MISSIONAL CHURCH PRIMER
for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Fall 2007

"Missional" has been the subject of much conversation since publication of Missional Church in 1998. A Google search for "missional blog" returned half a million hits. While widely used, "missional" is not commonly understood. Alan Roxburgh writes with a tinge of sarcasm:

> ["Missional"] is used to describe everything from evangelism to reorganization. . . . In a very brief period of time a new form of language entered the common conversation of the church... 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 (Roxburgh 2004, 2).

This "missional primer" is part of the Long Range Planning Committee's work to "develop missional ethos and practice in denominational life." It is written to help EPC leaders understand the roots of the missional church discussion, the breadth of its meaning and its implications for the church both locally and denominationally.

Missional Church and the Church Growth Movement

The missional church discussion traces its source to the work of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. During a period spanning thirty-eight years beginning in the 1930's Newbigin was a missionary of the Church of Scotland serving in South India. He was general secretary of the International Missionary Council at the time of its integration with the World Council of Churches in 1961 (for an extensive biography see Wainright 2000). Retiring to his native England in the mid-1970's, Newbigin found that his country's attitude toward Christianity was drastically different. English people in the 1970's were generally disinterested in the gospel in spite of their Christian heritage. Newbigin spent the rest of his life answering the question "Can the West be converted?" Since his death in 1998, Newbigin's work has been carried on in the United States by the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), and recently by means of Allelon, a "Movement of Missional Leaders" (see www.allelon.org).

The EPC is more familiar with the work of Donald McGavran, father of the Church Growth Movement. Both Newbigin and McGavran ministered in India at the same time, made

significant contributions to the study and practice of missions, but came from different traditions and their thinking took different courses. In the 21st Century there has been an unusual and fruitful confluence of the two streams.

Figure 1 shows the course of the two streams of thought flowing from Newbigin and McGavran. The dotted line represents the diversification of church growth thinking since the 1990's, progressing to a point where it is so varied to be legitimately called "post church growth." Post church growth / evangelical-missional writers have borrowed extensively from the Newbigin stream and use the term "missional" in a friendly but pointed critique of the Church Growth Movement. In doing so, they signal that times have significantly changed, that "church growth" and "church health" have made their contributions and it is time to move beyond (e.g., Stetzer and Putman, Driscoll, Minatrea). The diagram shows the McGavran stream splitting off in two different directions in the twenty-first century—emerging, and "evangelical/missional." The chart incorporates Mark Driscoll's distinction between emerging evangelical and emergent liberal (Driscoll 2006). The missional discussion in the EPC is in the "evangelical-missional" branch, borrowing significant themes from the GOCN stream while keeping McGavran's evangelical orientation and concern for church planting.

