

Exercise for “What is Church?”

Craig Van Gelder in *The Essence of the Church* writes: “The church’s ministry flows naturally out of its nature. This means that the church does what it is.” He continues by listing key elements of the church’s nature:

“The nature of the church is defined by the mission of God in the world.
The nature of the church is the result of the redemptive work of Christ.
The nature of the church is holistic in relating this redemption to all of life.
The church exists as a social community that is both spiritual and human.
The church exists as a full demonstration of a new humanity.
The attributes of the church’s nature determine the church’s ministry.” (page 128)

1. Go back to the five “modes” of church in the article. Write down the name of one congregation that you know about which “fits” the description of the “mode” of church you desire to plant. Write out answers to the following questions.
 - a. What do you like about this congregation? Why?
 - b. What do you dislike about this congregation? Why?
 - c. What are people interested in when they join this congregation? In what way does this relate to a key element of the nature of the church (see above)?
 - d. In what ways does this mode reflect the general life of the early church?
2. Write out a brief summary thought on each of the following issues that are included in the “modes.”
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Internal functioning
 - c. Outward functioning
 - d. Leadership
 - e. Community identity/relationships
 - f. Sense of belonging
3. Now that you have written responses to items 1 and 2, take the time to write out your own definition of “church.”
4. Reviewing your “definition” in item 3, how is this like or unlike what you have been thinking when starting a new congregation? What is going to be the essence of this church and how will that affect what this church does?
5. Why have you been thinking of starting a new congregation? (Use the discernment experience entitled “Reflecting on your journey.”) In what way is what you have been thinking about reflected in your “definition”? What have you done to learn more about starting a new congregation? (Please contact our New Church Planting Team in order to discover significant resources to use.)

After this initial time of reflection upon the issue “What is church?” we encourage you to engage issues identified in “What is ‘new’ church?”