

A FOCUS ON MISSION

Be a missional church

Disciple-making congregations follow the call of Jesus to make disciples from all the nations, to baptize them (bringing them into the church), and to teach them all that he taught us. They go out to the ends of the earth, beginning where they are, to give witness to Jesus and to the love and grace and eternal life that are God’s gifts to the world. They go out into the world beyond the church as ambassadors of Christ to engage in the ministry of reconciliation, urging people to be reconciled to God and to one another. (See *Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21*)

Our mission includes working together with God and other people to create shalom, to seek the kingdom of God where God’s will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Psalms and the books of the prophets, especially, repeatedly call God’s people to work for justice for those who are poor and those who are shunned by the larger community. Scripture urges us from beginning to end to live with compassion, mercy, and forgiveness for everyone and to create a place among us for those who are from another place (the stranger, the “alien” – today, the immigrant).

F O C U S
How would you describe the church’s mission in the world?

The vision of *shalom* includes the hope of a time when there will be no more war, when nations will turn their weapons of war into instruments of peace and prosperity for all the people. It will be a time when no one will be hungry or poor, when all will share the good things of this world, when neither young nor old will be in want, when everyone will have their “daily bread.” The Church has often pushed this hope into a distant future that the world will never know, that will come only when eternity comes; but when the prophets proclaimed that vision from God, they spoke of it as a reality to come in this world. Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God is similar, if not synonymous, with that vision. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He said those who enter the kingdom are people

who care for those who are hungry and thirsty, those without proper clothing and shelter, those who are sick and in prison. The stories of Jesus in the Gospels suggest that God’s desire for people who follow Jesus is that we would reach out to others who are shunned by society and neglected by the world. Missional churches go out into the world to fulfill God’s call.

Emphasize compassion

Moses once asked to see God’s true nature and God responded, in part, with these words:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. (Exodus 34:5-7)

The psalmists and the prophets repeated the same descriptive refrain and spoke only of God’s compassion, graciousness, and mercy. (See *Psalms 103:8-11*, for instance.) The gospels also often speak of how Jesus had compassion on the people. The stories of his interactions with most people, especially the poor, the neglected and other hurting people of his day, reveal a man of great compassion, “Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate” (*Luke 6:36*). This theme of compassion continues throughout the New Testament. Compassion expresses the essence of who God is and therefore who we are called to be, making compassion the foundation of the church’s mission and ministry.

Make people a priority

Most church budgets make buildings and staff the top priority. In many budgets, 80% of the gifts of God’s people to the church go to maintain the building and pay the staff. As your Pastoral Relations Committee or other group works with your pastor to set priorities for his or her work, consider how much time you allot for mission in the community



in addition to pastoral care and maintenance of the institution. Think about how much of the week your building is used for mission and how much of your budget goes to mission beyond your community.

F O C U S **How can you do more to make people and mission a priority in your finances?**

In most churches, the active members spend most of their “church work” time attending meetings designed to maintain the structures and programs of the church: board meetings, choir practice, dinners, fundraisers, and even traditional educational events are nearly always focused on sustaining the internal life of the congregation. Missional churches – disciple-making congregations – find ways to spend their money and time that make people, rather than buildings and programs, a priority – ways that include people outside the congregation, especially those who are in need.

Such choices are not always easy. We often have beautiful, historic buildings that we want to preserve. People often have strong emotional bonds even for buildings that are in disrepair. Pastors and staff are important to the health of congregations, and churches absolutely must be just in their financial support of their ministers. So what do we do? Study your community then commit \$500 or \$1,000 (or \$10,000 depending on the size of your congregation) this year to ministry directly tied to people in need. The answers are different for every church, but one principle remains the same. If we want to have missional churches, we will find ways to commit more time and money to people in need.

Get involved beyond the church

When we consider any kind of change in our lives and in our churches, the best counsel is to start small. Especially in smaller churches, but perhaps in churches of any size, the people doing most of the work often have already committed as much time as they can. Here are a few ideas for getting involvement beyond the walls of the church:

- Look for people in the church who are not already in leadership. They may respond with enthusiasm to doing something good for people in the community.