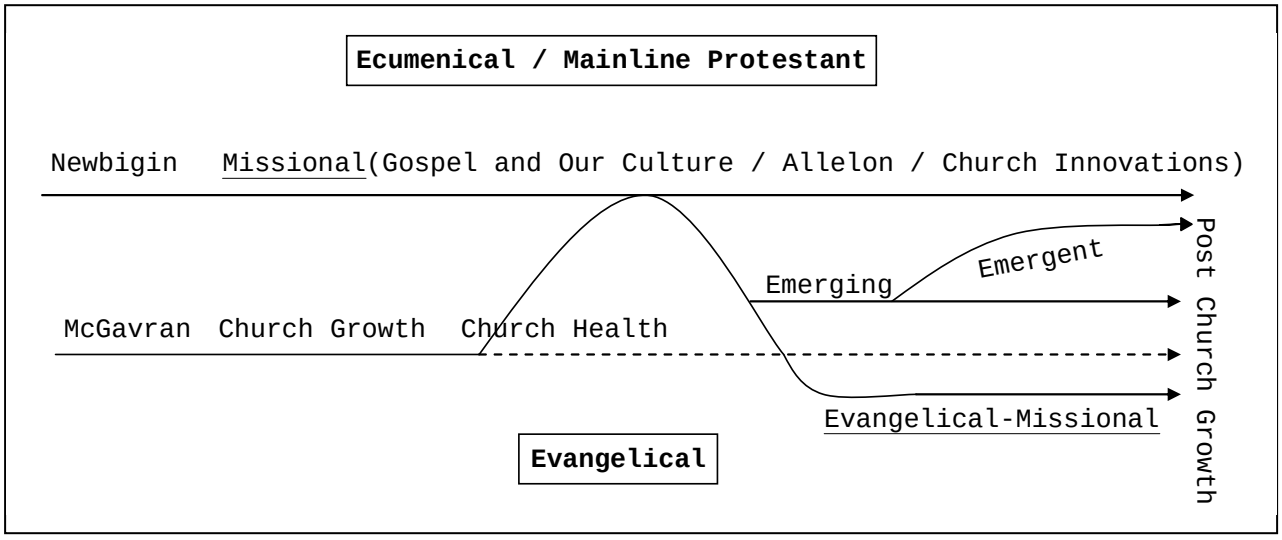

Figure 1. Two main streams of missional thinking

Missional church concepts will work themselves out differently in Ecumenical/Mainline and Evangelical streams. Different courses are inevitable because of important differences in

core beliefs about the nature of the Scripture, the identity of Christ, the exclusivity of salvation, the nature of the gospel, and the nature of the kingdom of God as it relates to God's work in the world beyond the church. These underlying differences help understand the confusing array of understandings of "missional church" and the importance of knowing the source of the waters in which we are paddling. That being said, the missional discussion is bringing about a remarkable resonance between people from different streams and a cross-fertilization of ideas that is unique in the lifetime of many evangelicals.

Figure 2 is a more detailed look at the roots of the missional church discussion in the EPC. Elmer Towns (McIntosh 2004, 48-50) described three phases of the Church Growth Movement (shown on the left side of figure 2). The first was the pioneer phase, beginning with the 1955 publication of Donald McGavran's book The Bridges of God. The pioneer phase was a movement primarily in the academy, centered around Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California) that spilled over into the church as more and more leaders became interested and took classes and seminars. After 1985 the Church Growth Movement divided into two distinct streams, one focused internationally and the other concerned with North America. At about the same time the Church Growth Movement began to swing away from the academies and toward practitioners. People who had developed large churches (e.g., Bill Hybels and Rick Warren) began to teach others their principles. Along with the move from pioneers to practitioners came a significant shift in vocabulary from growth to church health and church planting, signaled by Robert Logan's Beyond Church Growth. Towns describes the current stage of the Church Growth Movement as having broadened beyond the practitioner stage to the "Babel stage," (the dashed line in Figure 1) in which:

> Today each Church Growth authority seems to have a different niche, and each one seems to emphasize different principles or follow different methods. . . Babel means each authority and/or group now looks to itself and its interpretation of data to certify the true meaning of Church Growth. (Towns in McIntosh 2004, 49-50)

What Towns describes is remarkably similar, to what Alan Roxburgh has observed in the rapid spread and diverse meanings of the term "missional."

