

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY MADE SIMPLE

HIRSCH, CARTER, VANDERSTELT, etc.



MyVerge
my.vergenetwork.org

Missional Community

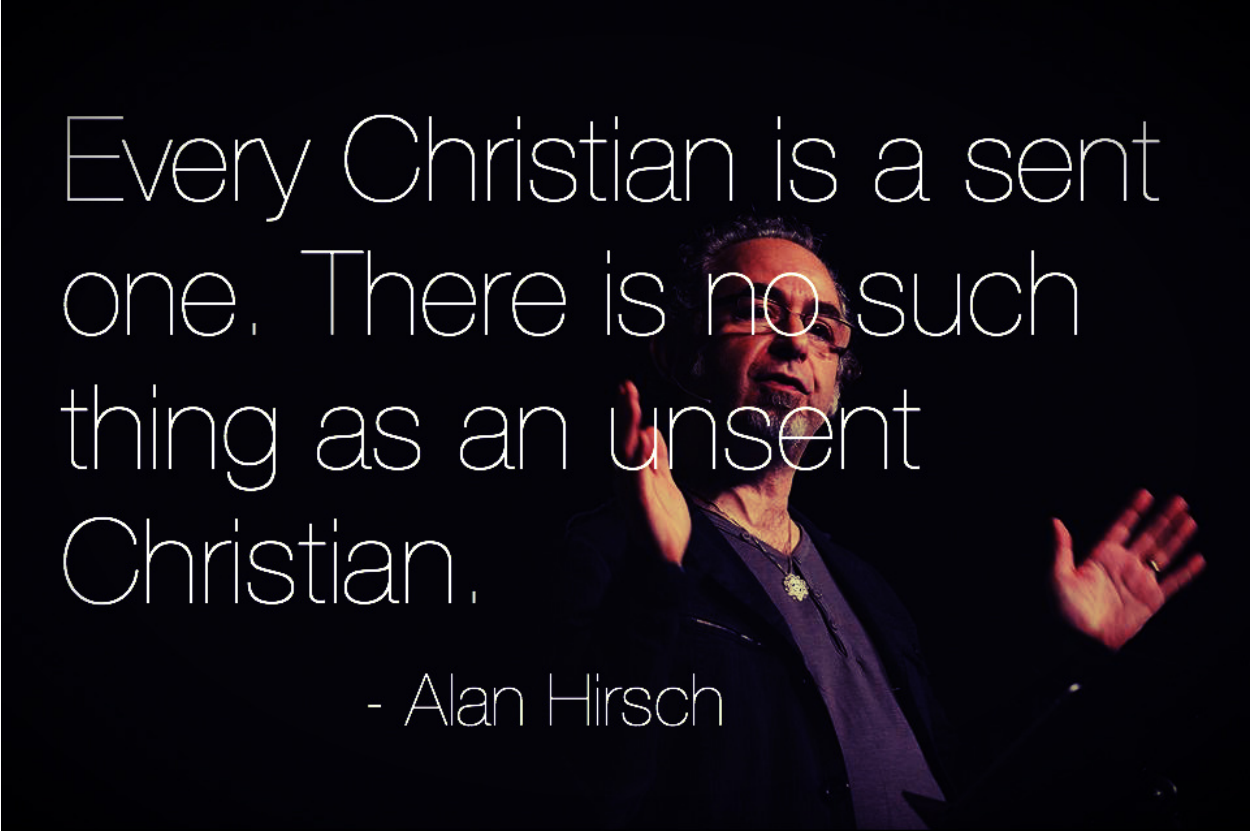
- *Made Simple* -

Use this free resource, *Missional Community Made Simple*, with your small group, staff team, or Missional Community to help others become equipped to live out the gospel on mission in community.

Whether you're a church planter, small group leader, disciple-maker, Missional Community leader, or pastor, this in-depth look at Missional Communities will help you in your own leadership to multiply the gospel in your context.

This free resource includes articles from leading practitioners and authors, each with their own unique perspective on what it looks like to define, establish and create vibrant, multiplying missional communities. Here are the contributors:

- Neil Cole
- Todd Engstrom
- Hugh Halter
- Mike Breen
- Alan Hirsch
- Felicity Dale
- JR Woodward
- Jeff Vanderstelt
- Matt Carter



Every Christian is a sent one. There is no such thing as an unsent Christian.

