

The Missional Leader: Cultivating Missional Growth

Karen West, April 2007
WMB Church, Waterloo
Tyndale, Contextual Ministry

“The missional church is not about new techniques or programs for the church. At its core, missional church is how we cultivate a congregational environment where God is the centre of conversation and God shapes the focus and work of the people. We believe this is a shift in imagination for most congregations; it is a change in the culture of congregational life (emphasis mine).”¹

*The dominant metaphors of leadership in our time have been either **pastoral** (caring for the flock of God, counseling, and spiritual care) or **entrepreneurial** (the leader who knows where the church needs to go and has the vision, passion, and strategy to take it there). These models of leadership definitely reflect the historical models for Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church! **Missional** leadership, however, is about shaping cultural imagination within a congregation in order to create an environment wherein **people** discern God’s activities among them and in their community context.*

Missional leadership cultivates the practice of indwelling Scripture and discovering places for experiment and risk as people discover that the Spirit of God’s life-giving future in Jesus is amongst them.²

Shifting from a ‘Christendom’ to a ‘Missional’ Model of Church

The church today is experiencing a major transitional shift from a “Christendom Model of church” to a “Missional Model”. North American evangelical churches are beginning to ask new questions about the place and function of the church in the world, and particularly about the place and function of their own local church in the context of its particular local community.

There is a growing understanding that the church (made up of the people of God) stewards a gospel message that is not only about personal salvation for individuals, but is also about salvation for communities, cities, nations, social systems, the earth and all of creation! The Gospel of Jesus Christ therefore engages the church in Christ’s active redemption in all these areas, calling us to the breaking down of barriers and dividing walls for the sake of equity, justice and reconciliation for all the peoples of the earth. The fullness of this call to mission begins locally, and penetrates our world globally, only as the Gospel is embraced holistically.

Shifting from ‘Christendom’ to ‘Missional’ Church Leadership

What changes does this shift need to bring to the role of a leader in a missional church still structured and functioning (as most are) in a ‘Christendom’ paradigm?

In a Christendom Model of church, the following are common realities, to which leaders are expected to respond, and against which they are typically evaluated:

¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, pg. 26.

² *Ibid*, pg. 26, 27.

1. Because our world is constantly changing, the role of the Christendom pastor is to address the constantly changing problems that arise in the life of the congregation, and to provide solutions in order to bring stability and comfort, and ultimately to maintain the institution of the church.
2. Because pastors in Christendom models are seen as ‘spiritual giants’, raised up in esteem beyond the average Christian, the role of the pastor is to carry the spiritual responsibility for every individual in the church. Discipleship in the Christendom model is the pastor’s role, rather than the responsibility of each individual Christian.
3. Because pastoral care is a key focus in the Christendom model, congregants only feel cared for if the pastor is personally engaged in the expression of that care towards each one. Ministries and programs may emerge for the care of individuals, but the presence of the pastor is expected and held in highest regard.
4. Because evangelism in the Christendom model is seen as a means to ‘win people for Christ’, (the measure of which ultimately centres on whether or not there is a growing number of people attending Sunday services), the role of the pastor is to attract people to Sunday services with charisma, communication skills and charm.
5. Because the Christendom model focuses on church growth, it creates expectations that the pastor will design and carry out programs throughout the week in order to attract more people to Sundays, and will be good at strategizing for new space, buildings and resources for future growth.
6. Because the Christendom model places the pastor within the walls of the church, any time the pastor spends outside of those walls is considered ‘personal time’. Evaluation is not typically formed around a grid of neighbourly, community involvement.
7. Because the Christendom model considers ‘missions’ as a program amongst many other programs, what is ‘missional’ is considered, not the central hub, but only a component of what the pastor does. It will be one category amongst many in a role evaluation.

Typically, the pastoral role in a Christendom model serves one or both of the following objectives:

- 1) leadership and administration for the purpose of sustaining the institution of the church;
- 2) management of resources to best establish the church as a vendor of goods and services.

This is not to suggest that the Christendom model has not placed godly, Christ-centred men and women in ministry leadership within churches, who genuinely desire to serve God’s mission in the world. Neither does it suggest that God has not been active in and through his church in the Christendom era. Rather, the issue is that we have humanly structured the church with an institutional mindset and *positioned* leaders within that structure in order to *maintain* that structure.