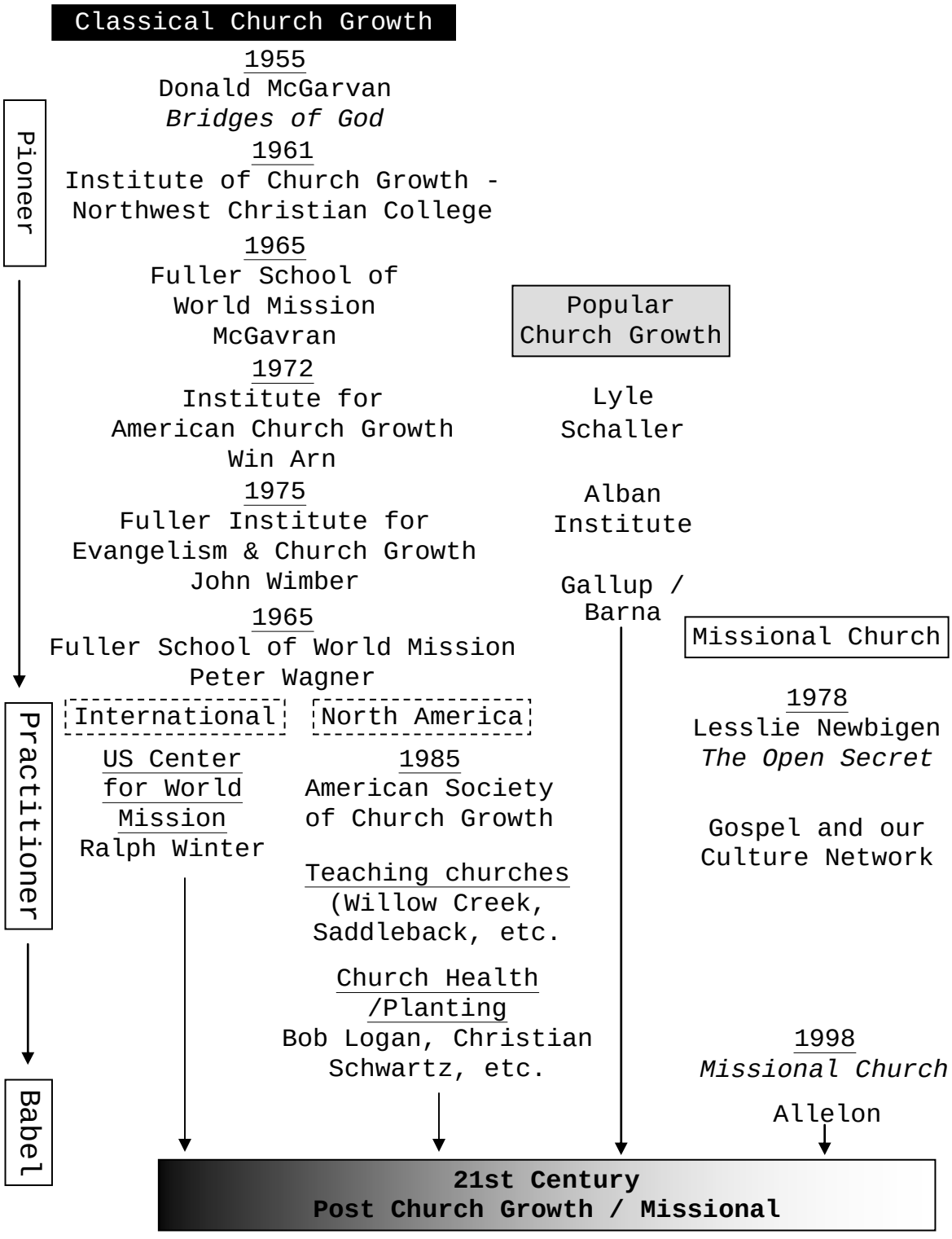

Figure 2. Development of the Church Growth Movement

The 1960's saw the emergence of a stream of thought labeled "popular church growth" which was motivated by the decline in mainline Protestant churches and spurred research intended to help turn around struggling churches (McIntosh 2004, 19). Arrows from all the streams lead into the post church growth/missional discussion in the 21st century. Today's discussion of missional church cuts across evangelical and mainline divides. The box is shaded from dark to light, corresponding to the three streams feeding into it and representing the various meanings and practices that different traditions bring to the missional church discussion.

