

What is a Missional Church?

Defining,

Describing

and Discovering

the Joy of Joining God on Mission

Introduction

What does it mean to be missional? Is it a fad, or is something more? What is a missional church? Can a person be a missionary in their own neighbourhood? Why is it harder to get friends to come to church today than it was 20 years ago?

Lesslie Newbigin was a missionary from England to India from the 1930's to the 1970's. When he retired back to England, he found a very different country than the one he had left. England was no longer a Christian nation. The church in England had been pushed to the margins of the culture and considered irrelevant. It was time for a rethinking of what it meant to be God's people in that place.

Newbigin was not interested in asking the question of how to get more people to come to church. Instead, he focused on the missio dei (the fact that God is a missionary God) and asked questions of what God was doing in that place. He asked how to share the gospel in context. Newbigin asked important missiological questions about the gospel, the culture and the church.

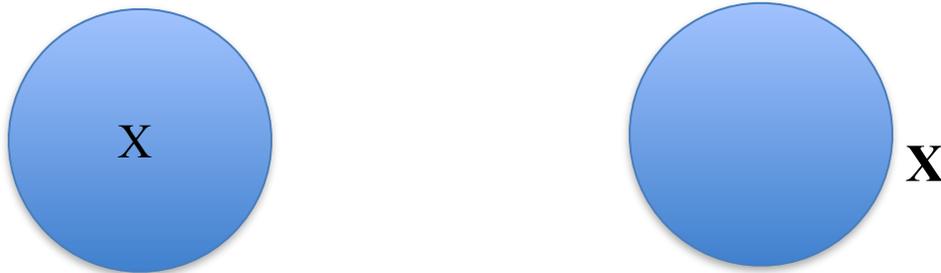
God has used the initial work of Newbigin, and then others in many places around the world to shape the current missional movement. This booklet will help us to learn what it means to be missional, to discover whether we personally, or we corporately as a church, are becoming more missional, and then give suggestions of disciplines/practices to use to join God on mission.

Cultural Dislocation

England is not the only place where the church has been pushed to the margins. We in North America have experienced our own cultural dislocation of the church, and are faced with a new reality. David Fitch talks about three examples of this cultural dislocation...

- * Post Attractional – people will no longer come to a church building to find answers to their spiritual questions in the same percentages that they did a generation ago.
- * Post Authoritarian – people no longer have the same respect for any authority, especially the authority of the church or Pastors.
- * Post Universal Language – people no longer know the story of God as they once did, and are not familiar with the “Christianese” that followers of Jesus often use.

There are other examples of this cultural dislocation, but these three likely help us to agree that the church is no longer at the center of our culture in most of the North American context. We no longer hold a position of power and privilege, and certainly don't have the prestige we once did. But here is the most important question... **Is this a bad thing?**



Many are spending time and energy, trying to help the church to return to the center. We come up with new programs, bigger and better evangelism campaigns and slick presentations, to try and recover what we have lost. **But we need to remember that the church has often flourished from a position on the margins.** Missional practitioners believe that this shift might be a gift from God.

Cultural Captivity

Many have begun to ask the question of whether the church has adopted the means and methods of the world into “trying to grow the church.” JB Phillips warned against this in his translation of Paul’s words in Romans 12 by saying “Do not let the world squeeze you into its mould.”

The seeker targeted movement of the 1980’s and 90’s, had wonderful intentions of reaching many who did not know Christ. As we reflect on some of that movement however, it might be said that we were inadvertently producing consumers of religious goods and services rather than disciples of Jesus.

One of the opportunities we have, as a result of being pushed to the margins, is that we can take a step back and ask questions of the church as to whether we are really producing missionaries, or whether we have settled for attracting attenders.

There are some shifts we may want to consider.

Shifts

This shift from the center to the margins, alerts us as His people that there may be some shifts that we too need to consider as we join God on mission. These include a shift from

Attractional to Incarnational and Attractive

Missional People are not trying to create services that will attract unbelievers to “church,” but are learning to live attractive lives of faith and introduce their friends to Jesus.