“Missional thinking, however, centres the body of Christ on God’s mission rather than Christendom’s concern for the church’s institutional maintenance.”³

³ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, pg. 7.

We have also placed expectations on leaders that they be Christ-centred individuals while still catering to a consumeristic society within their congregations. In practice, ‘consumerism’ and ‘mission’ are an oxymoron.

If the church is to be, in its very nature, ‘missional’, then the role of the leader has to change to be missional as well. Too many leaders in missional churches today are on the verge of burn-out, as the expectations placed on them remain intrinsically ‘Christendom-oriented’. But how do we write a role description for the missional leader today?

The Missional Leader: Engaging Missional Questions

In general, the role of the missional leader needs to be less task oriented and more thematically stated. Rather than beginning with a list of institutional or consumeristic needs, and then designing responsibilities and tasks to address and provide answers for those needs, the role description for the missional leader needs to be formed around the “missional questions” that God is stirring in a particular group of his people, in a particular local context, at a particular time in history. (These “missional questions” are formative for a local contextualized theology.)

These questions must first be embodied by the leader, and then cultivated in the imaginations of the congregation in order to discern God’s activity and movement within the particular context. Key missional questions in any context will include the following:

- 1) Is the gospel we proclaim the same as Jesus’ Gospel? How is the church to give relevant expression and faithful embodiment to the gospel of Jesus Christ in our context?
- 2) In what specific ways will the church be intentional in the breaking down of dividing walls of race, gender, economic and social status in every area of life and ministry?
- 3) How will we strategically create environments where Scripture is engaged and Christ is encountered *trans-formatively*, rather than *in-formatively*?
- 4) How will we cultivate environments where the church can collectively discern and engage Christ’s mission in its context—its neighbourhood, its city, its society and the world, and actually *be a neighbour*?
- 5) How will the church not ‘represent’ Christ *conceptually* (as if he were absent today, with the church being the steward of information and facts about him), but instead ‘re-present’ Christ *incarnationally* (as the living, active One who is himself on mission in and through his people today, for the sake of the world)?

The Missional Leader – Role Description

Based on the necessary missional shift in the culture of congregational life today, what would be the basic shape and the key components needed to build into the role description for a missional leader?

- Theological reflection
 - Spiritual disciplines and prayer
 - Reflection, discernment regarding the church and the culture
 - Encapsulate the community with the biblical narrative
 - Teach and guide through encounters with Scripture, rather than information alone
 - Opportunity to engage the context of the neighbourhood, and to personally be a neighbour
 - Develop and unleash the core leadership to the fullness of their potential
 - Facilitator of learning/discerning environments
 - Ability to prioritize missional essentials for the team and able to let other things go
 - Model interdependent style of leadership
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- Student of scripture
 - Student of culture
 - Relationship oriented – ability to engage in genuine and authentic conversation
 - Risk taker for the Kingdom, where mistakes are allowed
 - Pastoral care responsibility to immediate leadership team only, and span of care for others
 - Strategic discipleship plan that calls the congregation to be ministers to others
 - Engaged with a Spiritual director, ministry mentor, and support team for growth and accountability
 - Healthy self-awareness; self-learning
 - Courage⁴

Creating a Role Description for the Missional Leader

Rather than creating a role description for each leader based on an assigned list of expectations and tasks, the role description should engage each leader in missional components to be embraced first in the leader's life, and then lived out in the context of those they lead.

Mission is not a task, it's a way of life.

In each missional category listed below, ask the leader him/herself to develop, communicate and be held accountable to their own plan, making sure that each area is satisfactorily covered while allowing for the uniqueness of each personality.

It is anticipated that 'success' in each area will be determined in two ways:

- 1) accountability to others that the plan itself is being intentionally pursued; and,
- 2) accountability through a natural demonstration that the plan is working to better enable the leader to live, teach and share authentically out of their own personal spiritual growth in response to Christ's activity.⁵

⁴ Class dialogue at Tyndale Seminary, M. Div.-In Ministry, Cohort Alpha, with Donald Goertz facilitating, April, 2007.

