

Missional Leadership: toward pastoral priorities

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The following represents a series of thoughts coming from different directions that feed into the development of a first-draft set of priorities for pastoral leadership in missional mode. If you are looking for the quick set of priorities go to the end of this article, if you want a rationale for the model, read on.

A different model needed

The calls for a radically different form of church are not new. What is needed, however, is leaders who understand the times, have a fundamental sense of the nature of the church, have the courage to act outside the accepted norms, and the ability to take people with them into this new journey.

Seminary professors, Hauerwas and Willimon paint a picture of the leadership development process as it now stands in most denominational systems:

The seminaries have produced clergy who are agents of modernity, experts in the art of congregational adaptation to the status quo, enlightened facilitators whose years of education have trained them to enable believers to detach themselves from the insights, habits, stories and structures that make the church the church.¹

Along with their critique they call for courageous leaders:

... if we live as a colony of resident aliens within a hostile environment, which, in the most subtle but deadly of ways, corrupts and co-opts us as Christians, then the pastor is called to help us gather the resources we need to be the colony of God's righteousness.²

Enabling culture-change

Edgar Schein identified several tools that are used by leaders who have successfully enabled "culture-change" within their organizational context.³ I believe these are useful insights as we seek to understand how leadership will enable the missional church.

- 1) *what leaders pay attention to and control;*
that is, those things in the life of the community to which the leader gives special attention including having a 'yes' or 'no' role in whether an idea moves forward or not. This sends a signal to the rest of the community that "this is important."
- 2) *how leaders react to critical incidents and crises;*

¹ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, **Resident Aliens: life in the Christian colony**. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. p. 116.

² *ibid.*, p. 139.

³ Edgar Schein, **Organizational Culture and Leadership**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985, pp.224-225

that is, do major incidents produce a paralyzing crisis, are they taken in stride, or are they avoided/ignored? This sends a signal to the rest of the community of what can be expected in future situations from their leader, and therefore community behaviour will change to accommodate the leader.

3) *deliberate role modeling and coaching;*

that is, those activities or ministries in which the leader takes an active role in defining how they should be developed or conducted, and then provides mechanisms for coaching others to carry on. This sends a signal to the rest of the community about how ministry should be conducted and what leadership models are valued.

4) *criteria for allocation of rewards and status;*

that is, the leader sets the pattern (defines the categories) for how “successful” ministry should be rewarded and what roles leaders of “successful” ministries might play in the wider community. This tells the community what “success” looks like to their leader.

5) *criteria for leadership selection and recruitment*

that is, the leader establishes criteria for the kind of leaders they will work with as well as the process for identifying and developing such leaders.

This material suggests that leaders need to clearly identify the focal point of the church – its missional nature – and organize their ministry around the most important dimension – the outward orientation. Leaders need to give attention to the day to day conduct of their lives, developing the characteristics of godly competence which allow for Christlike responses. Leaders need to model missional ministry priorities through active participation in face to face ministry and through coaching of other leaders involved in priority ministries. Leaders need to determine, in advance: what are missional values and how they will be encouraged and rewarded? Leaders need to determine gifts, skills and character qualities of missional leaders and seek to actively identify and develop such in their faith communities.

The task of missional leaders

A way of leading is required that takes seriously the creation of a covenant community as sign and foretaste, agent and instrument of the reign of God. In this community, direction is determined by God’s intention to create a pilgrim people who, in Lesslie Newbigin’s words, “are always on the move, hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all to be reconciled to God... therefore the nature of the Church is never to be finally defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological.”⁴

As missional leaders engage with society and their local context, they will need skills that enable them to touch the lives of seekers/pilgrims, those who form the wider “congregation” or sphere of influence. They will likewise need to invite people to enter on a journey toward a set of values and commitments – the covenant community. So,

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, **The Household of God: lectures on the nature of the Church**. London: SCM, 1953. p.18.

while there is wide interaction with seekers, there is also a call to an alternative way of life.⁵

Missional leaders would focus their time, energy and thinking on the formation of this covenant community. There are three disciplines required to develop this new secular – or world-focused – religious “order.” “Secular order” means that people commit themselves to an ordered, covenant life within the reality of their everyday calling as spouses, children, siblings, workers. The disciplines required are: *the common life, learning and mission*. The discipline of the common life requires the shaping and forming of a community around shared values, commitment and activity. The discipline of learning requires the development of biblically-informed and theologically-grounded apprentices. The discipline of mission requires the covenant community to provide alternative, gospel, responses to their dehumanized and sin-distorted social context.

