

# Theology Matters

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## The Missional Church

By Alan J. Roxburgh

### Introduction and Background

Words insinuate themselves into the vocabulary of a culture when a group uses new language to articulate something that is felt and needs to find expression. This has happened with the phrase *missional church* over the past half dozen years. In 1998 Eerdmans published a book with the title *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. It was written in the most unlikely manner by a team of missiologists, theologians and practitioners who met for three years to compose the book. The book's genesis lay in the convergence of various people inside a new network called the *Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN)*. Comprised of people from a variety of church backgrounds (Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist and Anabaptist), GOCN coalesced around the writings of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, a missionary in India for over thirty years. Newbigin, upon his retirement in the late 60's, returned to his native England to discover that the Christian culture he had left some thirty years earlier had all but disappeared. Having a keen missionary sensibility, Newbigin recognized that by the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century the mission field for the Gospel had shifted dramatically. The greatest challenge to Christian mission was now those very nations that had once sent missionaries out around the world. It was the people of Europe, shaped by the Western tradition, that were rapidly losing their identity as Christian. In one memorable epithet Newbigin asked the question: *Can the West be converted?* That question captured the imagination of many church leaders in the UK and Europe. It represented one of the fundamental issues that had to be addressed by the church but had not been articulated clearly until that point. The challenge facing the Western churches was the re-conversion of its own people. Newbigin wrote voluminously on this subject, addressing underlying issues and outlining the missiological challenge such a situation presented to the church.

This European and UK conversation found its way into North America. Newbigin came to America on numerous occasions to lecture and teach on the themes of a missionary engagement with Western society. His writing and conversations caught the attention of academic missiologists and theologians on this side of the Atlantic where numerous leaders were themselves struggling with similar questions about the nature of Christian witness in

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### Table of Contents

The Missional Church .....	p. 1
Can the Church be Converted? .....	p. 6
The Initial Steps of Transformation .....	p.11

where numerous leaders were themselves struggling with similar questions about the nature of Christian witness in Western societies at the close of the millennium. It was out of these stirrings and conversations that a small group of such leaders began to have more intentional conversations with one another and, eventually, formed a network that became GOCN. Through its gatherings and conversations, it became clear that there was a significant amount of work to be done in addressing issues of Gospel faithfulness in North American culture. It was against this background that the Pew Charitable Trust provided generous funding to form the team that wrote *Missional Church*.

## The Missional Language

The *missional* language found expression as the book took form over that three-year period and thus, became its title. It has now become a part of the *lingua franca* of the church in North America. Almost everywhere one goes today the word *missional* or the phrase *missional church* is used to describe everything from evangelism to re-organization plans for denominations, to how we make coffee in church basements and denominational meeting rooms. In a very brief period of time a new form of language entered the common conversation of the church and diffused itself across all forms of church life. At the same time, it is still not understood by the vast majority of people in either leadership or the pew. This is a stunning accomplishment: from obscurity to banality in eight short years and people still don't know what it means.

These facts suggest something of the flux, stirrings and search for points of reference that are now shaping the church in North America. The missional language would have died and disappeared like so many other words and movements of the church if there wasn't already present an underlying sense that something is amiss about the Christian life and identity at this point in time. Anyone with a passing familiarity with the movements that have shaped the church on this continent over the past half-century is aware that this has been a period of massive change and upheaval. It was into this context that the *missional* language came and was received as a hopeful sign of how we could talk again about the challenges facing Christian identity. But at the same time, it is a testimony to the absorbing power of modernity that the *missional* language could become so meaningless so quickly. Each of these sides—the readiness of the *church* to receive *missional* language in the midst of tremendous flux and change, as well as, the capacity of modernity to absorb and neutralize it—must be part of our discussion. What is happening behind these dynamics? What are the implications of the *missional* language today in the life of the church?

## Missional Church: What Does it Mean?

In conferences, teaching sessions or simply dialogue with other leaders, the question is still continually asked: What do you mean by missional church? The non-clergy are the

most confused by and suspect of the word *missional*. They perceive it to be another unnecessary piece of esoteric language invented by clergy and seminary professors. Thus there is suspicion of the language and not a lot of trust that it means more than a fancy idea about evangelism or mission. There is a need for clarity and explanation. Where do we start in a description of what it means? There are multiple levels to an adequate response which is what makes the problem of meaning significant. If the language of *missional church* is to become a helpful way of forming communities of God's people in a radically changing culture then we have to spend the time and energy to understand what is at stake in the language we are using. Simple sentence definitions are not adequate.

What follows is a brief overview of how we might approach the issue of describing what is meant by *missional church*. Each of the points developed below should be unpacked, understood, appreciated and engaged within the church in a context of dialogue. The missional church conversation is far more than finding new words for old ideas. It is not about putting new paint over the cracked and chipped frames of an established way of thinking. The missional church conversation challenges some of the most basic assumptions we have about the nature and purpose of the church. Implicit in this conversation is the need to challenge and change some of our assumptions concerning the practice of church life in North America. What then are some of the characteristics of this missional conversation?

## Missional Church: Characteristics and Meaning

1. *Western society as mission field*: As indicated in the introduction, the language of missional church has to do with the recognition that somehow the Western societies are now themselves a mission field. This is saying something more than simply needing new evangelism tactics. To a large extent modern evangelism was practiced from within a context in which people generally took it for granted that the Christian story was a normative, regulative part of the cultural backdrop within which they lived. Put simply, most folks knew the basic story in one form or another. Evangelism was about understanding why they no longer accepted or lived in the story, developing a form of presentation or apologetic which addressed those issues and pressing for commitment. Evangelism assumed an environment of prior Christian understanding or background.

The use of missional language is to suggest that this memory of the Christian story as the essential background to evangelism is, in most Western societies, essentially lost and can no longer be taken for granted. In this sense, most Western societies are post-Christian and are mission fields. We can no longer assume that the Gospel story is part of the cultural narrative of people. Now this is more-or-less the situation. Certainly, in Europe and England it is the case that the Christian story is all but a faint and vague

memory that has no shaping power in people's lives except among increasingly small minorities. In 2002 a major British tabloid published a front-page interview with a Catholic bishop in that country. The headline quote was: *Christianity has almost expired in the UK!* Stark language but not inaccurate. The same comment could be made for most of Western Europe.

The majority of the emerging generation in Canada is growing into adulthood with no memory of the Christian narrative. What must be emphasized here is that twenty-five years ago this was not the case in Canada. The corrosive forces of change that had been building up for decades under the surface of popular culture suddenly reached the tipping point and rapidly transformed the culture. The dislodging of Christian life in Canada from the mainstream to the margins has been astoundingly rapid. Canada is not unlike America where the same kind of thing can and will happen. Thus, the missional language was created in order to emphasize that we are confronted with a radically new challenge in the West. We are not in a situation that requires minor adjustments and course corrections. We're not in a place where simply planting thousands more churches or changing existing congregations to *seeker-driven* outlets or developing methodologies for *natural* church growth, is going to address the massive changes now transforming the landscape of the West. We need to fundamentally rethink the frameworks and paradigms that have shaped the church over the last half-century. **The basic stance of denominations and congregations must be transformed to that of missionaries in their own culture.** This requires far more than adjustment. It calls for a radically new kind of church.

