

MISSIONAL PASTORS



an article by Bob Cowman, D.Min.

THE CHALLENGE

It is easy to assume that all pastors understand that they are to be the lead missionaries and primary missional thinkers of their particular flock. However, for years I have struggled against the extremely prevalent idea that churches should be developed with a corporate America mindset that puts the pastor in a position of administrator and manager of structures and programs, rather than that of missionary and missional thinker. Many ministries across the U.S. have a top heavy or top-to-bottom approach to ministry. These ministries have a few people doing the work and even fewer making the decisions.

The results of this kind of ministry vary. On one hand, pastors can become extremely frustrated with their congregations because the ministry cannot grow beyond the few who do most of the work. Also, struggles for power and control can become issues in this kind of ministry. On the other hand, ministries can, at least temporarily, grow rapidly because strong leadership is directing the programs, guiding the overall direction, and making decisions. This rapid growth, however, has a downside. These ministries are generally not built to last. As the leader goes, so goes the church.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the church in the United States is not currently healthy. Every available statistic indicates a general decline and apathy in the church as a whole. We, as pastors, need to turn a corner and begin investing our resources in equipping the next generation for kingdom building. This is done by closely evaluating our ministries and adopting a missional mindset as we approach the pulpit, the classroom, and the community.

We will begin by looking at the need for missional-minded churches, then we will learn a little about what God has done at Columbus Road Church in Quincy, Illinois, and finally we will turn our attention to steps to becoming missional-minded pastors.

THE NEED FOR A MISSIONAL CHURCH

We are in the midst of a culture war within the church. Music styles, Bible versions, worship styles, church traditions and ministry methods all are weapons used to mark territory. People are choosing sides based upon a romantic ideal concerning how church should be "done." We have moved far from the biblical descriptions and prescriptions of church. Some churches spend most of their time and money running programs and facilities. Budgets are cramped with top-heavy staff and salary packages. Actual ministry dollars are a small portion of the overall budget. We have lost sight of unity, love, harmony, benevolence, prayer, teaching, preaching, and making disciples.

While ministries struggle to measure who they are by the people and things they are against, the average person is getting lost in all the confusion. Many have left the church because we refuse to teach them how Jesus can help them. My experience has taught me to stick with the basics. Our church is filled with new converts. They are looking for the truth from God's word. They are looking for ways to reach their friends and family. They do not desire to engage in debates about our philosophies of ministry and our separation from other ministries.

The need for missional churches is great. We need to hear the call back to the biblical model set out for us from the early church—pastors who fulfill their role of preaching, teaching, equipping, and praying for the flock, deacons who serve the flock by meeting physical, emotional and social needs, and congregations who are fulfilling the great commission through their unique gifts and abilities.

A move toward this type of balance provides a threat to the typical church. First, the pastors lose some control over various parts of the ministry, and this can leave many pastors uncomfortable. Deacons can also feel as if they are losing control over some parts of the ministry. Unless their roles are clearly redefined, they can feel out of place. Finally, as the congregation is mobilized to work for the Lord, they are taken from the seats to the streets. This leaves many in the congregation uncomfortable.

At Columbus Road Church we require service as a part of our membership. People understand up front that we require a commitment to Jesus Christ, which will be worked out through service to the family and the community. The New Testament church had a balance of authority and responsibility, paving the way for a fruitful synergy of three unique roles played out within a church body.

OUR STORY

Columbus Road is a place where the people are taught to think missionally. They are on mission to their community, sent out by their church. It has not always been that way. Just a few short years ago, this church was headed in an entirely different direction. The church had dwindled down to a meager seventy people. Sixty percent of the members were over seventy years of age. Yes, you read that correctly! There were only two families who still had young children at home.

God led my family and me to Columbus Road from Ohio where I served as an outreach pastor. As I considered joining this ministry, I had many discussions with the church leadership about what the ministry would look like in the future and where it would be headed. From all of that dialogue, one thing stood out—we were going to have to do it together and everyone would have to chip in.

On Sunday, May 30, 2007, the people of Columbus Road and I agreed to join in ministering together. That was the day we started to become a missional church. From that day forward, commitment, unity, service, and a focus on reaching our community have been the priority. We have leveraged all that we have each and every Sunday. As people joined, they were asked to pray, serve, give and reach.

Numbers may not be the only way to evaluate success and effectiveness, however, numbers represent people and that is definitely God's priority in ministry—people. God has brought us the numbers. We have grown to over 250 people in a very short amount of time. Many are new to the community and new to the body of Christ. It has been very exciting to see people grow in the Lord and grow to serve Him. The ministries of this church are far greater than many churches that are triple its size. This has happened primarily because we have developed the gifts and abilities of the people. Leaders are being trained, new ministries are being developed, and people are coming to Christ.

On any given Sunday, eighty percent of our people are serving in some specific capacity. This is just the opposite of most congregations. It is our goal to have one hundred percent participation weekly. So you might ask, "What is the downside?" The downside is that the pastors put in an incredible amount of time training and giving away ministry. The church is always changing because it is growing. The bottom line is....**it requires a lot of work!**

Is it worth it? You better believe it. It has brought me great joy over the last few years to be able to impact these dear people for Jesus Christ. We have seen neighbors come to Christ, people put their marriages back together, people serve the Lord with all their hearts, and the church grow. And the best is yet to come.

HOW TO BECOME MISSIONAL-MINDED

1. Begin training laymen.

I am known for having the most meetings of anyone in the world. I am constantly harassed for wanting to get together. I meet with our staff for a minimum of two hours a week. I also meet with a group of volunteer ministry leaders each Friday to plan the weekend and evaluate where we are headed in their particular ministries. Deacons and pastors are in contact on a daily basis. Most conversations are focused on the needs of the flock. Columbus Road has leadership training groups, internships, men's Bible studies, Adult Bible Fellowships, and ladies' Bible studies. All of these forums provide opportunities for leaders to train new leaders.

2. Give away ministry. Pastors are ministry hogs! There, I said it. I got it off of my chest and boy do I feel better. But now I must explain. Pastors love the ministry. They love to teach, preach, lead, counsel, plan, and give out orders. All eyes are on them. This can be a real rush and can sometimes be very damaging to ministry. Many pastors are a one-man band. They are threatened by deacons, staff, assistants, and the people to whom they have been called to train and minister.

Take a moment and ask yourself, “When was the last time I gave away a ministry that I liked doing?” The answer to this question will expose where you are in relation to being a missional thinker and doer. We can all very easily give up the things that we don’t do well or the tasks we do not like to do. However, the ability to give up the things we enjoy to see others receiving the blessings from doing the work of the ministry is a primary ability of a missional pastor.

3. Think multiplication. At Columbus Road we daily think about multiplying. We want to multiply our congregation, our leaders, our teachers, our greeters, our musicians, our servants, our deacons, our missionaries, and even our pastors. We are focused on multiplying the Kingdom for Christ’s sake. We want to focus more on people, ministry, prayer, and outreach and less on programs, facilities and problems. We strive to keep the main thing the main thing—developing committed followers of Jesus Christ who are fully devoted to Him.

WRAPPING IT UP

I am reminded of Romans 12:4-5, where it says, “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Wouldn’t it be great to be a part of a church in which everyone carried his or her own weight; where everyone was leveraging every gift and ability for the cause of Christ; where people were mobilized to reach their families, co-workers, neighbors and communities? It is possible!