- Alan Hirsch

Contributors

Neil Cole is the founder and executive director of Church Multiplication Associates, which has helped start hundreds of churches in thirty-five states and thirty nations. He is seen by many to be one of the key founders of what is known as the organic- or simple-church movement. Twitter: [@neil_cole](#)

Todd Engstrom serves as the Executive Pastor of Campuses and Missional Communities at The Austin Stone Community Church. He leads out in strategic direction for engaging the city of Austin through small missional communities and develops leaders who are willing to follow Jesus and proclaim His gospel to their neighbors in the city. Todd grew up in the Northwest, was educated in the Midwest, and now resides in Texas. He and his wife Olivia have three children: Micah, Hudson and Emmaline. Twitter: [@toodus](#)

Hugh Halter is the national director of Missio, serving as a mentor to a global network of missional leaders and church planters. He is lead architect of Adullam, a congregational network of missional communities in Denver, Colorado, and is the coauthor of The Tangible Kingdom with Matt Smay. Twitter: [@hughhalter](#)

Mike Breen has been an innovator in leading missional churches throughout Europe and the United States for more than 25 years. He leads 3DM, a movement/organization that is helping hundreds of established churches and church planters move into this discipling and missional way of being the church. Twitter: [@mike_breen](#)

Alan Hirsch is the author of The Forgotten Ways, and co-author of Untamed, On The Verge, ReJesus, Right Here, Right Now, The Faith of Leap (among others). He is director of Future Travelers, and founding director of Forge Mission Training Network. Twitter: [@alanhirsch](#)

Felicity Dale trained at Barts Hospital in London where along with her husband, Tony, she helped pioneer simple church concepts while in medical school and later in the East End of London. Now living in the United States, Felicity and Tony are actively engaged in training church planters. Felicity is a co-founder of House2House magazine, author of the Getting Started manual on planting house churches, and has co-authored several books with Tony, including *The Rabbit and the Elephant*, and *Simply Church*. Twitter: [@felicitydale](https://twitter.com/felicitydale)

JR Woodward is a dream awakener and co-founder of Kairos Los Angeles, a network of neighborhood churches in the Los Angeles area. He serves on the East Hollywood Neighborhood Council as well as on the board for the Ecclesia Network and GCM. He founded [nlcf] a church at Virginia Tech, and *The Unembraced*, a ministry to orphans in the Turkana region of Kenya. He is also the co-founder and director of *The Solis Foundation* that awards micro-grants to help start small businesses in Kenya. JR enjoys coaching and consulting with a number of churches and church planters. Twitter: [@dreamawakener](https://twitter.com/dreamawakener)

Jeff Vanderstelt is one of the founding leaders of Soma Tacoma, a multi-expression, church-planting church. He serves at Soma Tacoma as an Elder, Missional Community Leader and Teacher, and oversees Leadership Development and Vision. He is also the Apostolic Movement and Visionary Leader of [Soma](#), a family of churches spread throughout North America. Jeff is married to Jayne and together they love and shepherd their three children in gospel, life, and mission. Twitter: [@JeffVanderstelt](https://twitter.com/JeffVanderstelt)

Neil Cole

Missional Community: Reproducing the DNA of the Kingdom

The church is not sent on a mission by God, rather God is on a mission and the church is called to join him. This is an important distinction, as much of what the church is about is trying to do stuff for God instead of letting Him do stuff through us.

The mission is not the church's—it is the *Missio Dei*, or “mission of God” that we are called to be part of. From Gen to Rev God is seen clearly on a pursuit to redeem humankind from the bondage of sin and death. The pursuit of this mission must take us beyond the walls of our church buildings out into the places where people live and work.

Missional activist Alan Hirsch says, “A missional theology is not content with mission being a church-based work.

Rather, it applies to the whole of life of every believer. Every disciple is to be an agent of the kingdom of God, and every disciple is to carry the mission of God into every sphere of life. We are all missionaries sent into a non-Christian culture.”

A missional community is a spiritual family (community) with the Spirit of Christ in their midst, called out to join Him on His mission to the ends of the earth. When people encounter Jesus, alive and present as King, they get a taste of God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. One cannot have the God of the Scriptures and not have His mission.



