

Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

Purpose Driven Mennonite

Craig Pelkey-Landes

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Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about *God's mission* in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "*across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world.*"

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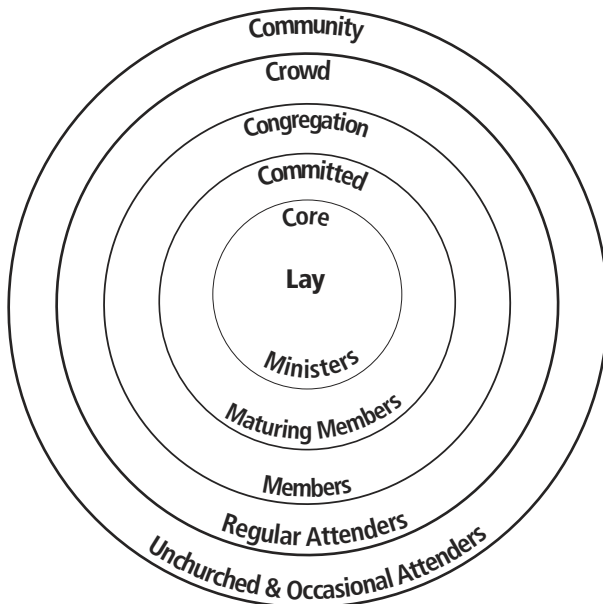
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Foreword

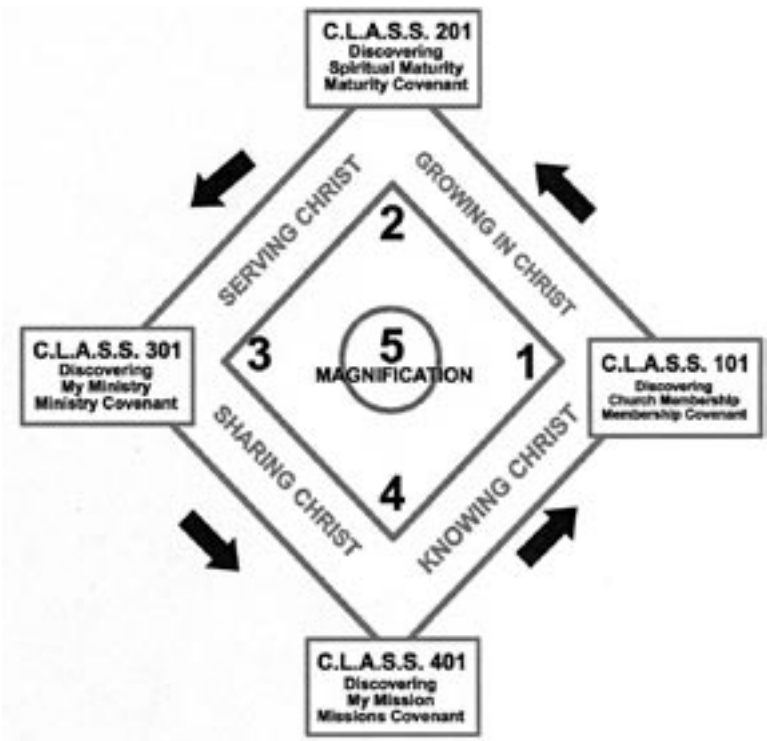
The hugely successful books of Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., have highlighted the word “purpose” in the vocabulary and lives of tens of thousands of people, including many Mennonite Christians. *The Purpose Driven Church*, *The Purpose Driven Life* and a campaign called *40 Days of Purpose* are prompting pastors, church leaders and others around the world to ask such questions as, “Who am I?” and “What on earth am I and my church here for?”

I first met Rick Warren and attended Saddleback Community Church when it was a small congregation meeting in a school gymnasium. Later, Warren came to Portland, Ore., to introduce the concepts of purpose and commitment. He presented two powerful symbols.

The first symbol is in the form of five circles. They represent the *community*, the *crowd* that gathers on Sunday morning, the *congregation* that commits itself to membership, the *committed* who adopt spiritual disciplines and the *core* of people who are committed to ministry.



The second symbol describes the training needed for a purpose-driven church in the shape of a baseball diamond. Class 101 represents first base and invites new believers to make a commitment to membership. Class 201 invites them to commit to four spiritual disciplines, while Class 301 invites spiritually disciplined people to commit themselves to a specific ministry in the church. Class 401 nurtures a commitment to a specific ministry in the community or world.



Release of *The Purpose Driven Church* in 1995 introduced these symbols and the concept of being guided by purpose to the world.

South Hutchinson (Kan.) Mennonite Church, Cape Christian Fellowship in Florida, and North Clinton Mennonite in Ohio were some of the first Mennonite churches to explore this emphasis. Mennonite pastors in Kansas, Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania studied the book and then began going to the seminars in Forrest Hills, Calif. They heard Rick Warren say with confidence that *a clear purpose* builds morale, reduces frustration, allows concentration, attracts cooperation and assists evaluation.

