

# Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

## **Does Your Church "Smell" Like Mission?**

Reflections on Becoming  
a Missional Church

James R. Krabill

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**Mennonite  
Mission  
Network**

*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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# Does Your Church "Smell" Like Mission?

## Reflections on becoming a missional church

James R. Krabill

West Africans are probably right. Mealtimes are not meant for talking, but for eating. If something needs to be said, it can wait until the meal is over. Had I followed such advice and talked less at the table, I would likely not have gotten myself in trouble. Let me explain.<sup>1</sup>

It all began over lunch at an Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference ministers' and elders' meeting when someone asked me to summarize what I was discovering in my many church visits about the status of mission and outreach in the congregations of our district conference. That is when, instead of continuing to eat like I should have, I opened my mouth and commented that "it doesn't take long when I visit a church to determine how important mission is to the life of the congregation. Some churches just 'smell like missions,'" I said, "and some don't."

### **"So what does a mission-minded congregation 'smell' like?"**

I should have anticipated the next question. "So what does a mission-focused congregation 'smell' like?" Unfortunately, I'm not sure I know. Have you ever tried to describe to someone what, say, *pizza* smells like? Most of us would be hard-pressed to do that effectively. Yet, none of us would have much difficulty in recognizing the particular odor of *pizza* when it hits our nose.

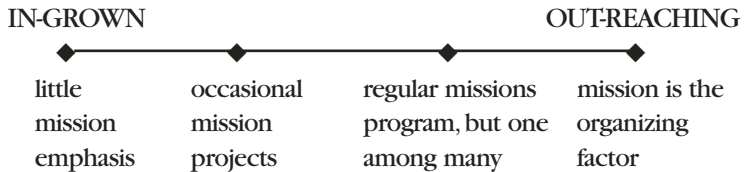
Perhaps we should start by stating the case negatively. What kind of congregation does *not* smell like mission? Some years ago, I was invited to a church to speak about my Bible teaching ministry with African-Initiated Churches in Ivory Coast. Following the service, a high-school senior approached me about short-term mission opportunities that would permit him to make use of the French language he had been studying in school. I suggested several possibil-

ities and then added that he might want to consider a one-year exchange program in France with MCC (Mennonite Central Committee). He looked at me with a blank face and asked, “What’s MCC?”

I wasn’t sure how to respond. Upon further questioning, I discovered that the young fellow had been attending this congregation since seventh grade – a full six years! I have no way of knowing how regularly the chap attended or whether he listened carefully when he did. But I cite this case as one illustration where the congregational “odors of mission” might well have been a great deal stronger!

### **Congregations generally fall into one of four categories**

I find that the congregations I visit generally fall into one of four categories:



First, there are those churches where mission emphasis is so minimal that to speak of local outreach or, even worse, of global ministries, feels like teaching people a foreign language. The mission visitor is perceived in such instances as an outside intruder, someone who temporarily hijacks the congregation from being about its ordinary preoccupations of introspection and maintenance. The smell of mission is indeed a rare and rather exotic experience in such settings.

Then there are those churches that engage in sporadic mission projects, perhaps two or three a year, such as providing special music at a local rescue mission, baking pies for the relief sale, or inviting neighborhood children to vacation Bible school. Such projects are well intentioned, but, in the end, short-lived. There is no continuity between flings, no sense of how these mini-excursions fit into the overall itinerary of where the congregation is going. This is mission by occasional “whiffs.”

Third are those congregations for whom missions has become a regular, ongoing program of the church. The “missions committee” is the institutionalized form of that program. Missions is, in this instance, one of several or perhaps even many preoccupations of the church, existing independently but alongside the kids’ club, the sewing circle and the softball league. Each receives fair and equitable “air time” Sunday morning, in the weekly bulletin, and during church business meetings.

It is particularly important in such settings not to miss the missions committee’s periodic report, since this is one’s principal source for knowing what the “church” is doing in the area of missions. The “aroma” of missions may be quite strong in such congregations, but there are so many competing and intermingling smells that the particular fragrance that missions has to offer is frequently diluted and perhaps even lost altogether in the collective scents being emitted.