<http://www.vergenetwork.org/effective-disciple-making/>

Because a missional community is a spiritual family, by necessity it must be a smaller group. has the Missio Dei in its DNA. This community may have formed for the mission with church members or, better yet, as a result of the gospel transforming the loves of people outside of the church. It is usually found in a place where life happens—a home, a place of business, a dormitory or a cell block. It is a community made up of followers in pursuit of Jesus and His mission.

A missional community does not exist for a task or simply for one another, but for Jesus—the Head. All community and all mission flows out from that connection with Jesus. A small group that meets together simply to fulfill a task will be short lived, one-sided and not holistic. A small group that meets simply to have community life is just as out of balance. Christ is the glue and the source of direction and energy for all life change and movement.

The DNA of a missional community is:

1. **Divine Truth**—the presence of the Spirit of Jesus and His Word
2. **Nurturing Relationships**—the many one anothers found in the New Testament
3. **Apostolic Mission**—being sent ones, individually and as a community.

All three elements must be at the core of every agent of God's kingdom. Remove a single leg from this three-legged stool and it all collapses. When the community comes together each one carrying the same DNA then the community as a whole has a healthy DNA in every part. It is vitally important that the missional community begin with the right DNA.

Hugh Halter

Missional Community: An Intentional Light To The Outsider

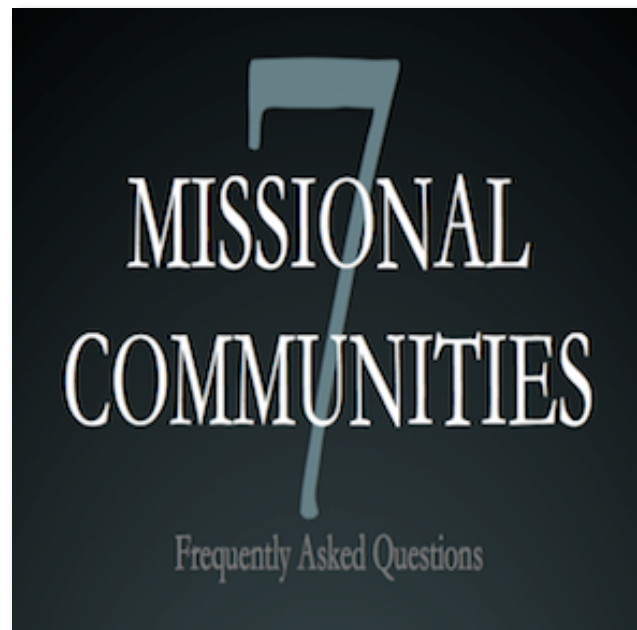
One of the greatest blessings in Adullam, (our network of missional communities in Denver), is to pray a prayer of “sending” over handfuls of people who are about to embark on starting new missional communities. It may not seem that unique but it is in this experience I find the true meaning of a missional community: THEY ARE SENT.

From Genesis 12, the first missional community led by Abraham, was called by God to “leave” their comfort zone and go to a foreign culture for the purpose of bringing and being the blessing of God to the whole world.

Whereas our normal church experience unconsciously calls us out of the world and creates an inward or self-oriented form of faith, a missional community is exactly the opposite. Missional communities are intentional webs of relationships bound together for the express purpose of bringing to light the Kingdom of God to those outside the faith.

One focus however is not just being “sent” into the culture, but also why we’re sent and what we do in our sent-ness.

Going back to Genesis 12, we’re sent to be a “blessing” and a blessing means the tangible touch of God in real life. Thus, a missional



<http://vergenetwork.org>

community, although they will see evangelistic fruit, is focused first on helping their friends, neighborhood, and network of relationships feel God's love. They help, they support, they advocate, serve, encourage, love, and keep doing it without any strings attached.

Maybe the most simplistic way to define a missional community is as a "missionary" community. Just like you might live and focus your time and energy in a foreign culture, learning, listening, and responding to the needs you see around you, so it is with a missional community here in your back yard.

What will it take to get one started? Friends who love the lost as much as you do and who are committed to live in relative proximity so that you can architect your schedules around the needs of the culture.