Pastors liked what they heard about the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The statement, “A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church!” rang true to our emphasis on mission and obedient love.

In 2003 Rick Warren personalized the emphasis on purpose by writing the book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. It asks the very penetrating and timely question, “What on earth am I here for?” For 40 days that question was pondered at Saddleback, and in small groups most participants answered the question enthusiastically with cries of “Worship!” “Fellowship!” “Discipleship!” “Ministry!” and “Mission!” The results were phenomenal. Six hundred, seventy-one people made a commitment to Christ, 1,200 new people joined the church, and attendance increased by 2,000.

God has changed thousands of churches and millions of lives as they have focused on the five biblically based purposes. They have found that an emphasis on these purposes — whether it be during 40 days, 40 weeks or 40 years — helps to define what it means to be a purposeful or intentional follower of Jesus Christ.

However, several elements in this movement have caused Mennonite Christians to be a bit nervous. Part of this is due to the fact that the purpose movement incorporates other aspects of renewal that have been moving through the church during the past decades, such as contemporary music, cell groups and seeker-sensitive services. These have been a source of tension for some.

Also, the word “driven” is offensive to many. Joyful Christians are to be encouraged, nurtured and invited, not “driven.” While “driven” often has the connotation of being pushed or forcefully pressed, Warren uses the word more in terms of being guided or directed, as in guiding or directing a vehicle. He indicates that something guides or drives any congregation in its decision-making. For some it is *tradition*, while for others it is *personalities, finances, programs, buildings or events*. Warren says a clear biblical purpose will best help a congregation make the decisions it needs to make. It will guide a church in its life and actions.

I prefer the term “purpose-guided” to “purpose-driven.” God *guides* us. God does not *drive* us in a forced sense. The Scriptures and the life of Christ guide us to purposeful worship, fellowship, nurture, ministry, and mission.

In our new missional denomination we have much to learn from this movement. We can adapt it. Instead of calling ourselves the Purpose-Driven

Church, we might call ourselves the Missional Church. God-given purpose will help us to be intentionally missional in all that we do. The five purposes will help us to a healthy balance of worship, fellowship, nurture, ministry and service/evangelism. I want to be part of such a purpose-guided church.

Palmer Becker
Director of Hesston Pastoral Ministries
Hesston College
Hesston, Kan.

Purpose Driven Mennonites

Craig Pelkey-Landes

I have not found many people who are lukewarm about Purpose Driven Church. Either they are excited by the possibilities of focusing their congregation on unique, God-given purposes. Or they think Rick Warren waters down the gospel in order to get as many people as possible to attend his church and pay money for his books, seminars and ancillary products. In other words, Warren has struck a nerve among the various cultures of North American Christianity.

Taking a serious look at the Purpose Driven phenomenon

This booklet comes to you with my own personal perspective on the resources surrounding Purpose Driven Church. The nutshell version is this: Purpose Driven Church is a worthwhile collection of resources through which congregations can discover and, more importantly, follow through on the purposes to which God has called them.

Purpose Driven Church is heavy on reaching the unchurched — a big reason why evangelism-shy Mennonites are paying attention — but light on critique of the dominant culture and on defining what it really means to participate in the reign of God while living at the center of a world empire. Many Missional Church resources, on the other hand, are somewhat the opposite, containing a stronger cultural critique and a weaker emphasis on practical outreach methods.

That is why I have come to believe that the two used together can perhaps best help congregations find their way toward a well-rounded engagement with God's mission in the world, to make new disciples, to make better disciples and to redeem creation itself.

So why would I, as a house church planter, write about the pastor of one of the most famous mega churches in North America? In his introduction to *Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren describes riding the

Purpose Driven Church has struck a nerve among the various cultures of North American Christianity.

waves of God's Spirit in order to join what God is doing in a particular time and place. Undoubtedly, Rick and I are riding different waves, but the Purpose Driven principles, and the reorientation and renewal happening in so many congregations as a result of Warren's research and experience, are undeniable and translatable across many different styles of "doing" church.

So the purpose of the churches I'm planting is not to grow to 10,000+. But the purpose definitely lines up with the *five-fold* purposes Warren describes as the essentials of a church involved in God's mission to the world — through fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism. The overarching theme of the book — determining why your congregation exists, its *purposes*, and organizing around those purposes — is at the very heart of what God is calling the often-lethargic North American church to become.

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Our objective in this booklet is not to "rebaptize" Purpose Driven Church materials, or to give a Mennonite stamp of approval. I'd like to explore the nerve that Warren has so evidently hit — why *Purpose Driven Church* and, more recently, *Purpose Driven Life*, have been making such an impact on the North American church. What can Warren teach us? What do Purpose Driven resources lack?