2. *Mission is about the missio dei:* Latin phrases may not be the most appropriate form of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but this one does capture a theme central to the missional conversation. If the West, including North America, is once again a mission field within which the central narratives of the Gospel have been either lost or profoundly compromised by other values and stories, then the focus of this mission is the *God* who has encountered us in Jesus Christ—the One whom we confess in the Trinitarian confession of Father, Son and Spirit. This may seem like such an obvious statement that it needs no comment; however, this is not the case. The missional conversation is convinced that throughout Western societies, and most especially in North America, there has occurred a fundamental shift in the locus of the understanding and practice of the Christian story. It is no longer about God and what God is about in the world; it is about how God serves and meets human need. More specifically, the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ has become the spiritual food court for the personal, private, inner needs of expressive individuals. The result is a debased, compromised, Gnostic form of Christianity which is not the Gospel at all.

The biblical narratives are about *God's* mission in, through and for the sake of the world. The focus of attention is

toward God not the other way around. The *missio dei* is about a *theocentric* rather than *anthropocentric* understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection which itself, as the apocalyptic engagement of God with the world, breaks into creation in order to call forth that which was promised from the beginning—that in this Jesus all things will be brought back together and made new. The focus of this movement is doxological. It is not about, in the modern, Western, expressive individualist sense, meeting my needs. The personal pronoun is not the subject of the narrative; God is the subject.

This is a fundamental element in the *missional* conversation. Enough has been written about this issue of the locus and intention of the Gospel and its debasement to an individualistic, needs-centered story in North America that it doesn't require further expansion in this brief essay. But whenever this part of the conversation takes place, it creates consternation and confusion among both clergy and laity alike. If, they ask, the Gospel isn't about the individualistic, personal-need-focus of expressive individuals in North America, then what is the nature of the Gospel? The question reveals the level at which our framework must be radically changed in order for the people in North America to hear and practice the Christian narrative once again. There can be no minimizing the level of the change required for the Gospel to be heard again in the West. The language of *missional* was coined in order to capture and express a) the locus of the Gospel on God and God's actions, b) the depth of the compromise that has overtaken Christian life and c) the extent of the challenge we face in addressing this situation.

3. *Missional church is about the nature and purpose of the church:* The church is an essential part of the missional conversation. The question which the authors of the book *Missional Church* set out to address was the nature of the church in North America as the agency of God's mission in the world. That part of the discussion focused attention on two critical areas of dialogue a) the nature of the culture in which we currently are located as North Americans and b) the purposes of God in the world as revealed by Jesus Christ and his Gospel. In terms of the former, the church is no longer at the center of the culture. This raises fundamental questions about the relationship between Christian life and the pluralistic culture in which we now live. In terms of the latter, the message of Jesus was about the in-breaking of the reign of *God* into the world. Therefore, on the basis of both these motifs, the church is the *called out community of God* in the midst of the specificity of a culture. The genitive in that phrase (the *of God*) is not an objective but a subjective genitive. In other words, the church is called out for the sake of *God*; this is what God has done in Jesus Christ in order to call into being a new society whose life and focus is God.

**The church is, therefore, an *ecclesia*, a called out assembly whose public life is a *sign, witness, foretaste and instrument* to which God is inviting all creation in Jesus Christ. The church, in its life together and witness in the world, proclaims the destiny and future of all creation.** In

this sense, local congregations are embodiments of where God is calling all creation. The church anticipates the eschatological future of all created things through the power of the Spirit. This is why Lesslie Newbigin gave so much energy in his early writing to understanding the nature of *election* in the biblical narratives of the reign of God. Election is not the *rescue* of human beings from some future damnation. It is the call of men and women (in the mystery of God's purposes) to submit their lives to the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ *for the sake of the world*. Again, to put that into the context of the church in North America (which is largely middle class and suburban) the call of God is to a vocation for the sake of the world, *not* one's own personal needs. In this context (and not any other in this conversation) the church is not a gathering of those who are finding their needs met in Jesus. This is a terrible debasement of the announcement of the reign of God. The God we meet in Jesus calls men and women in exactly the opposite direction—to participate in a community that no longer lives for itself and its own needs but as a *contrast society* whose very life together manifests God's reign. How the North American church could take this story, especially one focused around the One who, according to Philippians 2 *emptied himself* by giving up all his rights in obedience to the Father, into a story about God wanting to meet *my* needs, is a question that makes abundantly clear the church's own need for radical conversion to the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ.

4. As a *contrast society* the church is formed around a set of beliefs and practices which continually school and form it in a way of life which cannot be derived from the particular culture in which it is found, but must be embodied in translatable forms within a particular culture. Our North American culture is commonly designated as a modern or a postmodern one in which individual rights are paramount. We live in a context where it is simply assumed that in this tolerant and open society personal rights, feelings and desires are to be affirmed. As a contrast society the church is formed around a set of beliefs and practices that continually shape it in a way of life which cannot be derived from the particular culture in which it is found but must be embodied in translatable forms within a culture. **Therefore, missional church is about what Catholic missiologists call *ressourcement* meaning a return to the sources.** Missional church is not about the modern mantra that we must reject the insular, conforming demands of the past with their so-called cultural captivities, for some new future that is all about meeting the needs of middle-class expressive individuals. Missional church, like the biblical texts of Jeremiah and Isaiah, is convinced that God has brought the Western church into an experience of liminality within its own cultural world, a place of marginalization, in order that through its loss, anxiety and chaos, it might hear again the Word of God. This was the experience of the exile in Babylon.

The missional church conversation does not claim a parallel between our situation and that of Judah after 587 BC. The language of exile is alien to the North American

imagination. People look at churches full of people and it seems to them that these are signs that all is well in the land. Indeed, the assumption is that if there is a problem with a specific congregation or denomination, in terms of dwindling membership or finances, it is because that particular group has wedded itself to outdated methodologies. **All that needs to be done is to figure out the correct methodology for the moment and recalibrate the system for success just like those other church groups that seem to be thriving.** This is precisely the lie that the religious leaders of Jerusalem used against Jeremiah prior to the exile. It was all a matter of finding the right tactics; God was, after all on their side and nothing could change that reality. Therefore, a little change here, a little tweaking there and all would be well. This is the situation today.

