

# Becoming a Missional Church



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## Missional: Possible

*How to help your church look upward, inward, and outward.*

by Chad Hall

In his role as super spy Ethan Hunt, Tom Cruise portrays an agent willing to face incredible odds and unbelievable danger in order to accomplish a “mission: impossible.” Church leaders face assignments just as tough: to lead congregations to serve Christ in a changing and sometimes hostile world.

The word for this ministry challenge is missional. How does a church become missional? And for leaders, is moving a consumer church to become missional, in itself, a mission: impossible?

### What “Missional” Means

When asked, “What kind of church do you serve?” leaders are finding that denominational qualifiers or adjectives such as *innovative*, *emergent*, *contemporary*, *liturgical*, and *purpose-driven* don’t get to the heart of the question; they tend to over-emphasize a particular aspect of the church.

Leaders are (re)discovering that the essential calling of the church has less to do with the way a church is organized, its doctrinal distinctions, or its style of music, and more to do with the *missio Dei* (mission of God).

United Kingdom blogger Andrew Jones explains: “*Missio Dei* stems from the Triune God: the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, the Father and Son and the Spirit send the church into the world.” So a missional church is about doing God’s work in the world today. In this sense, the missional church isn’t a new emphasis, but is a renewed focus on what has been (or should have been) there all along.

Mike Breen, pastor at Community Church of Joy near Phoenix, Arizona, believes the missional church is something very old, very fundamental, and very much at the core of what it means to be church.

“Missional church is radical only in the sense that radical means root,” he says. “The missional church is rooted in not just the New Testament church of Acts, but in the mission of Jesus himself. A missional church lives out the church’s three-dimensional calling: to be upwardly focused on God in worship that is passionate; to be inwardly focused on community among believers that is demonstrated in relationships of love and compassion; and to be outwardly focused on a world that does not yet know God.”



## Two Distractions

But if being missional is the essence of being the church, why isn't every church missional? Because many churches have turned attention to matters that distract and deter from the mission. Two main distractions often block a congregation's missional expression.

The first is *self-preservation*. Janetta Cravens, pastor of First Christian Church in Macon, Georgia, says her congregation is beginning to rediscover and refocus on God's activity in the world rather than the church's activity for itself. "The Builder generation came back from WWII and built churches that could withstand bombs, metaphorically and sometimes literally. The focus was on an institutional church so solid that it could endure, and yet that focus on preservation too easily became the very identity of the church. The church began to exist for the sake of the church."

Brian Wright, pastor of Northeast Baptist Church near Atlanta, agrees: "The institution is the means to do the mission. The church serves the mission, not vice versa."

So the point is not whether we can build churches that last, but whether churches can touch the world with God's love.

The other primary distraction is *church growth*. When the emphasis is on bringing the world to the church, the church's mission of going to the world can get lost.

Jack Mercer, pastor of Harrisonburg (Virginia) Baptist Church says his church stumbled on this point: "Our mission statement is based on the Great Commission, and so we looked at those words of Jesus and everything was fine until we tripped on the word *go*. Jesus tells us to 'go' and make disciples, but we were just trying to get people to 'come' into the church so we could make disciples. We needed to shift our activity from getting people into the church to going out to the people of the world."

Obviously, attracting people to the church is not necessarily wrong. In fact, it's important not to view *missional* as the opposite of the term *attractional*. Placing these concepts at odds puts the church into an either/or contrast that is neither accurate nor helpful.

Leith Anderson, pastor of Wooddale Church near Minneapolis says, "I think attractional is really a subset of missional. Churches ought to be attractional. After all, there is an attractive appeal to the mission. Churches that don't attract people to the gospel or even to the institution will not live out the mission because they won't live at all. The problem arises when attracting people to the church becomes the mission."

Wright also believes being missional is attractive. Northeast is a rapidly growing small church. After three years of leading this church, Wright says, "We've found that many churches in our area have grown by putting on a great show. Our model is different. We believe that by serving those around us, we show them Christ, which does have an attractional quality. Still, the primary goal is to serve, not to attract."



In fact, when Northeast recently started two neighborhood groups, one that advertised fun for the kids, games, and free food got a mediocre response.

Another group invited people in the community to work alongside churchgoers in addressing community issues, from providing sandwiches for the soup kitchen to baby clothes for a shelter. The service group attracted more involvement from both the church and the community.

When a church focuses on trying to grow, the larger mission suffers and the church can actually become less attractive.

## **Redirected Resources**

Becoming missional means redirecting resources toward the world. This means church leaders take a hard look at how money, time, and energy are allocated. Is it for the sole benefit of those in the church, or invested in God's mission to the world?

For Community Church of Joy, the journey outward involved shifting from being a staff-led and consumer-driven church to being lay-led and contributor-driven. In such a context, staff become encouragers and equippers. Those spotlighted as frontline performers of ministry are those who serve Jesus in the world.

"The analogy is a football stadium," Breen says. "In the past, the majority of our church members were in the stands watching and applauding the paid staff on the field. The staff was worn out from doing all the ministry. Meanwhile, the lay members were well-rested but resistant to getting in the game. Now that is reversing."

Getting people active in ministry can get its start in worship. For a congregation like Community Church of Joy, which had perfected the seeker-sensitive approach, missional worship meant a major reversal.

"Back then," Breen explains, "we would say in worship, 'You don't need to stand or sing or give. Just relax, sit back, and observe.' Now, we say you do need to stand and sing and give. In effect, we are now much closer to a Reformation theology of worship in that worship is 'the work of the people' of God, not just observing and supporting the work of paid staff."

Anderson says that Wooddale emphasizes the priesthood of all believers and gets more people involved in God's mission by encouraging them to take ownership of ministry, including worship. While their traditional worship services rely on a few persons up front, their two newest services get as many as half the worshipers involved in important ways: "We have an arts team that creates wonderful and original works for each service, and a muscle team of about 40 people who set up and get things arranged. More importantly, we estimate that half our Sunday evening worshipers actively invite others to worship. The high level of ownership in making the worship service happen translates into ownership of inviting others."



## Taking It into the World

Missional churches activate laity to carry out God's mission in their various spheres of life. This creates a community of Christians who let the upward focus on God in the worship service impact their orientation and activity during the rest of their lives. This means inviting the lost and making worship hospitable to others on weekends, but also working for God during the week.

Cravens describes an attitude shift being made among her leaders: "We are moving from seeing ourselves as a church who needs members from the community to seeing ourselves as being in a community whose members need the church. We've realized we're here to serve the community in unique ways."

For instance, when the city of 100,000 stopped its curbside recycling program, First Christian Church converted part of its parking lot into a collection site for aluminum, plastics, and paper. And since earth stewardship is important, the children made door hangers about the recycling opportunity and delivered them, with cookies, to homes and apartments in the neighborhood.

"Our efforts generated great interest," says Cravens.