The fourth category of churches are those for whom mission is the central organizing factor for all aspects of local body life. Certainly there are greeters, worship leaders and Christian educators within the congregation, but each from their position of responsibility sees it as his or her task to participate somehow in extending Christ’s kingdom to people outside the community of faith in the neighborhood and around the globe. Congregations that smell this strongly of mission will give missions education and motivation a high priority in the classroom, in Sunday-school openings, in the church’s worship patterns, in the narthex, in the library, in discussions about budget, and in the general atmosphere that characterizes the quality of human relationships and pervades every aspect of life within their faith community.

**There are those churches that engage in sporadic mission projects such as providing special music at a local rescue mission or baking pies for the relief sale. This is mission by occasional “whiffs.”**

### **Pick a number and explain why**

I have found it an interesting exercise over the years to ask small groups or Sunday-school classes in churches I have visited to situate their own congregation on the continuum from “in-grown”

to “out-reaching,” or to actually pick a number between 1-4 describing their congregation, where: (1) represents “little mission emphasis;” (2) “occasional mission projects;” (3) “regular missions program, but only one among many;” and (4) where “mission is the organizing factor” for the congregation.

Discussing, then, the small groups’ findings with other members of their faith community has proven equally fruitful in generating a lively debate about mission awareness and involvement in the life of the congregation.

Very few people, I find, choose to rate their congregations as either “ones” or “fours.” Most select options in between. And most express dissatisfaction about being there.

A wide range of reasons are usually given to explain why a congregation might be stuck at a certain place. Do any of these sound familiar?

- ◆ OVER-COMMITMENT — “Everyone’s already too busy. There’s no way we could do more.”
- ◆ KINSHIP — “We can’t seem to make new people really feel at home in our church family.”
- ◆ LEADERSHIP — “It’s not a high priority on our pastor’s ‘to-do’ list.”
- ◆ CONFLICTS — “We’ve got lots of problems in our congregation that need attention before we can even begin to think about reaching out to others.”
- ◆ TIMIDITY — “Most people in our church don’t feel comfortable sharing their faith.”
- ◆ FINANCES — “Within two years we will have paid off our debts on the new facility we’ve built. Then we’re going to get serious about missions.”
- ◆ WORSHIP — “There’s nothing about our Sunday morning service that would attract new people and keep them for long.”
- ◆ SECURITY — “I’m not sure we really want any new faces in church. Most of us like it cozy and comfortable the way it is.”
- ◆ VISION — “We’re great at supporting missions overseas, but we have no vision for our own local community.”

- ◆ ILL-EQUIPPED — “We really don’t spend any time in our church helping members to understand the world in which they live and training them to build bridges from the gospel to people in the culture around them.”
- ◆ DYSFUNCTION — “We *do* have a missions committee, but it’s not very active right now.”
- ◆ FEAR — “It’s easy to just let a few people do missions for the rest of us. Most of us aren’t ready to think of ourselves as ‘missionaries’ — at school, on the job or in the neighborhood.”
- ◆ DISCOURAGEMENT — “We’ve tried all the programs out there. Nothing seems to work for us.”

### When all the programs fail, try ... IMAGINATION!

Suppose we took a different approach to the problem. Rather than forever citing the litany of obstacles and excuses we feel and face in our congregations on this issue, what would happen if we spent more time imagining what kind of congregations we would like to become?

Life’s most important changes happen when people begin to dream dreams, when they become inspired and motivated by new possibilities, by what gets them excited and gives them energy. The consequence of having no vision, the Scriptures tell us, is far worse than mere aimlessness, discouragement or boredom. It is anarchy leading to ... *death* (Proverbs 29:18).

Jesus demonstrated an enormous capacity to capture people’s imaginations. For representing, as he did, God’s comprehensive plan of salvation for the world, he spoke remarkably little about the “programmatic specifics” of that plan for personal and social change. Rather, through short stories and word pictures, he asked people to imagine a *new life* — one lived in close relationship with God and with others.