To that end, in the following pages we will look briefly at four Mennonite congregations who are already using Purpose Driven Church ideas and material. We will also examine the relationship between current Mennonite practice and Warren's ideas to see how each might enhance the other. For many Mennonite Christians, taking seriously some of the principles outlined in Purpose Driven Church is part of the mix of becoming missional.

"Purpose Driven Mennonites" — The experience of four congregations

North Clinton (Ohio) Mennonite Church. "What's next?" This was Pastor Gary Blosser's question seven years ago as the North Clinton congregation completed the LIFE (Living In Faithful Evangelism) process. For North Clinton, there was no doubt that LIFE was a helpful program, getting them to think about congregational barriers to growth and how they welcomed new people. As North Clinton and other congregations

in Ohio conference began to experience a level of growth following the LIFE process, they were all asking similar “what’s next” questions.

In 1995, Blosser took a seminary class in which he discovered *The Purpose Driven Church*. Blosser read the book and purchased copies for the leadership team at North Clinton. Since then, North Clinton has been taking incremental steps toward reorienting itself around the Purpose Driven approach.

Early in 1996, the leadership team began exploring the possibility of adding a contemporary, “seeker-sensitive” service for three Sundays. In “un-Mennonite” fashion, as Blosser describes it, the congregation decided to try the service for nine months, then vote on it. Given the choice, two-thirds of the congregation opted for the contemporary service, which caused some turmoil, particularly among those who chose to continue in the more traditional service. But after nine months of this experiment, the congregation affirmed both services.

During this same period, leaders at North Clinton were wrestling with the question, “What makes membership meaningful?” Again, Purpose Driven Church resources became a helpful tool. They adapted Saddleback Church’s *Discovering Church Membership* curriculum. “It really gave me something solid to customize for our congregation,” Blosser says.

Purpose Driven Church materials have helped North Clinton connect with the community. The church doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel. But customizing is definitely part of the bargain. “Warren brings a Calvinist perspective,” says Blosser. “For instance, ideas around predestination and eternal security crop up in a lot of the material. That’s not where we’re coming from, so we adapt it.”

Issues of peace and justice — not on the radar at all in Warren’s material — are areas where North Clinton has also needed to adapt the material. “We really start getting into these issues in the 200-level classes *Discovering Spiritual Maturity*,” says Blosser.

On the other hand, North Clinton leaders have found that Warren’s strong focus on community finds an easy fit as one of North Clinton’s core values and lived practices.

Throughout their experience with Purpose Driven Church, North Clinton has maintained an incremental approach — not necessarily voting on everything, but just doing things with more focused purpose. This

Purpose Driven Church materials have helped North Clinton connect with the community.

has enabled a doable pace of change. Congregational leaders have not simply dumped an old system and replaced it with a new one. Rather, they are applying aspects of Purpose Driven Church, and finding clearer purpose, health and growth as a result.

First Mennonite Church (Berne, Ind.). First Mennonite Church in Berne, Ind., is just beginning its journey with Purpose Driven Church. As pastor Craig Maven puts it: “After reading the book and looking at current reality, the board of deacons knew that we had a structure for a time that no longer exists — even in Berne!”

A key tool from Purpose Driven Church is the S.H.A.P.E. assessment. Where these elements (Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience) align is how God has ‘shaped’ each individual for ministry.

The changes First Mennonite is undergoing will help the congregation move from serving a structure that has been in place for a given number of years, to thinking through what it means to serve Jesus and his purposes in today’s world. “Obviously that’s the outcome we have always wanted,” Maven says. “We just got to the place where we realized the was really hindering that desire.”

Many congregations with long-established structures have difficulty with gifts discernment. “You don’t want to just plug people into slots,” says Maven, “but we didn’t have a strong way for assessing people’s gifts. A key tool from Purpose Driven Church is the S.H.A.P.E. assessment. The letters in S.H.A.P.E. stand for Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience. Where these elements align is how God has ‘shaped’ each individual for ministry.”

Maven describes the move that Berne is undergoing as a move from a *pastoral* focus to a *mission* focus. Maven and the leadership team at Berne are using some of the key ideas from Purpose Driven Church, but also focus on ideas from the Missional Church movement, especially the language pertaining to the reign of God. “Purpose Driven Church has a very pragmatic focus,” says Maven. “Missional Church writing has tended toward the theoretical, but the theology behind the theory is right on target.”

The process of change is not immediate, or once-and-done, the leaders at Berne realize. An “aha” moment came for Maven when he discovered that there were positions in the structure that were basically in place to make sure everything stayed the same. It wasn’t people who were put-

ting their feet down in the face of changes. It was functions embedded into the very structure. You can't just flip on the "Purpose Driven" switch, the congregation discovered, to change structures. If you could, it would be easy to leave God out of the process.