Community Church of Joy has organized groups of about 50 people. Breen says, "These groups are small enough to have their own unique vision—such as ministering to shut-ins or working with the homeless—but they are big enough to do something about that vision. Each group owns a specific aspect of God's mission for the world."

Such projects implant a missional mindset. Harrisonburg Baptist Church did a one-day community service project. Pastor Mercer says, "Operation 'In As Much' was a one-day blitz of community service projects. That day had a ripple effect in our church that lasted at least a year. It opened people's eyes to how serving those around us is not peripheral to the church, but is central to our mission."

These churches do face great difficulties, but as these leaders can attest, the task is indeed missional: possible.

*—Chad Hall is a ministry coach living in Hickory, North Carolina.*

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## Discuss

1. How do you see the foundations of missional ministry in the Old and New Testaments?
2. Is our church susceptible to an attitude and philosophy of self-preservation? Why?
3. What is the problem with a congregation being "attractational," but not also missional?



## Possible for You?

*Becoming a missional church requires change in several areas, and not all congregations can handle such changes. Assess whether or not your church has an atmosphere that can support and survive the changes that accompany a church's commitment to become missional. Check each attribute as changeable, unchangeable, or in progress.*

	changeable	unchangeable	in progress
Our church's vision statement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our church's emphasis on outreach and evangelism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our church's priority on relationship building and discipleship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The level of involvement for our lay people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The expectations placed on our pastors and staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reallocation of our resources toward missional programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Rediscovering an Old Calling

*How families and churches are relearning the meaning of mission.*

by Eric Reed

Talking with Connie Sabo in the living room of her north Atlanta home, you'd think from her poise and easy grace that she might have been a contender for Miss America. (She is first cousin to one.) But when I first meet Connie, her blond mane is pulled back in a ponytail, she's wearing jeans and sneakers and playing ball with a dozen Latino kids in the muddy parking lot of an aging apartment complex. "We don't speak a word of Spanish," she said, "but they know we care. We certainly were not equipped for this, but God has equipped us."

Her husband, Frank, is there, too. (He is greeted with shouts of "Mr. Frank! Mr. Frank!")

Soon daughter Taylor arrives with her high school classmates for an afternoon of tutoring, a Bible lesson, and games in the parking lot with the kids of Wyndham Creek apartments. For the past six years, this has been their Wednesday afternoon ritual.

The Sabos represent a shift taking place among believers and churches in North America. Frank and Connie lived in several cities during his career in corporate management with a major restaurant chain, and now, settled in Atlanta, they enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. As members of Perimeter Church, a large congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America, their family grew under the teaching of pastor Randy Pope and a wide variety of ministries for their girls. Then their older daughter, Chelsea, now in college, participated in a junior-high outreach to an apartment community of immigrants with lots of kids, few English language skills, and deep need. That in-town mission sparked a desire in the Sabos to move beyond their comfortable faith.

Theirs is part of the story of a church that awakened to the spiritual and physical need of their neighbors and the birth of a service ministry that now includes 90 churches of all denominations in the area.

It is a good picture of what happens when a church and a family go "missional."

### More than Buzz

The word *missional* has been in the dictionary for 100 years, defined in the 1907 Oxford English dictionary as something that is of, or pertaining to, missionaries. But those who use the word today have broader applications, focusing on the church's role in the culture.



It refers to a philosophy of ministry: that followers of Christ are counter-cultural, on a mission to change the culture. Missional refers to the specific activity of churches: to build the kingdom of God in all settings where church members are at work, rather than building up the local congregation, its programs, numbers, and facilities.

Many users of the term refer to a change of heart—that missions is not a distant program to which we send a check or boxes of used clothing, but instead something we're personally involved in. The whole life of a believer is to be dedicated to faithful sharing, giving, and going—more than studying, hearing, and sending others.

Those steeped in a missions tradition would contend it is the recovery of an old ethic. If the number of websites and recent books using the word are any measure, missional is hot and spreading. Time will tell if it is the successor to “church growth” and the antidote to consumer-driven church.

## **Nigh Society**

A missionary returning from South America to teach at the seminary I attended predicted the demise of the monolithic agency that sent him and funded him for nearly 30 years. “The denominational mission structure has grown large and unwieldy. The churches are losing connection with the missionaries they fund,” he told our class.

“The forces that led to these ad hoc groups of people from various church backgrounds and the passions that kept them together proved effective in spreading the gospel,” he said. “I think we’ll see the reemergence of the society method of missions sending in the next generation.” Not only as a funding and sending method, I would tell the professor today, but also as a congregational and personal ethic.

For congregations, the missional concept means:

1. Local churches (and the networks they form) replacing the denominational boards and parachurch organizations as missions senders.
2. The shared parish concept in local communities.
3. Personal ownership of missions responsibility.

From local congregations and missions societies supporting a few missionaries in the 1800s, the seat of Christian mission responsibility moved to denominations in the 1900s, to parachurch organizations in the latter half of the last century, to entrepreneurial megachurches in the past generation, and increasingly back to congregations and individuals in ad hoc groups that often want to do the work themselves.

Yes, professor, we are coming full circle. Individual Christians in local congregations are taking new ownership of the mission. We are becoming missional.

## **Going to People Afar**

Roberta Hestenes’s account of a missions trip to East Africa is just as gripping for the audience who hears it today as it was eye-opening for the church that supported it in





2000. Rather than another short-term trip that makes do-gooders feel good and leaves the missionaries on the field to mop up afterward, this trip was the first venture in the adoption of a distant, un-evangelized people by Hestenes's Southern California congregation. Solana Beach Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) chose the Afar in Ethiopia.

After extensive research and prayer, the church took these remote and little-known people to heart and began fundraising. Hestenes told the story of a woman named Vera, who waffled over going. Finally she joined the team.

After months of planning, and two days on cramped planes, the team was journeying several hours across the desert to find the Afar when one of their drivers swerved to avoid a collision. The van flipped. Three people were severely injured.

In the hours they waited for help to arrive, a group of boys came by. "Afar?" Roberta asked of the boys who were hours from the Afar village. "Afar!" the leader said, pointing to himself and several others. "Afar," he scowled, pointing to one boy and shaking his head. Apparently not Afar. Seeking some connection with the kids who knew no English, Roberta eventually led them in singing "Alleluia."

And undecided Vera found her purpose on this trip. Vera is a nurse. She tended the injured.

The group was led to the Afar town and met an entourage of 50 leaders, a door that had never been opened to Christians before. "We know you really care about us and our needs," Hestenes quoted the top official as saying, "because you came. Even though it was hard and even though your colleagues were hurt in the accident." This was the first trip in a multi-year relationship with the Afar.

Hestenes now urges other churches to promote personal involvement in mission work, not merely missions support. Our personal formation in the image of Christ demands hands-on ministry, she believes. Everyone is important in the work, even those like Vera who are at first unsure of their contribution. These are recurring themes in the missional conversation: hands-on, personal involvement, a purpose for everyone.