Toward a Meaning of Missional Church

The kingdom of God is central to Jesus' preaching and teaching. However, he did not give a precise definition in the way those schooled Western thought categories prefer. Instead, Jesus used parable and demonstration. Like the concept of the kingdom of God, missional church has a broad meaning that cannot be captured in a simple, abbreviated definition. One such abbreviated understanding says "missional church = emerging church." More accurately, "missional church > emerging (or emergent) church." Another abbreviated understanding is "missional church = a mission-minded church." Having an evangelistic outreach or supporting missionaries around the world does not by itself mean a church is missional. The missional discussion cuts deeper, understanding that missions is not only something the church does but also and primarily something that it is. A missional church is not content to be a sending church. It understands itself as a sent church.

If a succinct definition is more harmful than helpful, how then do we understand what a missional church is? A helpful way forward, suggested by Alan Roxburgh, is to explore three missional themes: (1) Western society as mission field, (2) mission is about the *missio Dei*, and (3) church as a contrast community (Roxburgh 2007, 6-8).

1. Western society as a mission field

Western society has reeled with significant changes over the last century, with the pace of those changes accelerating rapidly in the last half century. There is growing consensus among evangelical, moderate, and liberal traditions that the era of Christendom in the West has either ended or is coming to an end. One consequence of that significant worldview shift is that the

church is no longer in a central place of influence and power and must relate to Western culture as an outsider.

Christendom is a synthesis between church and state that began to emerge with official toleration of Christianity under the Roman emperor Constantine (Edict of Milan, A.D. 314). The synthesis was complete with the coronation of Otto I as the Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope John XII in A.D. 962. Craig Carter describes Christendom as:

> the concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to Christian faith...The essence of the idea is the assertion that Western civilization is Christian (Carter 2007, 6).

In Europe, the synthesis took a legal form, resulting in the state church. In the United States there was formal separation of church and state, but a "functional Christendom" emerged which has exhibited remarkable staying power (Guder 1998, 49).

With the emergence of Christendom in the early centuries, Christianity moved from one of many religions to the dominant religion in Western civilization. In Christendom, structures of both state and church supported Christian doctrine and morality. Tim Keller characterizes the situation as one in which "though people were Christianized by the culture they were not regenerated or converted with the Gospel. The church's job was then to challenge persons into a vital, living relation with Christ" (Keller 2001, 1).

Seeds for undoing the synthesis of church and state were sown in the 17th Century Enlightenment with its assertion that the individual person is autonomous and sovereign. Enlightenment rationalism called into question the very existence of God, the miraculous elements of the biblical story, emphasized the human element of the Scriptures and challenged their nature and authority as the Word of God. The ongoing process of secularization gradually pushed religion into the private realm. In contemporary North America and Europe, patterns of immigration have brought world religions side-by-side with Christianity. Tolerance of religions has moved from allowing freedom to practice one's faith to considering the various truth claims of all faiths to have equal validity.

So, the church in North America finds itself in a time of transition. It is not gradual transition, but fast-paced, radical change in which tools that worked before no longer do the job. Inherited road maps no longer describe the cultural landscape. In such a time of disorientation and confusion people tend to have one of two natural reactions: (1) resisting the change and

trying to recover what has been lost, or (2) turning away from what has been lost for the promise of a new, preferred future (Roxburgh 2005, 43). Those who react by "resisting and recovering" seek ways for the church to regain its place at the center. With radically shifting cultural attitudes, that is a futile objective. Those who react by "turning away" cut ties with the past and seek to set up something completely new. The more challenging way forward, because it resists the two natural reactions, recognizes, embraces, and does not rush the time of being in transition.

A time of significant transition does not have to be a time of threat–-it can be a time of opportunity. God has been at work in his people in remarkable ways during other times of radical transition. Such times occurred during the Exodus as God shaped a covenant nation; during Israel's Babylonian exile as it sorted out what it meant to be God's people without a land, a Davidic king, and a temple; and during the days the early church moved from a Hebrew to a Roman / Hellenistic world. In each of those periods, and in others throughout church history, God was at work forming his people to accomplish his purposes in a new environment.

