

Another Look at Discipleship, Mission, and the Development of Missional Communities

By Bob Young

Here is the problem.

For the most part, our churches are not missional communities! Our churches may be faith communities bound together principally by a common belief system. Our churches may be ministry or mission communities bound together by various activities. More often, our churches more closely resemble social communities.

But the number of churches that are missional communities where faith and mission are totally integrated are few.

These affirmations depend on seeing the close interrelationship between discipleship, mission, and community.

Discipleship. Cultivating disciples is a personal task. Disciple development is a process of helping people become more and more like Jesus.

Generally, discipleship is understood as the next step after conversion. Do all Christians want to become disciples? Should they want to become disciples? Is every Christian called to discipleship? If so, what does that look like?

When discipleship occurs, the result is that there is a group of believers that are fully committed to Christ-likeness, disciples.

Mission. Biblically, genuine discipleship intertwines with mission. Jesus provides the example in his calling of the first disciples. “Follow me, I will make you fishers of men.”

“Follow me” is discipleship. “Fishers of men” is mission.

Missional communities. Authentic discipleship combined with a missional focus that clearly identifies the mission results in missional communities.

Believers come together, formed and united together, because of their common belief and their common purpose. They thus become missional community. (While I am describing these sequentially, they are interrelated.)

Community development is essential to effective disciple-making and mission identity. The missional community becomes the context of nurture, spiritual maturation, and spiritual formation. This integration does not describe just any faith community – what is required is a missional community that combines faith and mission.



Ministry and Leadership. Ministry and spiritual leadership must focus on making disciples who are on mission with God, resulting in strong, vibrant missional communities that combine and integrate faith and mission. The training model* must integrate discipleship, mission, and community.

Here is the problem for the twenty-first-century church: disciple-making, getting on-mission, and community are counter-intuitive in contemporary U.S. culture and society.

The tendency is to emphasize champions over disciples.

The norm is participation in acceptably good activities without focus on the mission.

Attendance is disconnected from the community-drivers, making more difficult the development of a missional community that unites around faith and mission. In the missional community, the shared faith and mission become the subjects of every community conversation and activity. Faith and mission are the “glue” of the community, defined by faith in Jesus and the eternal purpose and mission of God through Jesus.

What binds together the church where you attend?

Understanding the dynamics of a ministry that integrates disciple-making, mission, and community development will guide ministry through all of the stages of church development—from initial church planting, to church renewal, to church maturity.

*graphic from Gailyn VanRheenen