

DEFINITION OF A MISSIONAL CHURCH

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A missional church is an authentic community of faith that primarily directs its ministry focus outward toward the context in which it is located and to the broader world beyond.

Just prior to the turn of this century, missiologist David Bosch (*Transforming Mission*) coined the term *missional church* to give a title to an emerging mental model of the church. This term has since gained a wide acceptance among both mainline and evangelical groups. Following is an abbreviated definition of the term and description of this mental model of “being and doing” church. As with any mental model, no singular image incorporates the full essence of what it is to be a church. However, as the context of North America continues to change rapidly, this emerging model may help guide your church’s imagination as you seek to initiate its form and actions.

Before delineating some of the core characteristics of a missional church, I will elaborate a bit more on the missional definition above.

A missional church is an *authentic community*. Missional churches are *authentic communities* in that their relationships with people, both within and outside the church, are authentic, not superficial. Authenticity also refers to a life of honesty, not perfection, in which the faith community’s practices of grace and mission are congruent with their profession of faith in Christ. For authenticity to flourish, missional churches seek to create safe environments of acceptance, forgiveness, healing and hope.

A missional church is an *authentic community of faith* in that it is formed in response to the living God revealed in Jesus Christ. *Faith* in missional churches is not so much a statement or doctrinal position *about* God as it is a response to God’s invitation to follow Christ into God’s mission. Faith is action—actions of service directed outward toward the world that “God so loved.” A missional church is a *community* in that individuals who respond in faith are connected with the communal triune God and with each other. Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he would be present in their midst. Whenever missional people participate in God’s mission, they do so, not individually, but with others. The formation of community is essential to missional activities. Wherever missional people go, they gather community, inviting and partnering with others to participate in the mission of God.

A missional church is an authentic community of faith that primarily directs its ministry focus outward. The church is called to be engaged in the mission of the kingdom of God. Mission is the church’s primary purpose, and that mission is to be participated in as the primary function of the faith community. As such, the church exists for the well-being of others and creation, not for self-serving purposes. Missional

churches take seriously the call of Jesus to “seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness.” They are therefore willing to risk their life as a congregation for the purposes of being engaged in God’s kingdom activities on earth. This outward focused ministry is directed *toward the context in which the church is located and to the broader world beyond*. By joining Jesus Christ and outside partners, missional faith communities serve God’s purpose by *being* good news people and *doing* good news in word and deed locally, nationally and globally. Missional churches recognize that they exist in a missionary environment. Therefore, their participation in God’s mission begins but does not end at their doorsteps. They serve with the understanding that God’s missional call extends beyond regional, national and cultural boundaries.

Primary Characteristics of Missional Churches

At least six primary characteristics identify missional churches. Sometimes referred to as “missional church DNA markers,” these characteristics are listed below. You may wish to read more in the Resource page article “Six Characteristics of a Missional Church.”

1. The missional church views its own context as a constantly changing mission field.
2. The missional church is both engaged in and supportive of missions.
3. The missional church recognizes its mission includes both the Great Commission (making new disciples) and the Great Commandments (loving God and loving others as self).
4. The missional church recognizes all people as being both the “subject” and “object” of God’s mission.
5. Missional churches are engaged in transformation of persons, churches, communities and cultures.
6. The missional church multiplies churches, disciples and mission.

Other articles on the Missional Church Transformation Web site give witness to the potential impact this mental model can have locally and globally once churches begin this transformational process. We invite you to visit regularly this site for informative articles, resources and stories of churches on the missional transformation journey.