Networks to Neighbourhoods

Missional people are learning to live in the neighbourhoods where God has sent them. They do not abandon the networks they have established, but they are looking for ways to dwell in the place where they live as a faithful presence.

Institutionalism to Kingdom Expressions

Missional People are seeking to plant more than Sunday Morning Worship Services. They believe that their task is to become a people who bring attention to where God is at work, themselves becoming a sign, servant and foretaste of the kingdom.

Programs to People

Missional People are investing more in people than in programs. They believe that an unhealthy emphasis on programs leads to the producing of consumers rather than disciples.

Personal salvation alone to Redeeming all things

Missional People believe deeply in the gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom. This good news of the coming of a new King and Kingdom in and through Jesus, includes the personal salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, for individuals that repent and believe. It also includes the good news that through the life of Jesus we have a demonstration of what it means to live life to the fullest. It also includes the good news that Christ the King is redeeming all things.

Propositions alone to Story

Missional People believe in the authority of scripture. In no way do they diminish the role of God’s word, but instead of seeing it as a series of proposition, they are learning to read it as the story of God at work in the world redeeming all things, with and through His people.

Understanding to Formation

Missional People are learning that to be a disciple/follower of Jesus means more than just having an intellectual understanding of orthodoxy. It means that we need to increasingly be formed in the character and life of Christ, as if He were living in and through us, and therefore have a right orthopraxy.

Believe to Participate

Missional People no longer accept that it is enough to believe that right things, but rather that we learn to participate in what God is doing.

Definition

Missional is not some program or latest fad. It is not a return to the first century church. It is not emergent or liberal, but rather is deeply rooted in a belief that we as followers of Jesus need to join God on mission in every context where He is leading us. We believe that we bear witness to who God is in every area of our lives. Therefore, we have defined missional as...

*“Renewed theological vision of the church on mission,
serving as a sign, servant and foretaste of the kingdom of God.”*

If you have read any of Newbigin’s writings, you will hear some of his words in that definition.

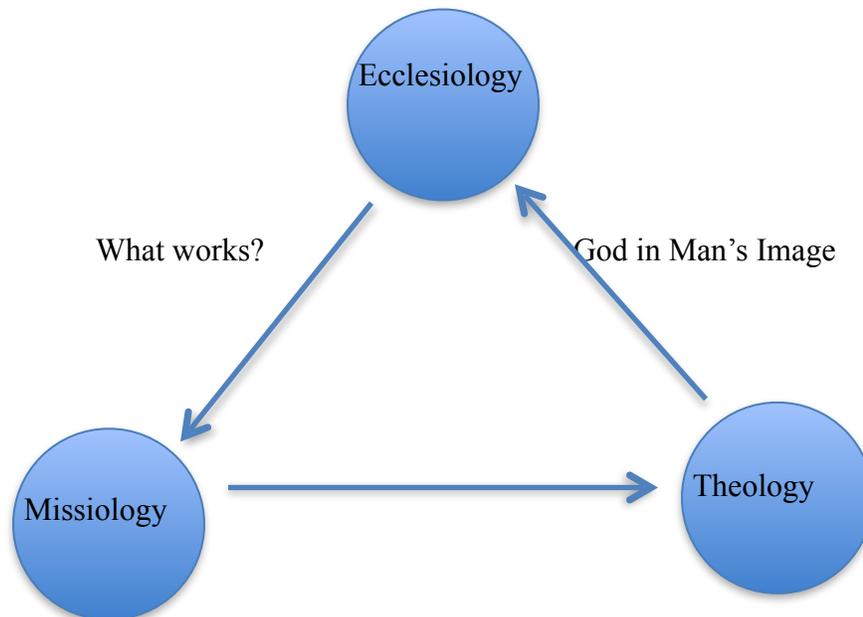
Foundation

One of the drifts that the church has experienced in the last number of years, is that we too often have asked ecclesiological questions first. By this we mean, “How do we get our church to grow?” Or, “What works?” If you ever go to Pastors conferences, you know the reality of people asking one another the attendance figures at their services, and then looking for the latest program or key that will help them to unlock their growth secret.