⁵ Class at Tyndale Seminary, *The Missional Leader*, M. Div.-In Ministry, Cohort Alpha, with Donald Goertz teaching, April, 2007.

While every leader's role has in common some general missional components, there are, of course, some specific functions that each leader in a team brings uniquely to a leadership team, based on giftings, experience, training and personality that need to align with and be a resource to the missional responsibilities of the overall team.

Key Questions for Discerning the Focus for a Missional Leader within the Team:

- What does this leader bring to ministry that is God's activity through them? (not what can they do that others can do, but what are the gifts, experiences and areas of training they bring to the team?)
- How can the team help to free up this leader for his/her role? If there is an existing role based on a more Christendom model, how will the role be reframed?
- How will each area in the job description be shown as valuable to the congregation? Growth and change in the leader as a result of the missional components of the role description (ie. spiritual disciplines) should be beneficial to the congregation as well.
- What should be the primary context in which this leader will minister to others?
- What should be the assigned area and span of discipleship care?

KEY MISSIONAL COMPONENTS FOR THE MISSIONAL ROLE:

The individual role created for each leader should consider the following key missional components as related to the context assigned:

1. Cultivating Missional Imagination

The missional leader should have a context of communal relationships in which to disciple and lead others in the spiritual discernment of Christ's missional activity around them. The environment created will leave room for risk taking, stepping out in new ways, and creative expressions of the gospel in a changing world. *"Missional leadership cultivates an environment in which the people of God imagine together a new future rather than one already determined by a leader."*⁶ *"Leadership focuses a sense of shared conviction. We're together for something important; it has taken hold of us; we must pursue it."*⁷

How will you engage Missional Practices in your role?

- Involvement: How/where will you be a neighbour?
 - You are accountable to have a participating role in the community
- Learning: How will you discover and stay engaged in missional thinking?
 - ie/ through reading current and cultural material
 - through theological discussion groups with peers
- Reflective exegesis and engagement: What is God revealing through your involvement and learning that needs to shape the community of your church? How will you engage others in dialogue around these topics?

In your area of responsibility and span of care, in what ways will you help the people you lead to discern, understand and shape a response to Christ's activity around them? How will you engage them in missional thinking and call them to 'be a neighbour' to others?

⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, pg. 42.

⁷ Ibid, pg. 44.

2. Cultivating Encounters in Scripture

The missional leader cultivates an environment for encountering the Scriptural narrative and inviting others to be transformed through its engagement. *“Missional leaders cultivate the creative energy and imagination of people through ongoing interaction between the indwelling of the biblical narrative and their experiences in the cultural context.”*⁸

How will you engage Scripture Communally in your role?

- How will you allow Scripture to be formative in your life and ministry?
- How will you encounter Scripture in the context of community?
 - ie/ staff manuscript study
 - discernment groups (Ignatian Group; Spiritual Direction Group)
- How will you lead people to engage Scripture in a way that allows God to stir in them missional reflection, and to align his activity in them with the world around them?
 - ie/ manuscript study; discernment groups
- How will you help people understand their individual and their collective narrative as it relates to the gospel?

In your area of responsibility, how will you engage others in new ways of encountering Scripture that give them a fresh encounter of the gospel and a growing understanding of the Kingdom of God?

3. Cultivating Spiritual Disciplines

The missional leader cultivates an environment of a missional-mindset through discipleship and spiritual formation, helping people to discover the habits and practices of Christian life, for the sake of others. This includes a primary focus on prayer as an active and creative engagement with God through Jesus Christ. *“Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”*⁹

How will you engage Spiritual Disciplines in your role?

- Outline a plan for your own spiritual maturity against which you can be held accountable and evaluated
 - ie/ if you include in your plan days for prayer and reflection, you will book off those days and capture what God is communicating to you (eg. journal)
 - ie/ if you include in your plan appointments with a spiritual director, that director might report to your team leader on your engagement and general growth
 - ie/ your plan will include engagement and reflection with Scripture, when? how? with whom? This could be an individual exercise or a group encounter
- Outline a plan for accountability in this area, through one or more of the following:
 - Spiritual Director; Support Group Teaching opportunities to share what you are learning (how will your growth be shared with the congregation? ie/ preaching; teaching; disciple-making)

In your area of responsibility, how will you lead others in spiritual formation? In what context will you be one who disciples others through spiritual disciplines?