So, in what position does First Mennonite Berne find itself today? Discerning God's leading, pursuing God's purposes, and being open to change. A great place to be in the missional journey!

South Hutchinson (Kan.) Mennonite Church. South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, and Pastor Howard Wagler in particular, were early enthusiasts of Purpose Driven Church resources. Wagler and his family came to South Hutchinson in 1992. At that time, the congregation was participating in the LIFE (Living In Faithful Evangelism) process. As with North Clinton, the LIFE process became a useful starting point for where God would lead them in the years ahead.

The LIFE process helped South Hutchinson notice some things and begin asking key questions, such as, "Why is it only our own people who attend Vacation Bible School?" and, "When did we last baptize an adult new believer?" So in the early '90s the congregation was realizing that not only was it not geared toward new believers, it wasn't even geared for summer "respite care" for kids of tired neighborhood parents. About this time, younger families began leaving the South Hutchinson congregation, saying, in effect: "Things seem pretty set here. There's not much openness to change."

On a visit to a friend in a neighboring state, Wagler picked up *Purpose Driven Church*. "It wasn't the theology that grabbed me," says Wagler, "but the practicality of making church welcoming — getting out into our community and not just saying, 'Our doors are open,' but being a presence in the community." Finding the resources around Purpose Driven Church, and desiring to equip leaders at every level of church life at South Hutchinson, has led the congregation on a path of making new and more committed disciples of Jesus.

As they began developing structures and a culture of purposeful engagement with their surrounding community, one of the first things

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— Craig Maven, pastor, First Mennonite Church, Berne, Ind.

South Hutchinson did was to build a playground specifically for the community — a visible, positive presence in the neighborhood.

When the congregation grew to the point where a second service was a logical next step, church members intentionally focused on the unchurched folks in their community with a “contemporary” worship service. When people attending the traditional service questioned the contemporary service, Wagler said: “Look at what God has done through this church! Look at folks in this second service! Can’t we agree that lost people matter to God? Close your ears if you need to, but look at the people.”

“We can experiment with new things, without locking in on something,” says Wagler. “If it doesn’t work out, we learn a few things and move on.”

— Howard Wagler,
pastor, South Hutchinson
Mennonite Church

The members of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church are trying to be attentive to who God is calling them to be. They will not be a Saddleback Community Church, and they are not attempting to be. When Saddleback started, it was among the fastest-growing communities in the nation. Census figures for South Hutchinson, Kan., haven’t changed much since the 1930s.

The congregation has used Purpose Driven Church resources, along with others, to foster a culture of exploration. “We can experiment with new things, without locking in on something,” says Wagler. “If it doesn’t work out, we learn a few things and move on.”

What is the bottom-line purpose for South Hutchinson? Wagler’s parting word to me at the end of our phone conversation probably sums it up best: “It’s all about relationships,” he says. “Whom do I know who doesn’t know Jesus? How do I earn the right to ask them about their relationship with Christ?” This is the heart of the gospel, and the heartbeat of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church.

Bally (Pa.) Mennonite Church. Bally Mennonite Church was ready. The congregation was making progress in engaging the surrounding community with the gospel of Christ. Then, in the summer of 2002, Pastor Jim Ralph attended a conference on Purpose Driven Church at Hesston College. Becoming energized by the Purpose Driven model, Pastor Jim brought back this energy to a congregation ready to move toward a missional future.

Bally is among the oldest Mennonite congregations in North America, situated in rural Berks County, Pa. The Purpose Driven path its members

have been on for the past two years has been remarkably positive, but has also stretched them in many ways. One of the first things the Bally leadership team did was to redefine and redesign the membership process. As Jim Ralph puts it, “we wanted the process of exploring membership to be invitational. What it had become was a screening process.”

“One of the big questions I’ve been asking,” says Ralph, “is how much of the radical behavioral details do we push on brand-new Christians?” The teaching materials from Purpose Driven Church, which Bally has adapted for their context, have allowed the congregation to join people from the “crowd” to the “core” in a process toward maturity in Christ. But it’s not how Mennonites have tended to do things. The concept of membership at Bally used to mean not only that you wanted to follow Jesus, but that you believed a certain way about a long list of doctrinal issues.

“We’re committed to both core Anabaptist teachings and to meeting people where they are,” says Ralph. “A Purpose Driven approach really helps us make sense of both desires.”

But before membership at Bally, there is “Coffee and Questions.” This has become a way of connecting with what Warren calls “the crowd” — those who have just begun to attend a church, but who are not as yet committed to Jesus or a particular congregation. “Coffee and Questions” is an option during Sunday-school time, and provides a relaxed atmosphere for people to say what’s on their minds and ask leaders at Bally any question they want to.