Those who are trying to follow God on mission ask a different set of questions however. We try and ask the questions of “Who is God?” and “What is He up to in my neighbourhood?” We are trying to move from questions about what works, to questions about what is right.

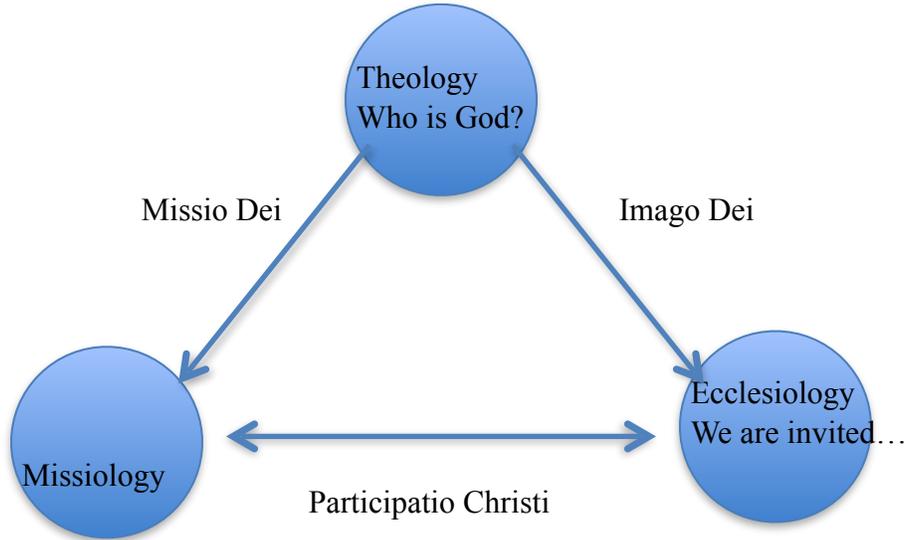
Said a different way, we are not beginning the conversations about gospel, culture and church with church questions (ecclesiology) but rather with God questions (theology). We believe that our theology needs to inform our missiology and our ecclesiology, rather than our ecclesiology informing our theology. We are made in God’s image, not vice versa.

These diagrams help to demonstrate this point. The first is about the drift we have experienced...



We have allowed the world to shape us into a way that seeks success in building the church. But this was never our job. Our task was to be faithful and to be witnesses to the reality of Jesus.

This second diagram is where those who are missional believe we need to be

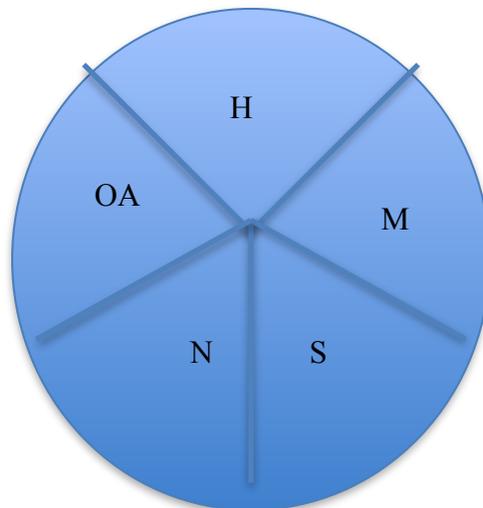


This diagram seeks to present the idea that the missional conversation begins with a discovery that God is a missionary God (in nature and in action), who created us in His image, and is at work in the world. He invites us as His image bearers to participate with what He is doing in the world.

Framework

How do we learn to participate with our missionary God, who is at work redeeming all things? One framework for this kind of life found in scripture is in the Schema. On one occasion, a teacher of the law asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Jesus reminded him that he knew the answer already. Jews were taught from the youngest age to love God with all of their **hearts, minds** and **strength**, and to love their **neighbours** as they loved **themselves (or one another)**.

