

Focused and Fresh: Worship in the Missional Congregation by Mike Ruhl

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A growing amount of new research on the behavioral traits of the *missional congregation* indicates that such a congregation exhibits *overt missional behavior* and not simple sentimental support or being “mission minded.” Such missional behavior transcends “thinking and praying about and giving money in support of others who do mission work,” or even supporting a “missions program” among the many and diverse ministries of the congregation. Indeed, in the missional congregation, missions is the very *essence* of everything the congregation says and does.

In his recent book, *Shaped by God's Heart--The Passion and Practices of Missional Congregations*, author Milfred Minatrea reports that a fourth “essential practice” of the missional congregation is concerned with worship. He uses the phrase “rewriting worship each week” to summarize that worship in the missional congregation is *focused and fresh*, as opposed to blurred and stale.

God is the focus of worship in the missional congregation. Worship is designed and intended to exalt the Triune God, not to entertain people. As members worship, they encounter God, they exalt God, they confess sin and receive absolution from God, they explore the grace of God and his goodness in Jesus Christ, and they extol their relationship with God among those present. In other words, *God is the singular focus of worship*. And as Christians worship God, the Holy Spirit enables them both to acknowledge God and to experience his grace, goodness and greatness. Because such worship is so focused and authentic, it invites *participants*, not simply spectators.

Some would equate the missional congregation with contemporary (non-traditional) forms of worship. But this is a false assumption. Missional congregations worship through both traditional and non-traditional expressions. The worship is *not* about style, but about content.

While the *form* of worship in the missional congregation remains constant, the *freshness* of that worship is stimulated continually through high value placed on using member gifts and talents and multiple forms of communication, actively embracing the creative arts, plus engaging the full range of human senses in the worship experience. So, within the constant form, the worship is fresh each week.

Missional congregations do invite those who do not yet know God to join experiences of worship, knowing that their encounter with God through the Holy Spirit and the Word might draw them closer to personal relationship (faith) with him. Although it includes those who are not yet disciples, worship is not intended to reach the unchurched, but to allow those who know God to declare his worth and bring him praise. ■

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.”