Models for discussion

Several authors give us clues as to the qualities and focii of missional leaders.

Catholic missiologist Gerald Arbuckle calls for “re-founding prophets” with *memories of hope* (able to communicate the essence of Yahweh’s abiding love), with *creative imagination* (to see as others don’t see), who are *community-oriented* (they keep seeking to build redemptive communities), with *a sense of humour* (able to see joy in the incongruities of life), *full of faith, courage and prayer*, and finally, *skilled in grieving, in empathy* (they see the pain, the insecurity behind the facades).⁶

Evangelical missiologist Alan Roxburgh suggests three roles:

The pastor/poet; poets are the articulators of experience and the rememberers of tradition; the poet listens to the pain and questioning and knows these are cries that long to be connected to a Word that calls them beyond themselves into a place of belonging. “There will be no vision of a missionary people without the poet/pastor living within the congregation’s experience and giving voice to its desire for transformation and renewal.”⁷

The pastor/prophet; the prophetic imagination directs the poetic discourse of the people toward a vision of God’s purposes for them in the world at this time; addresses the hard side of discipleship where we must face the reality that in God’s kingdom we are not at the centre of the universe. The prophet speaks a Word which engenders hope out of which arises authentic missional engagement.⁸

⁵Roxburgh, “Equipping God’s People for Mission” in **Missional Church: a vision for the sending of the Church in North America**, Darrell Guder (ed.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. p. 206.

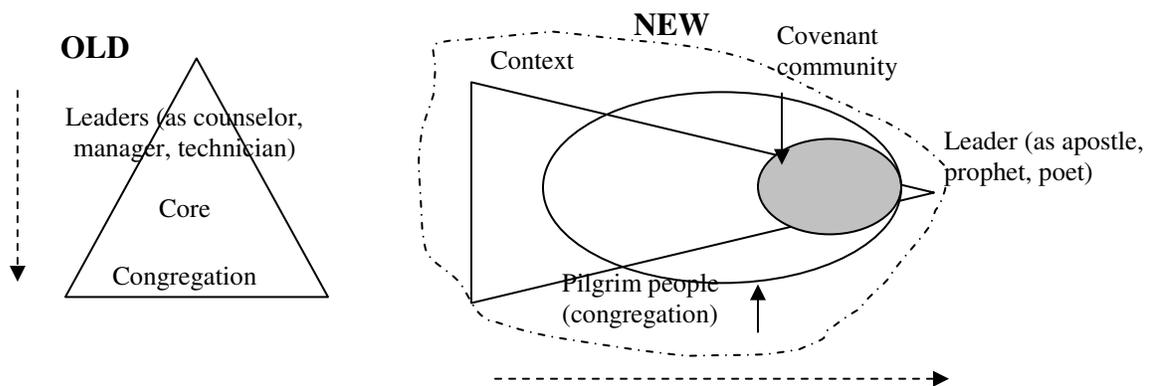
⁶ Gerald Arbuckle, **Earthing the Gospel: an inculturation handbook for pastoral workers**. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990. p. 214.

⁷ Alan Roxburgh, **The Missionary Congregation: liminality and leadership**. Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997. p. 59.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 60-61.

The pastor/apostle; pastors must lead congregations in places where old maps no longer work. Discipling and equipping require a leadership that demonstrates encounter with the culture in action, not just teaching and sending. In our present mission situation pastors must be in the world rather than in the church. “The pastor/apostle is one who forms congregations into mission groups shaped by encounters with the gospel and culture – structuring the congregations shape into forms that lead people outward into a missionary encounter.”⁹

In Roxburgh’s model, the apostle/prophet/poet leads from the front. These leaders “call into being a covenant community; second, they direct its attention out toward their context... being at the front means that the leadership lives into and incarnates the missional, covenantal future of God’s people.”¹⁰



In the parish/Christendom model, the pastor is responsible for the spiritual welfare of the whole congregation – to push them up the funnel! In the missional model the pastor is responsible for community engagement and forming the core/covenant community.

