

Missional Church

Continued from page 3

That's where missional church comes in. That's where you come in. That's where we all have a part to play. That's why this is a fad that just won't go away.

The only imperative of the great commission in Matthew 28 is to **“Go make disciples.”**

The goal of missional church is **not** to get butts in the pews and money in the offering plate. Relationships are to be cultivated and grown. Missional church work takes time. It's an attitude adjustment, not a new program that we can offer. It's a fully-embodied commitment to represent Christ wherever we are, in hopes that our lives become life-giving enough that others want to join in.

This can be a problem when we have large facilities to maintain and staff to pay. We grow impatient. We want to see quick results. We still want to measure success like the rest of the

world does. What does this mean for the future of our church budgets? Our conference budget? Our denominational budget?

If we can learn anything from the Bible it has to be this: God's ways are not our ways. The biblical measure of faithfulness has always appeared backwards to the world. What makes us think it should stop now?

*Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg is pastor of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold and a member of Ohio Conference's Mission Resource Team. This article also appeared as a blog post on the website of **The Mennonite.***



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Ann Leaman, editor: ohioevangel@gmail.com



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Missional Church: The fad that just won't go away

By Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg

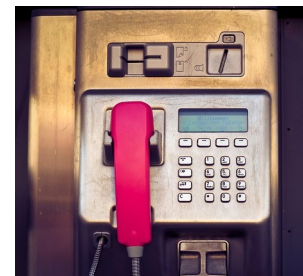
Recently I heard an observation following Ohio Conference's Annual Conference Assembly in which we focused on becoming a mission-driven (a.k.a. “Missional”) conference.

The observation? It seems as though our younger leaders are the driving force behind the passion for this movement.

And so the question becomes, “Why?” Why are younger leaders pushing for this change? Is it simply because we haven't been around long enough to become cynical to every church fad that has come around the pike? This may well be the case.

I can't tell you how often I have heard people (many of them pastors) say about the “Missional Church” idea:

“I am so sick of hearing that word.”
“I know it's important, but I'm still not sure why.”
“How do we know this just isn't another fad?”
“We've been talking about this for 20 years.”



Perhaps we have been talking about this movement for 20 years, but 20 years ago the church was in a much different place. Twenty years ago, being a Christian was the center of most of our communities. Competition

for Sunday worship services and Wednesday evening meetings was unheard of and/or definitely frowned upon.

The “faithful” members of our churches would have never dreamed of telling other people they were somewhere

Continued on page 2

Supporting
healthy, growing
congregations

Missional Church

Continued from page 1

else other than worship on a Sunday morning, let alone posting a picture of the evidence of not being in church on social media for the whole world to see.

Twenty years ago, our culture was pushing people into the doors of our churches, but today, even the faithful do not feel compelled “come Hades or high water” to be in church.

Twenty years ago, we believed our mission was to bring people to church, where they could hear the message, become Christians and bring their neighbors to church. But what happens when people who consider themselves faithful Christians only show up in church half the time?

Seven years ago, our congregation (Zion Mennonite Church) went through an intentional transitional period, in which our transitional pastor, Sherm Kauffman, tried to help us understand what it meant to be missional and why it is so important. We agreed that it was an important concept, but for the most part, we

didn't think it was entirely necessary to change everything about ourselves. We thought we were doing just fine.

But time has passed. Our young people leave for college and they don't come back. Our old people pass away, and our Baby Boomers retire and are either moving to be closer to grandchildren or spending half of their time *not* in Ohio.

Suddenly, 20 years later, we are recognizing the need to move beyond ourselves.

This is where the Missional Church idea and every other church growth fad

that has come down the pike are not the same, and this is why, I believe, the Missional Church idea is slow to catch on.

Missional Church is about making disciples wherever we are, not about bringing people into our church.

Three years ago, as our congregation went through an intentional period of studying the Alan Hirsch

Continued on page 3



Missional Church

Continued from page 2

book, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship*, our worship ministry chair came up with a brilliant visual: A telephone booth.

A telephone booth was brought into the sanctuary and put up on the stage. Now we all know that phone booths are basically obsolete. We don't need them anymore. Most of us carry our phones on our person. Most younger people don't even have landlines in their homes.

We don't have to be confined to one location anymore in order to get the message that is intended for us.

Twenty years ago a cell phone would have been considered a luxury; now it is considered a necessity.

We are not a location-centered people anymore, so why does the church continue to operate as though that is the only way to be faithful?

The problem for us as a church then becomes, who then is to make disciples? If we can no longer expect “*The Pastor*” of our church to bring the message to my neighbor, who is supposed to do it?

Discipleship has gone to a whole new level, much like it did during the Reformation when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. No longer did the people have to rely on the priest to read them scriptures; suddenly they were able to read scripture on their own. Bibles were printed and became available. “The Church” was no longer in control of the message.

And that is where we find ourselves today. Coming to the church building (or the phone booth) is no longer the center of how we receive the message. We go online. We hear podcasts. We have information available to us 24/7.

But that does not mean that our neighbors will “just so happen” to listen to a Christian podcast and come to Jesus. Maybe...but

probably not. And chances are if we cannot convince the already *convinced* to show up in the church building on a Sunday morning to hear our preacher preach, then it's a long shot to expect the *unconvinced* to do it.



Continued on page 4