<http://vergenetwork.org/ebooks>

Todd Engstrom

Missional Communities: Declare & Demonstrate the Gospel to a Specific Pocket of People

Like many churches, The Austin Stone has a very clear vision of what we believe God has called us to. We phrase our vision this way:

To be a New Testament church existing for the supremacy of the name and purpose of Jesus Christ.

Through years of experience, prayer and study, we have gained a clearer understanding what it means to be the church in the city of Austin and accomplish this vision.

Our mission became this: *To build a great city, renewed and redeemed by a gospel movement, by being a church for the city of Austin that labors to advance the gospel throughout the nations.*

As we've mulled over that mission in our city, we were consistently pressed to consider that there are pockets of people throughout Austin and the nations who have not been renewed and redeemed by the gospel. There are so many in the city of Austin who would not even consider darkening the door of a Sunday worship service.

When posed with this particular challenge, we realized that we HAD to change if we were ever going to see a movement ignited. That meant changing on the smallest level: we must declare and demonstrate the gospel in community on mission to every pocket of people for a movement to occur.

The Austin Stone, therefore, is in the process of becoming a network of missional communities. We are teaching small groups of people, called

of God, joined by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who by the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue the renewal and redemption of their community and the nations together.

That vision, in many ways, sets the stage for us to talk more about a missional community. We are often asked “what is a missional community?” Although definitions are limited in conveying the fullness of an idea, in summary a missional community, as we would define it, is:

A community of Christ followers on mission with God in obedience to the Holy Spirit that demonstrates tangibly and declares creatively the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a specific pocket of people.

Because it's impossible to capture everything we mean into a sentence, let me take some time to expand on what we mean by this statement:

The first piece of our definition that I want to highlight is this: “A *Community of Christians*”.

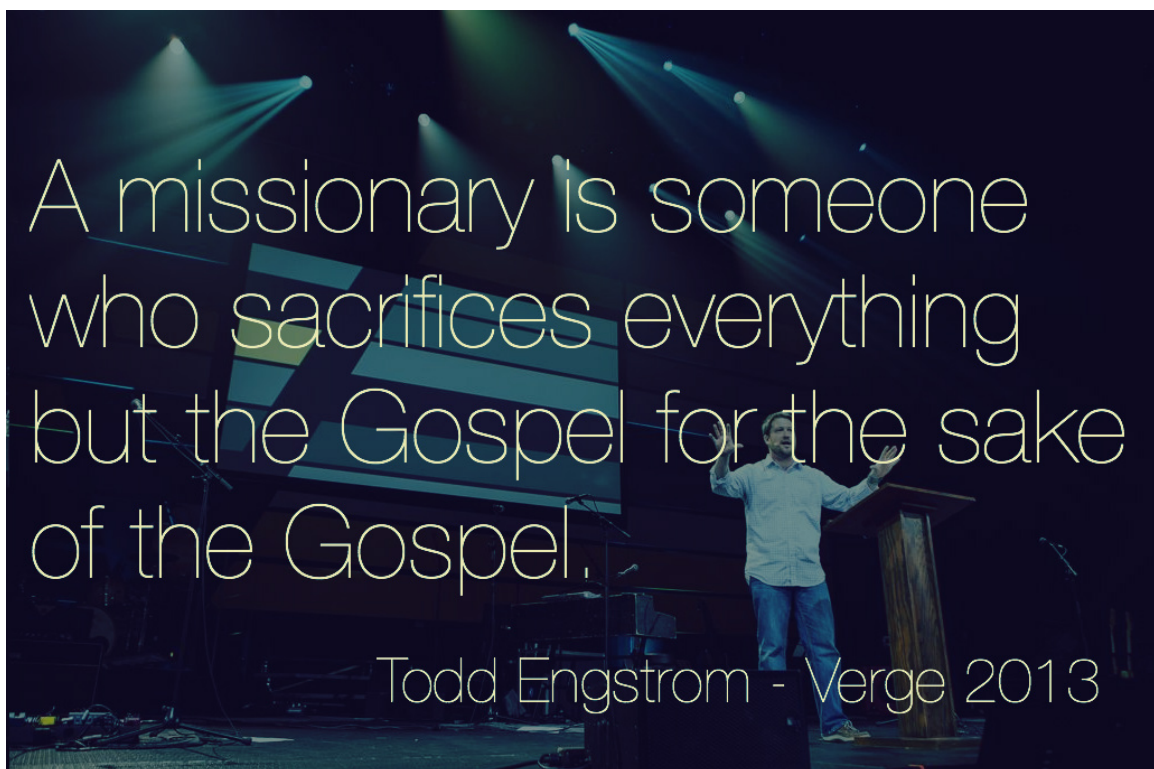
In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has redeemed a people for himself whom He empowers and sends to be his witnesses, as we see in John 20:21 and Matthew 28:16-20.