Being or becoming missional, means more than having a backyard BBQ. It is about learning to bear witness to God in every aspect of our lives individually and corporately. If we bear witness to the reality that we serve a missionary God, then we cannot help become missionaries ourselves.



Becoming a Missional Movement means that we are formed in the image of Christ and sent!

Description

Missional people and churches believe that there is a gift to us in the cultural dislocation of the church. There is no question that the practice of our faith becomes more difficult in ways, but we are reminded that as God's people, all of our life together must begin with an understanding of who He is and how we bear witness to Him. This foundation, and the framework of learning to love Him with all of our hearts, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves (one another), is a wonderful reminder of learning to be fully human.

Being missional is about more than just backyard BBQ's – it is about learning to bear witness to a missionary God in every aspect of our lives.

Heart

Being missional means we learn to love God with all of our hearts. If you were to ask people who it was that influenced them the most in their relationship to God, inevitably they will name someone who has a deep passionate love for the Lord. They will describe them usually as people filled with joy because of their love for Jesus. They will describe them as worshippers both individually and corporately. I would venture to guess that more people are influenced to follow Jesus through the love for Christ of another follower than through any theological argument.

Therefore we need to learn to give all of our hearts to the Lord for the sake of others.

Mind/Will

Being missional means we learn to love God with all of our minds/wills. This is certainly about learning about who God is, thinking rightly, handling scripture with skill, but it is about far more. We need to think rightly about who God is, and then we need to have our wills transformed so that we will live like Christ. Paul says this directly in Romans 12:2...

*“Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...”*

Strength

Being missional means we learn to love God with all of our strength. This is about learning to steward all that God has entrusted to us. This would include the use of our time, treasures, talents and the care of creation. At the pace of life that many of us live, we have very little time for relationships with our neighbours, which bears witness to the wrong image of God. With as much debt as we have, we struggle to bear witness to the generosity of God. We need to use our talents for the kingdom and lead the way in creation care. All of these are a part of what it means to be missional.

Neighbour

Being missional means we bear witness to God through loving our neighbours. Hospitality is a crucial part of the Christian life. Being a good neighbour is one of the instructions of Jesus. Being friends is one thing, but learning to share the good news of Jesus and His Kingdom is part of what it means to be hospitable. Is it possible we care for someone and not tell them about Jesus? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6md638smQd8>). We have settled for inviting our friends to church alone, instead of learning to introduce them to Jesus. Being missional means that we are learning to share our stories of encounters with the living God to those around us naturally.

One Another

Being missional means we bear witness to God through loving one another. Scripture instructs us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. We think this is at least in part plural and refers to the community of God's people and not just individuals. One of the distinctives about being a Christian is that we believe in a God who is “One God.” This means far more than we are monotheists. It refers to the reality that God is one – even though existing in three persons. It is this oneness that we bear witness too when we learn to love one another and live in community. One of the greatest ways to bear witness to God in this generation is to demonstrate what real community looks like and is all about. If we are His children, then we love one another as family.

Disciplines

Having defined, described and enabled people to discover where they are at in a becoming missionary people, it is helpful to suggest a number of ways in which individuals and churches might grow in becoming missional (more like our missionary God).

Twenty years ago, it seemed as if many churches spent their energies on trying to develop a vision, mission and values. They believed that these three guided them towards being effective in ministry. The church's values seemed to take center stage as time went on. Some people began to point out that many churches had very similar values (fellowship, relationship, creativity, generosity...) and that in the end, these values did not help very much to actually forming the people in the way of Jesus. It is not that values are unimportant, but it began to be clear that it was actually a set of practices/disciplines around these values that began to shape individuals and the body as a whole.

We believe that every church needs to discern what it is that God is calling them to be disciplined around. Each church needs to come up with a set of practices that will form them as a people in the way of Jesus. These practices can be for each individual, but there is something about a set of practices that are shared by each member of the congregation that brings about a sense of unity on the journey. As God's people engage in disciplines or practices together, they begin to recognize the presence of God in their midst, and hear His voice as He leads them forward.