What if we were to follow Jesus’ lead and begin imagining how that might look in our life together as God’s people? Close your eyes for a moment. And give it a try!<sup>2</sup>

- ◆ **Imagine what your church would be like** if its entire life was consumed by finding ways to mirror God's love, as taught and modeled by Jesus, in your neighborhood. Imagine how that might begin to alter your current congregational activities and priorities.
- ◆ **Imagine your church**, filled with God's Spirit, being of one mind and one body as it brings its life into line with God's great dream of restoring your neighborhood and settings things right with the world.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** – and every one of its members without exception – fully committed to seeing God's dream become a reality.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** having one central objective for every Sunday-school session, small group gathering and committee meeting it sponsored: to equip its members for living and sharing more effectively God's love in the world.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** joyfully recognizing and putting to full use the particular gifts and capacities God has given you. And imagine yourself desiring nothing more in life than to develop those gifts for the purpose of offering them back to God in passionate, life-long witness and service to others.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** being so welcoming of sinners, so filled with compassion for the lost, the last and the least, that word of your love and care spread across the street, throughout your neighborhood, and even around the world.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** designing and conducting worship experiences that celebrate what God is doing in your neighborhood and around the world, and that regularly invite each member to explore and expand their participation in these God-inspired initiatives.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** being committed to daily intercessory prayer for your neighbors, classmates, colleagues and friends.



# imagine!



... your  
community  
without your  
church.  
Would it be  
like soup  
without  
seasoning?



**Mennonite  
Mission  
Network**

**Add your  
seasoning and  
serve across  
the street and  
around the  
world.**

- ◆ **Imagine your church** being sought out by those experiencing injustice, because you have become known for insisting on fair and just relationships.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** seriously searching the Scriptures in a vibrant new way, recognizing them as a blueprint for creative engagement with the seductive forces and influences of the surrounding culture and society.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** being the best window your neighbors have into the life God intended. And imagine that what they saw pleased God.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** so in touch with neighborhood ways of understanding and experiencing life that you begin to reach people's deepest hurts and needs.
- ◆ **Imagine your church** making headlines for its firm stand on loving enemies, offering healing to the broken, and extending open arms to people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. And imagine all of this happening to such an extent that you were required to risk your security as a community for what you believed and practiced.
- ◆ **Imagine going to lunch** with the person in your church you dislike the most. And over lunch God's reconciliation allows the two of you to become friends. And others in your church are inspired to follow your lead. And the reconciliation and wholeness your church experiences spill out the front doors, across the street, and into your entire neighborhood. And your church becomes known throughout your community as a place for restoration and wholeness.
- ◆ **Imagine learning that other churches** are experiencing new life in Christ just as you are. That a neighboring congregation shares its experience with your church. And you find that both of you are catching the vision to extend your new-life experiences beyond your own neighborhoods. And a third church, then a fourth, links with you. And in collaboration with this

community of churches and Mennonite Mission Network you begin calling out people from among you to share God's mission in neighborhoods both near and far. And together, you connect with other churches in still other places to support their sharing new life in their neighborhoods and beyond.

Now ... open your eyes. You're back in the *real* world. Back wishing, perhaps, you were "there," not "here." Back wondering what practical next steps your church could take toward becoming a more *missional* people — a people reconciled *to God* and, in turn, invited *by God* to demonstrate and proclaim that reconciliation to others (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

### **From the real world to the "dream world" ... and back again**

As you think back on the imagining exercise you've just completed, what words or phrases jump out at you? What ideas or concepts strike you as particularly important for understanding how the church might become more "missional" in its primary identity, purpose and activity?

Here are a few that seem significant to me:

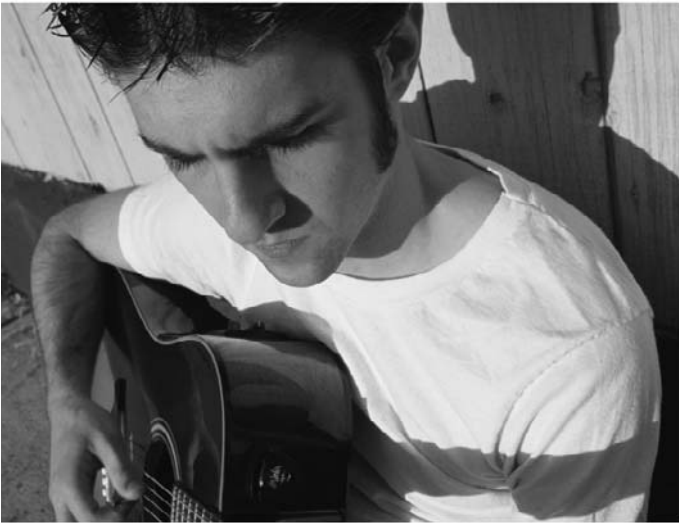
- ◆ God's great dream of "setting things right with the world"
- ◆ Mission as the heartbeat of congregational life
- ◆ Involvement of every member
- ◆ Shoulder-tapping
- ◆ Gift-affirming
- ◆ Member-equipping
- ◆ Bathed in prayer
- ◆ Rooted in Scripture
- ◆ Focused on Jesus
- ◆ Filled with the Spirit
- ◆ Holistic gospel: reconciliation, healing, justice
- ◆ New life in Christ
- ◆ Racial and cultural diversity
- ◆ Passion for the lost, last and least
- ◆ Relational in approach
- ◆ Reaching people's deepest hurts and needs

- ◆ In tune with the neighborhood
- ◆ In touch with larger social, cultural, global trends
- ◆ Worship that celebrates God's-dream-becoming-reality
- ◆ Prophetic witness
- ◆ Risk-taking
- ◆ Being, doing and proclaiming held together
- ◆ Church as "mirror" of God's love
- ◆ Church as "window" into the life God desires for all
- ◆ Extending new-life experiences
- ◆ Sharing stories
- ◆ Catching vision
- ◆ Inviting participation
- ◆ Combining resources
- ◆ Networking
- ◆ Collaboration
- ◆ Beginning at home
- ◆ Spilling out the front door
- ◆ In neighborhoods near and far
- ◆ "Reaching from across the street, all through the marketplaces to around the world"

What an incredible agenda! Sounds a bit overwhelming, to put it mildly. The good news, however, is that most congregations are already somewhere down the path on a journey toward missional faithfulness. Few, as we noted earlier, are actually starting from ground zero. Some of the above list — perhaps even *much* of it — is already deeply rooted in their consciousness and reflected at various points in their body life, congregational vision and current activities.

If you are looking for a tidy checklist by which to assess, once and for all, the "success" of your congregation in becoming a bona fide, fully accredited, card-carrying "missional church," you may be in for some disappointment and frustration. I can't provide you with such a list and neither can anyone else. On the other hand, I can't really describe for you what pizza smells like either. But, rest assured, if its odor drifted my way, I would know it in an instant. And so would you.

# imagine!



... a church where your teenager's music becomes a tool for teaching values and introducing God



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and invitations to God's new community spread across the street and around the world.

## **A few thoughts to consider on the road to becoming a “missional church”**

If you are fully satisfied with the level of mission focus and fervor present within your congregation, please let me know about it. I’d consider picking up my family and changing ZIP codes in order to experience it for myself. In the meantime, most of us are still somewhere “on the way” — seeking God’s face, striving to align our spirit with God’s Spirit and our best human efforts with God’s divine activity.<sup>3</sup>

As we do so, here are a few points to consider along the way:

**1. It’s important to begin at ... the beginning.** I didn’t invent the idea of “mission.” Neither did you. Nor did the church. It was *God* who started it all. The God of the Bible is, above all, a *missionary* God. It was God, the Scriptures tell us, who took the initiative to pursue us, coming into our world, seeking, wooing, calling, restoring. It was God who sent Jesus, through whom all things in the universe are to be “summed up” and “brought together.” There is only one mission, and it is God’s. This means there are a number of things we will want to know more about:

- ◆ What is the nature of this divine mission effort? And what are its characteristics?<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ How and where has God been at work, throughout history, in our neighborhood, around the world?
- ◆ In what ways can we align ourselves with this mission initiative and participate in what God is already doing?

**2. Smelly fishermen, ex-prostitutes and tax collectors don’t make much sense, but then ... this whole thing wasn’t our idea to begin with.** Amazingly, and for some unexplainable reason, God has chosen the church — sinner folk who were and forever will be the undeserving recipients of God’s grace and peace in their own broken lives — to be the primary instruments through whom that same grace and peace is extended to others. “By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves,” God told Abraham and Sarah.