⁸ Ibid, pg. 43.

⁹ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, pg. 25.

4. Cultivating Engagement with Culture

The missional leader cultivates an environment where the community discovers Christ's call to engage their surrounding culture. *"This leader focuses on the cultural rather than the organizational formation of the community."*¹⁰

How will you engage Partnerships in your role?

- How will you be in dialogue with other organizations in your community?
ie/ businesses; schools; hospitals; social services; current events; other churches
 - This could be a commitment to read the paper daily
 - To have lunch with congregants in their work place
 - To participate in community, school, social services or government connections
 - To serve on a board in another organization
 - To partner with other churches for the sake of your community

In your area of responsibility, how will you create encounters with culture for the people in your span of care, and help them to be students of culture?

5. Cultivating Diversity in Community

Missional leaders are active, both in word and deed, in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and the breaking down of barriers that divide. *"Leaders need to reflect an awareness of their role that is rooted in a view of God as one who welcomes all persons, regardless of their cultural frameworks. This perspective is developed through personal intercultural experience, theological reflection and intentional skill acquisition.... An environment needs to be created that allows people to interact with equal power and therefore redistributes power evenly.... Leaders need to enable people to think and act in an inclusive manner."*¹¹

How will you engage Diversity in the community where you serve?

- Our tendency is to form groups and teams around people like ourselves and to develop leaders out of these affinities.
- The missional leader must surround him/herself with diversity, so as not to stay static, but to learn from the diversity around them
- The group should come together not around commonalities, but around the Kingdom of God that begins to break down the dividing walls in our own networks
- How will you develop leaders who are not like you, so you actually break down walls?
 - Gender
 - Economics
 - Culture
 - Age

In the assigned area of responsibility, how will the leader make sure each person on a ministry team is in dialogue with and learning from others communally, and how will diversity be considered as key in the communities in which we participate?

¹⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, pg. 45.

¹¹ Dan Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, pg. 49, 74.

6. Cultivating Leadership Development

The missional leader recognizes that continual growth and openness to learning new things is necessary in order to discern and embrace God's constant movement in our contexts. The missional leader should create and participate in teams that help to discover, equip and develop both the leader themselves, and the people they serve. *"The key to the formation of missional communities is their leadership. The Spirit empowers the church for mission through the gifts of people.... Such leadership will be biblically and theologically astute, skilled in understanding the changes shaping North American society, and gifted with the courage and endurance to lead God's people as missional communities."*¹²

The missional leader is not threatened by the gifts and abilities of others. Leadership is not seen as 'hierarchical'. *"Confident missional leaders learn to trust that action and direction emerge out of the life and interaction of the community itself."*¹³

How will you engage your own Leadership Development?

- Where/how will you be developed as a leader on-going?
 - Round tables for peer development to talk through leadership issues?
 - How are the things you are learning changing you as a leader?
 - How is what you are doing to grow connected to how you are changing
- Who will hold you accountable to this development? ie/ others on staff; support group; your team leader

How will you engage the Leadership Development of those on your direct team?

- In what contexts will you seek to understand the giftings, personalities and experiences of each member on your team?
 - Weekly connects
 - Observing them in action
 - Skill development through training, assessments and courses
 - Networking them with others

In your area of responsibility, how will you establish an environment for equipping, leadership development and growth?

7. Cultivating Sabbath Living

The missional leader, rather than being caught in the tyranny of the urgent and the unrealistic expectations of others, needs to live and model a biblical, Kingdom-oriented way of life, different from the ways of the world. *A Sabbath way of life is "a profound resting in the Kingdom's grace instead of a perpetual struggle to 'do our work'."*¹⁴ *Grace reclaims us first, and out of its freedom we respond with our work.*¹⁵ *Sabbath includes spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional and social rest, and ministry, not out of one's strivings, but out of one's giftings, in Christ.*

¹² Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, pg. 183.

¹³ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, pg. 43.

