

AND NOW ... *THE MISSIONAL CONGREGATION*
by Mike Ruhl

This article is from the September 13, 2004, Mission Moments newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions. Permission is given to copy this article for distribution within your own congregation. Please credit the author and the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California, www.centerforusmissions.org. For more information, contact the Center at 949-854-8002 x1780.

It never ceases to amaze me. There seems to be perpetual movement ... a progression ... a genesis of emphasis ... which has definite impact on the fabric of the local congregation. At times these shifts appear to be *fads*, and there are times when they appear to be *trends*. All have dimensions of truth and dimensions of deception. For example, when starting ministry as a district Mission Executive 16 years ago, there was a movement called Church Growth. It featured a number of deceptive dimensions, but it did affirm that congregations are accountable for *making new disciples*. Church Growth quickly yielded to the Church Health movement, which affirms that both spiritual and numerical growth are natural by-products of a healthy, biblical congregation. And then there's the still-current movement known as the Emerging Church, which signals a youthful preference for more traditional, transcendent and authentic worship and witness.

And now the church in North America appears to be experiencing yet another shift of emphasis. Enter the season of the *Missional Congregation*. These congregations are deeply committed to kingdom growth. They see mission as the Lord's [*Missio Dei*] ... and missions as the way that God's mission is carried out in the local congregation. According to some early analysis, the missional congregation operates with at least nine essential practices.

1. Missional congregations have *high threshold membership*. Disciples are not nominal or casual; disciples have clear expectations from the congregation, and the disciples have clear expectations of the congregation.
2. Missional congregations are *real, but not religious*. Faith become real in the lives of God's people and NOT in authority.
3. Missional congregations *teach to obey rather than to know*. Members are helped to obey the Scriptures through Bible Study and training in Christian disciplines.
4. Missional congregations have *an audience of On*—the Lord--when they worship. This leads many of them to “rewrite” worship each week so that it is experiential and participatory, along with strong, biblical content.
5. Missional congregations live apostolically. Every Christian is *one who is sent* into the culture to share the good news of Christ.
6. Missional congregations expect to change the world. Seeing the vision of Acts 1:8, the congregation expects to see kingdom impact or *transformation* locally, regionally, trans-racially and globally. The congregation thinks *global*.
7. Missional congregations order actions according to purpose. Knowing their Great Commission purpose, all actions and ministries are ordered on the basis on that purpose.

8. Missional congregations measure growth by their capacity to *release people to new and needed ministries*, not simply retain people. Hence they value and equip disciples for church planting and missionary activity.
9. Missional congregations place *kingdom concerns first*. They *cooperate* instead of compete in order to advance the Kingdom of God.

The mission frontier has changed. Missional thinking calls for change in the organization and structure of congregational life. Formed for the *one mission* [*Missio Dei*], many congregations are now reorienting to face that new frontier.

Note: Mike has written separate articles on each of the 9 characteristics of missional congregations. They are all under the topic "Missional Church" in the Resources by Topic and Type page of our website