This is the principal reason why God's people were called out in the first place, and for which the 21st-century body of Christ continues to exist: to participate in God's mission in the world. If this is true, then we will find ourselves constantly asking questions like these:

- ◆ Are we as God's people being faithful to our primary calling?
- ◆ In what activities are we engaged — as wholesome and well intentioned as they might be — that actually distract us and dilute our focus?
- ◆ How much time do we spend in prayerful discernment as a faith community seeking God's deepest desire for our life together, our neighborhood, our world?

### 3. How you phrase the question makes all the difference.

So which way is it? Does God's church need a mission? Or ... does God's mission need a church?<sup>5</sup> Hmm?!? The implications of how one answers this question can be enormous. Both statements no doubt contain elements of truth. Reflect on each for several minutes and see what a difference it begins to make.

- ◆ Who "owns" the mission in each formulation?
- ◆ What is God's role in each case? And what is the church's task?
- ◆ Which statement best describes your own view of mission and that of your congregation?

### 4. It may be more about redefining "church" than tweaking our idea of "mission."

Some people know how to say things to make you think. "The church that is not evangelizing ... does not truly believe the gospel" (Wilbert Shenk).<sup>6</sup> Ouch! How about this one: "A church which is not an evangelizing church is either *not yet* or *no longer* the church, or only a *dead* church — itself in need of renewal by evangelization" (Karl Barth).<sup>7</sup> Paul Dietterich has this to say: "The church is not an end in itself. Its only reason for being is to declare God's wonderful deeds."<sup>8</sup> And Emil Brunner: "The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."<sup>9</sup>

**"The church that is not evangelizing ... does not truly believe the gospel."**

-- Wilbert Shenk

- ◆ Do any — or all — of these statements strike you as true?
- ◆ How do the convictions expressed here resonate with what you receive as a regular diet in the life of your congregation?
- ◆ What difference would it make if the church took more of this to heart and actually ordered its life around such ideas?

### **5. Being more missional might actually mean doing fewer things.**

There is a Latin American proverb that says, “If you don’t know where you’re coming from, and you don’t know where you’re going, then any bus will do.” Some congregations are clearly riding too many buses! What they need is not more *flurry*, but more *focus*. Becoming disciplined about being a missional church can provide just such a focus. Suddenly, instead of asking, “How many programs *can* we do?” the question becomes, “Which specific activity *must* we do in light of our congregational priority and commitment to being God’s missional people in this time and place?”

- ◆ To what part of God’s mission in your neighborhood or beyond is your congregation specifically called?
- ◆ What current congregational activities begin to pale in importance, or fade altogether, in light of these commitments?
- ◆ What discernment process do you have in place to continue testing and prioritizing new ministry opportunities that come your way?

**6. Warning! The term “missionary” is currently under reconstruction!** Some congregations define the level of their “mission-mindedness” by the number of full-time mission workers they send forth from their ranks to ministry locations around the world. There is no doubt that missional congregations will be *sending* bodies. But more importantly, such congregations will begin to understand their entire body as *being sent*. “As the Father sent me,” Jesus tells us, just as he told the first generation of disciples, “*so I send you*” (John 20:21).

- ◆ Does every member of your congregation have a sense of *being sent* by God into the work world, the marketplace, the neighborhood in which they live?



- ◆ What difference would it make if they did?
- ◆ In what ways does your congregation inspire and equip its members for their daily mission assignments?

**7. It'll require a stretch getting from "across the street to around the world."** Most congregations tend to focus either on *local* community involvement or on mission endeavors in some *far-off, distant land*. The first of these can lead to shortsightedness and provincialism; the second, to avoidance and denial of needs and opportunities God has placed in our own back yards. Healthy congregations, I believe, work at building mission awareness and involvement at multiple levels: in the *neighborhood*, through participating in some kind of *regional* initiative, and by connecting in one way or another with God's people in mission *worldwide*.

- ◆ Where is most of the energy for mission in your congregation: local, regional or international?
- ◆ "Shortsightedness," "provincialism," "avoidance," "denial" — do any of these terms describe your situation?
- ◆ What next steps would you need to take as a congregation to become more fully engaged in God's mission, "reaching from across the street to around the world?"