In one sense, seeing Western society as a mission field is nothing new. At least one EPC congregation has had a sign in place for many years visible to those leaving the parking lot: "You are now entering the mission field." Eric Reed describes "going missional" as essentially "recovering an old ethic" with a focus on individuals, local churches, and the networks they create doing mission rather than simply supporting mission (Reed 2007, 20). Viewed this way, a missional church is not really something new but recaptures something quite old and biblical rooted in the apostolic era.

In another sense, seeing Western society as a mission field is a new thing because of the nature of societal changes. Church structures in North America originated within the cultural atmosphere of a functional Christendom. It is nothing new for the evangelical church to organize itself to reach unbelievers—that is part of the positive heritage of the Church Growth Movement. But if Western society is a post-Christendom mission field, then the starting point for engagement has radically changed. A missional church in Western society has to rethink its relationship to its host culture. Knowledge of the biblical narrative is no longer a given when talking with those not following Christ. A foundation has to be laid before someone can hear and understand a call to commit his or her life to Christ.

Craig Carter poses the question, "What would it mean frankly to acknowledge Western culture as dominated by polytheistic paganism and to see Christianity as an odd little group of

people who actually take Jesus seriously, as opposed to the majority of the culture that does not?" (Carter 2006, 94-95). This is something new for Western Christians who have been in a culture that generally supported their beliefs, structures, and ethics. It something new for the church in the U.S. to think of itself as a cross-cultural mission outpost to its own culture instead of finding ways to evangelize those who are like us. Seeing itself as a mission outpost means moving from emphasizing programs that attract to ministering incarnationally–going to the culture, learning its language and living Christianly and winsomely in it. Roxburgh contends:

> We must fundamentally rethink the frameworks and paradigms that have shaped the *come-and-see* church over the last half-century. The basic stance of denominations and local churches must be transformed to that of missionaries in their own culture. This requires more than adjustment; it calls for a new kind of church" (Roxburgh 2007, 6).

A missional church is not content with being a sending church. It understands itself as a sent church. Missional church members will start thinking of themselves as "kingdom people" instead of "church people." Kingdom people are missional people.

> Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world. (Howard Snyder quoted in Bosch 1991, 378)

2. The Missio Dei

Missio Dei, "the mission of God," means that mission is not primarily something the church does but something the church is. It means that mission permeates all of the church's life rather than being one of many good programs that the church selects, funds, implements and accomplishes. A missional church perceives itself in a God-centered way, understanding that God is a "missionary" or "sending" God and that his church, as his creation and participating in his life is at the core of its being, a missionary church.

The term *missio Dei* is not found in Scripture and has only been used since the 1930's. We should ask the same question of the term *missio Dei* that we ask of the term "Trinity." Does the term describe what the Bible teaches? Christopher J.H. Wright makes a significant contribution to the answer in his book The Mission of God. The book is not an attempt to formulate another "biblical basis for mission" by amassing proof texts. Rather, he demonstrates

convincingly that the unfolding story of the Bible is both "Messiah focused and mission generating" (i.e., messianic and missional). He says of the *missio Dei:*

> Mission is not ours; mission is God's. Certainly, the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get involved in. . . .[It] is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world." (Wright 2006, 62; emphasis added).

The world created by the Triune God fell into sin. What was full, unhindered fellowship with God and with each other in the Garden of Eden became alienation. From that point forward, the Bible records the story of God's movement toward the world he created, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18-21). He chose and sent people like Abraham and Moses to establish a covenant people. He sent a series of prophets to remind his people of their covenant responsibilities. In a supreme act of love (Rom 5:8) he sent Jesus, God the Son, to be the sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus promised his disciples that the Father would send them the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Jesus sent his disciples into the world as the Father had sent him (John 20:21) to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8), making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching people obey what he had taught (Matt 28:18-20).

Believers "participate in the divine nature "(2 Pet 1:4). Corporately, the church participates in the *missio Dei* as an expression of that divine nature as a chosen people and as a sent people, being both recipients of and participants in God's ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Jesus said "as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). Once again in the words of Christopher J.H. Wright, "Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission" (Wright 2006, 62).