- Ask people serving on committees or boards, for instance, if they would rather work directly with people in the community. If they agree, allow them to leave their other position. Find someone else to fill it or leave it vacant, recognizing that outreach is foundational, not secondary.
- Children and teens are often excited about opportunities to help people in need. Find ways to involve a children’s class or youth group or allow young people to take the lead for the congregation by identifying and planning an outreach activity.
- Give pastors and other ministers on staff permission to use more of their time in direct ministry with people beyond the congregation. Work on your church coming to understand that they are a mutually supportive community, which means that traditional “pastoral care” – visiting shut-ins, hospital visits, home visits - are the responsibility of the community.
- Engage the congregation in a process of becoming a missional church, and encourage individuals to go out to serve people in the name of Christ and the church without any formal program or structure. Help them create a simple structure for the ministry they are excited about if other people and more money are needed.
- Form partnerships with other churches or other agencies in the community to address specific concerns of people that are beyond the financial and human resources of your congregation. Contact your ABC region office or the National Ministries’ [Volunteer Ministries](#) office to find out what opportunities for ministry with people beyond your community you can be involved with.

Focus on “Children in Poverty”

American Baptists currently have embraced a focus on the concerns and needs of children who live in poverty in our nation through the National Ministries’ [Children in Poverty Initiative](#). All of our congregations are urged to consider how they might be involved and live out this initiative within their own communities.



A Declaration of Importance for American Baptists on the Issue of Children in Poverty

In *Psalms 81*, God reminds Israel, “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket. In distress you called and I rescued you . . .” (*vs. 6-7b*).

In *Psalms 82*, God admonishes the powers that be to “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” (*vs. 3-4*).

According to *Matthew 25:40*, when our Lord Jesus appears absent from the world, we have only to look to “the least of these my brethren...” to see Him. Here we will find and honor Him.

Our society casts off these hungry, ill-clothed “brethren,” depriving them of the blessings of life. We marginalize them, denying them the resources of health and shelter. Finally, we “lock them up,” in many cases a vivid illustration of their exclusion from life and society.

Brothers and sisters of Christ of all ages fill the ranks of these despised and cast-off. The very young, however, notoriously make up the largest, most vulnerable and unnoticed segment. Thus Jesus in *Mark 10:14, 16* reminds the disciples, “Let the children come to me....And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands upon them, and blessed them.” Yes, children are Christ’s and our brothers and sisters.

In its most recent report on poverty trends in August of 2004, the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that for the third

year in a row both the percentage and actual number of people in America living below the poverty level increased. Of the 35.9 million people living in poverty in this wealthy nation, 12.9 million are children, an increase from 12.1 million in 2002. Many families with working members, living *above* the government’s poverty level, must make drastic choices, i.e., rent vs. food, healthcare vs. transportation every month. And, again, the children suffer the most.

American Baptists believe that God has called us to minister in love to children. We have shown it in our mission through the decades. Today, if we still believe that, then we must also speak urgently in advocacy *for* children and their families. As we seek God’s new direction for our denomination, God has already sought us.

We call upon the American Baptist Churches USA and its constituent partners to make the issue of Children in Poverty a priority of prayer, advocacy, ministry and stewardship. Let it occupy us in our sanctuaries, our fellowship halls, our communities, and especially the halls of power.

To this end we commit ourselves to learn from one another in churches and regional missions as well as from other organizations, such as the Children’s Defense Fund and the National Center for Children in Poverty. We will learn about and celebrate current mission. We will seek direction for new mission and how we may accomplish it.

A vision and a promise await us on the horizon of this commitment: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of these people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of hosts?” (*Zechariah 8:4-6*)

What will we do? How can your church become involved? National Ministries’ staff will work with national partners, region partners, and local churches to meet the needs of these most vulnerable members of our society. As you read the following material, think about where your church is already responding to the needs of children in poverty. Perhaps your Vacation Bible School reaches out to children in your community who have extensive needs. Perhaps you provide job training for adults in poverty whose children will benefit.

Compassionate responses to children in poverty must move beyond feeling to action. How might your church reach out to alleviate the suffering of children in the following situations? How could your church help to change the conditions of society so that children and their families experience justice?