What do these practices look like? Each church will need to come up with what they believe God is calling them to. What we describe below are examples of practices that have empowered one church to be on mission with God in their neighbourhoods (it is a multi-neighbourhood church). These practices come from the framework we have been suggesting throughout this tool.

Heart

Suggested Practice: Morning and Evening Prayer

Our desire is to love God with all of our hearts. We want to be more passionate about our pursuit of Christ than any other thing in our lives. Therefore we engage in practices that will increase our desire for the Lord and decrease our desire for other things.

In order to increase our passion for Him, we want to be able to recognize His presence in our lives. Many followers of Jesus are unable to answer the question of where they have seen God at work in their lives. They are therefore ill-equipped to be able to witness to the reality of the living Christ.

Every morning we take the first few minutes to recognize the presence of Jesus. We walk through what we think our day will look like, inviting the presence of God into each situation, and asking Him to order our steps. **We want to see God at work in our lives and be able to tell stories of how He encountered us.**

Likewise every evening, we finish our day by reflecting back on where we have encountered Christ in our day. We spend a few minutes celebrating His presence, and a few more asking forgiveness for those times when we ignored Him. We have found it helpful to journal the stories of when we have encountered Him so that we can recall quickly how where we have encountered Him throughout our week. These stories are useful in our corporate times of worship, as well as in our learning to share our faith.

Mind

Suggested Practice: Daily Scripture Reading

Not only do we want to recognize God's presence through seeing Him at work, but we want to be able to discern His voice in the multitude of noises in our lives. It is crucial that we learn to listen for the voice of God.

Scripture is one way that God speaks to His people. For generations we have seen the Bible more as a book of propositions or doctrine. We have sought to understand it through scientific methods. This holds some value, but the Bible is the story of God sending His word into the world as He is redeeming all things. God speaks in scripture and wants us to hear what He is saying to us. “What does this mean?” is a good question, but “what is God saying to us about what He wants us to do?” may be a better one. You cannot have one without the other, but missional people desire to get their marching orders from what God is saying to them in the word.

Strength

Suggested Practice: Keeping the Sabbath

There are many examples of practices around loving God with all of our strength. Ordering the pace of our lives, practicing generosity or taking care of creation are all important practices. However, missional people understand that the practice of keeping the Sabbath is foundational to learning to trust God.

We are not suggesting that we jump back into a legalistic posture with the Sabbath, but we are suggesting that every community of God’s people will benefit from creating a communal rhythm around the Sabbath.

At Southside Community Church in Vancouver BC, the gift of the Sabbath has become an essential part of the journey together. Every Saturday at 6pm, the people have covenanted together to cease work and celebrate God’s presence with them. They are learning to stop working and trust God for that which is left undone. The people gather in one another homes and invite neighbours to gather around a meal. This is no ordinary meal, but it is a feast – a celebration – where stories are told about where they have encountered the presence of Jesus in their week. Neighbours who do not know Christ are invited in as well to share in the celebration of God’s goodness.

Typically, the evening ends fairly early after a time of thanksgiving prayer. It is important to those from Southside, to be well rested to come to a time of gathering for worship on Sunday morning at their very best. The day is set aside to be with God’s people and to have space in the week for being recreated. Family time is crucial. Unplugging for the day from the normal activities of the week is important for being renewed in all our beings.

Learning to keep the Sabbath has taught the church to learn to depend on the Lord in all areas of their life together.

Neighbour

Suggested Practice: The Practice of Hospitality

Not all are evangelists, but we are all called to be witnesses.

So many have settled for inviting friends to church, missing out on the joy of introducing neighbours to Jesus. We need to practice hospitality, where we develop relationships with neighbours, because they are loved by God. We need to demonstrate that God is present and desires relationship with all people. Our desire is to learn what it means to be a good neighbour, add value to the neighbourhood and look for opportunities to share our faith with others, introducing them to the king and the kingdom.

