

Saints as the ‘Sent Ones’ -- Apostolic Living in the Missional Congregation
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With ample and well-documented research, missiologist Milfred Minatrea has helped us to discern the difference between congregations which are mission minded (giving to, praying for and supporting others who are sent into mission) and congregations which manifest overt *missional behavior*. (Missions is the very essence of everything the congregation says and does.) The word *missional* suggests *being and doing* ...not simply sending and supporting. His recent book, *Shaped by God’s Heart--The Passion and Practices of Missional Congregations*, identifies nine practices of overt, missional behavior that are observable in congregations (listed at the end of this article).

The fifth missional practice of the missional congregation revolves around the concept that *every believer in the congregation is “one who is sent;”* that is, all the members see themselves as missionaries. The Greek word *apostolos* denotes *one who is sent out on a mission*. In the New Testament, *apostolos* can also mean *delegate, envoy, messenger and missionary*, especially when used of *God’s messengers*. Hence the word *apostolic* describes how the saints of the congregation live out their lives *as missionaries in their local mission field*. The saints themselves are the “sent ones”.

Now the use of the term *apostolic* is not intended to communicate any line of succession with those originally called *apostles* in Scripture. Instead the term is used to describe the *kind of task* given to all followers of Christ. All are called into personal relationship with Jesus Christ and are *sent into the world* to witness His saving grace among the people and nations of the world. Indeed, this *apostolic task* is the earthly purpose of the church, just as it was in the first century. Although the eternal purpose of the church is to worship God and enjoy Him forever, its earthly (temporal) purpose is to proclaim His glory among the nations in order that people from every nation may join to worship Him.

While there are those that encourage withdrawal from the world’s cultural influences, the fact is that Christians are *sent into the world*. The Holy Spirit is ever-present as missionary saints move beyond stained glass and pews into office buildings, schools, malls and theaters. Missional churches believe that every follower of Christ is *one who is sent*. All are missionaries. Therefore missional congregations seek to prepare all the saints to *live apostolically*.

The missional congregation strives to reach beyond itself into local areas in order to bear witness to the Reign of God and to invite others into the community of faith. Therefore missionary saints invest in extended spiritual dialogue (usually not memorized plans of salvation) as they engage the hearts and minds of people where they are in spiritual pilgrimage. They make no efforts to withdraw from culture, but instead interpret contemporary culture through biblical guidance. And because they see themselves as the

sent ones, missionary saints will participate in appropriate secular social groups where there are boundless opportunities to engage in dialogue which magnifies the Christ. ■

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.”