

## The Unmasked Rider -- Moving Out Missionally in Spiritual Authenticity by Mike Ruhl

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A paraphrased version of the Confession of Sins begins, *Let us take off our masks and open up to God*. The phrase is a reminder that repentance and confession is not a time to continue that daily slide into *artificial Christianity*. Hiding behind feigned spirituality and sincerity in the presence of a Righteous God is like wearing a mask ... similar in some ways to *Zorro* or the *Lone Ranger*. It is an attempt to disguise our true identity and inner essence, and it can be a powerful signal that there is detectable dissonance between what we say and how we live. In other words, it is not *authentic*.

According to Milfred Minatrea (*Shaped by God's Heart ~ The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*), a second essential and missional practice of the missional congregation is that the people, leaders and followers, are *real, but not religious*. And that has everything to do with *unmasked spiritual authenticity*, both with God and with people.

Today the hunger for authenticity has reached epidemic proportions, especially in the church. Authentic spirituality is being contrasted with “organizational religiosity” and congregations which fail to project tight alignment of confession and personal countenance are suffering from lack of missional kingdom impact. Minatrea states that ... *loss of authority results when there is no congruence between words and actions, between presentations and practices*. And in case you have not noticed, our postmodern world is sick and tired of redundant words and rattling religiosity falling from lips beneath the facial masks. It wants *real!* It craves authenticity above artificiality.

Congregations that are authentically *missional* express this *realness* in at least three dimensions:

1. Authenticity of Faith Faith in the Triune God does not address only the head; it embraces the heart and the emotions, the inner person. The Holy Spirit ignites this faith in such a way that it transcends mere intellectual assent, and actually becomes an experiential reality. More than a system of religious regulations, this authenticity of faith blossoms into a life-changing relationship, a Body in love with God.
2. Authenticity of Relationships The saints of the congregation luxuriate in the intimacy of Body life which demonstrates the comprehensive *one another* commands in the New Testament. Community is created across cultural and ethnic lines as hospitality is expressed continually. Unity transcends and embellishes diversity. Members grow often in relationship with other believers through small groups or cells.

3. Authenticity of Actions in the World One significant measure of the missional church is how the members conduct their lives during the week when scattered from the sanctuary. Transforming, consistent faith is demonstrated at work, at school, at the mall, at the neighborhood barbecue and on the ball field. With missional impact, members act and live out their *consistent, authentic faith* in all of the crossroads of life.

Some have called these missional congregations in North America *a new breed of congregation*. But in actuality, are they not *an ancient and apostolic breed of congregation*, so vividly described in the Book of Acts. In fact, one can see them more as the *ancient/future church*. No masks. No artificial religious rubrics. Authentic from the inside-out. Real ... but not Religious. ■

*This article is one of a series on the 9 characteristics of missional congregations. Access the others from our website: Resources – listed by topic and type – under the topic “Missional congregation.”*