Spring of 2004 for Bally included participation in *40 Days of Purpose* — a congregation-wide walk through another one of Warren’s writings, *The Purpose Driven Life*. The book takes the basic premise from Purpose Driven Church and helps individuals ask and answer the question, “What am I here for?”

Coordinated through Purpose Driven ministries, *40 Days of Purpose* occurs simultaneously at hundreds of congregations across the country, several times a year. Among the various outcomes churches tend to experience following *40 Days of Purpose* is increased participation in small groups. That’s the current growing edge at Bally. “Intimacy and pastoral care in growing churches happens in small groups,” says Ralph.

Purpose Driven materials have put Bally on a solid footing and given

The teaching materials from Purpose Driven Church have allowed Bally (Pa.) Mennonite Church to join people from the “crowd” to the “core” in a process toward maturity in Christ.

the congregation some good questions to wrestle with. As new believers make their way toward Jesus and toward the center of community life, as the congregation as a whole experiences greater vitality, leaders at Bally are glad to have discovered these tools.

So, what can we learn from Rick Warren and the Purpose Driven approach to ministry?

Both in my own personal encounters with Purpose Driven Church resources and in my interaction with leaders who are either using or studying these materials, a few key points resurface again and again.

Belonging before believing. The congregations I interviewed have found a way to invite people on a journey toward Jesus, toward following Jesus from an Anabaptist perspective. People are allowed to belong before they believe all the “right” doctrinal stuff. Don’t mistake this for watering down the gospel. Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth, recognized the congregation itself was so young in the faith that he needed to communicate with them accordingly: “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it” (1 Cor. 3:1).

This shift in thinking and practice is perhaps the biggest challenge for Mennonite congregations who might consider using Purpose Driven materials. In valuing the idea of a visible church, set apart from the world, North American Mennonites have developed and inherited systems in which, in order to be a member in good standing, one must be born in and/or live under certain written and unwritten behavioral expectations. Many of these expectations indeed relate to actually following Jesus in life. Others — we have come to realize even as we struggle to do away with them — are just folkways and preferences that have too long masqueraded as moral imperatives.

Imperative or not, the question in terms of practice is, can we allow grace to act in people’s lives as they are embraced by the body of Christ, transforming all of our lives toward the image of Christ? Said another way, if unchurched people cannot find an entrée into congregational life, how can we expect to participate with God in making new disciples? The

principles surrounding Purpose Driven Church make plenty of room for belonging before believing.

At the same time, the Purpose Driven model provides a clear and strong teaching system that leads believers into spiritual maturity. All too often, Christian adult education is a series of discussions that have little impact on behavior. The Purpose Driven approach suggests that Christian education should lead from seeking, to believing, to participating in ministry within the congregation, to engaging in mission beyond the congregation. Adult education is therefore not just sipping coffee and recycling the same old debates and discussions. It is actively learning more about God's mission and exploring ways that we might participate more fully in it.

Practical and adaptable. I am a person who loves specifics, especially when it comes to leadership in the church. Purpose Driven materials give congregations good concrete ideas about how to align behavior with purpose and mission.

A major hurdle for any organized group of people is the ability to put into practice the values they hold dear. Here again, Purpose Driven Church offers many resources to create traction and momentum in making vision, values and purposes become reality. Kendra King, a member of South Hutchinson Mennonite, put it this way in a recent article in *The Mennonite*: "What appeals to me about Purpose Driven material is that it is active. It is concrete. And it includes a call to action."

The nuts and bolts Warren offers are not meant to produce Saddleback clones. In fact, the materials are delivered as document files on CD so that each congregation can customize them as necessary. Among the common elements in the congregational stories above is the fact that they adapted the material, both to incorporate Mennonite theology and to reflect their particular geographical and cultural contexts.

That being said, it seems that so much of the Purpose Driven Church book details how purpose was shaped at Saddleback that one really does need to stand back a bit and sift through the book to find principles applicable to one's own specific context.

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— Kendra King,
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So, for example, I pass quickly over chapter 14, “How to Develop a Seeker Sensitive Service,” because I am not attracting “Saddleback Sam” (the typical Orange County resident Warren’s church is set up to attract), or his equivalent in my area. While Warren looks to the broad middle, some of us are looking at the margins. Many of his real-life suggestions thus just don’t make sense for reaching the people in the communities where God has placed us.

Focused on making new disciples. Warren is not interested in “shuffling the saints” from one congregation to another. He cares about bringing people into relationship with Jesus and with the body of Christ, the church.

This emphasis, I believe, is a big reason that Mennonites and so many others are finding Purpose Driven materials so helpful. Understanding one’s neighborhood, at a theoretical level, as a mission field is one thing. Discovering real ways for people to actually experience and respond to the gospel of Jesus — that is quite another thing.