Even the monolithic sending agencies are admitting, "We can't do it alone." The Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, which has for decades prided itself for fielding the world's largest team of missionaries, turned to local congregations for assistance in reaching "unreached people groups." In SBC life, this is a remarkable change from the decades in which *all* the churches supported *all* the missionaries in order to reach *all* the lost people—in the process losing close contact between missionaries and the people back home.

This is the supra-denominational approach to missions—local churches working above and beyond the reach of the sending agency, and often outside the denominational or even parachurch structure.

On the local level as well, the new watchword is *partnerships*. "In the '80s and '90s, the national agencies would come up with the ideas and fund them. On the local level, we participated in what they funded," said Keith Draper, a church planting strategist who is



executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association, an alliance of Southern Baptist congregations. “Now, the national leadership wants to know what is working on the local level. Then they join in and may support it financially.”

This, too, is a significant shift for a denomination with a top-down missions strategy. “Today our work is about creating partnerships on the local and regional levels,” Draper said.

“In some ways this is nothing new,” he pointed out. “There is historical precedent for local congregations leading regional, national, and international missions. Before denominations coalesced 150 years ago, local churches took responsibility for global missions. They were ‘glocal’ two centuries before the word was coined. We are getting back to that.”

### **Shared Parish, Shared Purpose**

What the Billy Graham organization pulled off in the cities where it crusaded—bringing churches of different stripes together for a common purpose—is beginning to happen organically and for ongoing ministry. Think of it as the church without borders.

In Columbia, South Carolina, they call it a “circle of accountability,” the responsibility shared by churches to reach the 600,000 unchurched people in their city. Jeff Shipman founded Columbia Crossroads Church six years ago with the intention of reaching every lost person. Realizing the enormity of the goal, Shipman enlisted fellow pastors to subdivide the region and tackle the task together. His church has even supported the planting of 20 churches in five denominations, none of them his own. Today 70 churches partner.

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 30 of the 80 evangelical churches are working together under the banner “Loving our Communities to Christ,” a project of Mission America. The alliance is one of nine in cities across the nation. In each city, the churches focus on issues specific to their location, including reconciliation, justice, and strengthening marriages and families.

A community-wide work in Little Rock, Arkansas, has become a model in more than 20 other cities. Started eight years ago when 31 pastors prayed for a way to demonstrate Christ’s love to their city, Sharefest annually brings together dozens of churches in Central Arkansas for repair work in rundown schools and neighborhoods. Fellowship Bible Church continues to spearhead the annual event.

These are a few examples of what may be called a “shared parish,” the desire to build the kingdom together with other congregations.

The church that inspired the Sabos to become a missional family is part of Unite!, 90 churches sharing a parish and resources in North Atlanta. The ministry centers around International Village, an area that has seen an influx of thousands of immigrants from more than 100 language groups.



## **When Churches Work Together**

About the time the Sabos' daughter was asking dad to drive the van for that junior high mission project, pastor Randy Pope was asking God for clarity for Perimeter Church's next season. At their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the church had quality teaching and strong faith (head and heart, as Jonathan Edwards put it), but what was missing was involvement in ministry to people in the area (the hand, as both Edwards and Pope point out).

"Our church is in an area where the spiritual need is great, but the physical need may not be so obvious," said Chip Sweney, Perimeter's Metro Outreach pastor. "We began looking in a larger ring around our community." A demographic study showed that big changes were happening around them. Along Buford Highway the black-owned businesses and mom-and-pop shops were becoming ethnic stores: Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Latino from a dozen countries.

"There are 400 apartment complexes around here, and each nationality settles together in a few apartment complexes," Tim Cummins of Whirlwind Ministries explains. "Every complex is like visiting a different country. In every one, people need help talking with the landlord or reading the letter from their kids' school. A tremendous opportunity for the gospel here. Talk about going to the world? The world is coming to us!"

In that environment, leaders of a few churches said, "We are each doing some good things in the community, but what if we were to do it together?"

A core of eight churches formed with Sweney and Bryan White of Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, a historic, black congregation, taking the point.

Now, almost four years later, Unite! involves more than 90 churches—black, white, and Hispanic—from a range of theological backgrounds. They lead prayer initiatives and adopt schools. The Unite! churches took in 1,000 families who fled to Atlanta after Hurricane Katrina. And they support a clinic for indigent people.

Sweney is still a church staff member, although much of his work is outside Perimeter. He is their gift to the community. "The churches with resources have responsibility to lead out," Sweney said. "We just need to love on people, and let them know that we care."

And much of their work centers on the people of International Village.

## **Moving Into the Neighborhood**

Like the Sabos, Ben and Julie Sawyer are members of Perimeter Church who heard a calling.

"It was just like a finger in the eye," Julie said of the prodding they felt from their pastor's teaching and from the Lord. "We had a strong family life. It kept coming to us that it's natural to serve in an area where you're already strong." So when they heard of



an opening at an apartment complex in the International Village, where one of the their children’s teachers had lived and led ministry to immigrant children, the Sawyers packed up, left their suburban home, and squeezed their family into a four-room apartment. The downstairs living area becomes a kids’ club a couple of afternoons a week.

A marker board in the window, with the Unite! logo, says “Homework Help, 4–6 P.M., Welcome!”

Ben comes home from work in time for the tutoring and games on the asphalt drive. “We felt it was important to move into the community itself because it lends credibility to what we’re doing here,” Ben said. “The problems and issues and struggles of the community are now our problems and issues and struggles.”

“It grabs me every time I drive into the complex,” Julie said in her makeshift dining room, surrounded by immigrant children struggling with simple math. “This is important. I need to live here because it’s important and it keeps my heart tender toward my neighbors. And I fear leaving, that my heart would harden again.”

—Eric Reed is managing editor of LEADERSHIP.

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**Discuss**

1. What is our church’s current level of involvement in missions and other ministries of outreach?
2. How is *missional* similar to *missions*? How is it different?
3. What aspects of the missional Christianity described above does our church exemplify?

**Sounds Like... Missional**

Here are three quotes that appeared in the original version of this article above. Read each quote and list the characteristics and attitudes in that quote that qualify it as “missional.”

➤ “This is not a project. It is integrated into our lives.”

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➤ “The problems and issues and struggles of the community are now our problems and issues and struggles.”

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➤ “I need to live here. It keeps my heart tender toward my neighbors.”

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## **Renewing the Church's Mission**

*How one church moved toward missional values, and how it changed along the way.*

by Charles Roesel

Leesburg, Florida, is an hour's drive north of Orlando, but it has little in common with the tourist mecca.

The town of 19,000 has no major industry. Back-to-back freezes in the 1980s killed the orange groves. The juice plant operates on a small scale now.

We have begun to draw some retirees in recent years, but most of them live in modest homes on fixed incomes.

Our little city is miles from the interstate highway and the Florida Turnpike, and still, people by the hundreds find Leesburg every year—needy people, hurting people. And they come to First Baptist Church.

