

Footprints:

Indicators of a Missional Church

Preface

The missional church represents God in the encounter between God and human culture. It exists not because of human goals or desires, but as a result of God's creating and saving work in the world. It is a visible manifestation of how the good news of Jesus Christ is present in human life and transforms human culture to reflect more faithfully God's intentions for creation. It is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God's activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world.

Indicators

The following indicators are an effort to identify what might be some of the key aspects that contribute to the church's unique saltiness and yeasty nature in the varied and diverse worlds within our North American culture today. Twelve indicators are summarized below with a brief definition followed by a statement of "what each indicator looks like" when it is present in a congregation. Each of the indicators is then explained more fully in the subsequent pages.

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
What it looks like: The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of different ways.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
What it looks like: The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.
3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.
What it looks like: The church is reading the Bible together to learn what it can learn nowhere else—God's good and gracious intent for all

creation, the salvation mystery, and the identity and purpose of life together.

4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
What it looks like: In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
What it looks like: The church has made its "mission" its priority, and in overt and communal ways is seeking to be and do "what God is calling us to know, be, and do."
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
What it looks like: Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in the locale characterize the generosity of the community.
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
What it looks like: The church community is moving beyond homogeneity, toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender and socioeconomic make-up.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
What it looks like: Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality.
What it looks like: Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
What it looks like: There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
What it looks like: The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.
What it looks like: There is a widely held perception that this church is

going somewhere—and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.

The Indicators in Detail

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
What it looks like: The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of different ways.

The community's thought, words, and deeds are being formed into a pattern that proclaims the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. As a result, the good news of God's reign is publicly announced. The proclamation is a "word and deed" proclamation; it is not only audible but visible as well. It is audible in a proclamation that focuses not solely upon the salvation of persons, or the transformation of individual human lives, but also the transformation of the church, human communities, and the whole human community, history, and creation in the coming and already present reign of God. It is visible in, with, and through the quality of a common life that manifests the unique culture-contrasting good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Church members indicate that they understand that "proclaiming the gospel" is the responsibility of all Christians; it is more than the vocational option for a selected minority.
 - Persons are able to point to and articulate the source from which the good words and deeds of the church emanate, that is, in their own words, they are able to indicate, "it is because of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ that you see all these things."
 - Persons, in their words and actions, express to others what God has done in the world and in their lives through Jesus Christ.
 - There is evidence that this is a community that can be entered into as a concrete expression of the gospel's own living story. That is, persons can see a community of people who believe, struggle, doubt, sin, forgive, and praise—together.
 - The body of people admittedly seeks to believe and behave in ways that conform to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
What it looks like: The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.



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Persons are not expected automatically to know the “way of doing things in the reign of God.” Citizenship in the reign of God is learned. The learned protocol involves primarily those behaviors and processes that witness to the way of Jesus, who is forming his people for life in the reign of God. The community does not simply rely on “how we’ve always done things here,” or “that’s how we Baptists/Lutherans/Presbyterians/Methodists/etc. do it,” or even “that’s how we do it in the company where I work.” Rather, the community seeks critically to integrate already learned practices with skills and habits of Christian discipleship. This community shows evidence of growing, changing, and deepening the skills and habits of discipleship. Nurturing citizenship in the reign of God is an overall priority of the church for all members of the community of faith.

- New participants in the community indicate that they are being helped to integrate their life with the practices and habits of life in the reign of God.
- Existing participants in the community indicate that they are engaged in a lifelong process of integrating their life with the practices and habits of life in the reign of God.
- Illustrations can be given of how people are learning how to pray and are discovering prayer as a powerful resource for living in the reign of God.
- The community demonstrates a variety of ways in which participants train, mentor, or nurture one another as the community seeks to develop, across the entire spectrum of participants, the capabilities (ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving) required of disciples who are attempting to follow Jesus Christ.
- Members can identify several different ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving that are characteristic of life in Christ that differ significantly from the ways of the culture in which persons find themselves on a daily basis. They can give at least two or three examples of how those differences are being practiced in the life of the congregation. (Examples might include rejection of competitive and coercive ways of interaction, use of language that expresses a Christian world view, attitude toward money and possessions that reflect God’s generosity and abundance, exercise of power through service rather than domination.)

- The church organization is characterized by the participants as one that is ever open to change, to new and expansive ways of organizational thinking and behaving that enable rather than block the cultivating of faithful discipleship.
3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.
What it looks like: The church is reading the Bible together to learn what it can learn nowhere else—God's good and gracious intent for all creation, the salvation mystery, and the identity and purpose of life together.

There are two commonly held expectations: that we will seek to know the Scriptures, and that we will seek to become obedient to the Word which is revealed in the Scriptures. Listening, reading, studying, and obeying the Bible is integral to all of church life, including its worship, spirituality, service, education, stewardship, and witness. The Bible is engaged communally. The overarching approach to Scripture study in the body is not solely “personal devotion” or merely “moral guidance,” but is characterized by the question, “What is the text saying to the church which is attempting to be faithful today?” “How does the biblical word prepare God's people for their mission in this particular place?”