But the formation of a missional church is going to be a very costly matter. It calls for a people who are willing to conform their lives to practices and habits of Christian life which, at their root, are about the willingness to give up one's personal needs and rights. This is a terrifying, archaic, almost anti-human thing for most contemporary people to imagine. Human life is not about my needs and me! The humanity that God calls into being in Jesus Christ is one shaped by obedience and conformity to habits and practices learned by God's people in the Old Testament through the *Torah* and in the early church through the development of catechesis, offices and practices. Therefore, the missional church is about a way of life that cuts across the grain not only of the culture but the pastoral models of therapeutics or management and control. Missional church is about the formation of a people in the particularity and materiality of real contexts in neighborhoods and communities. **Therefore, missional leadership is more about the rediscovery of the ancient work of the *abbot* among a people.** This is terrifyingly hard work for contemporary pastors because nothing in their training or habit of life has prepared them for such a vocation. The missional church conversation calls for leaders themselves to become novices; but novices who return to ancient practices and novices who choose to live under the authority of Scripture among a community of people where the I is replaced by the We.

### **The Work of a Missional Ecclesiology**

A major critique of the missional church conversation is that it's primarily an academic discussion among intellectuals and academics which, while interesting and important, does not lend itself to practical application in congregations and denominations. It is fair to say that has been true. From its beginnings the conversation, shaped to a large degree by the *Gospel and Our Culture* movement, has been the academic and intellectual work of missiologists, theologians and biblical scholars seeking to bring theological and sociological resources to the question of the church's missional engagement with our own culture. The numerous books written by members of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) reflect that engagement. This has been an appropriate focus of work and energy. There was a need to frame the issues the

church must address in our context first, from a missiological, theological and biblical perspective. The importance of this focus was that it made clear that the missional church conversation was not just one more tactic for church growth or other pragmatic means of success. The work of these academics underlined the extent and depth of the issues that face the churches of the West. Therefore, the critique of the movement is accurate and yet fails to be cognizant of the monumental shift in biblical and theological imagination required of the church. The church must return to its sources not by copying some past time but by discerning the shape of a faithful Christian witness today.

A second element of the “too theological, too academic” critique from pastors and denominational leaders is the reality that in North America the churches and schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century often failed to cultivate leaders with the intellectual capacities to understand or teach theology. Theology is sometimes considered an abstract discipline with little real relevance for the practical work of pastoral ministry. There is a critical need for theologically informed leaders capable of engaging their people in a very different kind of reflection on what is happening in their lives and in the church at this moment in time. It is only a church that re-enters the power of its rich theological and biblical traditions that will have any chance of missionally engaging the culture.

Having said all that is not to deny that the missional church conversation has, to a very large extent, failed to address the issues of translation. It has remained a relatively theoretic and abstract academic conversation about the church. Its books and ideas have been shaped more by internal conversations within the missiological academy than attentiveness to the needs of the churches. Unless this critical issue is addressed, the missional movement will die because it has failed to create an environment which can nourish its life in the churches. The answer here is not the creation of more missional books. Commentaries and hermeneutics on missional issues relative to scriptural interpretation is an important work for academics which will, over the long term, bear fruit for the church. But the pressing need of the moment is for three things. First, translation of materials and resources that make available to pastors and leaders the rich resources have already been developed within the missional conversation. This work has yet to be done with any seriousness.

Second, there is a critical need to understand how people learn, how they enter into dialogue as communities of

learners that results in change. Paulo Friere in Latin America understood that change is not simply a matter of transmitting information but requires a whole new way of thinking about how people learn for themselves. The missional church movement must address this issue of pedagogy and change if this critical conversation is to diffuse into the churches in ways that bring about a deep shift in understanding and action.

Third, there is a need to develop tools and resources that congregational and denominational leaders can use in the work of missional transformation. Within certain elements of the missional church conversation there has existed a resistance, perhaps disdain, for this kind of practical work. But the nature of the case is that most of us learn by doing, by involving ourselves in processes of missional action that enable us to see an alternative way of being the church. The majority of us do not first learn a set of abstract ideas and then put them into practice. Without well-developed tools, processes and resources for innovating and cultivating missional church, the movement is dead at birth. To this point a few of those within the missional conversation have focused their attention on addressing this issue. People like Craig Van Gelder, Pat Keifert and myself from within the missional church movement have made available such tools for the practical application of missional church in congregations and denominational systems.

In conclusion, the missional church conversation is one of the most hopeful movements to emerge in the last decade. This is partly why the term quickly became popular throughout the church. It is an indication of the church’s searching for ways to understand its current malaise and discover a faithful and fruitful future under the reign of Christ.

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# Can the Church be Converted?

## How “Missional” Came to College Hill Presbyterian Church

By Stephen Eyre

College Hill Presbyterian Church celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2003. Throughout its rich and diverse history it has had an impact on Cincinnati and the world. The period of its history during the 70's and 80's was a particularly exciting time under the leadership of Jerry Kirk. Worship services were packed. People showed up 15 to 30 minutes early to get a seat. The church developed into an “Equipping Center” for the U.S. and the world. People came from all over to take courses on “Rational Christian Thinking,” “Apples of Gold,” and “Speaking the Truth in Love.” The church's impact not only included worship and education but evangelism and mission as well, generating a significant number of PCUSA missionaries and pastors. In the late 80's Jerry Kirk left the church to begin the National Coalition Against Pornography and in 1991 Pat Hartsock was called to be the senior pastor/head of staff.

During its “Equipping Center” years, the College Hill Church had struggled with its relationship to the denomination. Of particular concern was the issue of the role of active practicing homosexuals in ordained leadership. What was a smoldering fire of concern in the 70's and 80's broke into a full fledged flame in the early 90's. A significant minority was no longer content to oppose the homosexual issue within the denomination. Instead they called for the church to pull out. The conflicts over whether to stay or leave consumed the church's energies and despite a good deal of pain and hard feelings eventually led to a “gracious separation.” Somewhere between 400 and 600 people left to begin their own church in 1996.

After such a massive departure, the church was faced with re-staffing and replenishing its leadership. As a result of the gracious separation all but two of the session members left as well as most of its staff. I came to CHPC in 1997 as a part of the new staff team that eventually numbered six ministers/pastors. Much of the wind had been taken out of the sails of the church. What were we going to do to get it moving again? While building on the church's rich history, we felt that we needed to articulate a new vision for the church that captured imaginations and inspired members. In search of material for the vision we visited several mega churches around the country and attended several “advanced” church leadership conferences. While

we observed a great deal of exciting ministry programs, we didn't find the foundational thinking and theology that we hungered for. Eventually we seized on the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* as the guide for our re-visioning and re-development. What we found in *Missional Church* was exactly the foundational thinking and theology that struck a spark within us.

### The Missional Church

There were a number of themes in the *Missional Church* that captured our interests and inspired us. Perhaps foremost was the acknowledgement that the church in North America was increasingly in a “missionary” situation. The culture was rapidly changing from Christian to non-Christian due to the secularizing process that had been unfolding around us. Life in the late 90's in America was very different than life in the 70's, particularly in the understanding of the centrality of God. We were conscious that ministry in the present situation could not be merely a duplication of the past.