**8. This is about much more than mission agencies and outreach committees.** When I think back on the people who have shaped my views of mission over the years, I realize just what a diverse group of folks it is. My parents were clearly instrumental, but many others would have to be mentioned as well: a sixth-grade Sunday-school teacher, a summer camp director, a youth minister intern, several close friends, my college campus pastor ... and this is only a beginning. To inspire and train the whole church for participation in God's mission, it takes ... *the whole church*: friends and family, teachers and mentors, professors and preachers, churchwide institutions and their leaders.

- ◆ Who are the people in your life who have most encouraged your

participation in God's mission?

- ◆ Whom have *you*, in turn, mentored along the way?
- ◆ In what ways could your congregation work at this more intentionally, rather than assuming it must just somehow be happening?

**9. Guess what? We're not inventing the wheel!** It's not as if we have no clue about what a missional church might look like. For starters, there's Jesus, *teaching, preaching* and *healing* his way through Galilee (Matthew 9:35) and giving us the clearest picture ever of what it means to be about God's purposes in the world. The earliest disciples and faithful believers throughout church history embraced the challenge of continuing the work of Jesus in their own cultural settings and historical contexts. The stories of past witnesses are indeed plentiful. Yet the hard work of discerning how to be faithful in our own time and place still lies ahead.

- ◆ What do you think are the unique challenges the church will face in participating in God's mission in the 21st century?
- ◆ How much time does your congregation devote to studying and understanding North American culture in preparation for this formidable task?
- ◆ What lessons can we learn from God's people in Scripture and throughout history that might prove helpful to us in demonstrating and proclaiming the good news of Jesus today?

**10. Some people outside North America know more about all this than we do.** Much of the church's numerical growth in recent years has taken place in the global south: Africa, Asia/Pacific, Caribbean/Central and South America. The Ethiopian Meserete Kristos Church, for example, has welcomed 70,000 new members into the Mennonite family of faith since 1980. While there are, no doubt, many reasons for MKC's phenomenal growth, much can be contributed to a *clear vision* and a *focused plan*. The vision has been to place mission at the heart of the church's life. And the plan, to organize every part of the church — be it Bible schools, semi-

naries, youth ministries, women's groups, or relief and development programs — around achieving the one common goal of “glorifying the Almighty God” and “serving the whole person” by “carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in homeland and abroad” and “providing both spiritual and physical assistance to the needy” (MKC brochure).

- ◆ In what ways does your congregation build awareness among its members of what God is doing through the church around the world?
- ◆ What, do you believe, are the key learnings we should be gleaning from missional communities of faith in other parts of the world?
- ◆ Would your congregation be ready to host an African, Asian or Latin American missionary to assist you in reaching your neighborhood for Christ?

## Notes

1. The story on the next three pages was first told in my shorter article, “Does your church ‘smell’ like missions?” in *Gospel Evangel* [monthly publication of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, 212 S. Main St., Goshen, Ind. 46526] November 1990, pp. 1-2.
2. The following “imagination exercise” was adapted and expanded from a text developed by the Mission Identity Project Team of Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA. Team members included: Burton Buller, team leader; Barbara Eichorn; Ken Gingerich; Gloria Lehman; Tom Price; Cynthia Snider; Timm Wenger; and Jeannie Zehr. The team also developed the “Imagine” poster series, two of which are found here on pages 7 and 11.
3. These ideas are developed more fully in Robert J. Suderman’s *Calloused Hands, Courageous Souls* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1998).
4. A popularized approach to these questions is found in *A Theology of Mission for Today* [Mission Insight series, No. 1], 1999.
5. This question was inspired by the 2001 seminar series title, “God’s Mission Needs a Church,” sponsored by the Center for Parish Development [5407 S. University Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60615].
6. Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision. The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 54.
7. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), p. 874. Italics my own.
8. Paul M. Dietterich, “Mission programs or missional church?” in *Transformation* [a newsletter of the Center for Parish Development], VI (1) Summer 2000, p. 1.

## *And now, it's your turn!*

If you had to define the term “missional church,” how would you do it? Here are a few examples to get you started:

A missional church is ...