A local TV station once called us “the church that cares.” The description stuck. What started as an outreach to homeless and transient men in a time of high unemployment has grown into 70 ministries to all kinds of people with all kinds of needs. In the process, we learned to minister to the needs of others that we might lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. We call it “ministry evangelism.”

Our first ministry to the community was a men's rescue mission. Our Sunday school director suggested that we use an old two-story house in the block next to our yellow-brick sanctuary for ministry. It was a wreck. If the termites had stopped holding hands, the building would have collapsed.

The church I had pastored in another Florida town had started a children's shelter after we learned that children entering the foster care system were often housed in the jail until the county could place them. I saw the effect an outward-focused ministry had on that congregation. It seemed this church was ready to begin its first ministry. We opened the men's center.

Today, almost 20 years later, a new men's rescue mission is the first building you see as you drive around the green knoll and up the slight hill to the church. Our “ministry village” is a collection of beautiful new one-story buildings housing shelters for battered women and children who have been abused or abandoned, a pregnancy care center, a counseling center, and a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation program.

The storefront at the far end of the block houses the food pantry, clothing closet, furniture warehouse, and the financial counseling office. The next piece in this patchwork in the blocks surrounding our sanctuary will be a new clinic.

We opened a small medical office with two nurses several years ago. A retired doctor began donating his time, and eventually started giving as many as 60 hours a week. The



local hospital gave us \$430,000 to build a new facility. It will be staffed by volunteer doctors who will treat people who have no insurance or government-paid medical assistance. Even in Leesburg, a lot of people fall through the cracks.

Now 4,000 people each year are reached through the services at the ministry village.

Our campus is alive. With these ministries, our elementary and middle schools, after-school programs, arts academy, and support groups, it's busy here seven days a week. Sunday is the day we celebrate all that God is doing.

## **Waking a Sleeping Giant**

First Baptist was as sleepy as Leesburg when I came here in 1977. The 100-year-old congregation was white, middle- and upper-class, with attitudes typical of its time. The church averaged 300 in Sunday school and worship and baptized fewer than 20 people per year, mostly the children of members. The church was focused inward. Most all our programming was for the benefit of members. Our business meetings were long and rancorous, and our members squabbled about insignificant things.

Through ministry evangelism, we began to look beyond our own needs. I confronted prejudices with biblical truth. Over time, we have come to see all people as Christ sees them, as recipients of his love and needing his salvation.

As I look across the congregation today, I see people whose only possessions are those we gave them sitting next to the wealthiest residents of our community. We have every race. We have every style of dress. More than 2,000 worshipers attend each weekend. And we have averaged approximately 300 baptisms every year over the past decade. One-third of those are people who come to Christ through our social ministries.

## **The First Piece of the Puzzle**

When I first arrived in Leesburg, I wanted to establish an emergency rescue shelter for children. One man offered to give the land and another offered a large financial gift, but the church feared the legal risk. The vote in favor was only 51 percent. It seemed unwise to start a new ministry with that kind of vote.

Moving from a "ministry for us" mentality to a "ministry to others" mindset was like turning a barge in a ditch. It was tough. During this time I continued to preach on the love of Christ for lost and hurting people. I frequently preached from the Gospels, showing how Jesus personally cared for people. In the meantime, the rescue mission opened. We began to see lost men saved and wrecked lives redeemed. It's hard to deny the work of God when it's sitting in the pew next to you.

Five years after the first vote, the congregation overwhelmingly approved the children's ministry. Hearts had finally been softened.

And the church began to get personally involved. Our older members started working in the center. Many have become surrogate grandparents. You can walk through there at any time and find volunteers holding babies and rocking them to sleep.



The children's shelter opened the gate for dozens of outreach ministries. I have watched the pattern: God plants a ministry idea in someone's heart. One or two offer money and facilities. We make the ministry need and the opportunity known to the congregation. They give freely, without financial campaigns, and then they volunteer to serve.

Our pregnancy care center started that way. One lady who felt we should not just preach against abortion but offer real help to pregnant women gave \$5,000 to start the center. Church members ran with the idea. Now we see 150 women every month. We provide adoption counseling, baby supplies, and help with jobs and housing.

When we began thinking about the shelter for abused women, one quiet man came to my office to discuss the plans. He gave \$100,000 anonymously. Another woman gave a few tracts of land valued at more than \$800,000. And she asked me to come to her house for another donation—\$100,000 in cash she had stuffed in a small bag.

A few people caught the vision, then the whole congregation saw it. In four weeks they gave a total of \$2 million, without a campaign of any kind. They see the joy in that kind of experience. They keep asking, "What are you going to do next, Lord?" And the ministries multiply.

Now, I'm careful about mentioning a ministry unless I mean business. I was just testing the waters on a ministry to people with AIDS when the deacons came with a unanimous voice. "If this is a need in our community," they said, "let's go for it."

## **Service Is Contagious**

I wish I could say I had a system to make people want to serve. My insight is hindsight. I can tell you what we do regularly.

- *We call the congregation back to evangelism every week.* The tendency of Christians is to drift *from* evangelism, not *toward* it. And we emphasize that our ministry is for the purpose of sharing the gospel.

We have built accountability for sharing Christ into our meetings with ministry leaders. And three or four times each year I teach a course on sharing our faith for those joining a ministry team.

- *We encourage people into service.* We don't push them, but we help them see what they can be. I often ask, "What are you doing today that's going to matter a million years from now?" That gives our members an eternal perspective.

Every person who joins the church takes the new members' class. There, as part of determining their giftedness, people are encouraged to choose a place to serve. Then, when they are presented to the church, I say, "Let's welcome Joan. She wants to work in the kids ministry." The congregation hears how each person will be involved, and it serves to check their own involvement.





- *We hold up needs before the congregation.* If God gives someone a vision for a ministry, we often begin to see that confirmed as a few give to the project and a team coalesces. We share that with the congregation, and another ministry is born.
- *We celebrate accomplishments.* We regularly have testimonies from those who have been helped: a couple who received counseling to get out of debt, or a man from the rescue mission who is marking six months off alcohol. Our worship services break into applause as we cheer what God is doing.

Often stories of volunteers illustrate my sermons. I once told the congregation about Charles and Bonnie Keesley, a retired couple who minister to 700 people through the homebound ministry. He then works in our Saturday Sunday school. His service is his recreation. So I lift up people like that. I see my role as preacher, pastor, and cheerleader.

### **If It Works in Leesburg ...**

In recent years I have shared our story with other pastors and church leaders, and they ask, "How do I get my church to do this?" Some tell me their churches are too small or too entrenched. I suggest:

- *Start with what you have.* Our renaissance began with a ramshackle house and the willingness of the congregation to let a few people do the work. But it was a start. And their success and joy became contagious.
- *Start where your people are.* Find the need that most touches their hearts, and they will give themselves to it. Even people who are not directly affected by a problem may feel deeply about it. We recently raised \$1.4 million to build a high school. The biggest givers were older people who have no school-age children. But they see the violence in our schools and they care very much about the children. And when the school opens, many will find ways to serve.