A second theme was the use of the kingdom of God theology and the unique role of the church. It seemed to us that the church experience was being limited and localized. Members allotted the church a limited role in their lives, alongside of all kinds of other activities that competed for their time. The authors of the *Missional Church* described the role of the church in the mind of most people as “...the place where Christianized civilization gathers for worship, and the place where the Christian character of society is cultivated.” (p. 80.) In contrast, *Missional Church* articulated a call for the rediscovery of the kingdom of God as the comprehensive realm of God's rule that encompassed all of life. The church becomes, not merely a place where one goes, but an instrument of witness that displays to all the world what God's kingdom is like. As such, the church is not one place among many, but the hub of one's life in which all activities find their meaning.

A third theme of the *Missional Church* was that of community. Instead of the church being “a place where” religious goods and services were provided for the Christian public, we hungered to cultivate a network of people in Christ who were interwoven into life-shaping relationships. As the authors of the *Missional Church* put it, “The church is not simply a gathering of well-meaning individuals who have entered into social contracts to meet their privately defined self-interests. It is, instead, an intentional and disciplined community witness to the power and the presence of God's reign” (p. 158).

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A fourth theme from the *Missional Church* that resonated deeply with the new staff team was the entanglement of church and culture created by the Christendom of our European heritage. The authors lamented that “discipleship has been absorbed into citizenship” (p. 78). The tangle of gospel and culture in the end meant both the loss of the church’s unique identity, as well as, its sense of mission. We wanted our congregation to become an intentional community with a clear sense of Christian identity and mission in the midst of our secularizing culture.

## Spreading the Word

Having become convinced “missional” was honoring to God and faithful to the gospel, our task now was to spread the word. Our first challenge was to seek session support. We began session meetings an hour early, initially for six months, but the time spread far beyond that. We assigned books to read, made presentations and had lively discussions. The response from the session was encouraging but not overwhelming. Many session members didn’t quite “get it.” One problem was the word “missional.” It was a word they had never heard before and it seemed cumbersome. And what was the difference between missions and missional anyway? If we were seeking to introduce a missional vision, were we saying that College Hill hadn’t been involved in mission and evangelism in the past? Didn’t our church have a great track record in both evangelism and mission?

Not only was the concept of missional difficult, the application of the missional perspective to specific ministry programs was difficult as well. While we, the pastoral staff, were talking about the need for a change of “identity” of the church within the broader culture, session members wanted to know what programs and practices were going to be put into place. Our response, “It will emerge as we go forward” was hardly the clear and compelling call to action that session members were looking for. Looking back on that time period it amazes me that the session was not more resistant. They continued to ask questions, we continued to lead discussions.

## Missional Foundations

In the fall of 1999 I wrote a paper that attempted to summarize the essential concepts of the missional church for the session using as its basis the work of Lesslie Newbigin. I had been exposed to the work of Newbigin for some years through George Hunsberger, one of the authors of *Missional Church*. Leslie Newbigin, a missionary to India for 40 years, retired to his home in England and discovered that he was as surrounded by the unconverted at home as he had been on the “mission field.” He published a revolutionary article in a mission publication in 1967 entitled, “*Can the West be Converted?*”

That article of Newbigin’s became a catalyst. I wanted the session to see that what we were beginning to struggle with as a church, missiologists in North America and

England, under the influence of Newbigin, had been struggling with on an academic level for a decade or so. But whether on an academic level or on the local church level, all of us were faced with the shocking reality that the West was no longer a Christian culture and that Western Christians were now in a missionary situation. Instead of the word “missions,” Hunsberger, Guder and others coined the word *missional* because the word *mission* had come to mean proclamation of the Gospel “across the seas” and on the “mission field.” What was needed was a word that meant we were engaged in mission, not only “over there,” but “over here” as well.

As it had been practiced in the West by the evangelical church for the past centuries, evangelism assumed a *Christian* culture shared between the speaker and the listener. In a common Christian culture both the speaker and the listener shared an understanding of God, sin, and the ultimate fate of humanity beyond death. The evangelistic task was, for the most part, to seek to bring conviction of sin to the unconverted and extend a call to believe what the speaker and listener both “knew” to be true. Even those who didn’t believe the Gospel to be true understood its meaning. The missional perspective however, requires that the speaker of the gospel now grasp that such common shared understanding can no longer be assumed and that a translation effort must take place if the Gospel is to be understood.

In order to help the session understand the missionary challenge we are now facing in our own country, my paper told the session the story of “The Peace Child.” The missionary Don Richardson faced cultural barriers that kept the Savi people in Irian Jaya from understanding the Gospel. The Sawis were head hunters and cannibals. They lived in a constant state of conflict with other head hunting cannibal tribes in their area.

In the context of their culture they could not understand Jesus as a savior, only a fool, because they valued betrayal as the highest expression of social skill. To their way of thinking, Judas was a hero and Jesus was a sap. Only when Richardson discovered the concept of the Peace Child was he able to actually translate the Gospel faithfully so that it could be understood culturally. The peace child, a swapping of two infants between warring tribes, was a means by which hostile tribes could trust each other. As long as the peace child lived, tribes were bound to keep the peace. The murder of a peace child was the one act of treachery that was considered unacceptable. Richardson realized this insight provided the key to “translating the gospel” in ways that connected to the tribe’s mental world and culture. Once the Gospel was proclaimed in the context of their culture, Jesus as God’s peace child, they truly heard the Gospel and responded.

In light of the missionary task before us, the paper challenged the session to find ways to translate the gospel so that the secularized people around us could grasp its meaning as Richardson had done with the Savi people.

## What's Next?

As we moved into 2000, members of session finally seemed to be getting the idea of the missional church and were willing to talk about moving forward. But then we faced a new set of problems. What specifically and concretely would this change of thinking mean for setting the direction of the church? How would the way we do ministry change?

One area that we explored was worship. We were aware that our style of “blended worship” that had worked so well at College Hill Presbyterian Church for the past 30 years didn't seem to be connecting across the age spectrum anymore. Older members of the church didn't enjoy some of the more “cutting edge” contemporary pieces that were now being “blended” in. Younger members were becoming impatient with the classical music that we “blended” into our worship services. How could the idea of the missional church help us continue to minister to the older members of our church while connecting with the younger members of our congregation who were drifting off to churches that offered a more contemporary style?

We also explored how our facility could be considered from a missional perspective. We wondered how our sanctuary could be altered to enhance more diverse styles of worship. We also sensed that there was a new hunger for gathering spaces. Starbucks and book stores like Barnes and Nobles were rising up all over Cincinnati to meet the need. We wondered how we could alter our facility in order to make the church a gathering place.

The exploration of worship and facilities changes occupied us during most of 2000 and 2001. But there was more to be done. While worship and facility changes were a good place to start, they merely seemed to be first steps towards recreating the church as missional in a way that would impact our entire congregation. When the session wanted to know what else we could do, our response for specific concrete steps was limited. As a pastoral staff we admitted that this was all new ground for us as well and we really weren't sure what was next. But we were confident that it would emerge. Our task was to keep moving in the direction that we believed God was leading us.