Hospitality is more than having a neighbour over to your house – it is about developing a relationship where they will have you over. Then we test to see if God is at work in their lives and help them to pay attention to what He is doing. Luke describes this in Luke 10:1-12.

One Another

Suggested Practice: Gathering Together Weekly

Our generation has developed a poor habit. We have assumed we are our own people, and we are always looking for the most exciting option for our time and energy. We try and keep as many options open as we can, so that if something better comes up, we are available.

Our grandparents lived in a time when people went to church three times a week, but now the average church attender seems to attend once every three weeks. There are many other events vying for his or her time. Life is busy and the pace is fast.

Missional people recognize the value of gathering together with God's people and practice a commitment to gathering weekly together. They recognize that God instructs us to not stop gathering together in Hebrews 10, and it becomes the priority of their time.

Conclusion

"I am convinced that the greatest threat to the faithful witness bearing of the church is the absence of vibrant and vital practices of the gospel. When the life of the church is alive with practices faithful to the gospel, the witness of the church simply has to point to these practices." Jonathan Wilson

When we come to the place of believing that to live as a faithful presence means that we no longer seek to regain a position of privilege and power, but learn to live life on the margins, we will understand that we bear witness to God in everything that we do. Therefore it is essential that we do not just understand the gospel, but that we are formed into the image of Christ and learn to participate in it and live it.

Discovery

Appendix 1

Missional Life Questionnaire

Transformation and Engagement “A Personal Missional Discovery Tool”

Purpose

The Kingdom of God is where “what God wants done gets done.” (Dallas Willard). Those who have decided to follow Jesus have become citizens of the Kingdom of God where Jesus is King. Growing in the ‘missional life’ happens through learning to love God with all of our hearts, minds, strength and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves. God’s mission is that all people may come to know Him, and that all things might be redeemed. He has called His disciples to follow Him and made them Ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. This questionnaire is designed to help people to discover how they might be joining God on His mission.

Heart

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. I am learning that worship is about what I bring, not what I get | True/False |
| 2. Jesus is becoming my greatest affection, far above all other things | True/False |
| 3. Others say my life is marked by joy, as Jesus is my passion | True/False |
| 4. My prayer life is growing and I look forward to talking with God | True/False |
| 5. Worship is a conviction that Jesus is Lord | True/False |
| 6. I am honest with myself and others about my true self | True/False |
| 7. I practice some of the spiritual disciplines in my life regularly | True/False |
| 8. Being in community has helped me to love Jesus more | True/False |

Comments:

Mind/Will

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. I read scripture as the story of God at work in the world through His people | True/False |
| 2. I am learning to hear God speak to me through His word | True/False |
| 3. I am growing in my knowledge of who God is through reading scripture | True/False |
| 4. I am being discipled and have a plan for growing in my relationship with God | True/False |
| 5. I am growing in knowledge of the religions of others in our neighbourhood | True/False |
| 6. I am growing in obedience to Jesus | True/False |
| 7. I am increasingly aware of Christ’s presence and the reality of His kingdom | True/False |
| 8. Being part of this church has helped me to grow in my knowledge of God | True/False |

Comments:

Strength

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. I have a healthy pace to my life and am learning to not hurry | True/False |
| 2. I am increasingly generous with the resources God has entrusted to me | True/False |
| 3. I spend wisely and have no debt | True/False |
| 4. I have the ability to be still and know that He is God | True/False |
| 5. I am a servant of the King and gifted for use in the Kingdom | True/False |
| 6. I am learning what it means to be a steward of creation | True/False |
| 7. Others look at my life and see a way of living that they long for | True/False |
| 8. I gladly use my gifts to serve the mission of God through this church | True/False |

Comments:

Neighbour

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. I understand and have the heart of Jesus for people who don't know Him | True/False |
| 2. I am intentional about becoming friends with non-Christians | True/False |
| 3. I know the names of 10 neighbourhood families and pray for them regularly | True/False |
| 4. I regularly prayer walk my neighbourhood | True/False |
| 5. I am an expert in the issues of our neighbourhood and have a good reputation | True/False |
| 6. I am participating with God's people as missionaries in this neighbourhood | True/False |
| 7. I articulate my faith in ways that a post Christian culture understands | True/False |
| 8. I have led someone to Jesus in the past few years | True/False |

