

What is the missional church?

The rise of the missional church is happening all over the world. Two primary shifts are occurring that give the missional church its unique characteristics:

- The shift from an internal focus to an external focus.
- The shift from program-driven to people development

The first shift is not just the latest fad; it is being powered by the theological perspective of a kingdom paradigm. In kingdom theology, the church is not the destination; the kingdom is. The church has a role in the kingdom: to partner with God in his redemptive mission in the world. Church-centric thinking sees God at work in the church primarily, desperately trying to make inroads into the world where he can. Kingdom thinking sees God always at work in the world. The question is whether he is free to work in the church!

The external focus of the missional church requires that church leaders be missiologists. They understand the various cultures they are trying to connect with for the sake of the gospel.

This shift also has huge implications for the activities of those who participate in the church. Missional churches are not determined to develop church leaders; their intention is to deploy missionaries. Because of this many missional groups have limited "club" activities so they can release their members' time and energy for serving the people in the community where they live, work, go to school, and play. The key evangelism strategy involves blessing people and being ready to engage them in conversation when they are intrigued by the actions of believers.

The second shift of the missional church is determined to help people grow, not just be busy in church activity or curriculum study.

Spiritual formation in missional churches expands the bandwidth of where people look for God. While Bible study remains important, people are led to look for God's work in their daily lives, in their marriages, in their kids, in their school, in their office, in their neighborhood, in routine and not-so-routine encounters with people. This process of learning to see God typically involves some form of life debriefing and coaching.

Missional churches still have programs, though typically not as many as program churches would have. However, the difference is in the starting point. Missional churches begin with people's declared needs and then customize a development path for them, using some of the church's programs. Program churches spend lots of energy recruiting people into the programs, often for the sake of making the program successful. The beginning concern is how the program is doing, what its needs are, and how it can be sustained.

Missional Christians are turning church from a noun ("I go to such-and-such church") into a verb ("I church at Starbucks, at the office,"). This development both fuels and reflects the major realignment of how Christians are going to give expression to their faith in the next two decades.