When Rick Warren started Saddleback Church in the middle of Orange County, Calif., back in 1979, he dropped himself into a pond of many “big fish” of conservative evangelical Christian leaders — Jimmy Swaggart, Chuck Smith, Chuck Swindoll, Robert Schuller, to name only a few. “Bible-believing Christians,” as Warren puts it, had plenty of options. But God called Warren for a specific assignment: to grow a church for unbelievers. “We never encouraged other believers to attend Saddleback,” Warren writes. “In fact, we openly discourage it. We don’t want transfer growth.”

This focus on unchurched people is in itself enough to make us pay some attention to Warren’s work. Being missional may include many behaviors, but there’s little argument that the one many Mennonites need most practice in is evangelism. And speaking of missional ...

You say Purpose Driven. I say missional. Let’s call the whole thing off. Some see missional church and Purpose Driven Church approaches as incompatible. I don’t believe this is the case. Many of the leaders I have spoken with recently see how the two can complement each another.

In some missional church literature, a bit of sleuthing is required to find attention paid to evangelism. The strength of scholars like Darryl Guder and others in the missional church movement is the social analysis that

helps us see how most North American congregations have become captive to our culture, rather than agents of change. These writers remind us unequivocally that it is not about *us*, but about *God* who invites us to be engaged in God's mission.

Conversely, Purpose Driven Church makes little critique of the dominant culture of North America, and of God's desire for the church to live in risk and opposition to that culture. For Warren, dominant culture seems to be a factor only in reaching the lost in a context they can understand. In short, once again, the church as "evangel" and church as "social critic" seem to have trouble finding common ground.

But bringing these together is precisely our most compelling task in the beginning years of the 21st century. And here is one key reason I appreciate Purpose Driven Church resources. Warren, in attempting to prepare us for our own particular contexts of ministry, introduces us to a few helpfully distilled principles and invites us to adapt them into a workable set of practices for use in the ministries where God has called us.

If you believe the principles around Purpose Driven Church might help your congregation, don't be hindered by false dichotomies between this or that group of resources. Core Anabaptist teachings, along with ideas from the missional church movement, will strengthen your congregation's approach to Purpose Driven Church and, most importantly, your congregation's abilities to live and breathe the whole gospel across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world.

Being missional may include many behaviors, but there's little argument that the one many Mennonites need most practice in is evangelism.

What are some of the weaknesses of the Purpose Driven approach?

Critics of Warren and Purpose Driven resources express a variety of reservations regarding this approach. Six most often heard are:

- ◆ It is too focused on numbers.
- ◆ The pastor has too much authority.
- ◆ It is too male-centric.
- ◆ It lacks theological depth.
- ◆ It is too market-driven.
- ◆ It is program-based.

Focused on numbers. In one sense, I agree. For me personally, I would never start a church the way Warren did. My first big question as a church planter is not, “Where is the fastest-growing region of the country?” Orange County, Calif., was a region with this particular distinction in the late 1970s, and it was a big reason Warren chose to move there.

Warren is focused on getting “a bang for his buck” — as big a crowd as possible. Again, this would not be my preferred strategy.

On the other hand, if we do *not* have as one of our main purposes to see new people come to know Jesus — to have the body of Christ grow in numbers — then we’ve become a nice club, a mutual edification society, or a well-meaning social-service agency. God wants the church to grow, not to see burgeoning religious bureaucracies, but so that people can know of God’s love and deep desire to redeem all things.

Pastoral authority. Purpose-Driven materials presume a high degree of pastoral autonomy and authority. Much of Mennonite polity and practice at the congregational level tends to discourage this.

Historians and social analysts can address this more thoroughly than I, but suffice is to say that Mennonites, for a wide variety of reasons, have tended to limit the scope of pastoral leadership. Trying to get members of a congregation on the same page, in terms of mission and purpose, is well nigh impossible in an atmosphere where leadership is neither trusted nor trustworthy.

The congregations featured in this booklet have attempted to adapt Purpose Driven materials to a Mennonite polity, paying attention to past excesses of both the destructive use of authority and the “vote-on-the-carpet-color” path of immobilizing consensus.

Male-centric. Are Purpose Driven materials male-centric? There is nothing about this approach that, on the surface, makes it so.

Warren is a Southern Baptist, so there is certainly no content that openly encourages the pastoral leadership of women. The leadership make-up of the churches sampled for this booklet is overwhelmingly male, so I’ve been no help in overcoming this bias. I do know women pastors who use these resources and who find them helpful.

What I haven’t found is a Mennonite congregation with women in pastoral leadership who have leapt whole-heartedly onto the Purpose Driven bandwagon. There probably are such congregations, but the fact that they did not come up on the radar screen in the research for this publication may be telling in itself.

