missionaries. A missional church is a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all creation in Jesus Christ.

[Towards the end of the book, they summarize things in four points]

1. Discover again the forces that affect the lives of people in our communities
2. Connect people in congregations with their neighborhood and community
3. Keep this connection so that missional imagination about the future of the church becomes a regular part of people's thinking
4. Constantly connect all that is happening with the biblical narratives of God's purpose

Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation* (Augsberg, 2008), p.34

Rouse and Van Gelder outline 7 transformational keys. They also provide a solid theological foundation for their suggestions, drawing on recent reflections on the mission of God and the church, the social doctrine of the Trinity, and the workings of the Spirit. For them, congregations are central to God's mission in and for the world:

“The primary way the people of God exist in the world today is in the form of congregations. Congregations are at the center of God's plan and purpose. They bear witness through the Spirit to the reconciling power of God through Christ in their midst by living as a reconciled community. They also bear witness through the Spirit of this reconciling power of God to the larger community in which they minister. Congregations are unique in that they represent God in the world, being formed by the Spirit as particular communities that live in dynamic relationship within their larger communities. This perspective needs to stand at the core of a congregation's identity.”

Here is a summary of the 7 keys:

1. Congregations that have a clear vision for ministry are more likely to move forward together than those that seem to lack a common purpose.
2. Congregations that focus on becoming a discipling community as they deeply engage their context are more likely to develop a healthy life that moves beyond institutional survival or just serving the needs of its members.
3. Developing healthy, Spirit-led leadership can help cultivate a positive climate change within the faith community.
4. It is imperative that care and intentionality be taken to build a supportive, missional leadership team that is comprised of both staff and lay leaders.
5. It is important for healthy, Spirit-led leadership to stay the course when facing conflict by practicing truth telling as an opportunity for learning and growing together.
6. A congregation that wants to move forward in mission will find it necessary to practice stewardship as it builds financial viability.

It is important to celebrate our successes along the way and, especially, the accomplishments of others.

J. Todd Billings, "What Makes a Church Missional?" *Christianity Today*, March 2008.

A 1998 book titled *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* was the first work to introduce the concept of a missional church. The multi-authored book grew out of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, a group of professors and pastors that sought to bring the World Council of Churches' discussions of *missio dei* ("the mission of God") and Lesslie Newbigin's missionary insights to bear on North America. ...

Missional Church authors were not merely "redesign[ing] the church for success in our changing context," or seeking a pragmatic "method and problem solving" approach to ministry. Instead, they sought to diagnose the cultural captivity of today's church, including its obsession with marketing and technique. More importantly, they painted a theologically rooted vision of the church as a community called to participate in God's mission in and for the world. ...

What does it mean to be missional and Reformed? The Reformed emphasis on the power of God's Word and Spirit can give the missional church a more fully biblical theology, while a missional vision can remind Reformed believers that the Word is sent evangelistically into and for the world.

Darrell L Guder (ed), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998), pp.4-5

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. "Mission" means "sending." And it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history. God's mission began with the call of Israel to receive God's blessing in order to be a blessing to the nations. God's mission unfolded in the history of God's people across the centuries recorded in Scripture, and it reached its revelatory climax in the incarnation of God's work of salvation in Jesus ministering, crucified, and resurrected. God's mission continued in the sending of the Spirit to call forth and empower the church as the witness to God's good news in Jesus Christ. It continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it moves toward the promised consummation of God's salvation in the *eschaton* ("last" or "final day").

We have learned to speak of God as a "missionary God." Thus we have learned to understand the church as a "sent people." "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21) This missional reorientation of our theology is the result of a broad biblical and theological awakening that has begun to hear the gospel in fresh ways. God's character and purpose as a sending or missionary God redefines our understanding of the Trinity.

*Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus part of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classic doctrine of the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (Donald Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.390)*

This trinitarian point of entry into our theology of the church necessarily shifts all the accents in our ecclesiology. As it leads us to see the church as an instrument of God's mission, it also forces us to recognize the ways in which the Western church has tended to shape and fit the gospel into its cultural context and made the church's institutional extension and survival its priority. As we have used the tools of Biblical scholarship carefully, we have begun to learn that the biblical message is more radical, more inclusive, more transforming than we have allowed it to be. In particular, we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness. God's mission embraces all of the creation." God so love the *world*" is the emphasis of the beloved gospel summary in John 3:16. This does not mean the church is not essential to God's work of salvation – it is. But it is essential as God's chosen people "who are blessed to be a blessing to the nations" (Gen 12).

Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Brazos, 2007), p.82

Missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. When the church is in mission, it is the true church. The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible. The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus. To obstruct this is to block God's purposes in and through his people.