- The community gives visible evidence that its life, work, witness, and worship are influenced and shaped by what the community is learning together from Scripture's revelation of God's claim upon its life.
 - The community has established processes through which it reflects critically on its hearing of the gospel, and its obedience to the gospel's imperatives, in order to become a more faithful disciple community.
 - The community is becoming "bilingual" as it learns how to translate the biblical message into the language and experience of its immediate context.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
What it looks like: In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.

Discipleship requires a willingness to follow the way of the cross and

share in the sufferings of Christ. The church is not getting its bearings by the world's standard of success—institutional status, power, or influence. Rather, it witnesses to the truth of the gospel that the one on the cross is the way, the truth, and the life for the church. Jesus models what the church is called to be. Thus the church is called to show hard evidence that as a body of people it provides a collective witness to its crucified savior. The church's distinctive conduct, then, is frequently different from and often in opposition to the world's patterns of behavior. This is particularly evident when the power of love, service, and sacrifice for one another in the community is contrasted with the powers of hate, violence, and domination in the world.

- Members can readily give at least two or three instances when the church was willing to take risks, suffer, be looked down on, or be treated unjustly for the sake of the gospel.
 - The church practices love, sacrifice, and service in such a way that people from both within the church and in the wider community can point to their positive results.
 - The church is becoming aware of, confessing, and turning away from its patterns of conformity to the world while it learns to follow Jesus Christ.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
What it looks like: The church has made its “mission” its priority, and in overt and communal ways is seeking to be and do “what God is calling us to know, be, and do.”

The goal of decision making is not simply to discover the will of the community, but to discern together the will of God. Because all participants in the body participate in decisions that affect their life and mission together, shared power and influence (rather than status, position, or “majority opinion”) are the keys of authority. The need for the gifts and insights of all members to shape and guide a faithful and effective ministry is recognized and emphasized. Mentors, teachers, and partners provide intentional support, challenge, and advice to enable one another to extend these skills and habits and deepen their participation in the life of Christ. Members make efforts to set aside the necessary time to listen, study, share, struggle, pray, and plan together as they search for God's will and seek to participate in God's mission. Members pledge to live out together the conclusions they have reached together.

Church leadership encourages, guides, teaches, and serves the process of communal discernment through consistently holding the following key questions before the community as they seek together to answer them:

- What is God calling us as this church to be and do?
 - How can we enter more faithfully into the reign of God?
 - How will we learn from the Bible what it means to be the church?
 - How will we more faithfully and effectively practice Christian community in our life with one another?
- Believing that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all, the entire community participates in programs and processes for identifying, commissioning, and utilizing the gifts of both new and continuing participants for service in the mission of the church.
 - The church intentionally develops the skills and habits of listening, praying, studying, thinking, sharing, disagreeing, confronting, planning, working together in ways that build up one another, discovering and supporting the rich diversity of giftedness within the community.
 - Leadership teams and groups demonstrate, model, and cultivate in their words and behaviors with one another what the whole community is called to be and to do. They indicate that they recognize that they too are an expression of the church when they gather, and thus are also intentionally learning the practices of the reign of God in their life together.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
What it looks like: Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in the locale characterize the generosity of the community.

The church exhibits the fruits of the Spirit which include (but are not limited to) not thinking more highly of oneself than one ought; valuing the gifts of others; loving one another with mutual affection; eagerness to show the workings of the Spirit; patience in suffering; hospitality to strangers; blessing those who do not understand, or who persecute; associating with the lowly; not repaying evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good; and living peaceably. Acts of generosity are commonplace and self-giving is a behavioral characteristic of this community.

- Congregational life demonstrates a variety of ways for cultivating the attitude and habit of expressing self-sacrificing compassion and concern for one another.
 - The church exhibits patterns of individual and corporate prayer which seek to promote the welfare of the community as well as the transformation of lives and changed conditions within their locale.
 - There is indication that the church is changing its expectations about what participation in the Christian community looks like (for example, spending more time with one another, taking their relationships with one another more seriously, providing tangible support for one another).
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
What it looks like: The church community is moving beyond homogeneity, toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender and socioeconomic make-up.

The barriers that separate people are identified, addressed, and overcome. Differences and dissension among people are dealt with constructively. Conflict is used to enrich discussion. Evil done within or to the body is overcome by doing good. Healing involves confession to and the forgiveness of one another wherever and whenever wrong exists. This process of healing and reconciliation takes place between individuals and within the body, both of which serve to shape and reform the community as a whole. Society's boundaries are crossed—class, economic status, race, gender, age, occupation, education. Amazingly diverse people allow themselves to be formed by one Lord into one body. Violence is rejected as a method of resolving difference.

- Members can give anecdotal evidence from the church community life showing where forgiveness and the healing of relationships occurred—consistent with the life of Jesus and in contrast to the society's standards of behavior.
- There is evidence that leaders and members expect positive results from expressing differences.
- There are norms by which the community abides for the constructive use of conflict. These include informal or formal procedures of which both leaders and members are aware and can make reference to.
- There are examples of reconciliation that indicate the community

is learning to transcend racial, ethnic, age, gender, socioeconomic barriers. The community values and accepts both similarity and difference out of its unity in Christ.