So at least by sins of omission, Purpose Driven Church materials would appear to have a male-centric bias. Some of this, however, can no doubt be overcome by adapting the materials to specific contexts of ministry.

Lacking theological depth. Do Purpose Driven resources lack theological depth? It is safe to say that Warren's theology about the reign of God is found wanting. He certainly doesn't communicate the idea of the church as a body of believers who create an alternative social reality, a people of "The Way" of Christ, a community standing in stark, even dangerous contrast to the social and political powers of this present age.

While there is an argument to be made about his theology of the kingdom, is his theology in general shallow? I'm not a great one to answer this question. Frankly, I find "depth" somewhat overrated. It seems to me that Warren is clear more than he is shallow. He and the leaders of Saddleback have developed a set of materials that guide individuals from the "crowd" to being committed, active Christian servants. In the process he addresses the major points of salvation, sin, redemption, service, etc.

As has been mentioned several times already, however, there are certain theological gaps, especially from an Anabaptist perspective. Purpose Driven resources provide a good theological starting point, to which one can add or take away, and with which one can wrestle or disagree. Users of these materials should feel free to do just that. Rick Warren, by his own admission, won't mind in the least!

Market-driven. Before we launch into this area, let me just be upfront in saying that much of my personal income is made in the areas of marketing and public relations, so I'm not opposed to people honestly peddling their products or services.

Are Purpose Driven resources market-driven? Yes, and yes. That is, yes, the resources themselves tend to project a view of church growth as vying for the largest "market share" of new Christians. And yes, there seems to be a marketing machine pushing sales of the resources themselves, which will disgust some of us before we even dig into the principles Warren is promoting.

The congregations featured in this booklet have attempted to adapt Purpose Driven materials to a Mennonite polity, paying attention to past excesses of both the destructive use of authority and the path of immobilizing consensus.

In the final stages of writing this, I walked by my local Christian bookstore. The window display was a wall full of *Purpose Driven Life* 2005 calendars. Picture me on the sidewalk in a pose reminiscent of the painting “The Scream.” I was trying to imagine a similar marketing blitz for *Politics of Jesus* daily planners (Monday, 9 a.m. — Attend Ploughshares nonviolent direct action; Tuesday — Sell old SUV, buy Explorer hybrid, etc.).

Related to the market mentality is the problem of homogeneity. This issue is, of course, not unique to Purpose Driven Church, or Saddleback. But Warren doesn’t seem to question homogeneity. Saddleback Sam (the “target” of Saddleback’s ministry) is an upper-middle-class, suburban white guy. He represents the broadest demographic segment of this particular corner of Orange County. The world in this view is made up of ethnic and socioeconomic homogeneous enclaves.

Purpose Driven resources provide a good theological starting point, to which one can add or take away, and with which one can wrestle or disagree.

Yet this is not what the reign of God looks like. A missional, purpose-driven church should begin resembling the reign of God. If only our actual practice as Mennonite Christians matched our anti-racist, multicultural theology on this one, we’d really have a strong critique for Warren!

Program-based. Some leaders in the missional church movement are critical of *Purpose Driven Church* and other encapsulated approaches to church vitality. This criticism is valid when Warren’s approach, or any other method, is used as a blueprint for programs to implement “until the next new thing comes along.”

Changes that result from this or any such approach are often short-lived, rather than deep and lasting. The Purpose Driven materials can certainly be used in this way, particularly the *40 Days of Purpose* exercise.

For those leaders, however, who are seeking change on a more profound level and over a longer period of time, *Purpose Driven* materials have proven to be effective across a broad spectrum of churches when used creatively and adapted to specific contexts of church life and ministry.

A few concluding remarks

Anabaptist thought and practice, at its best, finds itself in the company of widely diverse Christians the world over, of people who desire to live

out the reign of God and invite people who don't know Jesus along on the journey. It is in this context that I find Purpose Driven Church materials the most compelling.

Used in the context of a church seeking to be truly missional, desiring God's shalom to reign on earth as it is in heaven, longing to simply be in God's presence, weeping for friends and neighbors who do not know this shalom and have not found peace in God's presence — the simplicity and practicality of Purpose Driven materials can be a mighty resource.

For me personally, I will continue to use them at the "broad strokes" level. The specifics of how Warren approaches things — his linear, homogeneous approach — do not match my calling to reach out to post-moderns, to artists, to a multi-ethnic community, to cultural creatives, to those who are comfortable with mystery, and those who barely register on the charts of demographic researchers. The broad strokes are where Warren grabs me.

I won't, however, be using his 100- to 400-level classes any time soon. I probably won't lead a "40 Days of Purpose" campaign. But I will be seeking to share Christ with those who don't know him. I will be seeking, along with those in my spiritual household, to be in alignment with God's purposes for us as a faith community. For these are the purposes by which I want all of my personal and community life to be guided.