- *Children of inmates:* Children whose parents are incarcerated often drop out of school or become enmeshed in the criminal justice system.
- *Homelessness:* Our common picture of homeless men and women misses the reality that many children are homeless as well. These children need stability and belonging. They need to go to school.
- *Access to health care:* Poor families, even those with an adult working full time, rarely have health insurance. The emergency room of a hospital becomes their clinic in a crisis. Many young mothers or women who have no prenatal care give birth to low weight babies.
- *Public Education and Literacy:* The single greatest predictor of future success is education. Yet, children living in poverty are less likely to finish high school or go to college.
- *Latch-key Kids:* Children who come home to an empty house need supervision and care.
- *Abused and Neglected Children:* Would you recognize the signs of abuse? Do you know whom to contact if you suspect it? These and other children need the love, care and nurture that communities of faith can offer in Jesus' name. Think about these possibilities for your church:
 - ✓ before and after school programming and care

- ✓ recreational activities on weekends
- ✓ invitations to children to join families in the church at a baseball game or other sporting event
- ✓ a health clinic in your church or other space
- ✓ collaboration with a local hospital for a health screening day
- ✓ fund-raising for immunizations for children in your community

Become a missional church

A missional church is a community of faith that directs its ministry focus primarily outward toward the context in which it is located and to the broader world beyond. We live in a pluralistic, dynamic, and spiritually inclined culture where many churches are declining. How can our congregations experience transformation from an inward focus on maintaining what they have to an outward focus where believers are equipped, empowered, and deployed to be engaged in the work of the mission of God in their context and beyond?

Participate in The Missional Church Transformation Journey Workshop led by National Ministries' staff (ronald.carlson@abc-usa.org). You will learn about the changes happening in our culture and our churches. You will learn what a missional church is. You will hear stories of where it is already working and how you can begin in your own congregation.

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ENFOQUE EN LA MISIÓN

La iglesia discipuladora se ve así misma como una estación de misión. Entiende que el servicio fiel a Dios es un compromiso de ser enviada primero localmente. Se enfoca en que la iglesia existe no para si misma, sino para aquellas personas que no son parte de la comunidad de fe. Una iglesia enfocada en la misión vive el gran mandamiento de amar a Dios y a los demás.

ENFOCAR

¿Cómo describiría usted la misión de la iglesia en el mundo?

Inculcar este enfoque en la misión cambia todo. Las decisiones –sobre el ministerio, las finanzas, el personal, el edificio, el compromiso del laicado y más– surgen al querer servir mejor a la misión que Dios nos da de “ir y hacer discípulos”. Demanda cambios en el uso del tiempo, el uso del edificio, o las prioridades pastorales. Las personas cumplen su compromiso al servir a otros(as), no al server en comités. Las funciones del edificio son menos como un lugar de reunión y más como un lugar para enviar. El pastor invierte más tiempo en equipar y por ende de habilitar a cada uno(a) para cuidar de otros(as).

Un enfoque en la misión cambia las prioridades de la estructura y mantenimiento de lo que Dios nos ha llamado a hacer y ser para otros(as) en este tiempo en particular y en este lugar. La supervivencia institucional pierde su importancia, aún en épocas de presupuestos apretados y de malos tiempos.

ENFOCAR

¿Qué más podemos hacer para que las personas sean una prioridad en nuestra misión de apoyo financiero?

Este enfoque, claro está que no minimiza las necesidades legítimas, las heridas y penas de sus miembros en la comunidad de fe; las pone en una perspectiva diferente. Llenar las necesidades, curar las heridas, aliviar las penas se convierte no en un fin en sí, sino en una manera de aumentar nuestra habilidad de responder al llamado de Dios a servir a otros(as) tanto como individuos, como comunidad de fe. Las necesidades, heridas y penas se convierten en experiencias que realzan nuestra misión porque las vemos como vínculos que nos conectan con el mundo necesitado, herido y sufrido.



Un enfoque en la misión requiere de mucha fe porque la misión es costosa; no se visualiza inmediatamente en nuevos miembros y nuevos dadores. Inquietará y tal vez incomodará a aquellos(as) que están más preocupados por la viabilidad financiera de la institución dado que los resultados de esta inversión son invisibles. Requerirá que la congregación piense de manera diferente en cuanto a las razones legítimas de endeudarse, cambiando de capital para mejoramientos a capital para fondos de apoyo para la misión.

Muchos desafíos siguen al enfocarse en la misión. Pero una congregación que se ha despertado a la realidad de que son parte de la misión de Dios en el mundo, ve un tesoro en la niñez que aprende por primera vez que alguien en verdad les ama y en los adultos que experimentan el poder de Cristo en maneras nuevas al transformar sus vidas y al traen significado y nuevas posibilidades a ellas. Experimentan gozo al compartir el amor de Dios con otros(as) y reciben en retorno ese mismo amor en maneras sorprendentes y en abundancia.