

Elders' Toolbox

The Missional Church

“Missional church” has become a catch-all phase for trendy movements in church growth, evangelism and seeker-driven movements in recent years. It is as challenging to define the “missional” church as it is to define the Kingdom of God. (Jesus used parables to describe the Kingdom.) The term is fluid and difficult to pin down. This tool clarifies the vision and goals of the missional church.

Missional is an approach to ministry that offers a particular vision of how we understand the purpose (ecclesiology) and mission (missiology) of the church. The work of missionary/theologian Lesslie Newbigin provides the theological foundation of the missional church. (See *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989).

Mission provides the overarching vision and goal of the church.

This vision demands a significant shift from an **attractional** model of church (“If you build it, they will come.” – Kevin Costner’s character in *Field of Dreams*) to an **incarnational model** (God is present in the world outside the walls of the church.) Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury states, “It is not the church of God that has a mission. It’s the God of mission that has a church.”

Typically in **attractional** churches, the mission of the church is defined and carried out by mission committees that organize various activities and events. In missional churches, everyone participates in identifying and participating in the mission [note: no “s”] as a call from God to the entire congregation. This mission creates the unique call and identity of the congregation.

What is God doing in our communities, neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, recreational places, etc.? What does God want to do in our world? The answers to these questions define the focus and purpose for all church worship, programs and activities. In the missional church, we no longer deliver God (our vision of God) into a culture or present God in worship as culturally neutral; rather, we address how God is already at work in the lives of the people with whom we engage every day.

Teaching and ruling elders are primarily missiologists and engage in mission at every level of church work. Their primary responsibility is to empower and train God’s people to discern God’s presence and engage in meaningful conversations about God and the Scriptures in the lives of all God’s people in the communities in which they live and work. They can do this through worship, leadership training programs, spiritual discernment and renewal events for all members of the church community. (For training opportunities, check out the Elders’ Institute workshops and online courses.)

For more information, reading lists and testimonies from missional churches, see <http://www.friendofmissional.org/> and YouTube “missional church – simple.mpg” or “missional community ...Simple”.

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