

# The Eight Practices of a Missional Church

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Some time ago I ran across a bare list of practices of missional churches by an anonymous person. The list has been sitting in my “to do” box until this morning when I decided to add my touch to them. Because it’s clear to me now that the missional approach to the meaning of *ecclesia* is firmly embedded in the hearts and minds of just about every mega church pastor I know, I feel it’s time to put some meat on these eight practices. See which ones are present or missing in your ministry.

**Transformation Driven** – the leaders and a good number of the congregation are focused on transforming the community around them rather than taking care of their own needs. I find this to be the number one paradigm that separates pastors who can grow churches from pastors who can’t grow a church. If the primary paradigm is to take care of people you can almost forget any growth of both the people and the institution.

When the paradigm is to take care of people the following almost always happens:

- The pastor becomes the spiritual “hit man” who tends to all the spiritual needs, thus robbing the people of the joy of the priesthood of the believer.
- A good number of the people become whiners and grumble about most everything no matter what it is. People disengaged from hands-on ministry are usually unfulfilled. You know the saying, “Idle hands are the Devil’s tools.”
- The institutional church declines as well as any mission it might have.

If you’ve ever wondered why so many small mainline churches are so dysfunctional, you just got your answer.

**Networked Leadership** – leaders network with like-minded leaders, always aware that their power comes from God not themselves. This is one of my biggest regrets as a United Methodist. Mainline denominations are some of the most silo-driven organizations of the planet. If you doubt me, just try to plant a new church near a dying church of the same denomination and see the reaction from the dying church. It certainly won’t be joy.

But in my travels I’m amazed at how much missional churches enjoy each other’s company and thrive on the presence of another missional church in the area. They don’t see other churches as competition but as partners in the mission. It’s like a missionary, ministering in a 10/40 window that hasn’t seen another Christian in months, running into another Christian. The missionary doesn’t ask what tribe he’s from, he’s just glad to see another Christian to partner in the mission.

**Measurable Values and Results** – growing people into the likeness of Christ and expanding the number of Christians regardless of church affiliation. Missional churches measure how many new Christians result from their work. This is a huge step forward for Christianity in the West. Does your church measure the number of new Christians as a result of your ministry or are you still counting new members and transfers?

**Planting Churches is Assumed** – the issue is never planting churches but planting churches that plant churches and forming Christian communities wherever they go. The missional church takes after the Church at Antioch rather than the Church at Jerusalem. Their primary goal is planting churches of all shapes and sizes. It doesn’t matter if their micro or mega, the more the merrier. Is your church planning on planting a church in the near future? If not, why?

**Lay Driven Outreach** –the world is won when the ordinary lay person does the extraordinary ministry of sharing their faith in the workplace. If you’ve ever wondered how the church down the street, that wasn’t there ten years ago, is now the largest church in town, you’ve just received your answer. Mega churches don’t usually grow by advertizing; they grow because their people go and tell and invite their networks to worship with them or join them in a small group or in a mission project in the city. In a missional church you’ll never hear, “I’m just a lay person” because the distinction between lay and clergy is diminishing rapidly among missional churches.

Do 20% of your people do 80% of the ministry or are 80% of your people involved in ministry?

**Focused on What God is doing in the world** – denominational affiliation doesn’t mean much compared to fellow travelers on the road to mission with Jesus. This practice reminds me of poor Peter when he finally went to Cornelius and found that God had beaten him to the scene and had prepared Cornelius’ heart for the Good News.

In my coaching, I use a Leadership Assessment tool I created that consists of 32 statements. Statement 31 reads “When I design a ministry it is born out of my understanding of the surrounding community more than the needs of my church.” It’s surprising to me that so many pastors score 6 or more on a scale of 1 to 10 with one being agreement and 10 being disagreement.

A missional church designs its ministries with the unchurched in mind rather than its members because it understands my favorite saying, “Life comes to us on its way to someone else; if we pass it on we blossom; if we keep it to ourselves we wither and die.” How many ministries do you have for the community compared to your members?

**Indigenous ministries** – everything done must be in the language, technology, and culture of the people you are trying to reach. I don’t need to say more here.

**United and Incubator** –the missional church is united around providing a warm, hospital, loving place in which new Christians can grow in their likeness of Jesus Christ. One of the huge changes in my life time is that very few people come to church anymore on their own. And when they do show up on the arm of a friend, they are a blank slate that must we must write on. Taking someone from a blank slate to a full blown disciple takes time. It also takes a warm, welcoming environment – like an incubator.

Which of these practices are prevalent in your church and drive you ministry and how can you expand them? Which ones are missing and what can you do to include them in your paradigm?