The Missional Church

The following are excerpts from articles, books & blogs on the subject of being a Missional Church:

Missional is a Shift in Thinking

But first a necessary word of caution for those who wish to explore and understand what it means to be the missional church or people. Alan Hirsch rightly states that "the word 'missional' over the years has tended to become very fluid and as it was quickly co-opted by those wishing to find new and trendy tags for what they themselves were doing, be they missional or not. It is often used as a substitute for seeker-sensitive, cell-group church, or other church growth concepts, thus obscuring its original meaning." As a result, missional is often looked upon as just another phase or program. But we error when we do so for missional is more than just another movement, it is a full expression of who the ekklesia ("Church") of Christ is and what it is called to be and do. **At its core, missional is a shift in thinking.** This shift in thinking is expressed by Ed Stetzer and David Putman in their book, "Breaking the Missional Code" (Broadman & Holman, 2006) like this:

- From programs to processes
- From demographics to discernment
- From models to missions
- From attractional to incarnational
- From uniformity to diversity
- From professional to passionate
- From seating to sending
- From decisions to disciples
- From additional to exponential
- From monuments to movements

And let me add a couple more to the list:

- From services to service
- From ordained to the ordinary
- From organizations to organisms

God's church doesn't have a mission in the world. God's mission in the world has a church!!! The Church is not an end in and of itself. It is the Missional Means to a Kingdom End.

Making this shift can be difficult for many, but to fully appreciate what the missional church is, we must look outside of our traditional understanding of how we do church and realign ourselves with the biblical narrative. So, as you consider the following "description," don't attempt to understand it within your traditional framework, shift your thinking.
Description of the Missional Church

- The missional church is a collection of missional believers (more appropriately called disciples) acting in concert together in fulfillment of the missio dei. (the mission of God)
- The missional church is one where people are exploring and rediscovering what it means to be Jesus' sent people as their identity and vocation, no matter what it is you do to make your living.
- The missional church is faith communities willing and ready to be Christ's people in their own situation and place.
- The missional church knows that they must be a cross-cultural missionary people and adopt a missionary stance in relation to their community.
- The missional church will be engaged with the culture (in the world) without being absorbed by the culture (not of the world). They will become intentionally indigenous.
- The missional church understands that God is already present in the culture where it finds itself. God is already moving there just like God was prior to your own faith in Christ. Therefore, the missional church doesn't view its purpose as bringing God into the culture or taking individuals out of the culture to a sacred space.
- The missional church is about more than just being contextual or relevant, it is also about the nature of the church and how it relates to God.
- The missional church is about being -- being conformed to the image of God.
- The missional church will seek to plant all types of missional communities.
- The missional church is evangelistic and faithfully proclaims the gospel through word and deed. Words alone are not sufficient; how the gospel is embodied in our community and service is as important as what we say.
- The missional church understands the power of the gospel and does not lose confidence in it.
- The missional church recognizes that it does not hold a place of honor in its host community and that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into that host community as salt and light.
- The missional church will align all their activities around the missio dei.
- The missional church seeks to put the good of their neighbor over their own.
- The missional church will give integrity, morality, good character & conduct, compassion, love and a resurrection life filled with hope preeminence to give credence to their reasoned verbal witness.
- The missional church practices hospitality by welcoming the stranger into the midst of
the community.

- The missional church will always be in a dynamic tension or paradox between missional individuals and community. We cannot sustain being missional on our own, but if we are not being missional individually we cannot sustain being mission-shaped corporately.
- The missional church will see themselves as representatives of Jesus and will do nothing to dishonor his name.
- The missional church will be totally reliant on God in all it does. It will move beyond superficial faith to a life of supernatural living.
- The missional church will be desperately dependent on prayer.
- The missional church gathered will be for the purpose of worship, encouragement, supplemental teaching, training, and to seek God's presence and to be realigned with God's missionary purpose.
- The missional church is orthodox in its view of the gospel and scripture, but culturally relevant in its methods and practice so that it can engage the world view of the hearers.
- The missional church will feed deeply on the scriptures throughout the week.
- The missional church will be a community where all members are involved in learning "the way of Jesus." Spiritual development is an expectation.
- The missional church will help people discover and develop their spiritual gifts and will rely on gifted people for ministry instead of talented people.
- The missional church is a healing community where people carry each other's burdens and help restore gently.
- The missional church will requires that its leaders be missiologists.
- The missional church is the result of a church culture that passionately works at disciple-making (discipling).