## The Missional “Think Tank”

In addition to asking what the next steps were for ministry, session members were asking how to create an awareness and understanding of the missional church within the congregation. In the late summer of 2001, I invited a few people to meet with me on a weekly basis “just to talk” about developing a strategy for cultivating leadership in order to move the church forward.

Those who were invited were motivated and capable strategic thinkers. As we focused on leadership, the missional concepts that session was working with began to work their way into our discussion. They had not yet been exposed to the missional conversations of the session.

Before we could begin to think together in earnest they needed to be brought into the missional discussion. The book I used to “initiate” them was one that I had recently come across by Alan Roxburgh, also an author of the *Missional Church*. He had written another book on the missional challenge, *Crossing the Bridge: Church Leadership in Time of Change*. What attracted me to this book was that Roxburgh not only talked about the missional church, but he also addressed the leadership actions necessary to move a church from traditional to missional. Drawing upon biblical resources, Roxburgh drew insights for leadership from Israel's exilic and post-exilic period. Just as with Israel in its exilic and post-exilic experience, turbulence and discomfort could be expected in the church due to vast shifts that were taking place in Western culture.

Several months into our discussions there was a growing understanding of missional. There was a growing understanding of the challenges that missional transformation brought to leadership. But there was little new insight into the session's questions about what steps needed to be taken in our missional journey. Since Roxburgh's book so directly addressed the issues of missional leadership, I thought it might be good to invite him to speak. I issued the invitation, and then asked the “Think Tank” if they would help me pull off the event.

In the fall of 2001 Roxburgh spoke to the session on Friday night and then to 70 or 80 members in our Fellowship Hall the next day. Chatting by the podium before I introduced him on Saturday, Roxburgh said to me almost under his breath “I warn you, you are entering into a process.” Having been engaged in a process for the preceding couple of years, I was sure I knew what he meant. Looking back now in the fall of 2004, I realize that I had little understanding how much process, difficult process, was before us.

Roxburgh generated a great deal of interest and energy. This event was the first time the word *missional* had been introduced to members of the congregation at large. His grasp of cultural shifts, biblical concepts, and organizational dynamics connected with those who came. After the weekend was over, both the Think Tank and the pastoral staff felt that we had made another step forward. Yet we knew that we still had a long way to go. The session continued to ask, *What difference will missional make?* and *How will it affect our ministries?* The answer that emerged from the weekend was, “It will make all the difference in the world in the way that we are a church, but we can't yet say what it will look like.”

## Missional Readiness Leadership Team (MRLT)

In addition to writing and speaking, Roxburgh was beginning to do consultation with churches and presbyteries on the missional process. Our conversations with him were especially satisfying as it felt good to be in touch with others who were engaged in the same

challenges that we were facing. Both the Think Tank and the pastoral staff began to consider entering into a consultation contract with Roxburgh.

When we approached the session with that idea, there was a cautious restraint. Session members wanted to know why we needed a consultant when the pastoral staff team had been so active in leading the process to this point. While we hadn't answered all their questions, the pastoral staff seemed to be moving the church forward. Our answer was that this shift from traditional to missional was something that none of us had ever actually led a church through before. While we didn't want to abdicate leadership, we felt it wise to be connected with someone who was completely focused on missional transformation and who was engaged with others in the same process.

A next step was to invite Roxburgh back for another weekend in the late winter. Again the Think Tank stepped in and made the event happen, masterfully covering all the details. However, the Think Tank was covering more than just program details. True to form as strategic thinkers, members of the Think Tank were now interacting on a regular basis with Roxburgh. They were exploring with him what missional meant and what was required for organizational change. As we moved toward a consultation relationship, they were becoming primary "change agents."

Although I had received the session's approval before beginning the Think Tank, the session was becoming uncomfortable with the increasingly visible and significant role the Think Tank was playing in shaping the life of College Hill. Clearly it now was much more than an informal group to help me think. The solution was for the session to charter the group, naming it the Missional Readiness Leadership Team (MRLT). In order to make sure that leadership for church-wide change was coming through the session, two session members were placed on the team.

## The Roxburgh Consultation

The session agreed to a consultation relationship initially for nine months, but the consultation ultimately extended to almost sixteen months. The Roxburgh consultation process was built around a sociological change model that involved five phases, moving from awareness and understanding at stage one to commitment, phase five. What was especially helpful about this change model was the insight that asking for commitment too soon was counter-productive. Gone were the days when a leader could proclaim a vision and then expect commitment. Participation in a process that facilitated deepening levels of involvement was essential to organizational change.

Each phase of the change process was connected with a series of tools and tasks such as a survey of the congregation, weekend seminars for members at large, periodic day-long consultations with the pastoral staff, the

development of Missional Action Teams and meetings with the session.

Roxburgh and his colleague Romanuk developed a survey instrument that discerned four general behavior states of a congregation relative to "missional readiness:" stage one, *reactive*; stage two, *developmental*; stage three, *transitional*; stage four, *transformational*. The survey turned up a number of interesting insights. While College Hill was not at the reactive stage one, neither were we at the transformational level four. Clearly we were on the way but there was more work to be done.

In addition, the survey picked up a number of concerns. There was a growing disaffection with pastoral leadership in the congregation. People wanted a clear and compelling direction, and they weren't getting it. There was also a growing sense of disconnect between various ministries within the church. The word "silo" kept popping up in the essay comments of the survey. Rather than a smooth functioning organization, the congregation was sensing underlying tensions related to "turf" in our various ministry departments. In addition, the survey discovered that there was a disconnect between people and ministries. People who wanted to become involved couldn't seem to find a way to use their gifts.

As we met with Roxburgh in our pastoral consultation times, we struggled over these discoveries from the survey. It became clear that there were organizational structure conflicts that needed to be addressed, as well as, relational tensions among us as a pastoral team.

Clearly we had things to learn about being a team that worked well together. Roxburgh explained that there were different types of team models available to us. For instance, a football team functions one way, a baseball team another and a basketball team in yet another. The data from his survey suggested that we were functioning as a baseball team, playing on the same field, but in a highly individualistic way. A more effective type of team for the missional church was the basketball team that moved the ball down the court by constantly passing it back and forth in a spontaneous but highly coordinated way.

One could guess that we were in trouble as a team when Roxburgh assigned the book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team!* After a year or so, the results of the consultation within the pastoral staff resulted in a loss of three of the five staff members.

While the staff component of the consultation process was important, there was another component taking place at the same time that was perhaps more important, the Missional Action Teams (MATs). These teams engaged in a creative listening process that asked the "next-steps" questions in ways that were not simplistic or reactionary but nevertheless provided clear and concrete actions. Since it was so central to the process, there is a separate article following this one on the MAT's, written by Valerie

Hershberger, a member of the Missional Readiness Leadership Team.