Leesburg is not rich, but a few years ago, the people of our church gave \$3 million to local ministry, over and above our operating budget. People will give to the causes that matter to them. For leaders, it's a matter of recognizing those needs.

- *Start with something familiar.* A pastor told me his church was not likely to try anything too radical. I understand that. I recommend as a first step that the church do an old thing very well. While many churches are deciding whether they will do Vacation Bible School, our church returned to a two-week VBS. It's one of the highlights of the year. And we have people who take vacation days from work so they can teach.

This church does Sunday school well, but we weren't reaching a significant portion of our community. We started Saturday Sunday school, a Saturday





morning version of what we do well on Sunday. Through it we reach poor children and many from single-parent households who are unavailable to us on Sunday. Something familiar became a source of innovation. Our congregation understood it and embraced the new incarnation.

This has become a church willing to try something new in order to share the gospel.

- *Start with your most available work force.* In our case, it's retirees. Florida is blessed with them, and at our church, retired people lead the way in ministry. I have found that older people are quite willing to serve if they can see how others benefit. But they need to be asked and given specific tasks. Many of our members work practically full-time in volunteer capacities.
- *Start networking with other churches.* Many churches in Leesburg support our work spiritually, financially, and with workers. I enjoy a better relationship with other local pastors here than I have anywhere. The ministry village has become a communal project, now drawing support from the local medical community. Smaller churches especially need to work together. Most churches will agree on the need for a social ministry such as a food pantry or clothing closet. It is vital that they also agree on the importance of sharing the gospel as part of that ministry.

## **How Will We Know Them?**

A visitor told me he drove into town not long ago and stopped at a store to ask directions to the church.

"First Baptist?" the clerk said to him. "Oh, yeah, that's the church that helps the ladies."

Our church has developed a reputation for helping the ladies—and the children, the men, the addicted, the depressed, and the hurting. Those who come to us aren't impressed by our facilities, and many don't know much about Jesus. But when they see his followers helping people, when we help them with a spirit of empathy rather than pity, then they know we love them. And soon, we hope, they will know Jesus loves them too.

*—Charles Roesel was pastor of First Baptist Church in Leesburg,  
Florida, from 1977–2006.*

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## **Discuss**

1. What were some of this church's important steps in discovering its identity as a missional church?
2. What are some of our ministry strengths? How can we start with those to reach out?
3. Why is it important to introduce change gradually, as this pastor explained?



## Helping Service Catch On

*Church leaders can help move people toward a missional mindset by establishing a few standard practices. Rate yourself on the ones described above. For each of the four habits, rate your church leaders as "We do this well," "We do this adequately," "We do this poorly," or "We do not do this."*

	Well	Adequately	Poorly	Do Not
➤ <b>Evangelism.</b> We regularly call our congregation to share the gospel through words and actions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ <b>Service.</b> We highlight opportunities for service, and the call that God places on believers to demonstrate love to one another.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ <b>Needs.</b> When someone senses a need for a new ministry, we share that vision with the congregation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ <b>Celebration.</b> We publicly acknowledge and rejoice over the ministry successes of men and women in our congregations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Moving in a New Direction

*What happened when one church redefined itself around mission.*

by Wade Hodges with Greg Taylor

*One day a preacher said to a friend, "We have just had the greatest revival our church has experienced in many years."*

*"How many did you add to your church membership?"*

*"None. We lost five hundred."—Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel*

When I considered the possibility of moving from Bellingham, Washington, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, the question wasn't just why I would exchange Mount Baker for oil country. I'd come to a fork in the road.

Was it time to plant an emerging, or missional type of church? Or could I help an existing modern-ish church position itself for ministering to the next generation by developing some emerging sensibilities?

Rather than giving up on existing churches, which is what the prospect of church planting felt like to me, I wanted to believe that an existing church could make the transition. So I came to Garnett Church of Christ and set the transition in motion.

The results have been astounding.

850 members in 2003.

550 members in 2006.

Everyone told me that church planting would be hard, but I don't know if anyone warned me how difficult making this kind of church transition, with its epistemological, cultural, and sociological elements, would be.

### **After the Boom**

Garnett was once a flagship congregation in our denomination, quite visible in the community with JOY buses fetching children city-wide and splashy events that captured national attention, including a segment on Good Morning America. Garnett was blessed with a location in the growing edge of East Tulsa, and it had visionary leadership in Marvin Phillips, a gifted evangelist and motivator.

Our facilities were built with a megachurch in mind. With a 3,000-seat auditorium built in the center of 40 acres, Garnett was positioned in the mid-'80s to grow exponentially like the oil-boom neighborhoods that surrounded it.

It never did.



At least, it never grew the way it was supposed to. The building was never filled with multiple services of enthusiastic crowds. The oil-boom intoxicated debt the church incurred to build the facility was never paid off. Financial difficulties, leadership controversies, and a demographic shift in the neighborhood left Garnett, by the late '90s, a shell of its former self.

A church that at one time boasted 2,000 attending now averaged closer to 700. Marvin Phillips retired in 1996, and the church struggled to find its way in his absence. The senior minister who followed him inherited conflict and systemic dysfunction that made success impossible.

Beginning in 2000, the Garnett leadership entered into a recovery process that lasted three years. During this time, the church had no senior minister, but the leadership culture and structure was reshaped with the help of several church consultants, who said more shepherding by the leadership, more depth, more balance, fewer events, and less flash were some of the important steps for the congregation to heal and turn the corner.

In 2003, having taken this advice, the final touch was to call an energetic young preacher to deliver relevant messages. And everyone assumed Garnett was just a few months away from returning to the glory days.

Yes, I was that energetic young preacher.

I arrived confident in my choice to revive an existing church rather than plant a new one. I set out to ride a new wave of spiritual formation in a church hungry for depth. Together we would learn what it means to live out the gospel in today's culture.

I had a clear sense of my mission: to catalyze a process in which a personality-driven, event-oriented, excitement-addicted, down-on-its-luck failed megachurch is transformed into a missional community.

For me, that meant starting with the gospel, asking what it means today for our church, our community. And perhaps that may have been where the trouble started.

## **Why Study the Gospel?**

During my first six months, I was leading a Bible study with the leadership team, and I suggested that we start with a study of the gospel.

One of the leaders responded, "I think we've already got the gospel figured out. Why do we need to study that? Let's figure out how to start moving the ball down the field."

I was sure we *didn't* already have the gospel figured out and that what we were calling "the gospel" was actually only a small slice of what the gospel is all about.

That conversation was one of the first indicators that we had a problem, that the modern we-have-it-figured-out concept would clash mightily with the newer ideas of what gospel means, what it means to be a missionary in our own culture, and what it means to live it outside the walls of the church.



At the same time, the rehabilitated leadership structure relapsed and some of the old problems began to show up again. Attendance, which had remained steady and even increased a bit during the get-well season, began to drop.

Some left because they didn't know who was in charge anymore. Others left because they perceived the church wasn't focused on proclaiming the gospel anymore. Still others left because it seemed the current leadership was soft on truth.