What the Missional Church is Not

- The missional church is not a dispenser of religious goods and services or a place where people come for their weekly spiritual fix.
- The missional church is not a place where mature Christians come to be fed and have their needs met.
- The missional church is not a place where "professionals" are hired to do the work of the church.
- The missional church is not a place where the "professionals" teach the children and youth about God to the exclusion of parental responsibility.

Etymology of Missional

Definition: "Relating to or connected with a religious mission; missionary."

Part of Speech: Adjective. An adjective modifies a noun or a pronoun by describing, identifying, or quantifying words. An adjective usually precedes the noun or the pronoun which it modifies.

Etymology: From the word missionalism which is a noun meaning, "missionary work or activity."

First Usage: 1907 in W. G. HOLMES' Age Justinian & Theodora II. Page 687. Quote: "Several prelates, whose missional activities brought over whole districts and even nationalities to their creed" (emphasis added). (Reference: Oxford English Dictionary)

It should be noted that Andrew Jones has found it used as early as 1883.

Modern Usage: The first missiologist using the term "missional" in its modern understanding was Francis DuBose in his book, "God Who Sends" (Broadman Press, 1983). By the 1990's the term began to appear more and more in such books as "Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America" (Edited by Darrell L. Guder) and the works
The missional church is not a church with a "good missions program." The people are the missions program and includes going to "Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The missional church is not about a new strategy for evangelism.

The missional church is not missional just because it is contemporary, young, hip, postmodern-sensitive, seeker-sensitive or even traditional.

The missional church is not about big programs and organizations to accomplish God’s missionary purpose.

The missional church is not involved in political party activism, either on the right or left. As Brian McLaren wrote, we need "purple peoplehood" — people who don't want to be defined as red or blue, but have elements of both, like Jesus.

What the Missional Church Looks Like

- Not simply how many people come to our church services, but how many people our church serves, especially beyond the church walls.
- Not simply how many people attend our ministry, but how many people have we equipped for ministry.
- Not simply how many people minister inside the church, but how many minister outside the church.
- Not simply helping people become more whole themselves, but helping people bring more wholeness to their world. (i.e. justice, healing, relief, one new disciple at a time)
- Not simply how many ministries we start, but how many ministries we help.
- Not simply how many unbelievers we bring into the community of faith, but how many 'believers' we help live out the life & ministry of Jesus--so they become more than "believers," but rather "disciples."
- Not simply counting the resources that God gives us to steward, but counting how many good stewards are we developing for the sake of the world.
- Not simply how we are connecting with our culture but how we are engaging our culture, so that if we didn't exist, the community around us would experience grief because of the tangible loss.
- Not simply how much peace we bring to individuals, but how much peace we bring to our world.
- Not simply how effective we are with our church mission, but how faithful we are to our God and His Kingdom.
- Not simply how unified our local church is, but how unified is "the church" in our neighborhood, city and world? The church is NOT our parish or charge to keep. The WORLD is! No United Methodist pastor is appointed to a church! But they are appointed to a geographical community!
- Not simply how much we immerse ourselves in the text, but how faithfully we live in the story & mission of God in the world.
- Not simply how many people we bring into the kingdom, but how much of the kingdom we bring to the earth. It's BOTH!
1. Missional Church is about the missionary nature of God and His Church.

Those in the missional movement recognize both God and the church are intrinsically and principally “missionary” in nature. God is a missionary God who sends a missionary church. In fact, a survey of the term “sending” in its various forms in Scripture reveals the missionary nature of the Triune God, as well as the very essence of the church. The redemptive activity of God, his relationship to the world, and his dealing with mankind is described in Scripture by the word “sending.” The word “sending” is the “sum and substance of God’s creativity and activity” (Georg F. Vicedom, The Mission of God, 9).

