

Dear Friends:

One of the key concepts in the American Churches today is the desire to be “missional”. What does that mean? What lies behind this movement?

We have seen for quite a while a decline of Christian faith in our society. Alex McManus said: “The Western world has lost its faith in the shadows of church steeples”. This has caused church leaders to describe a paradigm shift in their emphasis.

“Missional church” refers to a broad and loosely united movement committed to recapture the apostolic emphasis of the early Christian church. It refers to the church seeking to reengage the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by a “going” and “sending” emphasis. Missional churches are seen in their addressing their worship life with new forms of services. But they share a commitment to taking the Gospel to those outside the church rather than waiting for them to be attracted to programs within existing communities of faith.

Briefly, there are 5 emphases that have been identified as missional:

1. The Church is seen as the sent people of God. The congregations seek to go out to the community rather than expect others to come in to their congregations. (Remember my sermon recently on “Out of the Barn Yard”?)
2. The world is seen as the sight of the churches ministry. Missional churches consciously embody an “outside of the four walls of the church” posture. Ministry is practiced in the neighborhood rather than in a church building. Missional churches seek to feed the hungry, hold Bible studies in public places and present a visible witness to a watching world.
3. Churches are seen as mission outposts. Communities of faith exist as training and equipping bodies that gather for worship in preparation for doing God’s work in the world. Missional churches exist in and for the sake of the world.
4. Missional Pastors are seen as resident missiologists. Pastors do not see themselves as chaplains, resident theologians or CEO’s. Instead they focus on equipping all of Christ followers to engage fully in God’s mission in the world and community. They take seriously the concept of the “priesthood” of all believers (compare Ephesians 4:11-13).
5. Missional churches have new measures for evaluating success. In the past, communities of faith judged vibrancy and health of a congregation by means of high membership rolls, tracking average attendance in services of worship and Sunday school and just counting baptisms and confessions of faith as the measures of success. Missional churches mark success on how much a community is impacted by its work in eradicating hunger, how much of the budget is spent on the community rather than building bigger and better church buildings.

Is this a new “cure all”? Probably not. But it is food for thought and action.

Let the discussion begin,
Pastor Terry