



## **There is No Definition of Missional Church – Only Pictures, Stories, and Comparisons**

When you read the gospels in the New Testament, you discover that one of the main themes of Jesus' teachings when He was on earth was the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was central to what Jesus was all about. You would think that if this was such an important subject for us to know about, that Jesus would give us a definition of the kingdom of God. But, He never did. He never gave us a simple sentence or three bullet points. He never gave us a sound bite. He did tell stories and parables about what the kingdom of God was like. He did make comparisons with what people knew so they could get a picture in the minds, but He never defined it.

Missional church is the same way. We can give pictures and stories and comparisons about what the missional church is like, but we can't give any definitions. Why is that? There are several reasons:

- 1) Definitions diminish our imagination rather than increasing it. One of the goals of the missional church conversation is to cultivate and stimulate the missional imagination of God's people. When you give people a definition of missional church, they say, "OK, I understand it now." It doesn't spark their imagination to grow. It ends the conversation rather than opening it up. We want to create more conversation and imagination. Giving definitions defeats the whole purpose.
- 2) Definitions reduce complex ideas to smaller pieces that are easier to understand but ultimately are not helpful. In this political year, there is a lot of talk about the "evangelical vote." The media seems to think that all evangelicals think and act alike. But, the picture they present, does not match most evangelicals I know. If the politicians follow this reduced picture, and assume it applies to all evangelicals or all Christians, it will actually lead them into the wrong strategy.
- 3) Our desire for definitions is a sign of our captivity to modern culture. Since we have been raised with this, we are unconscious of it, and don't see how destructive it can be on our lives.

So, we don't understand missional church by giving definitions of it. We understand it by sharing pictures, stories, and making comparisons. So, here are a few:

**A picture:** Most people view the church as a family. We think of it as a place for us, a positive place for our homogenous relationships, that others are not a part of it. It's not. The Bible never uses the word family to describe the church. One word the Bible uses for the church is the *ekklesia*: the group of elders who sit at the city gates, discussing how they can add value to their community.

**A story:** The eastern shore Canadian fishing industry thrived in the 1950s and 1960s. It was huge. All you had to do was go out a little way off the shore, drop your nets, and the fish would jump in. The numbers of fish were so great, it was so easy to catch them. Today, the situation is quite different. The numbers of fish are way down, so the numbers of fishing people, fishing boats, and fishing companies are way down. They have to go farther out to find the fish, and the numbers they are catching are much smaller. This is the story of the North American church. Our congregations have experienced the same story as we fish for people.

### **Comparisons:**

Missional church is not a program – it is a process.

It is not a new way of doing foreign missions – it is a way of being the church.

It is not a method for church growth – it is a way of church life.

It is not the “next” way to do church – it recovers the ancient way to be the church.

It is not a post-modern way of doing church  
– it is a pre-modern way of being the church.

It is not an anti-traditional pattern of church  
– it is recapturing our living traditions.

The missional church is really not about the church – it's about God.

Sending missionaries overseas is still important. Giving money to missionaries, feeding the homeless once a year, and going on a mission trip once a year is still important. But, it is not missional. Because so many people today are talking about being missional, people look for one thing their church is doing that is missional, and then they say, look, we are being missional! But, that is missing the point. The whole idea of missional is that it cannot be one little part of the church's ministry that we do. The whole idea of missional is that the entire church is shaped by God's mission in the world.

The “American” way of doing church is to write a vision statement, mission statement, and purpose statement about what we aspire to do. Then, we try to align our people and our programs with these statements and try to implement

them. 95% of the time this fails. The statements sit on our shelves, powerless to change the church culture. The missional church doesn't waste its time with these kinds of statements. The missional church learns to listen to its neighborhoods, learns to discover what God is doing in the community, and finds ways to join what God is already doing. The "American" church tries to figure out the mission of the church. The missional church tries to figure out the mission of God. The "American" church focuses on programs to draw people in. The missional church enters into a spiritual discernment process to send people out. The "American" church couldn't exist without our buildings. The missional church is often hindered by our buildings. The "American" church wants to send people to the mission field in other countries. The missional church realizes that our own culture has become a mission field, and we are all missionaries in it.

If this is hard to understand, don't worry. If you enter into the conversation, you will come to understand it eventually. And it won't take you long. Most people can figure it out within 2-3 years.

One way we want to invite you into the conversation is to ask you to join us in the monthly missional leadership gatherings we have started. This month, we will have our third lunch meeting. It will be on Wednesday, June 11, from noon – 1:30 pm, at [Solana Beach Presbyterian Church](#).

Please RSVP by Friday, June 6, at [www.SolanaPres.org/Events/277461.aspp](http://www.SolanaPres.org/Events/277461.aspp), or by emailing Kathy Grundy at [Kathy@SolanaPres.org](mailto:Kathy@SolanaPres.org).

**New this month!** This month, we are also starting our first evening missional leadership gathering, if you are not able to attend a lunch meeting. We will be meeting on Tuesday, June 10, from 7 – 8:30 pm, at the [Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church](#).

Please RSVP by Friday, June 6, to Machel May at the presbytery office at [OfficeMgr@PresbyterySD.org](mailto:OfficeMgr@PresbyterySD.org). We hope to see you at one of these meetings!



Respond to: [ClarkCowden@PresbyterySD.org](mailto:ClarkCowden@PresbyterySD.org)