Now, a few years later, numbers in attendance and giving are lower than ever and a spatula is needed to elevate morale. On paper, Garnett appears to be in pretty bad shape.

Yet on our good days, we're hopeful that God is up to something important among us.

God is doing something at Garnett Church of Christ that seems counter to what I previously thought God would do in a church. The Spirit, I believe, is teaching us that it's not about people populating programs but about God inhabiting every moment of our lives, most of which happens outside the walls of the church.

And we're learning that these church walls must come down.

Facing ongoing debt and fewer members, a neighborhood that is transitioning to Hispanic, and the fact that we fill less than one-fifth of the assembly hall, we invited Larry James, director of Central Dallas Ministries, to help us discern what we should do.

He opened our eyes to the dramatic potential of our underutilized property. He focused on urban renewal, debt reduction, and community outreach.

That led us to take these steps.

*1. To be honest about our current condition.* This can be hard for a church with such a storied past.

People kept asking: Why have our long-term members left? When are things going to get back to the way they were? What's wrong with us?

Such questions can squelch even the most sincere brainstorming sessions. The hard truth we've tried to communicate through all of this is that the glory days of the past are exactly that—past glory days. We're not to try to return to them. Garnett will never again be the church it once was. We have to do the difficult thing of letting go of our former glory in order to allow God to do a new thing in us.

*2. To relinquish our rights as members to a church building that we are no longer able to pay for by ourselves.* The Garnett Church of Christ building is becoming the Garnett Event Center.

Already, several other churches are using our facilities on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon: a Messianic Jewish community, a charismatic Hispanic church, a rock church called Rolling Stone, and a new church plant.

Throughout the week, a number of other events, some church-related and others not, are held at our building. Not only is the rental income from these events helping to pay the bills, but it's also giving us a hospitable presence in our neighborhood.



But not without some difficulty. Everyone, myself and all ministry staff included, must reserve any classroom or meeting space equally with those in the community who are using or renting space.

The way we're trying to see it: this building no longer belongs to us. It belongs to our community. This isn't easy to explain to a charter member who's been helping to pay off the building for 20 years!

We've started a bilingual preschool that has grown to 50 students, half Anglo and half Hispanic. We've projected beyond our ability to speak Spanish, putting "Bienvenido" (Welcome) on the front doors and asking Spanish speakers to help us translate for different events.

We made it our goal to pray for every family that comes into our weekly food subsidy ministry and to invite them to serve with us.

*3. To recognize that the most life-giving activities of our church aren't necessarily going to happen in our facility.* Church leaders in event-driven and personality-centered churches tend to gauge success by headcount, the number of people who show up. This is what leaders talked about, and subsequently members tended to judge success by how pews and collection baskets were filled.

With several books and other resources, we have been forced to ask new questions: What if events of church, personalities of church, and Sunday assembly went away? What would be our view of the Christian life? What would we do as Christians, and who would we be?

We're working with the local fire department to arrange Spanish classes for them so they can better serve and communicate on daily calls. We're partnering with Habitat for Humanity and our city to build and renovate houses and help people to get back on their feet again.

We are learning to see our community, and individuals, not as needing handouts, but as valued people who can together with us serve our Lord and our community.

*4. To learn to be missionaries in our own culture.* Across the street from us, Fire Station 27 is the busiest station in the city. Fire Chief Michael Baker said, "This is a big church and the neighborhood is waiting ... waiting to see what you are going to do for this community."

This comment has been forcing us outward, while we are at the same time redesigning our space for community groups to enter. Church Shepherd Robert Garland replied to Chief Baker that "we want to be a better neighbor to you and this community."

And really, that's the first step to becoming missionaries: getting to know our neighbors' needs.

Todd Hunter of Alpha-USA articulates well what we want to do: "I want to help people become the cooperative friends of Jesus, seeking to live lives of constant creative goodness through the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the world."



That's what we're determined to do: equip our congregation to be Christ to neighbors, co-workers, and family members, rather than trying to coax people into signing up for every church program possible and burning families out with church involvement.

We've had to ruthlessly ask of each ministry venture, "Is this an energy drain? An event without purpose? A building-centered program that determines success by how many populate this building?"

Anything aside from a Christ-centered approach is out in favor of teaching one another how to be an incarnational presence of Christ, in practical ways in our jobs, neighborhoods, PTAs, and sports teams.

### **The Next Step**

This is the direction our transition is going. It has been hard, painful, and messy. At times it's confusing and depressing. And we're not done yet. The hardest part may still be in front of us.

Every day we remind ourselves that what we're attempting to do may not work.

But we wouldn't have it any other way.

*—Wade Hodges is preaching minister at  
Garnett Church of Christ in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

*—Greg Taylor is associate minister at Garnett Church of Christ  
and managing editor of New Wineskins, an online  
magazine for spiritual seekers.*

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### **Discuss**

1. Honestly assess your church's opinion of the gospel. Do you feel you "have it figured out," or do you strive to integrate it into all aspects of life and ministry?
2. What are the practical outworkings of your answer to question one?
3. How did the church in this article model a missional mindset? How can we do the same thing?



## **Moving Missional**

*Here are several important steps for developing a missional mindset on your leadership team. Use them to assess your current state, mark your progress, and map out important next steps.*

- Articulate what the call of the gospel is for your church in your culture and community.
- Honestly assess your church's current conditions, attitudes, and impact on the community.
- Allow your church to focus on ministries that impact the community and build up the name of Christ in your neighborhood.
- Affirm your leaders and members as they participate in life-changing ministry outside the walls of your church.
- Reach out, support, and be supported by other churches that share your convictions for reaching the community.





## The Missional Leader

*How does a leader prepare a church to look outside itself?*

by Chad Hall

Here are four important principles to keep in mind if you're part of church that is trying to become more missional in its ministry.

### 1. Anticipate and work through conflict.

As with any transition, the shift to being more missional will be felt as a loss by those who are accustomed to traditional “the staff is here to meet my needs” assumptions. Churches that have long been self-focused have well-formed habits and attitudes that are tough to overcome.

Mike Breen with Community Church of Joy says that many members resisted the emphasis on laity doing ministry: “They were used to being consumers who paid professionals to do the ministry. It was like we were a restaurant where they'd been coming for years and had always been served great meals. When we handed them an apron and asked them to help in the kitchen, many resisted and quite a few left the church.”

### 2. “Controlled release and releasing control.”

That's how Jack Mercer describes it. A dogged resolve coupled with a relaxed willingness to let the Spirit blow in unexpected ways.

The leader must be direct and uncompromising in leading the church to live out the missional mindset. But once that mindset catches hold, the leader must step back and let go. Leaders who attempt to control the expressions of missionality will always be tempted to control them, and thus suffocate them.

Breen says that Community Church of Joy puts together community-size groups of 50 to gather around the vision of serving, but then lets each group give birth to its unique mission.