Participating in the *missio Dei* calls the church to a radical dependence and obedience. The church has no mission apart from God's mission. The *missio Dei* calls the church to participate in the life of the Trinity in worship and service (1 Peter 2:9), living out the truth of being in union with Christ (John 15:5; 17:20, 21; Larger Catechism #65, 66). A missional church thinks relationally first rather than organizationally – living together in communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, discerning where he is moving and moving with him

3. Church as a contrast community

A third missional theme draws attention to the extent individualism saturates Western culture. This missional theme is related to the other two. If Western society is a mission field, the church must be a contrast community. This community is not an end in itself but a means to the end of the mission of God.

The Bible reveals God's intention to form a people and the remarkable ways in which he is bringing his intention to pass. His aim is not to have a collection of individuals, but a "people of God, the assembly and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (Clowney 1995, 28). God's intent is to form a people from the diversity of nations on the earth to be one new humanity under one King, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 5:9, 10; Eph 1:9, 10; 2:14-18). That new humanity is to live in a way that demonstrates the reign of Christ and draw others to live under that reign.

The missional church as a contrast community is a people chosen by God, gathered from the world, living under the redemptive reign of God in such a way that it winsomely demonstrates the way of life of God's kingdom. The church is a contrast community by demonstrating how to live the way of peace, reconciliation and fellowship rather than a way of individual self-promotion and competition. It shows the way of generosity and hospitality instead of greed-inspired financial gain at the expense of others. The contrast community is committed to continually being schooled in the Scriptures and learning from those who have gone before and who surround us now. The church as a contrast community worships the true God, prays, shares the Lord's supper, and extends hospitality to outsiders. A missional church does not become ingrown by pursuing community as an end in itself,. Because it participates in God's nature and God's mission, it experiences "communitas," the connection and bonding that people experience when doing a significant task together or being stretched well beyond their comfort zone together.

If indeed the era of Christendom is over or ending, and the structures of society no longer support Christian faith and ethics, then living as a contrast community is a biblical and logical way forward. It is the way the church lived in the first centuries.

Missionally Evangelical and Presbyterian

With the three missional themes in mind, the EPC's Long Range Planning Committee has adopted a working definition of a missional church and a missional denomination:

A missional church is a church:

1. That is grounded in the Scriptures and historic Christian orthodoxy and so committed to the primacy of the Great Commission.
2. That believes that the United States has become post-Christian and is now a mission field.
3. That believes that it has been planted by God in its own community to effectively reach those around them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. That is committed to reproducing a community of authentic disciples of Jesus Christ.
5. That is continually in the process of equipping its members to be missionaries sent by God to live and proclaim the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus in their own world and to the ends of the earth.
6 That is constantly re-examining itself as to whether it is merely doing maintenance of existing ministries and members, or whether or not it is effectively doing the mission of reaching its own community with the reign of God through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.
7. That perceives that the essence of these fundamental attributes is the essence of its own existence.

A missional denomination is a denomination:

1. That believes the location of ministry is the local church.
2. That is made up of local congregations committed to be missional.
3. That is constantly re-examines itself as to whether or not its polity, structures and programs are serving or inhibiting a missional mindset.

This working definition puts the EPC in the evangelical-missional / post church growth stream (see figure 1). It contains a strong statement about a missional church being grounded in the Scripture and committed to historic Christian orthodoxy. The EPC's working definition plays one of the missional themes dominantly: Western society as a mission field. It identifies U.S. society as a mission field and calls the church to equip its members to "effectively reach those in their community." It deliberately includes the understanding that the North American prominence in the broader missional church discussion will not diminish the EPC's historic and ongoing commitment to world missions. The *missio Dei* theme is heard in the statement that the

church "perceives that the essence of these fundamental attributes is the essence of its own existence." The third missional theme is imbedded in the phrase, "reproducing a community of authentic disciples of Jesus Christ."