As the MAT's completed their work, the direction we hoped for the church began to emerge. One MAT had written a clear and compelling vision statement that called our congregation into the future. A second MAT articulated a fresh approach to engaging the different generations of the church. A third MAT called for leadership development processes that educated all church officers with a missional perspective and skills. A fourth MAT called for a new way to think about our whole Sunday morning experience that will nurture those who hunger for a "traditional" Christian worship while yet reaching out to those who don't "speak" traditional Christian. These proposals and reports were written up and published in a full color magazine entitled the Jubilee Journey in the winter of 2003. (A copy can be found on our web-site, CHPC.org.)

### **A Summarizing Reflection**

We are now over five years into our missional journey. Due to a congregational crisis back in 1996, the new pastoral staff team set out to seek a future from God for College Hill Presbyterian Church that could build on its rich past. That has happened. People again are engaging in mission and ministries with emerging enthusiasm and understanding.

As we moved along in our missional challenge, what the future actually looked like has been vague throughout most of our journey. Often there was a sense of walking forward into a gray fog. With good reason, the session kept asking for clear and concrete steps. For much of this time we had a sense of direction, but we did not have "answers." Only recently have the contours of the vision begun to emerge through the gray.

At times, the Church experienced anger, mistrust, suspicion and accusations both within the staff team and with members of the congregation. More people have left the church than have become new members. The staff team we now have is not the one we started with. (We now

have an interim senior head of staff who is working on a D.Min. in missional studies.)

We had no clue of how difficult or long this missional journey would take. But almost all who have been engaged in this journey would say that it is the right one; and we would say that it is not only right for College Hill Presbyterian Church but for all churches in our historical and cultural context. Christendom is gone and the church no longer occupies a privileged place in our society. The church had configured itself to minister to a reality that no longer exists. Far reaching change is a necessity. For College Hill, the missional process has required us to rethink our worship, our staffing, our facilities, our organization, our education and our outreach programs.

Not long ago I was in a worship strategy meeting and someone asked, "Tell me again what missional means." I responded, "The missional process is the shift from the church as an institution in a Christian culture, to a community in mission in a non-Christian culture." Someone else said, "Say that again." I repeated "The missional process is the shift from the church as an institution in a Christian culture, to a community in mission in a non-Christian culture." There was a quiet deep sense of resonance around the room.

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# The Initial Steps of Transformation

By Valerie Hershberger

By the year 2000, the members and leadership of College Hill Presbyterian Church knew something was wrong, but no one could clearly identify just what it was. The church had once been known as “a great church” with steadily increasing membership, a nationally known ministry. It was a magnet for motivated people of faith from all over the city. There had been in the 90’s a change of pastoral leadership, a change of vision and call, and a split as a large number of members decided to leave the denomination and set up a new evangelical church. It was still a large church, with nearly 900 attendees on Sunday morning, but there were signs of stress and distress throughout the church. Leaders of various ministries who had picked up responsibility after the split felt tired and alone, without adequate support or interest from others in the congregation. The amount of money being given to the church was in steady decline from year to year. Efforts at new programs and ministries seemed nearly always to fail, and there was starting to be a pervading sense of cynicism. The age of church attendees was rising as young adults in their 20’s and 30’s left the church after happy years in the youth programs to go to newer, non-denominational churches which seemed to be more focused on them and their needs. There was a growing rift between people in the pews and the total lay and pastoral leadership of the church; members saw leaders as increasingly out of touch with the thoughts and feelings of the congregation, and leaders felt increasingly frustrated at issues that seemed unsolvable no matter what they did.

The natural inclination was for everyone, leadership and congregation, to look inward to identify root causes for these issues and find ways to solve them. And certainly, there were and are internal issues. However, it was not until the church looked outward that it found the primary root cause: the culture around us is changing at a fast pace, and increasingly sees us and our customs as irrelevant. And many of us, shocked and overwhelmed at the rate of cultural change, were unwittingly striving to make the church a place with minimal change, a place where we could catch our breath and relax, even recharge, to enable us to survive the rest of the week in the maelstrom our lives have become. This maelstrom is the result of rapid technological change, the erosion of traditional morals and families, the increasing sexualization of entertainment and advertising, the 24/7 pace of global businesses, and the scramble to just stay employed in a very competitive job market.

It took additional help to see what else was also happening—the loss of Christianity as the bedrock of the American culture. While the USA was never the

kingdom of God on earth, it was certainly Christianized, that is, highly influenced in laws, common values, and moral structures by the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Theologians call this “Christendom,” and reference the reign of Constantine as the time Christianity became central to Western culture. In addition to all the cultural changes listed already, Christians and their churches are no longer at the center of the new pluralistic American culture and are having a difficult time finding their way in the new landscape.

College Hill Presbyterian Church found itself in this landscape in the late 90’s. It had become a refuge from the world, a place of stability and familiarity in a strange land. But as it has become irrelevant to the culture, it was also a place starting to show the first signs of decay. Into this situation, came the word “missional,” as described by Dr. Roxburgh in another article.

## The Initial Steps of Transformation

This article focuses on just one part of the transformation process that College Hill Presbyterian Church is undergoing. It is not the only important part of the process, but it is proving to be one of the very critical elements.

As described in a separate article, Rev. Stephen Eyre called together some strategic thinkers within the church to help him think about how to grow and improve the leadership of the church. With time, and especially interaction with Dr. Alan Roxburgh, that team evolved into a chartered team of the session with the elaborate name of Missional Readiness Leadership Team or MRLT. This team worked with the session (including the ordained pastors) and on behalf of the session to get the church started on the missional path.

It would be nice to be able to describe a clear step-by-step process of how to do this. We on the MRLT or on the session certainly would have liked to have had such a process handed to us. But that is not the nature of the major cultural shifts which are now starting to happen within established North American Christianity. The dilemma we faced was how to get started so that the effort didn’t die either from missteps or the active resistance of people who are frightened of change.

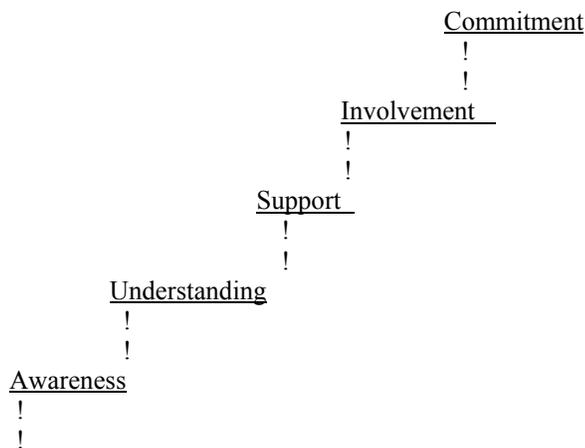
The session engaged Dr. Alan Roxburgh as a consultant to provide us with some of these practical processes to help us get started. Even here, the MRLT worked closely with him to adapt these approaches to the situation at CHPC, and sometimes we were just feeling our way as we took each step. Thus, we started with Dr. Roxburgh by asking him to do a series of weekend training seminars/workshops for our leadership and congregation. We quickly realized that before making any changes we needed to have as many people as

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possible understanding and wrestling with this new idea of “missional church” and what that could mean for College Hill Presbyterian. It turned out that this fit naturally with a change model that Dr. Roxburgh shared with us, as illustrated below:

### Transition Model



- Awareness – I know what it is
- Understanding – I know what it means
- Support – I think it should be done
- Involvement – I want to do it personally
- Commitment – I will do it even if nobody else does

Dr. Roxburgh explained that people must go through all the steps without skipping any, and that it takes a typical organization about 3 to 5 years for most of the people to go through all the steps for a major change. He also explained that it only takes 10-15% of the organization’s population to be committed to make the change self-sustaining.

