

## Palcon 2010

# Transitioning an Established Church To a Missional Church

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## Defining the Term Missional

"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." -- Rick Meigs

## Discerning the Shift in Thinking

At its core missional is a shift in thinking. This shift in thinking is expressed by Ed Stetzer and David Putman in their book, *Breaking the Missional Code* like this:

- From programs to processes
- From demographics to discernment
- From models to missions
- From attractional to incarnational
- From uniformity to diversity
- From professional to passionate
- From seating to sending
- From decisions to disciples
- From additional to exponential
- From monuments to movements

### Etymology of the Word

**Definition:** "Relating to or connected with a religious mission; missionary."

**Part of Speech:** Adjective. An adjective modifies a noun or a pronoun by describing, identifying, or quantifying words. An adjective usually precedes the noun or the pronoun which it modifies.

**Etymology:** From the word missionalism which is a noun meaning, "missionary work or activity."

**First Usage:** 1907 in W. G. HOLMES' *Age Justinian & Theodora II*. Page 687. Quote: "Several prelates, whose *missional* activities brought over whole districts and even nationalities to their creed" (emphasis added). (Reference: Oxford English Dictionary)

It should be noted that Andrew Jones has found it used as early as 1883.

**Modern Usage:** The first missiologist using the term "missional" in its modern understanding was Francis DuBose in his book, "God Who Sends" (Broadman Press, 1983). By the 1990's the term began to appear more and more in such books as "Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America" (Edited by Darrell L. Guder) and the works of Lesslie Newbigin.

## **Discerning what the Missional Church is not:**

This term has been overused, misused and often abused by people in pursuit of the next big plan or program to bring people to church. Somehow we have to free ourselves from the tyranny of “nickels and noses” being the measure of a successful church. We must judge ourselves by our effectiveness as the body of Christ or local expression of His body in our communities.

Missional church is not a label to describe churches that emphasize cross-cultural missions.

Missional church is not a label used to describe churches that are using outreach programs to be externally focused.

Missional church is not another label for church growth and church effectiveness.

Missional church is not a label for churches that are effective at evangelism.

Missional church is not a label to describe churches that have developed a clear mission statement with a vision and purpose for their existence.

Missional church is not a way of turning around ineffective and outdated church forms so that they can display relevance in the wider culture.

Missional church is not a label that points to a primitive or ancient way of doing church.

Missional church is not a label describing new formats of church that reach people who have no interest in traditional churches.

## **Describing the Missional Church**

- The missional church is one where people are exploring and rediscovering what it means to be Jesus' sent people as their identity and vocation.
- The missional church is faith communities willing and ready to be Christ's people in their own situation and place.
- The missional church knows that they must be a cross-cultural missionary (contextual) people and adopt a missionary stance in relation to their community.
- The missional church will be engaged with the culture (in the world) without being absorbed by the culture (not of the world). They will become intentionally indigenous.
- The missional church understands that God is already present in the culture where it finds itself. Therefore, the missional church doesn't view its purpose as bringing God into the culture or taking individuals out of the culture to a sacred space.
- The missional church is about more than just being contextual, it is also about the nature of the church and how it relates to God.

- The missional church is about being -- being conformed to the image of God.
- The missional church will seek to plant all types of missional communities.
- The missional church is evangelistic and faithfully proclaims the gospel through word *and* deed. Words alone are not sufficient; how the gospel is embodied in our community and service is as important as what we say.
- The missional church understands the power of the gospel and does not lose confidence in it.
- The missional church recognizes that it does not hold a place of honor in its host community and that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into that host community as salt and light.<sup>2</sup>
- The missional church seeks to put the good of their neighbor over their own.
- The missional church will give integrity, morality, good character and conduct, compassion, love and a resurrection life filled with hope preeminence to give credence to their reasoned verbal witness.
- The missional church practices hospitality by welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community.
- The missional church will always be in a dynamic tension or paradox between missional individuals and community. We cannot sustain being missional on our own, but if we are not being missional individually we cannot sustain being mission-shaped corporately.<sup>3</sup>
- The missional church will see themselves as representatives of Jesus and will do nothing to dishonor his name.
- The missional church will be totally reliant on God in all it does. It will move beyond superficial faith to a life of supernatural living.
- The missional church will be desperately dependent on prayer.
- The missional church gathered will be for the purpose of worship, encouragement, supplemental teaching, training, and to seek God's presence and to be realigned with God's missionary purpose.
- The missional church is orthodox in its view of the gospel and scripture, but culturally relevant in its methods and practice so that it can engage the world view of the hearers.
- The missional church will feed deeply on the scriptures throughout the week.
- The missional church will be a community where all members are involved in learning "the way of Jesus." Spiritual development is an expectation.
- The missional church will help people discover and develop their spiritual gifts and will rely on gifted people for ministry instead of talented people.
- The missional church is a healing community where people carry each other's burdens and help restore gently.