Additionally, as Jesus indicates in John 13 and John 17, the community of God is sent for a purpose. We are called and sent to show a hurting, broken, and dying world that Jesus is who he says he is and did what he said he did.

The purpose of Christian community has always been to demonstrate God's character to the world. We do this as individuals for sure, but our communities are to be defined in this way too. This leads us to our next point.

When we say, “*On Mission with God*”, we want to be clear about something. God is about bringing glory to His name and establishing His kingdom and reign in the world...it’s what He’s always been up to throughout redemptive history!

He is saving and blessing a people through the finished work of Jesus that they would make disciples and bring his kingdom to the world around them. The life of the community is bound up in participating in God’s mission in the world and making disciples of Jesus.



Most churches would not disagree with us on this particular issue, but when it comes to practically working out what it means to make disciples, everyone has a different definition and strategy. We believe that mission of making disciples should play out in two primary ways in EVERY community, from large to small, and every individual:

The first way is to “*Demonstrate the Gospel Tangibly*”. Just as Jesus came demonstrating the kingdom through selfless acts of service, we actively look for opportunities to meet the felt and real needs of our neighbors. We seek to become a blessing to our neighbors, and demonstrate the reality of God’s new kingdom.

When you look at Jesus, however, he did not simply stop at healing and meeting needs. He consistently spoke a true message of great hope to those whom he encountered. Just look at the story of the woman at the well: He met her where she was, but through her expressed need he spoke of the true needs of her heart.

Therefore, as communities patterned after Jesus’ life, we “*Declare the Gospel Creatively*”. A missional community listens to and understands the stories of their neighbors in order to be able to tell the Gospel Story in ways that are Good News to those specific people.

We want our communities to wrestle with and understand how to speak the good news of Jesus’ perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection in power are indeed good news to their neighbors.

Finally, we turn to who the community exists for: “*A Pocket of People*”. God’s grace in Jesus is good news for those in the church and those outside the church – we all need the gospel! Just as the Father sent the Son to a specific time, place, and people, so the Spirit does with the church, sending us to specific groups of neighbors.

A missional community is seeking to wrap their lives up with the pocket of people that God has placed them in.

For us, a “neighbor” is anyone you cannot avoid or anyone who has needs that you have the resources to meet. Your neighbor may be those who live next-door, those you work with, those you play with, or those with whom you share some sort of affinity.

Your neighbor may also be someone you have little in common with but whom God has placed squarely in your path or specifically called or commanded you to care for. A missional community is a group of people who have a common set of neighbors and are intentionally living lives among them.

We could probably expand several volumes on those simple statements above on theological, philosophical and practical levels, but I want to highlight one distinction that is important for us in pursuing these kind of communities at The Stone.

A missional community by nature is intended to be more than a typical bible study.

For us, a missional community is not just a bible study, it's not just a fellowship group, it's not just a social action club, it's not just a support group, and it's certainly not just a weekly meeting. Healthy missional communities include all of those things over time, but it's a family of missionaries learning to follow Jesus in every area of their lives.

A missional community is a group of people asking “What does loving my city and neighbor really look like?”, and realizing Jesus may ask far more of me than I ever thought. The great news though, is that we are experiencing and knowing Jesus where He is... on mission to the broken and lost.

Mike Breen

Missional Communities: Sent To Every Crevice of Society

Often times people use the phrase ‘missional community’ to describe the state of a group of people. It’s descriptive. The question seems to be, “Is this community missional?” Or, as Neil Cole says, “Is this community joining the mission that God is already doing?” Are we existing as a sent people? It is meant to be descriptive and rather general.