As a result of these models, and studying recommended books on becoming missional, the MRLT decided to recommend to the session that we work with Dr. Roxburgh in two phases. The first phase would focus on building awareness and understanding by inviting the leadership and congregation to attend the teaching seminars by Dr. Roxburgh. Five of these were scheduled through the Summer and Fall of 2002.

After the session assessed the impact of these seminars, which many on the session found were positively received and created excitement about the possible future of CHPC, the second phase was initiated.

In this phase, 4-6 fast moving teams would be established to tackle the biggest, most important issues and challenges facing the church. Dr. Roxburgh would guide these teams through a specific process to keep them from falling into old behaviors and traps that would block breakthrough thinking. These teams were called Missional Action Teams, or MAT’s, and they would largely function outside of the established structures and

systems, although they were directly accountable to the session. The MAT process would turn out to be one of the most powerful mechanisms to both jump start change and to work through old issues and resistance in the congregation.

To begin, the session had a weekend retreat with Dr. Roxburgh in which the session identified the top several challenges facing the church. The top four were selected for the establishment of intense and fast moving Missional Action Teams (or MAT’s). Dr. Roxburgh’s guidance was that these were to be significant issues, and challenging enough that we might reasonably question whether the teams would be able to tackle them successfully. The session selected and then detailed their questions and advice concerning these areas: Vision, Leadership, Sunday Morning, and Generations. The final act at the retreat was to choose several session members to serve on a nominating/recruitment committee to staff these teams.

Charters for each team were adopted at the next session meeting, and the recruiting began for the MAT’s. Unfortunately, as the recruiting began in earnest in October, the team found that people were reluctant to make a commitment to an activity that was potentially going to require a lot of time as the holiday season approached. The kickoff was moved to the end of January, and recruiting was successfully completed by December.

Dr. Roxburgh strongly advised not having any ordained pastors on the teams. He pointed out that the laity of the church had become personally disempowered, and were overly dependent on the pastors. Certainly, talking to the pastors would be an important activity of each team, but having pastors on the teams would circumvent the process. This was uncomfortable for many leaders, but we all eventually agreed to try it. The session recruiting/nominating team developed additional MAT member guidelines. Because a perception had developed broadly in the congregation that the church was being run by a limited “in-crowd,” the team decided to avoid putting anyone on the team from the session or staff, or even the relatives of session members or staff. While this did eliminate some very capable people from consideration, we were fortunate in having many talented and excellent people in the congregation. The recruiting team came up with a list of 30-50 people for each team, which with discussion and prayer, they prioritized and contacted. Each team finally ended up with 7 to 9 members.

Dr. Roxburgh developed and guided the overall process. All teams were given notebooks, which guided their work. The overall effort was to take six months, proceeding in three increments. First, a listening phase, in which the teams were to listen to the congregation regarding their specific challenge areas. Second, an options development phase where the information from the listening would be used to create various options for

addressing the challenge area. And finally, a planning phase which would focus on one option and develop it sufficiently to enable implementation.

The MRLT liked the proposal, but was concerned that it would be difficult to go through such an intense process and then be able to communicate fully and convincingly to the session at the end of the six months. So the MRLT established bi-monthly review dates with the session, roughly corresponding to the end of each phase, for the teams to review their work to that point and receive questions. In-between these dates, the MRLT scheduled intra-MAT reviews for the teams to discuss how things were going with each other and with Dr. Roxburgh. Finally, since Dr. Roxburgh was only going to be with us once a month, the MRLT worked with him to design a coaching configuration. Two members of the MRLT became coaches to each of the teams to assist with the process and to act as a conduit back to Dr. Roxburgh with questions. The MRLT also met weekly to discuss among ourselves how the teams were proceeding and to advise each other as coaches.

To help everyone in the congregation understand what was going on, the MRLT also took on the task of ongoing communication. A letter outlining the MAT process was sent to everyone in the congregation. Periodic updates were published in the church newsletter, *In The Shadow of The Belltower*. And all members of the MRLT took the time to answer questions from anyone in the congregation.

At the kickoff meeting, Dr. Roxburgh outlined the six month process and especially the listening process. He explained that the natural tendency would be to jump immediately into action planning, but if this approach could work, these issues would have been solved already. Many capable and motivated people had tackled these before. He suggested that as followers of Christ, we all have the Holy Spirit and that by listening and dialogue we would hear the voice of the Spirit speaking to us. The task was not just to solve a problem, but to advance the church in each area toward becoming missional. In fact, the many issues inside each challenge would probably not all be solved because many would likely be contradictory. Each team's challenge was to find a new way, which would solve some of the issues but also would move the church forward toward the missional goal. The MRLT gave every team member a copy of Erwin McManus' *An Unstoppable Force* as a way of enabling them quickly to align their understanding of what it meant to be a missional church.

Finally, the MRLT outlined just two "rules" for the teams: (a) they could not decide to leave the Presbyterian Church, and (b) they could not hire or fire anyone, which is the responsibility of the Personnel Committee of the session.

Thus we started with hope and enthusiasm, but immediately ran into difficulties. We on the MRLT

believed that the process was clear, that most of the people on the teams had been to one of Dr. Roxburgh's seminars, and that the teams would hit the ground running. But the teams had a lot of questions and doubts and concerns that had to be processed before they could begin.

First, they needed frequent reassurance that their work would not be in vain. So many things had begun and faded away at the church in recent years that there was an understandable concern that "missional" was just the flavor of the day which would fade away as well. MAT members were hearing conflicting messages from individual members of the session, some of whom were very enthusiastic and some of whom clearly had a wait and see attitude. The MRLT committed to the MAT's and to itself to make sure that leadership commitments and healthy processes would be in place and functioning by the end of the MAT process to ensure none of the work would be discounted or lost.

Second, the MAT's all struggled with the listening phase. As Dr. Roxburgh predicted, everyone would have preferred to jump right into creating new ideas and problem solving and were uncomfortable with the perceived delay. The teams were not sure that they would acquire very much more information or perspective by listening to the congregation, since they saw themselves as typical members of the congregation. Eventually, some people decided to move ahead just because this was the outlined process and to trust Dr. Roxburgh. Some people decided that they could be comfortable with this as long as the team listened outside, as well as, inside the church, to the community and to the culture and even to those new non-denominational churches which had so successfully attracted our younger generations. One team decided that it would focus on "listening" to the Holy Spirit through prayer and the study of Scripture.

