

## **Missional Leadership: what is required to have “missional” change?**

**By Bob Young**

### **Introduction**

I believe a congregation can be transformed into a missional community—reaching out, not existing solely for self, casting aside self-serving attitudes. I believe churches can escape the often endless cycle of growth-plateau-decline. I believe the church can grow again. I also believe that the church must experience missional change in order to grow. The church must relearn its reason for existence in God’s eternal purpose. Such will require new thinking and the development of a new model.

Local churches and leaders must address three fundamental questions. Do we want to change? Are we interested in living out God’s purpose in this church? What are we willing to do, or not willing to do?

Much of what is talked about today will not generate genuine missional change. Many proposed changes are just the old dressed up in new clothing. In my experience in ministry, church consulting, and mission work, churches struggle with change, nothing really changes, and nothing is new.

### **Problems**

Let us begin by thinking about the challenges the local church faces.

- The church must constantly be on guard to insure that the church is the church and not just another business or organization.
- In many congregations, there is too little focus on developing thoughtful, contextually informed ministry. There is too much cloning. How can we do what God desires? This question is more than procedures—it is process and thoughtful analysis.
- Churches must overcome the tendency to simply repackage the old stuff.
- Rapid change presents discontinuities. Change is disruptive and brings unanticipated results so that the church faces new situations that challenge long held assumptions.
- Developing new capacities is seldom easy.

### **A New Paradigm**

First, it is about Jesus and the kingdom. It is not about programs or the church. The God who creates and develops in marvelous ways wishes to emerge among the people of God.

Therefore, congregations and churches matter. Have you not felt how shallow are our efforts, in terms of what the gospel is about?

Second, God is present in the church today, but not as we have thought or expected, and not in the places we have thought. The “rules” are changing.

- The majority of the church is not in Europe or North America. It is in Central America, South America, and Africa. In places where the church has few resources, the church is vibrant and growing. It is addressing basic needs.
- In China, the church is thriving and God is present.
- In Latin America, thousands of poor live out a common witness to the power of God and Jesus in the world. (1 Cor. 1:25-28)

- The church in North America, Western Europe, and Australia is in serious decline, experiencing confusion, anxiety, resistance, and loss. The western church is seeking to recapture a lost sense of place and importance in the culture. The church does not matter in many places. Further, churches are beguiled by an ideology of growth, numbers, and trends. Energy is focused to market the church as provider of religious goods and services, to market to seekers. Yet despite such efforts, churches continue to decline. The numbers are astounding. Few churches are growing so they tend to turn to programs and methodologies that promise recovery, good old days, growth through marketing and measuring. Most churches do not know what to do, how to change.

### **New (Biblical) Leadership in this New World**

I believe such change will begin with missional leadership. The average church functions out of low hope and low expectation. That is the right level if we are going to continue to do church as we have in the past, keep doing what has gotten us in the shape we are in. The church is filled with many dispirited people who do not know what to do in the face of loss and decline in a changed and changing world.

- Leadership involves caretaking (but is not complete in this dimension). We must not inform leadership and shepherding only by psychological or spiritual counseling needs. Genuine pastoral leadership enables the formation of an alternative society, community formation in the kingdom.
- Leadership is not administration where boards and CEOs take charge and set forth new goals and strategies. This view of leadership is rooted in the North American myth of heroic, charismatic personality, spiritual supermen, and guarantees success through personality or strategic skill.
- A newer, biblical, missional model is that of the leader as cultivator, to cultivate an environment that discerns God's activities among the congregation and in its community and context. Cultivate. Cultivate what?

### **Suggestions**

- First cultivate awareness. Three aspects of this awareness:
  - Of what God is doing within the church community at present,
  - How the church can see/imagine itself as center of God's actions/activities, and
  - What God is doing in the church's context and community surroundings.
- Second, cultivate co-learning. The church needs folks who will work together to look at the issues we face as a church.
- Third, cultivate genuine community.
- Fourth, cultivate fresh ways of engaging/using Scripture. We may be tempted to hammer to drive home a doctrinal point, but the Bible is a treasure chest/bank deposit box of information/knowledge to be collected when needed. Scripture is the narrated presence of God in the world, where God is revealed, seen, considered, heard, followed.
- Fifth, cultivate new practices/habits/norms. Spiritual discipline, indwelling Scripture.