

# Testing & the Mission of the Presbytery

[1 Peter 1:6-7](#) says “*For a little while . . . you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

**These words are so true for us right now.** Many of us are feeling the grief of the trials brought on by the major fires in our area. Some of us have been tested and pushed to our limits. Some of us have not, but ours may come in the weeks and months ahead.

The good news is that even though gold perishes in fire, our faith doesn't have to. Instead of melting away, our faith can be forged even stronger than it ever has been before. I ask that you continue to pray for those whose homes have been destroyed and those whose lives have been turned upside down. Please reach out to those in your church and those in your community who are in need. Please let us in the presbytery know how we can help you, and we will do whatever we can to support your ministry.

These are important times. In the midst of a terrible tragedy, God is giving us some great opportunities to be a missional community of believers, sent out by Christ into a world in need. Let's learn how to do that together!

**I would like to extend a special invitation to you to join me at the next meeting of the Presbytery of San Diego.** We will be meeting on Tuesday, November 20th, (Thanksgiving week) at the Village Community Presbyterian Church in Rancho Santa Fe. The meeting will include my installation service, officially installing me as your Executive Presbyter.

Our special guest preacher for the meeting will be the [Rev. Dr. Alan Roxburgh](#). Alan is one of the world's leading thinkers, practitioners, and consultants on what it means to be a missional church and how to lead God's people to engage a post-Christian culture. Alan will be giving a presentation prior to the regular meeting that I encourage you to attend as well.

If you are not familiar with Alan's work, please read this following excerpt. This is taken from the preface of his book “[The Sky is Falling](#),” ACI Publishing, Eagle, Idaho, 2005. Here it is:

“The (missional) idea was first fully articulated when the book [Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America](#) was published in 1998. Its beginnings lay in the writing of [Bishop Lesslie Newbigin](#), who had been a missionary in India for over thirty years. Newbigin, upon his retirement in the late 1960s, returned to his native England to encounter the fact that the Christian soul of the Western culture

he'd left thirty years earlier had all but disappeared. Newbigin saw that, by the late twentieth century, the greatest challenge to the Gospel was no longer the unreached masses of the world, but the peoples of Europe and North America who had rapidly lost their Christian identity. In a memorable epithet, Newbigin asked: 'Can the West be converted?' That question expressed one of the fundamental issues of the missional quest: the challenge facing the European and North American churches was the re-conversion of its own people.

"This new view of the church as needing to be missional struck a note in the churches of North America as well and quickly became the lingua franca of many church leaders. The missional conversation might have died and disappeared like so many other concepts and movements of the church had there not been such a strong underlying sense at the time that something was indeed amiss about Christian life and identity in our society. The values that were central to our churches in years past – namely, 'what God was calling us to do for others' – had drastically changed to 'what am I going to get out of coming to church?' The message of Christ being preached from our pulpits was changing accordingly and has become radically different from what was preached even half a century ago. We are in a period of massive change and upheaval. In this context, the missional conversation has given us useful language to discuss and address the challenges facing what it means to be a 'Christian' in our time.

"The word missional was coined to express the conviction that North America and Europe are now primary 'mission fields' themselves. Missional also expresses that God's mission (the *missio dei*) is that which shapes and defines all that the church is and does, as opposed to expecting the church be the ultimate self-help group for meeting our own needs and finding fulfillment in our individual lives. If the West is once again a mission field within which the central narratives of the gospel have been either lost or profoundly compromised by other values, then the focus of this mission must be upon placing the God who has encountered us in Jesus Christ back in the center of our communities of faith that shape and give meaning to our lives. This may seem an obvious part of being a Christian, but it is not happening in our American churches today.

"Throughout Western societies and most especially in North America, there has occurred a fundamental shift in the understanding and practice of the Christian story. It is no longer about God and what God is about in the world: it is about how God serves and meets human needs and desires. It is about how the individual self can find its own purpose and fulfillment. More specifically, our churches have become spiritual food courts for the personal, private, inner needs of expressive individuals. The result is a debased, compromised, derivative form of Christianity that is not the gospel of the Bible at all. The biblical narrative is about God's mission in, through, and for the sake of the world and how God has called human beings to be part of God's reaching out to that world for God's purpose of saving it in love. The focus of attention should be what God wants to accomplish and how we can be part of God's mission, not how God helps us accomplish our own agendas."

**I hope you will join us for this first of many missional conversations.** Thank you for

the trust you have put in me to serve with you as your Executive Presbyter. I will do my best to earn your continued trust as we learn to be Christ's servants together here in the southwestern corner of the United States. God bless you all.

Clark Cowden