A learning frame

A learning or educational construct may be helpful to our understanding of how particular communities can be developed and shaped. As children our initial learning comes through *socialization*, that is, through our relationships within a particular community – our family. Family shapes our habits, behaviours, and attitudes. Family gives us the primary images, whether positive or negative, that will form our beliefs about how the world works and our values regarding what is important. Our network of relational socialization is expanded as we move out into the neighbourhood as preschoolers, then start school, etc.

The next learning stage is *non-formal*; we learn through doing tasks, whether play-related or small chores. Trial and error is the basic pattern for learning at this stage. We learn to complete tasks, building self-worth and competence. These tasks may involve setting the table correctly, helping with a carpentry job, or learning to ride a bike. The

⁹ Ibid., p. 62-66.

¹⁰ Roxburgh, “Equipping God’s People for Mission” in **Missional Church: a vision for the sending of the Church in North America**, Darrell Guder (ed.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

people around us give feedback on our practical experiments, affirming (or not) our skills, gifts and abilities.

The third learning stage is *formal*; we learn through structured teaching. Formal learning gives us knowledge, theory and frames to help us organize and reconstrue our socialized and non-formal learning. Structured learning of information and categories gives us access to new ways of understanding where our beliefs, values, habits and behaviours come from. Formal learning can provide tools for acquiring new frameworks and practices, as well as setting aside no longer appropriate beliefs or practices.

It is obvious that all three modes of learning were instrumental in our present formation and are therefore necessary as we seek to shape new communities of faith. Our problem as evangelicals is that we have primarily used formal teaching as our method for passing on the faith. Fellowship or koinonia has not been fully understood or utilized as the locus of socialized learning – where beliefs and habits are “caught rather than taught.” With the renewed focus on gift-based ministry we are finally understanding something of the non-formal mode, but even here we have tended to overlook the apprenticeship function.

As the missional church seeks to form “a called-out” faith community to engage in mission in their social context, this learning frame needs to be part of the missional pastor’s toolbox. Each learning mode needs to inform each pastoral priority.

Toward priorities for the missional pastor

What principles can be derived as we seek to develop a job description for the missional pastor?

1. Telling the Jesus Story – poet

Missional pastors must give their attention to understanding, experiencing and communicating the story of God’s plan for healing and restoring our personal and social environments.

- personal spiritual development – devotional life
- understanding the Jesus story – study
- understanding the people of your community – research and conversation
- utilizing effective communication models for Christ-followers and for the wider community – research, conversation and experimentation

2. Forming the Community – prophet

Missional pastors must develop committed communities of faithful, growing Christ-followers who understand their place as of agents of Spirit-guided transformation.

- giving shape to the community’s worship environment
- forming a community of missionally-committed individuals and families
- modeling/apprenticing and multiplying wholistic change-agents (disciples)
- modeling and multiplying support and accountability groups