Scripture is replete with sending language that speaks to the missionary nature of a Triune God. God the Father sends the Son, and God the Father and the Son sends the Spirit, and God the Father and the Son and the Spirit sends the church. In the Gospel of John alone, nearly forty times we read about Jesus being sent – either from the evangelist or from Jesus’ own lips. In the final climactic sending passage in John’s Gospel, Jesus sees himself not only as one sent but also as one who is sending: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). A church is really The Church more in its going/sending than it’s coming/receiving. That is to say, a church is being the church more faithfully when it is NOT gathered in the church building, but as a dynamic kingdom realizer scattered throughout the community. The purpose of the church is derived from the very nature of a sending, missionary God, which in turn compels it to be sent from the building as a missionary people, both individually and collectively.
2. Missional Church is about incarnational ministry (versus attractional/extractional) in a post-Christendom context.

Those with a missional perspective no longer see the church service as the primary connecting point for those outside the church. While there is nothing wrong with attracting people to participate in various gatherings of the church, the missional church is more concerned about sending the people in the church out among the people of the world, rather than getting the people of the world in among the people of the church. That is now a lost cause as Christianity is increasingly pushed to the margins of society! Some have described this missional-attractional distinction as a challenge to “go and be” as opposed to “come and see.” The attractional model, which has dominated the church in the West for the past several decades, seeks to reach out to the culture and draw people into the church. However, this approach only works when there are no significant cultural barriers to overcome when making the required move from outside to inside the church. “And as Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, the attractional model has lost its effectiveness. The West looks more like a cross-cultural missionary context in which attractional church models are self-defeating. Furthermore, the process of extracting people from the culture and assimilating them into the church diminishes their ability to speak to those outside.” (Alan Hirsch, Defining Missional, Christianity Today)

On the other hand, missional churches see their primary function as one of actively moving into a community to embody and enflesh the word, deed, and life of Jesus into every nook and cranny. Alan Hirsch speaks of the “missional-incarnational impulse,” where the word “missional” expresses the sending nature of the church, while “incarnational” represents the “embedding” of the gospel into a local context. In other words, “missional” speaks to our direction – we are sent; while being “incarnational” is more about how we go, and what we do as we go. Eugene Peterson’s “incarnational” rendering of John 1:14 in the Message paraphrase illustrates this well when it states, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”

3. Missional Church is about actively participating in the missio Dei, or mission of God.
Many times we wrongly assume that the primary activity of God is in the church, rather than recognizing that God’s primary activity is in the world. The Church is God’s instrument sent into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. God’s primary activity in the world is THROUGH the Church.

This key distinction clarifies the difference between a church with a missions program and a missional church. A church with a missions program usually sees missions as one activity alongside many other equally important programs of the church. A missional church, on the other hand, focuses all of its activities around its participation in God’s agenda for the world. God’s mission must form and inform everything we do. All activities of the church must be catalyzed by and organized around the missio Dei.

As the sent, missionary people of God, the missional church understands its fundamental purpose as being rooted in God’s mission to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled relationship with Himself. It is God’s mission that calls the church into existence. In other words, we can no longer see the church as the starting point when thinking about mission. Instead, the church must be seen as the result of God’s mission. In the words of South African missiologist David Bosch: “It is not the church which undertakes mission; it is the missio Dei which constitutes the church.” Or stated in a slightly different manner; “it is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world” (Christopher Wright 2006, 62).
Practical Advice For Becoming a Missional Church

Here are a few ways to begin a missional shift in your local church:

1. Take baby steps. Don’t blow your church up all at once. Your church will never be missional if you don’t have anyone left.
2. Personally live and lead on mission. It all begins with you. As pastor, lay leader, staff, or missions chair, you are the example that others will follow.
3. Recognize the needs of your community and pray about how you can meet their needs.
5. Just do it. Get people to leave the four walls of the church and get out into the community.