Third, the teams were all concerned with how to interweave their work with the other MAT's. There was a perception in the church that ministry areas had become isolated and divided silos, and there was a strong desire for the MAT process to avoid perpetuating this situation. Dr. Roxburgh strongly encouraged the teams to set this aside until later in the process, and the MRLT's plan to have periodic intra-MAT meetings seemed to help, but the teams quickly decided to have some ongoing conversations between teams as well.

Each team decided to meet once per week. As they began, they were both excited and overwhelmed.

The teams coordinated listening by setting up a location on the church campus on Sunday morning after each service and advertising to the congregation. A couple of teams outlined specific questions to prompt input. All the teams initially had to recruit people to come talk to them, since this was new for the congregation and there was a lack of understanding and trust. One team had

their team members visit all the small groups in the church and interviewed them. However, after a few weeks, the teams were fully engaged in listening and astonished at what they were hearing. Many people in the congregation felt that they were being ignored by the church leadership, their opinions uninvited and unwanted by lay and pastoral leaders alike. Others wanted to serve, but couldn't figure out how to plug in and use their God-given gifts. And the contradictory desires arose early, such as the styles of music desired in Sunday morning worship. Even those MAT members who were questioning the wisdom of listening as a way to begin, came to believe that this process was therapeutic for the church.

Just as important was the information that was gathered by "listening" to Scripture, to the Holy Spirit, to the culture, and to other churches. The Sunday Morning MAT spent considerable time understanding what was happening among young people on college campuses, and in newer non-denominational churches. The Vision MAT studied Scripture, looked at the vision statements of other churches, considered the church history and patterns of successful ministries and prayed. The Generations MAT delved into generational differences via discussions, reading, and interviews. The Leadership MAT read extensively about leadership in both church and secular books.

As the time came for the report to the session, the teams requested additional time to finish their listening and summarize their findings. An additional month was allocated. They all had a lot of negative input that was either tangential to their challenge or just isolated comments. The teams coalesced the information into key themes and shared examples of those themes. Isolated or tangential comments were not shared in the presentation to the session, only major themes and examples.

The next phase focused strongly on figuring out what to do. The teams spent many of their meetings wrestling with what they heard and learned, and how to do more than problem solve, but move toward becoming missional. It was not a simple task, since they had to keep reminding themselves that they were not charged with making everybody happy in the end. They explored a lot of different directions during this phase and went down a number of blind alleys. Interestingly, as they came to the next scheduled meeting with the session, they were already starting to converge on the direction and key option they wanted to develop more fully in the next phase. The teams again did not feel ready for the review, but instead of delaying the review with the session, the MRLT set up a working meeting where the teams reported in a more informal way, sharing their progress but also their issues and challenges. In anticipation of this different process, the MRLT set up a different meeting configuration and process. Four tables were set up which corresponded to each of the teams, and session members spread among the teams. Then after each

presentation, each table had a short discussion and developed questions for the presenters.

The final phase involved the teams developing their preferred option more fully and developing implementation ideas. The teams were committed only to the development of the ideas and recommendations, not to the implementation which the session would own. They wrestled with how detailed to get with the implementation recommendations and they were starting to become weary. The final presentations to the session were completed in September of 2003 with such quality and depth of spirituality that the session moved spontaneously to a standing ovation. The new vision touched hearts and brought tears to many eyes, the leadership ideas stirred up passion and commitment, and the new Sunday morning and generation proposals and thoughtfulness brought hope.

The new Vision statement was, College Hill Presbyterian Church: A Jubilee Community; Connecting, Serving and Celebrating.

- Connecting people to God and each other. Freeing us to understand, live and tell God's story.
- Growing generations serving side by side, empowered by servant leaders.
- Celebrating continually the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The Leadership recommendations were:

Leaders will consciously cultivate, shape and nurture a culture that lives the vision at CHPC. This will be accomplished via the following "building blocks."

- Defining the culture via: 1) Adopting core principles; 2) Implementing pastorate expectations, 3) Becoming a learning community.
- Training and equipping people to be leaders in this culture via: creating a Missional Academy.
- Reinforcing and supporting the culture via: organizational design.

The key Generations ideas were:

To become "*transgenerational*" in our way of living. *Transgenerational* goes beyond the mere presence of several generations and speaks to the interactions and relationships between the generations.

Transgenerational strategy includes: Healthy relationships across the generations; mentoring to build up the body for mission; mission side-by-side with members of other generations, shared leadership across the generations.

Sunday morning changes proposed were:

To make a deliberate choice to reach the lost we will create 3 Transgenerational "events" on Sunday morning.

1. A family service for parents and their children entitled Kaleidoscope
2. A seeker event (not a worship service) entitled Epic
3. A traditional style service, but even deeper and richer than what we have had entitled Heritage

At the next session meetings in September and October, the session moved to adopt the key directional recommendations, but not the implementation recommendations. Many of the implementation ideas were controversial, and threatened to mire down progress through debate on these items. Instead, the session delegated sorting out those details to new Implementation Teams which the session set up and then allocated session members to.

The MAT's were thanked by the session, and decommissioned. MAT members were invited to continue on with the Implementation Teams, and while some did accept this invitation, most declined in weariness and a desire to return to those ministries and family activities that has been put on hold for seven months.

The session's next challenge was to communicate the recommendations and decisions to the congregation. A small communications committee was formed that used a variety of means and media to reach the congregation. A full color report was written, published and handed out free to the congregation through the generosity of an anonymous donor. The MAT people and recommendations were highlighted at a congregational meeting. The new Vision was presented from the pulpit on a Sunday morning. Brief seminars were held to share the results of each team in more detail and to answer questions on Sundays after each service, and again on a weekday evening. This continued until Thanksgiving of 2003, at which time both the communications committee and the MRLT disbanded. The MRLT felt strongly that although they had worked together very well, it was important for them to disband to avoid becoming a "power" group in the church, and to ensure that leadership of the implementation would rest completely with the session.

### Where Are We Now?

The MAT's gave the session their recommendations in September, 2003, and the session adopted them in October, 2003. The recommendations had been communicated to the congregation in written reports and in presentations by December 2003. However, progress since then has been slower than we had hoped for a number of reasons. The Implementation Teams formed by session have found it challenging to figure out how to make the needed changes and appropriately enroll the staff and congregation. There have been some senior staff changes.

But, probably most importantly, we have begun to understand the amount of work we must do on our outdated and poorly functioning internal systems, even as

we encourage people to begin to understand the call of God on our lives individually and together as a body in reaching out to the culture around us with the good news. This seems to slow us down but is actually helping to lay a new foundation for the new ministries that we believe God will call into being for His purposes among us. The transformation will require a few more years and the movement forward continues even when it seems not to.

### Suggested Additional Reading

- Bosch, David, 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
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- Schenk, Wilbert, 1995. *Write the Vision; The Church Renewed*.
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