¹⁴ Marva Dawn, *the Sense of the Call*, pg. 14.

¹⁵ Marva Dawn, *the Sense of the Call*, pg. 36.

Questions to help frame ‘Sabbath Living’:

- Which forms of your service currently have the most lasting results in the ministry of Christ through you? Is your role unleashing that potential in the normal rhythm of your role?
- When you feel most true to who you were created to be, what are you actually doing?
- What visions for ministry stir up the gifts within you?
- How is prayer establishing a rhythm in your life with Christ?
- Do you have the resources of others around you to free you up for a regular Sabbath experience? If not, what are the obstacles in the way?
- When and how do you ‘feast and celebrate’ in your life?

How will you engage being Rejuvenated in your role?

- To remain sustainable, ministry must be based first on *input*, not only *output*
- Ministry should be like farming! It needs to be framed around cultivating, lifestyle, family, replenishment, stewardship, Sabbath rest.
- What is replenishing to you spiritually, mentally, physically?
 - Nature? Creative expression? Sports? Exercise? Time alone? Friends?
- How will you build and model this kind of ‘Sabbath’ living, and engage in both serving *and* resting?¹⁶
 - Watching for, affirming and unleashing the gifts in others and positioning them in roles where they can develop those gifts
 - Eg/ encouraging people to serve on *one* team, rather than on many, even if you really need them(!)
 - Modifying expectations to match a Kingdom, rather than a worldly set of measurables

In your area of responsibility, how will you as a leader be revitalized and renewed before others, and on behalf of others? How will you help others to minister out of Christ’s giftings in them? How will you help those on your teams to move towards Sabbath living?

(It is important to note that the role description for a missional leader needs to be adaptable and open to change, based on God’s activity in any given season. Discernment around changes needs to happen in the context of others and decisions made collectively.)

Letting Things Go

In the formation of a Missional Role description for a leader in a church transitioning from a Christendom Model, it is important not only to form new role expectations, but also to take out of the current job description expectations from the old paradigm. This really is a paradigm shift. Consider the following:

- The church must transition the idea that the leader will make people happy all the time and replace it with intentional discipleship and leadership formation plans;

¹⁶ Ideas included from class at Tyndale Seminary, *The Missional Leader*, M. Div.-In Ministry, Cohort Alpha, with Donald Goertz teaching, along with additional insights through dialogue amongst WMB Staff Team, April, 2007.

- The role of the leader is to train leaders to train leaders, not to train all the people oneself;
- The Christendom model funnels everything back to the leader (discipleship, pastoral care, programming, etc.) The question now becomes: how will what the leader has been doing still happen, but in a different way, and through others, rather than the leader him/herself?
- All leadership role descriptions should be made known to the congregation. Church leadership should position the leader before the congregation to define the expectations in this shift. The entire team should work together to hold this new missional placement with and for one another.

Realities in the Shift from a Christendom to a Missional Model

This is a major shift in the life of any congregation. The shift, however, should not be viewed as a shift we have to make by our own efforts and creative genius! Rather, this shift is in response to the movement of Christ in our midst, and our alignment to his missional activity around us. As this re-alignment to this movement occurs, we can expect some of the following to occur:

- Numbers may drop in attendance on Sundays, as we move away from a consumeristic mindset to a missional movement in the church;
- The laity may feel less ‘serviced’ as the leaders ask them to care for one another, rather than turning to the leaders to meet individual needs through programs and resources;
- Some ministry programs will need to be stopped in order to redirect energies, time and resources to new initiatives. Other ministry programs will need to continue, but without the direct involvement of someone on pastoral staff;
- Not all existing staff will necessarily be comfortable with the shift, especially if their sense of personal identity is tied to the affirmation and praise that comes with ‘people-pleasing’;
- Since the Gospel breaks down all dividing walls of race, gender, economic and social status, over time, the congregation should become more and more diverse. Not all in the existing congregation will appreciate that diversity or the change that comes into their environment because of it;
- Budgeting resources will need to become more fluid and less departmentalized in order to respond to Christ’s activity as it is revealed in one area or another. The measurables of ‘success’ in ministry will change, and therefore the means of allocating funds will need to change as well. New criteria will have to be established.

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