- ◆ *all* of God's people demonstrating and proclaiming  
*all* of God's gospel throughout  
*all* of God's world
- ◆ a church that understands its purpose in light of  
God's invitation to participate in aligning all human  
activity with the intentions of God
- ◆ ordinary people  
living extraordinary lives  
characterized by a hunger for spiritual growth  
seeking accountability to others in community  
possessing a heart for the lost, last and least  
passionate about justice and righteousness

**My definition of a “missional church”**

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In which category (1-4) would you situate your own congregation on the continuum of churches described on pages 2-3?
2. What are the key obstacles your congregation faces in moving from one category to another? Do any of the obstacles listed on pages 4-5 sound familiar? Are there others you would like to add?
3. If you could imagine a congregation truly faithful to its missional calling in your neighborhood or community, what would it look like? How would it worship? Whom would it reach out to? For what would it be known?
4. What three things does your congregation do well in participating in God's mission? What three things could stand some improvement? What three "golden opportunities" are you overlooking or passing by that you believe your congregation should pray about and explore over the next six to 12 months?
5. Where is God's saving, reconciling power most evident in your community? Across North America? Around the world? In what ways is your congregation aligning its own energies and efforts with the people, projects and places where God's Spirit is already at work?
6. There are various terms one could use to describe a congregation fully engaged in God's mission:
  - ◆ Missional
  - ◆ Mission-minded
  - ◆ Mission-focused
  - ◆ Mission-centered
  - ◆ Mission-driven

What distinguishes these terms one from another? Which do you find the most — and least — helpful?

## Additional Resources

### Publications

- ◆ BARRETT, Lois, ed., *Mission-Focused Congregations: A Bible Study* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Faith & Life Resources, 2002.)
- ◆ BARRETT, Lois, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, scheduled for release in 2003).
- ◆ “Being Shaped by God’s Mission: How the mission of God is shaping the identity of the new Mennonite Church USA.” *Beyond Ourselves* [the Mennonite Mission Network magazine], Summer 2002.
- ◆ GUDER, Darrell L., ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).
- ◆ DIETTERICH, Paul M., “Mission programs or missional church?” in *Transformation* [a newsletter of the Center for Parish Development, 5407 S. University Ave., Chicago Ill. 60615], VI (1) Summer 2000.
- ◆ HUNSBERGER, George R.; and VAN GELDER, Craig, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996).
- ◆ Mennonite Mission Network can offer consultation in forming effective partnerships ([Partnership@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:Partnership@MennoniteMission.net)) or launching new ministry ([NewMinistry@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:NewMinistry@MennoniteMission.net)). Call 866-866-2872 for either of these services.
- ◆ SHENK, Wilbert R., *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).
- ◆ OLSEN, Philip N.; SIDER, Ronald J.; and UNRUH, Heidi Rolland, *Churches that Make a Difference* (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).

### Readers Theater Scripts

- ◆ “Across the Street; Around the World — A Churchwide Vision” [written by Bethany Swope], 2000. Available by mail from Mennonite Mission Network, Box 370, Elkhart, IN 46515-0370 or on the web at [www.MennoniteMission.net/Resources/MissionalChurch](http://www.MennoniteMission.net/Resources/MissionalChurch).

# Does Your Church “Smell” Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church

**James R. Krabill**

The word “missional” has been around for many years. Recorded usages of the term date back to at least the early 1900s. But only in recent times have we heard it employed more frequently, usually in reference to the challenge God’s people face in becoming a “missional church.”

Many people are asking, “So, what is meant by ‘missional,’ anyway?” “Is this just the latest fad, or are we really talking about something new and important we should pay attention to?”

The reflections offered here do not provide an easy shake-and-bake recipe for answering these questions. But they do invite the church to a careful evaluation of current practices and understandings, and inspire us all to fuller participation in God’s mission in the world.

The invitation to participate goes out to more than “a chosen few.” It is addressed as “a challenge to all of God’s people to demonstrate and proclaim all of God’s gospel throughout all of God’s world.” Were this challenge met, in fact, we would be far down the road to discovering what being a “missional church” is all about.

*James R. Krabill has served with Mennonite Mission Network and its predecessor agency since 1976 in a variety of capacities, as a village Bible teacher in Ivory Coast, regional program director for West Africa and, most recently, as senior executive for Global Ministries.*

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