Whatever your structure, whoever you are called to reach with the whole gospel of Jesus, Warren's approach to discerning your purposes and lining up behavior with those purposes has the potential to shake things up for God's glory. This is the nerve that Warren has struck. This is the need that these resources have the potential to meet. As Warren himself says at the end of *Purpose Driven Church*:

My hope is that this book has strengthened your faith, stretched your vision, and deepened your love for Christ and his church ... I pray that God will use you to fulfill his purposes in your generation. There is no greater use of your life.

Used in the context of a church seeking to be truly missional, the simplicity and practicality of Purpose Driven materials can be a mighty resource.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Does your congregation have a sense of its unique mission or purpose? What has helped or hindered the process of discovering your purposes?
2. What does a church look like whose structures are in service to the purposes God has called it to? Is this always the same in every time and place?
3. Why do you think people's reaction to Purpose Driven Church resources tend to be either very enthusiastic or very negative? Has this study affected, one way or another, your impression of these materials?
4. Warren talks about the five biblical purposes of the church: *fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry* and *evangelism*. Can the gospel be encapsulated into these five areas? If not, what are other ways following Jesus can be described?
5. Do you feel that Purpose Driven Church and missional church approaches are compatible for growing healthy congregations? Why or why not?
6. What ideas do you have for moving a congregation beyond ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity?
7. What are your suggestions for "doable evangelism," earning the right to talk to non-Christian friends or acquaintances about Jesus? For ideas, go to the "Ordinary Attempts" section of www.off-the-map.org.
8. Are you satisfied with your congregation's gifts-discernment process? How might Warren's principles benefit the way your congregation encourages people in using their gifts?

Resources for Further Study

- ◆ BARRETT, Lois, ed., *Treasures in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).
- ◆ GUDER, Darrell L., ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).
- ◆ *In This Time, In This Place: Five Missional Stories* (17-minute video produced by Mennonite Media depicting how five congregations are fostering a missional identity), 2002. Available in English and Spanish. Contact: 1-800-999-3534.
- ◆ KRABILL, James R., *Does Your Church “Smell” Like Mission?* [In *Missio Dei* series, No. 2] (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Mission Network, 2003).
- ◆ OLSEN, Philip N.; SIDER, Ronald J.; and UNRUH, Heidi Rolland, *Churches that Make a Difference* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002).
- ◆ OSWALD, Laurie L., *20 Ways to Join God’s Mission in the World: First Steps on a Missional Journey* (Mennonite Church USA, 2003).
- ◆ *Pathways to a Missional Future: Becoming a Christ-like Church* (Mennonite Church USA, 2004). Available by calling toll-free: 1-800-999-3534.
- ◆ SHENK, Wilbert R., *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).
- ◆ SINE, Christine and Tom, *Living on Purpose* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002).

- ◆ VAN GELDER, Craig, ed., *Confident Witness, Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999).
- ◆ WARREN, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995).
- ◆ _____, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).
- ◆ Websites worth consulting:
 - ◆ www.mennoniteusa.org/missionalchurch
 - ◆ www.mennonitemission.net/resources
 - ◆ www.missionalchurch.org
 - ◆ www.msainfo.org
 - ◆ www.off-the-map.org
 - ◆ www.purposedriven.com
 - ◆ www.thirdway.com

The *Missio Dei* Series

- No. 1 Calvin E. Shenk, *Understanding Islam: A Christian reflection on the faith of our Muslim neighbors* (2002).
- No. 2 James R. Krabill, *Does Your Church "Smell" Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church* (2003).
- No. 3 Donna Kampen Entz, *From Kansas To Kenedougou ...And Back Again* (2004).
- No. 4 Alan Kreider, *Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?* (2004).
- No. 5 Peter Graber, *Money and Mission: Allies or Enemies* (2004).
- No. 6 Craig Pelkey-Landes, *Purpose Driven Mennonite* (2004).

Purpose Driven Mennonites

Craig Pelkey- Landes

For the last three years, we have been working together with many other colleagues to provide missional church resources for Mennonite Church USA congregations. At the same time, a significant number of Mennonite congregations have taken advantage of Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church* to move beyond themselves in pursuit of God's purposes. Warren's materials are also recommended in our missional church resource guide, *Pathways to a Missional Future*.

In order to better orient congregations who are considering the use of Purpose Driven resources, we commissioned Craig Pelkey-Landes, Mennonite pastor and congregational consultant, to interview Mennonite leaders who have used or studied these materials and report his impressions. Here are his findings and personal reflections on the matter.

We commend this booklet to any and all readers considering how best to move their congregations into a missional future.

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Keith Harder, Mennonite Church USA Congregational and Ministerial Leadership Team
Marlene Kropf, Mennonite Church USA Congregational and Ministerial Leadership Team
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