3. Living the Story – apostle

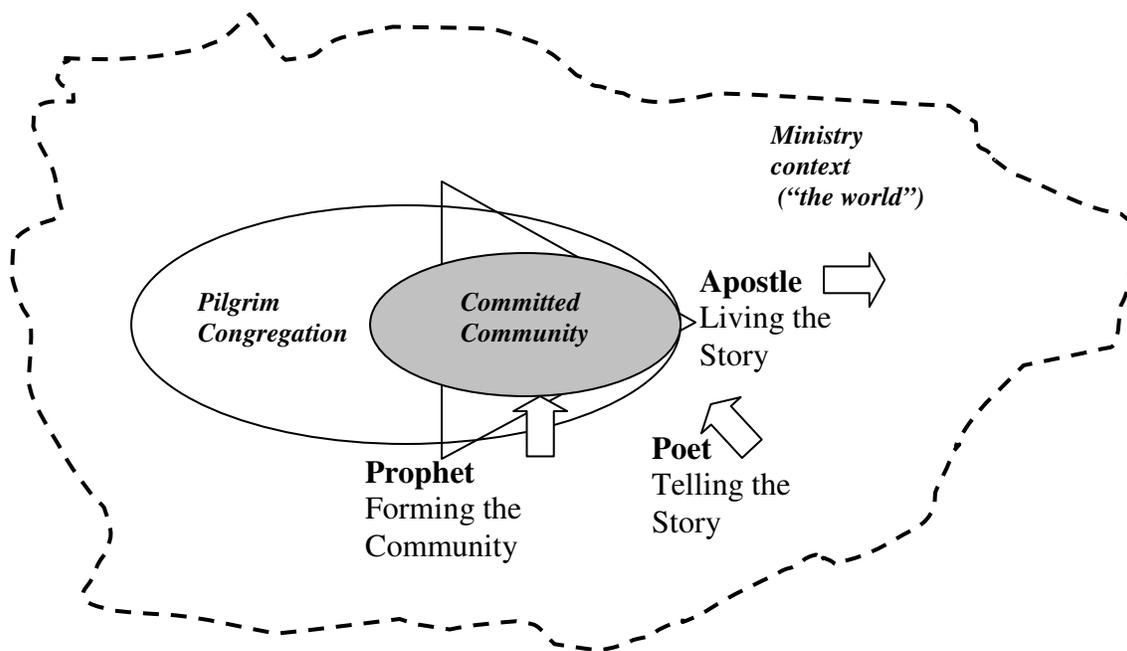
Missional pastors must lead their congregations into authentic encounter with the lives of those who still need to know the Jesus story.

- Modeling authentic engagement with your community context
- Apprenticing learners in the context of ministry engagement
- Multiplying ministry engagement through apprenticed leaders
- Giving direction to a team of co-labourers based on emergent missional authority

Leading from the front

This set of priorities essentially calls for a three-way division of time and energy. Telling the Story and Forming the Community are tasks focused upon the faith community, while Living the Story is an outward-focused task. But Living the Story is the lead priority.

A leadership image for the kingdom-outpost, missional church



Crafting a Job Description

In this model, one-third of the missional pastor's time and energy is focused upon **hands-on ministry engagement** with real human needs in the community. The pastor must develop a long-term ministry response in an area that matches passion and giftings. This ministry involvement serves as both model and inspiration for the missional congregation. Authority in this model is *earned* rather than *ascribed*.

Another third of time and energy is focused upon forming a **“called-out” community**. This group of individuals and families who have risen to the call to disciplined Christian living is the primary *pastoral* responsibility of the missional pastor. Worship is designed

around enabling these earnest followers into authentic encounter with God. Vision, policy and decision-making for the congregation is rooted in this committed community.

The ongoing formation of the pastor's ability to **tell the story of Jesus** to both seekers and disciples focuses the third priority of the missional pastor. Study of scripture and society coupled with practicing the spiritual disciplines enables the pastor to connect the Word to people lives and to model Christlikeness for the community.

This picture suggests that caring for the fringe community of God-seekers (the pilgrim congregation) is not a priority role of the missional pastor. The missional pastor's task is to lead the way into engagement with the community and to form the character of the committed community. Many in the pilgrim congregation are people who have come into the fellowship through the influence of ministries lead by the core/committed community; they will naturally continue to be nurtured by these leaders. They are attracted to the transformed character of the missionally-engaged leaders. In existing churches which care for a whole group of "Christian hangers-on," undue attention should not be given them by the missional pastor. Rather than "seeking to engage them" the energy of the missional pastor and the committed community should be attractional.

As those with authentic, mission-shaped authority cultivate missional practices in the congregation, they enable the development of a missional identity. These leaders say with Paul, "live according to the pattern we gave you" (Phil 3:17) and "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). *The place of leadership is to be at the front of the community, living out the implications and actions of the missional people of God, so all can see what it looks like to be the people of God* (Missional Church, p.186).

By Dan Sheffield '05

Missional Leadership Reading List

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