In seeking to develop missional ethos and practice, the EPC is seeking to be missionally evangelical and Presbyterian (a phrase suggested by former EPC Stated Clerk Mike Glodo). In doing so, the EPC is not simply adopting the "latest thing" in order to stay current. From its founding, the EPC has understood itself as "Reformed in doctrine, Presbyterian in government, and evangelical in spirit." By seeking to become missionally evangelical and Presbyterian the EPC is building on its foundation, being faithful to the Reformed practice of being the "church reformed and always being reformed" in the light of God's word. The EPC, by being missionally evangelical and Presbyterian is seeking to understand itself as an evangelical and Presbyterian body in light of Scripture and in a new relationship to Western society. Table 1 illustrates this understanding by showing the development of thought from church growth in the 1980's through church health in the 1990's, and drawing from missional church thinking in the Newbigin stream (see figure 1). The chart is intentionally broad, in order to be a means of understanding the larger picture. It does not do justice to the subtleties and shades of meaning in each perspective. The similarities between "missional" and "missionally evangelical and reformed" are many. The differences result from being in the evangelical/missional stream (figure 1).

As the EPC continues "developing missional ethos and practice in denominational life" it will have to grapple with its changed relationship to church growth and church health thinking, which have been part of its ethos in church planting and church revitalization. Characteristics of being missionally evangelical and Reformed flow from its overarching God-centered perspective. On the one hand, it sounds like this shift in thinking should be easy. Who would argue against a God-centered orientation to ministry? But, on the other hand, it will challenge our understanding of the gospel, realizing that the gospel is not only about calling people to a faith commitment but also about proclaiming the already-begun kingdom of God and appreciating, as John Piper puts it, that "God is the gospel." If this is biblical, our thinking may need to change. Christopher J.H. Wright's work, The Mission of God is highly recommended to help understand the messianic and missional nature of the Bible.

Table 1. Development of thought from church growth to "missionally evangelical and Presbyterian"[1]

	Church Growth	***Church Health***	***Missional***	***Missionally Evangelical and Presbyterian***
Overall Perspective	Human-centered Focus on methodology Draws signify-cantly on contributions of sociology and organizational development Great Commission	Church-centered Focus on methodology Use of self studies to determine state of health and strategize accordingly Great commandment.	God-centered Methodology grows out of biblical understanding of missionary nature of God and the church. Great Commandment.	God-centered Methodology grows out of biblical understanding of missionary nature of God and the church. Great Commandment and Great Commission
Beginning Questions	What factors cause / hinder church growth?	What consti-tutes a healthy church?	What is the gospel?	What is the gospel?
Growth	Intentional growth – understanding principles and applying methodology Attractional – members invite.	A healthy church grows naturally. Members as ministers utilizing spiritual gifts.	*Missio Dei* Incarnational – members as missionaries participating in God's work in their community.	*Missio Dei* Incarnational or attractional – members as missionaries equipped & re-leased to serve. Church planting

[1] Table 1 draws from Van Rheenen 2006, 2; Stetzer and David Putman 2006, 48-50; Driscoll 2006, 16-21, and the EPC Long Range Planning Committee working definition of missional church.