Like any birth, it is messy: “A leader with a controlling tendency—like most of us!—will try to come up with the mission for the community. But letting the group birth it allows the life of Jesus to be expressed in and through that community in ways the leader could never imagine.”

Brian Wright is finding his leadership role in helping Northeast Baptist Church make the shift “from people being consumers to being producers.” He has had to stop producing ministry for would-be consumers as well as cease trying to get people to



resource his ministry ideas. Instead, he is setting his members free to dream of what God wants to do and is then empowering them to do it.

“We gathered people in groups of six to eight and let them dream up ways of creatively addressing the needs of our community,” he says. “I’ve helped the groups find grants to support the ministries, and I encourage and coach them to invest their own time and energy as well. Really, my role is as much to stay out of the way as it is to be involved.”

### **3. Recognize the personal losses.**

For pastors and other church leaders, this includes getting less recognition for doing ministry. Janetta Cravens, pastor of First Christian Church in Macon, Georgia, says their missional emphasis means the spotlight is less and less on her. “I’ve become more like a symphony conductor than one who actually plays an instrument. This has required me to really be a servant leader, to stop working for accolades, and to start measuring success according to the quality of music [ministry] the symphony members are producing.”

Breen says the church staff also faced the reality that some paid positions would have to be eliminated in order to help the church shift toward lay-led and outward focused mission.

“We realized the church is not here to give someone a job. It was tough to make decisions that cost people their job on church staff, but the move toward being missional meant we had to become a lighter, more nimble church. Too much staff was weighing us down and preventing our pursuit of God’s activity.”

### **4. Stamina required en route to better days.**

Since the transition toward becoming a missional church is complex, there will be great difficulties to endure. For leaders used to measuring success by attendance or accolades, they may have to endure desert days without those signs of success.

Signs of health may get inverted. Attendance and giving may actually drop.

This is what happened at Community Church of Joy. Breen says, “We lost a lot of people initially. That was tough, but eventually the levels of commitment went up, and today we have a more highly committed congregation. Our attendance and giving are still rebounding, and we have a much higher level of commitment in almost every measurable way.

“Our average attendee gives 50 percent more than a year ago, we have more kids in Bible study, and more people in our teaching experiences. Interestingly, our demographic is shifting younger, because the younger people want a call to commitment, not another call to be a consumer. For them, being a consumer is not compelling. If we had not weaned ourselves off the consumer model, we’d never have gotten to the level of commitment we are today.”



—Chad Hall is a ministry coach living in Hickory, North Carolina.

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## Discuss

1. What is a consumer model of church? In what ways does a missional model contrast with a consumer model?
2. What will our church need to lose in order to become more missional?
3. Are our leaders and congregation ready for some of the challenges listed here?

## Surviving the Shift

This article outlined a number of important hurdles to overcome on the way to becoming missional. Use this assessment to determine which of those hurdles may trip you up.

Answer each question with one of the following: “This is completely true of our church,” “This is somewhat true of our church,” or “This is not true of our church.”

	Does Not Describe	Somewhat Describes	Completely Describes
<b>Conflict</b>			
➤ Our members are relatively flexible and would be open to a change in the direction and style of our ministry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Staff and lay leaders have open communication with much of the congregation and all of the most influential congregants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Control</b>			
➤ Our staff can function—at least for a time—with ambiguity and shifting power dynamics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Our congregation can function with ambiguity as lay people and staff take on different roles in ministry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Loss</b>			
➤ Church leaders do not require accolades or attention to perform excellent ministry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Our church staff is prepared for cutbacks as some paid positions are handed over to volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Stamina</b>			
➤ All of our key staff and lay leaders believe that it is vital for our church to become more missional, and they are willing to the changes that will accompany our transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## How to Be a Good Church

*Many churches are redefining themselves around significance, not success.*

by Eric Swanson

Jim Collins's book *Good to Great* has inspired both business and church leaders. It is a study of 28 good companies that became great as measured by their outperforming the stock market by at least seven times over a 15-year period. Countless companies are now applying the "hedgehog concept" and other principles from the book, trying to become similarly great.

Likewise, many churches are seeking to become great churches. Entire ministry industries exist to help that process—from fundraising, to church building programs, to worship resources, to programming. And in nearly every community, there's at least one great church, as measured by numbers and facilities.

But large churches discover a troubling secret. Size alone isn't good enough. Great or small, churches need something more than bigger numbers.

Bob Buford, author of *Half-Time*, notes that at midlife, many people discover they've built their lives around "success" only to find it empty. So they reinvent themselves to build the second half of life around "significance." Similarly, Christian Washington, former investment banker and director of Leadership Network's MC2 (Missional Church) Network, notes that many "successful" churches are now in "half-time" mode and want to move "from success to significance." What does that look like?

The Bible says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good ... because God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Wouldn't you expect more superlatives to describe his greatness? Yet Jesus' ministry is summed up, "he went around doing good." Maybe from God's perspective, the greatest thing we can do has more to do with goodness than greatness. Some churches follow that pattern—trading "greatness" in numbers for doing the "good" that Jesus modeled.

These are the "Great to Good" churches.

And this isn't just about big churches. Two-thirds of America's churches are either plateaued or declining. Not all churches are destined to become "great." But regardless of size, they can go about "doing good."

Good churches are those that do good things. The good that Jesus did can point the way.

### Ministries of Mercy

What did Jesus do? He did "good" through his ministry of mercy. Mercy is "God's attitude toward those in distress." Mercy is giving a person a fish so he can eat today. It's



not attacking problems at the systemic level. It's just making someone's life better, if only for today.

It's why Jesus so willingly fed the 5,000 (the only of his miracles recorded in all four Gospels). He didn't give them a lecture on planning ahead, or how to plant wheat for a future harvest. No, he said, "I have compassion on these people ... I do not want to send them away hungry" (Matt. 15:32).

He did not solve the world's hunger problem, but he did make these people's lives better for that afternoon. And that was good. Sometimes we are paralyzed by inaction. With the overwhelming problems that people have, we often think, *What good will this little act of kindness do?* But Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

At Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, California, Andy Bales is well aware of the poor and homeless people in his community. Although there are nearly 1,900 homeless people in Pasadena, the shelter capacity sleeps less than 100. The problems with "the system" are huge, but that doesn't prevent Andy and the caring people at Lake from showing Christ's mercy to those without homes.

One January, Andy held a Super Bowl party at Lake Avenue Church for the homeless in Pasadena. It was a day of feasting and football with 250 homeless people coming to a place of love, care, and celebration. The party did not cure their homelessness that day, but for those January hours it was a respite. This Super Bowl party has since turned into a weekly supper followed by a burgeoning Bible study.

If Andy's dreams come true, one day soon Lake will have transitional housing apartments over their parking garage, but for now, he is "doing good" by making people's lives better for the day.