### **Observations about Missional Churches**

- The average person finds the church through the personal invitation of a friend or coworker who has typically previously been unchurched.
- The majority of people inviting others to attend a weekend service are still disconnected from Christ and have only recently started attending weekend services or exploring and experimenting with the faith themselves. Sometimes they experiment and explore with several different faith options.

- Those who attend who are formerly disconnected from Christ and the church often attend for several years before going public with an expression of faith in Christ.
- Those who attend often participate in many aspects of church life prior to going public with their faith.
- Those who go public with their faith often have been disciplined and grounded in the faith long before going public. Conversion, in this context, becomes part of the discipleship process.
- Those who formerly disconnected from the church who find Christ and assimilate into the church seldom fall out of the church. Change seems to be lasting.

(Taken from the book, *Breaking the Missional Code*, by Ed Stetzer and David Putman, Pages 90-91)

## **Discovering and Driving the Transition**

Please understand that the Missional Church transcends categorization! Does missional fit the various traditions, networks, affiliations and denominations? Yes! At the same time, if one wants to lay missional tag over or add it to our known ways of being the church, the answer is a resounding no! The missional journey calls us out onto a new kind of river that none of us know how to navigate, because it challenges the core of our church imaginations.

Missional is a way of being the church that can be expressed in many different forms, traditions, structures and sizes.

1. We must come to understand that we now live on the mission field.
2. We must teach our churches to think in terms of their responsibility for their communities.
3. This is a wine skins issue: Anyone considering this topic who thinks (whether they realize it or not) that this is basically about getting new wine into old wine skins is destined for frustration and failure. Missional churches represent brand new wine skins, not just new wine.
4. This takes a long time: The most experienced people will tell you 8-10 years minimum. When we are talking about changing the core identity of, not just a person, but a community, we have to expect a long hard road. An apt analogy – God got Israel out of Egypt in pretty short order, but it took another 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel.
5. No one person is capable of maneuvering this transition: Solo pastors are dead in the water in this regard. And this isn't to say that the better way is having a team of top-down leaders – this will end up being damaging as well. One of the keys to instilling missional DNA in a church community is inspiring and encouraging new imagination from the bottom.

## **Questions to consider:**

- In both small numbers as well as large, what are the practices we can engage in as a community that will shape us into people and “a people” who think and act like Jesus?*
- As we try to be honest with ourselves, what things are we doing as a community that don’t seem to be contributing to our spiritual formation?*
- How do we incorporate space in our times together (in homes, in meetings, in gatherings) to intentionally reflect on and respond to what we sense God is speaking and doing in our community?*
- Who are those in our community who seem most gifted to teach (identified by the fruit of their teaching helping people become more like Jesus)? How can we encourage these people to engage with authors and speakers who are dealing with the subject of missional ecclesiology on our behalf?*
- How do we make incremental yet strategic changes in the percentage of money that goes to those things which ensure our security as opposed to those things which necessitate faith in the midst of great risk?*

## **Three sets of Missional Practices:**

### **1. Presence:**

The first set of practices that demonstrate how the church is called to be a sign, witness, and foretaste is the practice of presence. This includes disciplines like worship, experiencing God’s presence, connecting with and listening to God, simplicity, sharing the Lord’s Supper and keeping the Sabbath.

Being God’s missional people begins with God and how we relate to Him through His Son and the power of His Spirit. All of this should be viewed through the lens of the community of believers.

### **2. Love:**

This is about how a group of people commit to doing life together. Being missional means that we do life together in a way that marks us as distinct from the surrounding culture. Often this takes on the form of small groups and it is in these groups that we learn to love, forgive and experience genuine community. The practice of love is messy and often requires grace and mercy.

### **3. Engaging the neighborhood:**

This is a huge subject and goes way beyond an occasional outreach event. This is about living as a contrast in society in how we relate to God and others. When a church loves God and others in

a way that a watching world can see, it is able to go into the neighborhoods and enter into conversations about what the gospel means in respect to the difficult questions that people face today.

## **Discussing it**

### **Leaders are Readers:**

*Introducing the Missional Church*, Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, Baker Books

*Church Unique*, Will Mancini, Jossey Bass

*Beyond the Box*, Bill Easum and Dave Travis, Group Publishing

*Deliberate Simplicity*, Dave Browning, Zondervan

*Breaking the Discipleship Code*, David Putman and Ed Stetzer, Broadman and Holman Publishing

*Breaking the Missional Code*, Ed Stetzer and David Putman, Broadman and Holman Publishing

*Planting Missional Churches*, Ed Stetzer, Broadman and Holman Publishing

*Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*, Milfred Minatrea, Jossey Bass Publishing

*The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh, Hendrickson Publishing

*A Journey to Freedom for Pilgrims and Wanderers*, Jonathan and Jennifer Campbell, John Wiley and Sons Publisher