	Church Growth	***Church Health***	***Missional***	***Missionally Evangelical and Presbyterian***
Nature of church community	Gospel spreads most rapidly in homogeneous people groups A safe place that welcomes non-believers into the church.	Holistic small groups	Contrast communiity of disciples living under the reign of Christ sent by God in mission to their world. Inclusiveness.	Contrast community of disciples living under the reign of Christ sent by God in mission to their world. Homogeneous or inclusive
Relation to culture	Christendom orientation Adopt cultural forms within biblical limits.	Christendom orientation. Focus on needs and questions of non Christians.	Post-Christendom. Ministering from the margins. Contrast and transformation	Post-Christendom. Ministering from the margins. Contrast and transformation
Orientation toward social action	Priority of evangelism and church planting; social action is secondary.	Healthy churches reach out beyond themselves to those in need.	The Gospel, evangelism, and social action cannot be separated.	Evangelism and church planting are primary but should not be separated from social action.
Leadership	Visionary leadership. Leadership and organizational models drawn from biblical and corporate models.	Leaders equip and empower members for ministry corresponding to their gifts.	Leaders cultivate an environment for church to discern its role in *missio Dei*, equip members and organize ministry.	Leaders cultivate an environment for church to discern its role in *missio Dei*, equip members and organize ministry.
Worship	Sunday worship for believers replaced by seeker sensitive evangelism in a style influenced by the target group.	Spirit-inspired worship not driven by a particular style target group. The shared experience of God's presence	Worship as public witness, blending ancient forms and current local cultural styles	God centered, Spirit-inspired worship based on the word of God. Welcoming and sensitive to unbelievers, blending ancient forms and current local cultural styles

A short-sighted response to all this would be, “Missional means we need to adjust our programs so we can reach more people.” That response changes the surface appearance but does little to cultivate “missional ethos and practice.” Conversations in churches and presbyteries need to probe much deeper, freshly examining their identity as a people of God in light of Scripture. As our understanding grows, and if we become convicted that our identity has been formed more by Western culture than by what God has revealed in his Word, we may find ourselves drawn to continue our corporate repentance and renewal which began at the 2007 General Assembly. An understanding of missional themes could mean changing the way we measure success—less in terms of numbers and programs that attract people into the church and more in terms of equipping individuals to live as a community of authentic disciples, seeing beyond themselves and penetrating society. Increased numbers will often be a byproduct of this kind of authentic discipleship, but it is not be the goal.

The EPC will be challenged to apply missional thinking to leadership development. The EPC puts a high priority on an educated clergy. If missional thinking takes hold, the question, “What kind of education?” must be faced and our models may need to change. Our conception of leadership, which draws much from the church growth stream, may need move from an emphasis on a leader casting vision to leading by cultivating an environment in which the body of Christ understands itself as a mission outpost, lives in a way that demonstrates God’s kingdom, and participates with God in his mission to their community and the world.

Conclusion

The EPC began its missional discussion in 2005. Focus groups have been conducted in presbyteries and at two General Assembly meetings. The Long Range Planning Committee identified its goal as “developing missional ethos and practice in denominational life” and published a White Paper describing its direction (Evangelical Presbyterian Church 2006, *Stronger Future*). As of this writing, four of the EPC’s eight presbyteries have identified themselves as taking steps toward becoming missional denominational bodies.

After its General Assembly meeting in 2007 the Evangelical Presbyterian Church embarked on a five year transitional period in which it will likely be receiving a significant number of new churches. The decision to do so had its roots in discovering others of evangelical and Reformed convictions in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (the New Wineskin Association

of Churches) who were also seeking what it means to be missional and Presbyterian in the 21st Century. There is a sense among EPC denominational leadership that this transitional time will not simply be one of becoming larger, but also a time in which the EPC will be formed by God into something different. Some things are not open for change. The Essentials of Faith are not negotiable. We will continue to be a confessional people, believing that the Westminster Confession of Faith contains the system of doctrine taught in the Scripture. We believe that the Scriptures teach us to be a connectional people and that the Lord has chosen to govern his people through a plurality of Elders. But we must ask ourselves whether the way we have organized ourselves around these principles is consistent with being *missionally* Reformed and Presbyterian. Has our connectionalism emphasized regulation at the expense of mission? Are there ways our church government can better further the mission of God? Can we live our connectionalism better so that we have true relational accountability, equipping, and encouragement? Sessions and presbyteries are encouraged enter a time of corporate self-examination, exploring these missional themes and discerning together what it means to be missionally evangelical and Presbyterian.

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