Martem Tenens (later to be named Saint Martin) was born in what is now Hungary and was drafted into Constantine's army at age 15. As a tribune at the age of 18, on a bitterly cold day in Gaul, Martem came across a beggar, naked and shivering. Martem, a follower of Christ, slashed his heavy military cloak in two with his sword and gave half of it to the beggar. That night, sleeping under his half cloak, Jesus appeared to him in a dream wearing the other half and commended Martem for his mercy. "When you did it to the least of these brothers of mine you did it to me."

If we really believed that our actions toward the "least of these" were actions toward or against Jesus, would these little acts of mercy have greater meaning for us?

Every time a church gives someone water in the name of Jesus, it is a good thing, which makes visible the kingdom of God.

## **Ministries of Empowerment**

Among those Jesus encountered were the blind, the lame, the deaf, the lepers and the demon possessed. Apart from the physical infirmities, these people faced at least two other problems.



First, they were most often unable to work and so lived in dependence on others to care for them. They were unempowered.

Second, they were excluded from the social and spiritual life of the community. They were disenfranchised. They were outcasts looking in.

Jesus comes across one such individual in John 5:1–15, a man who had been lame for 38 years. Jesus asks him, “Do you want to get well?” This question was neither cruel nor rhetorical. It was a real question because Jesus knew that if the man were to be healed, everything would have to change—he’d have to go from dependency to sufficiency. He couldn’t sit and beg the next day; he’d have to get up, get out, and earn his livelihood. Every time Jesus healed someone of a debilitating illness, he was empowering him or her not just for a day but for a lifetime.

It is well known that proficiency in reading is essential to be in the mainstream of our educational and employment system. As director of urban ministries at Hope Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Eli Morris seeks to involve every member in meaningful ministry both inside and outside the church.

Several years ago 25 volunteers from Hope paired up with 25 inner-city first through fifth graders from South Memphis. Children were tested before the program began. In the first 12 weeks of reading with these children for just an hour a week, reading scores were raised by 1.2 grades!

Today, Hope has more than 100 of its adults helping children to read. Every time you teach a child to read you empower that young person for a lifetime.

In 1987 Luis Cortes, working with other clergy in North Philadelphia, began Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) “to improve the quality of life in our community through the development of Hispanic owned and operated educational, economic, and spiritual institutions.”

The economic disparities in Philadelphia are challenging. The average net wealth of a Latino family is a mere \$4,000 compared to an Anglo family’s wealth of \$44,000. With 60 percent of wealth held in home equity, helping people own their own homes was a natural place for Nueva Esperanza to start. This innovative ministry has now built or refurbished more than 100 homes to sell to Latinos at cost and provided mortgage counseling to more than 2,500 people. They have served more than 650 people in their Welfare to Work initiative. People in North Philadelphia are better off because of Luis and Nueva Esperanza.

Helping kids that struggle with reading, coaching the unemployed with interview training, providing job skills—these are ways some churches are making the leap from great to good by empowering others.

## **Ministries of Evangelism**

Jesus also went about doing good through announcing the Good News. Ultimately his agenda involved bringing people into the kingdom of God through faith. While mercy



brightens one's day, and empowerment prepares a person for a lifetime, when a person comes to faith, that life is changed for eternity. Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, and many others came into the kingdom because of this aspect of "doing good."

The most effective apologetic for the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a combination of good news and good works. Often good works is the bridge over which the good news runs.

## **Ministries of Replication**

The fourth way Jesus went about doing good was through his ministry of replication—helping transform others from followers into leaders. If Jesus wanted to change individuals he would have stuck with teaching, feeding, and healing. But because he wanted to change the world, he invested in leaders, primarily 12 disciples he trained to duplicate his good works and to preach the good news.

Before sending them out, Jesus gave them the essential components of replicable ministry—authority and instruction.

In East Los Angeles is a church called Mosaic, which is full of ministers and not just consumers. For the past four years, they have averaged one adult each month being sent out as a career overseas worker—mostly into the 10/40 window of China, Indonesia, India, the Middle East, and North Africa.

To become a part of Mosaic's community is quite easy. One simply needs to declare that they "want to be a part of this community of faith." But pastor Erwin McManus challenges everyone in their community to become part of Mosaic's self-supported "staff." To be on the staff requires four commitments:

1. To live a holy life (understanding that no one does it perfectly, but to come clean when you fail).
2. To be an active participant in ministry.
3. To be a generous giver reflected in tithing.
4. To live an evangelistic lifestyle.

More than 400 of the 1,300 attending adults have been anointed and commissioned to be part of the church staff. McManus has multiplied his effectiveness nearly a thousand-fold by teaching and empowering these people to invest their passions, their service, their resources, and their relationships for the kingdom.

Jesus said the key to greatness really is goodness through service to others. "But whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). Not every church can go from good to great in the traditional sense, but perhaps it is in doing good that we become great—no matter what our size.

*—Eric Swanson is leadership community director for the Leadership Network.*



## Discuss

1. How does our church rank in terms of success? How does it rank in terms of significance?
2. Why is service so important to significance?
3. What do you think of Erwin McManus's four commitments for self-supported "staff"? What would be the effect of such a commitment from our members?

## Doing Good

*List the major ways your church carries out ministry in each of the categories described above. Then, assign a number, 1–4, to each of the types of ministry. Rank your No. 1 ministry as the one you feel is strongest. Rank your No. 4 ministry as the one that could use the most work.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Mercy:

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\_\_\_\_\_ Empowerment:

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\_\_\_\_\_ Evangelism:

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\_\_\_\_\_ Replication and Discipleship:

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## Further Resources

*Books and resources to help your church become more missional.*

**BuildingChurchLeaders.com**. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “Meeting Community Needs” Assessment Pack
- “Doable Evangelism” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Becoming Outward Focused” Training Theme & PowerPoint
- “Church Health” Training Theme & PowerPoint
- “La Salud de la Iglesia” Spanish version of “Church Health” Training Theme
- “Reaching Our Community” Training Theme and PowerPoint

**LeadershipJournal.net**. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**EmergentVillage.com** An online community and blog focused on promoting missional Christianity.

**Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community** by Ed Stetzer and David Putman. This book offers pastors and church leaders methods, strategies, and success stories for churches that are attempting to grow in their mission. (B&H Publishing Group, 2006; ISBN 978-0805443592)

**The Externally Focused Church** by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson. A book about how to help local congregations become transformative communities of faith. (Group, 2004; ISBN 978-0764427404)

**The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church** by Alan Hirsch. One leader’s plan for reinvigorating the church and his plan for how congregations across the world can reapproach (Brazos, 2007; ISBN 978-1587431647)

**The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World** by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk. How to cultivate and engage a congregation to be missional. (Jossey-Bass, 2006; ISBN 978-0787983253)

**Planting Missional Churches** by Ed Stetzer. A practical book to help guide the planting of churches organized around mission. (B&H Publishing Group, 2006; ISBN 978-0805443707)

**The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church** by Reggie McNeal. Pushes leaders to move from “church growth” to “kingdom growth.” (Jossey-Bass, 2006; ISBN 978-0787965686)