8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.

What it looks like: Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.

They covenant together to uphold and watch over one another in love, praying for one another. They are committed to one another, and that commitment is expressed through collaboration, interdependence of work efforts, and being dependable. People place a high value on sharing a common life and supporting one another.

- Participants indicate that a fundamental purpose of the community is the expression of Christ's love—mutual love and accountability to one another.
Participants indicate that they are accountable to a grouping of people with whom they are learning to live the Christian life more faithfully. (In such a grouping, they are learning to acknowledge their status as forgiven sinners, receiving from and giving both encouragement and admonition to one another, helping one another to live in God's grace, seeking consistently to be restored to right relationships with one another.)
- Participants indicate that the community is characterized (i.e., it is the norm rather than the exception) by a life together carried out in a unity of spirit. Consistently, words and actions toward one another indicate mutual respect for one another.
- Participants take time to pray for one another. They pray for one another in their varied circumstances, circumstances that are not limited to sickness or death. They pray for those with whom they differ and whom they dislike as they do for those with whom they agree and whom they like. They recognize that prayer is a key aspect of being accountable to one another in this community.
- The community reflects on how its structures (meetings, frequency, length, and use of time together, organizational structures, physical arrangements) either hinder or enable the demonstration of mutual love, respect, and accountability to one another.

9. The church practices hospitality.

What it looks like: Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role.

People are reached and invited into new relationships with God and with one another as the community's intent is to welcome as God welcomes. As a result, people are becoming citizens of God's reign. Having heard and received this invitation themselves, they extend the invitation to others to know and experience God's love.

- The church demonstrates a sense of urgency about inviting people to enter the reign of God.
- Visitors experience welcome, aid, and comfort, thus making wider the circle of the church community to include those who are different from us.

10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.

What it looks like: There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.

Worship is the community's action of publicly giving allegiance to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an act of the whole people of God who remain faithful to tradition while integrating variety which reflects and gives new meaning to the unique cultural context of the congregation. Worship actively engages the community in ways that nurture the dynamic, growing and changing aspects of discipleship in the world. As such, it provides for the incorporation of people into the community of faith, their formation into a new humanity, and their reception of God's gift of sustenance for daily life. Its focus is on celebrating God's presence and promises without seeking or expecting worship to be the occasion for God to meet human needs. The congregation departs from worship, knowing that it is a sent and sending community, and each Christian is conscious of his or her apostolic sentness as light, leaven, and salt in the world.

- The organization, structure, content, language, rituals and practices of worship demonstrably focus upon God and give opportunity for human responses to God.
- There are aspects of communal worship that reflect the local culture, but also give new meaning to those elements of local

culture.

- Participants can give anecdotal evidence of how corporate worship enables persons to become incorporated into the life of Christ, and thus the Christian community.
- Participants can describe ways in which worship gives expression to and provides the experience of God's sustaining presence in the life of the congregation.

11. This community has a vital public witness.

What it looks like: The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.

What the community intends to be and do actually does occur, and is confirmed both by those who participate in the community (e.g., "I have learned here that I can disagree and I don't have to leave") as well as by those who do not, (e.g., "Oh, you're the church that always helps clean up after floods and tornadoes"). Like political ambassadors, persons know and can articulate where their allegiance lies. They know and can articulate the nature and expectations of the mission that has been given to them. Its public deeds do not consist of imposing its moral will on others, but of giving hard evidence of the reign of God that intrudes as an alternative vision and practice.

- The community defines itself as "sent"—representative of the reign of God and offering alternative ways of life to the world, where participants know themselves to be accountable to one another and to God for the faithfulness of their witness in daily life.
- Members of the local neighborhood and/or larger church can give examples which illustrate a variety of actions through which the church, over time, has communicated God's love in the immediate locale and elsewhere.
- Members can identify examples of actions and activities that have resulted in the transformation of lives, changed conditions, promoted justice and combated evil (e.g., economic injustices, violence, discrimination, addiction, oppression).

12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

What it looks like: There is a widely held perception that this church is



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going somewhere—and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.

The church has been given the gift of citizenship in the reign of God which it has received less than perfectly. Knowing that the church is as yet a flawed witness to the reign of God, it is open to its own reformation as it continually seeks to provide a more faithful and more effective witness in its changing context. Therefore, the church is constantly critiquing and intentionally reshaping its vision, common life, teaching, organization, obedience, witness, and ministry on the basis of its hearing of the Word of God.

- When people talk about their church, there is evidence of honest review of its ministry and mission, measuring itself against biblical standards of the reign of God, and not culturally established standards of success.
- The measure of success used in this church is the quality of Christian love experienced in its common life and ministry.
- People who participate indicate that this church is on a journey to the future, that it has not yet arrived.
- Participants are able to pray with meaning Jesus' prayer "Thy kingdom come." This prayer creates for them a sense of expectancy and anticipation of God's fulfillment of all God's promises.
- This church demonstrates faithfulness, while recognizing that it has not yet fulfilled its calling.
- Recognizing itself to be a human institution, the church intentionally seeks evaluation, redirection, and renewal through the Holy Spirit.