Comments:

One Another

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. God is one – existing in community, and in nature – love. | True/False |
| 2. God creates out of this oneness and becomes Father to those who believe | True/False |
| 3. My primary identity is that I am a child of God, a member of His family | True/False |
| 4. Living in community is a way of expressing a part of the gospel | True/False |
| 5. I demonstrate a care about the needs of my brothers and sisters | True/False |
| 6. I am open to being accountable to other believers | True/False |
| 7. Gathering together regularly is one way of my loving other believers | True/False |
| 8. I participate in communal practices of our church | True/False |

Comments:

Missional Life Questionnaire

Transformation and Engagement “A Corporate Missional Discovery Tool”

Purpose

Missional Churches are those who have recognized that they need to live as a faithful presence on the margins of the culture, instead of trying to recapture a position of privilege and power. Although this may seem as evident, it does mean that there are some paradigm shifts that the church will need to go through in how we view God, the world and the church.

This **Discovery Tool** is not meant to answer questions of “how” but rather to alert us to those areas where we will need to pay attention in order to live as a faithful presence in community.

Use the following questions to discover where your church is at in key issues of joining God on mission. In those areas where you recognize a need for growth, be prepared to have conversations with your RM or the IO in order to take steps towards exploring a paradigm shift in your ministry.

How We See God?

“It’s not that our church has a mission, but rather that God’s mission has a church.” David Bosch

We see God ...

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Through the lens of the missio dei – seeking and sending in nature and action | T/F |
| 2. As one God, three persons, existing in Community | T/F |
| 3. The Father sent the Son to establish the Kingdom on earth, redeeming all things | T/F |
| 4. The Father and Son sent the Spirit to be at work in the people of God in the world | T/F |
| 5. Throughout Scripture, the story of God at work in and through His people | T/F |

Comments...

How We See the World?

“Christians feel useless because the church feels useless. And the church feels useless because it keeps on trying to perform Constantinian duties in a world that is no longer Constantinian. So the grace is this: Christians feel useless because they are no longer useful for the wrong thing, namely serving as chaplains in a sponsorial religion.” Rodney Clapp

We see the world...

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. As the place where God is at work, establishing His rule and reign | T/F |
| 2. As the context in which God’s people bear witness to God in word and action | T/F |
| 3. As people created in God’s image who are in need of being reconciled to God | T/F |
| 4. As the place that has great value and that is being redeemed | T/F |
| 5. As filled with uniqueness and diversity that reflect aspects of God’s nature | T/F |

Comments...

How We See the Church?

"I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it." Lesslie Newbigin

We see the church as a ...

Heart

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. People filled with joy, having their passion and priorities rooted in Christ | T/F |
| 2. Worshipping community bringing gifts to their king, celebrating His presence | T/F |
| 3. People of prayer for the renewal of the church and the restoration of the world | T/F |

Comments...

Mind

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. People who have scripture – God's story – as normative in their lives | T/F |
| 2. People being re-formed in the image of Christ in identity, character and vocation | T/F |
| 3. People, taught to obey the teachings of Christ, through the renewing of the minds | T/F |

Comments...

Strength

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Priesthood of all believers where every member is equipped to serve on mission | T/F |
| 2. People, stewarding God's resources of time and money and creation | T/F |
| 3. People practicing the generosity of God here on earth | T/F |

Comments...

Neighbour

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. People living incarnationally, building relationships and bearing witness to God | T/F |
| 2. People who proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed | T/F |
| 3. People who add value to the neighbourhood and enjoy the favour of the people | T/F |

Comments...

One Another

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. People who are structured for mission in missional communities and congregation | T/F |
| 2. People living in a reconciled community of accountability, bearing witness to God | T/F |
| 3. People led by leaders who model the way of Jesus and develop next generations | T/F |

Comments...