

## **Focus on Mission**

### **The Challenge to Focus on Mission**

Whether you call it a paradigm or a mental model, we all use internal images and definitions to make sense of our world. Our mental model of “church” serves as an imaging tool that helps us examine and identify what is church and what is not church (for an individual). Once we accept a mental model of what it is to *be a church*, that mental model controls how we *do church*. A mental model effects how we think about something and controls our actions.

Older mental models often defined a church as active in “mission” if it provided “mission support” or was “mission minded”. Consequently, mission activities were limited to the selection, training and support (prayer and finances) of a few professional missionaries who were trained, sent, and supported to witness to populations in foreign lands. While active in “mission,” the primary energy and resources of a “mission minded” or “mission supporting” church would be focused inwardly.

One exception to that mental model of mission-minded church was the activity of a denomination’s “home missions” which often functioned as a cross-cultural and social service mission organization within the North American context. Even with this relationship, mission support and mission mindedness for a local church reinforced the mental model of *financially* supporting missions, and occasionally sending “one of their own” members to serve in a cross cultural context. This could be accomplished with the church giving a small percentage of its income to the “sending” mission agency, either through the denomination or other parachurch organization.

“Missional church,” originally coined by missiologist David Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission*, is a term intended to describe a new mental model of both church and mission. Why do we need a new term? The new term is helpful in freeing us from the old mental model so that the church can build upon an effective new mental model to be and to do church today. As the disciple-making church focuses on mission, it should look to this new model in which disciples are formed for the purpose of mission.

One problem with the old mental image is that it worked in relatively static context, not the rapidly changing world we find ourselves in today. Those older models of church may have successfully accomplished God’s intended mission in previous years when the context was radically different. However, previous success does not guarantee success in a new period of discontinuous and exponential change such as we are currently experiencing. The disciple-making church attempts to equip, empower and support disciples for mission in our current situation.

The term and its definition are based upon the mental model that the church exists not for those who are currently gathered into a faith community but for those who are not gathered. In other words, it is intended to focus the energy and resources of the church

outward toward others. The following is a synopsis of the term as it is used by National Ministries. As with any mental model, no singular image incorporates the full essence of what it is to be a church. However, as the context of North America continues to unfold, this emerging model may help guide your church's imagination as you seek to be a disciple-making congregation which is faithful in mission where you are.

## **A broad definition of the term “Missional Church”**

**A missional church is an authentic community of faith that primarily directs its ministry focus outward toward the context in which it is located and to the broader world beyond.**

Each phrase of this definition is intentional and purposeful. As you examine these phrases, consider how different your church would be and how different your church's ministry would be in your community if your church would implement this mental model in your context.

**A missional church is an authentic faith community** (*authentic in that the relationships are authentic—not superficial. It refers to a life of honesty, not perfection, in which the faith community's practices of grace and mission are congruent with their profession of faith in Christ. Faith in that it is a response to the Living God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not a statement or doctrinal position about God as it is a response to God's invitation to follow Christ into God's mission field. Community in that individuals who respond in faith are connected with God and with each other. Whenever missional people participate in God's mission, they do so, not individually, but with others. The formation of community is essential to missional activities.*)

**that primarily directs its ministry focus outward** (*the church is called to be engaged in the mission of the Kingdom of God. Mission is the church's primary purpose and that mission is to be participated in as the primary function of the faith community. As such the church exists for the well being of others and creation, and not for self serving purposes*),

**toward the context in which it is located and to the broader world beyond.** (*By joining Jesus Christ and outside partners the church serves God's purpose by **being** good news people and **doing** good news in word and deed, locally, nationally and globally.*)

This changes everything! In a disciple-making congregation, disciples are being formed to share in God's mission and disciple-making congregations become mission stations. It changes how church members spend their time, energy and resources, how church buildings are used or not used at all, and how budgets and governance are handled. In order to think through the implications of being a disciple-making missional church, we encourage you to study “Six Essential Characteristics of the Missional Church.” You will receive the most benefit from this article by responding to its questions. To perceive the contrasts in operation between existing traditional churches and missional churches, review the article “Maintenance or Mission?”