The way that I have used this phrase in the past 20 years is a bit more specific and more as a proper noun. Just like the phrase ‘Worship Service’ denotes something quite specific, so the phrase ‘Missional Community’ originated as a very specific thing, identifying a type of missional vehicle that was created in the late 1980’s in the UK.

A Missional Community is a group of 20 to 50 people who exist, in Christian community, to reach either a particular neighborhood or network of relationships. With a strong value on life together, the group has the expressed intention of seeing those they are in relationship with choose to start following Jesus through this more flexible and locally incarnated expression of the church.

They exist to bring heaven to the particular slice of earth they believe God has given them to bless.

The result is usually the growth and multiplication of more Missional Communities. These MCs are networked within a larger church community allowing for both a scattered and gathered church. These mid-sized communities, led by laity, are “lightweight and low maintenance” and most often meet 3-4 times a month in their missional context.

Each MC attends to the three dimensions of life that Jesus himself attended to: Time with God (worship, prayer, scripture, teaching, giving thanks, etc), time with the body of believers building a vibrant and caring community, and time with those who don't know Jesus yet.

MCs first began as missional small groups (groups of 8-15 people) more than 20 years ago in England. After a few years it became clear they were small enough to care, but not large enough to dare. Missional growth, multiplication and momentum was rare with these smaller, more missional groups. Leader burnout was common.

Quite honestly, it took several years for this to surface as a recurring problem that needed to be dealt with. After a few more years of experimenting, mid-sized groups, about the size of an extended family, emerged as a missional and discipleship vehicle that was capable of the exponential growth and depth we see today.

As Missional Communities continued to develop further and as we began to research why, something exciting came

to light: Every culture (and sub-culture) gathers and finds identity in groups the size of extended families. When natural genetic extended families break down, people of all races, ethnicities and backgrounds organically begin to re-create the extended family. Missional Communities were simply tapping into something hardwired into human DNA.



Click here:

<http://vergenetwork.org/films>

In Sheffield, England at St Thomas Church, what I started with a few hundred people in these groups of 20-50 people, each reaching out to various mission contexts, has turned into thousands upon thousands of people in Missional Communities...in a city where less than 1% of people attend church. Untold numbers of people are finding Jesus.

MCs for the creative class.

MCs for former Iranian Muslims.

MCs for former gang members and murderers who became Christians.

MCs for students studying at the university.

MCs for new parents.

MCs for people living in particular neighborhoods.

MCs for the homeless.

MCs for former prostitutes and drug addicts.

What Missional Communities do is find a crack or crevice of society and incarnate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to that specific culture of people by creating an extended family on mission together.

And when this scattered church of Missional Communities gathers together as one large family, it is a picture of the coming Kingdom, or as Newbigin would say, “a sign, instrument and foretaste.” Every color, age, race and religious background. That is what the ‘gathered’ worship service has been like.



Perhaps what is more exciting is that we have now seen it spread. Missional Communities aren't something specific to England, Europe or even South America. Now in the United States, all across the country, hundreds and hundreds of churches are beginning to see this kind of vibrant, missional life in their own contexts.

Urban churches. Suburban churches. Church plants. Mega churches. Lay leaders are being released into their destiny to lead the church of God in his mission of rescuing and redeeming the whole world. These leaders refuse to believe that being a disciple and being missional are mutually exclusive; in fact, they see it as inseparable.

Missional Communities are simply a vehicle to send these leaders out into their divine calling.

Jeff Vanderstelt

Missional Community: A Family of Missionary Servants

A Missional Community is a **Family** of **Missionary Servants** who make **Disciples** who make Disciples.

Family

First of all a missional community is a group of believers who live and experience life together like a family. They see God as their Father because of their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the new regeneration brought about by the Holy Spirit.

This means they have and know of a divine love that leads them to love one another as brothers and sisters. They treat one another as children of God deeply loved by the Father in everything – sharing their money, time, resources, needs, hurts, successes, etc...

They know each other well. This knowledge includes knowing each other's stories and having familiarity with one another's strength and struggles in regards to belief in the gospel and its application to all of life.

They speak the gospel truth to one another, regularly building each other up in love. They also love the people around them as if they were part of the family, showing them what the love of the Father looks like and in so doing inviting them to experience life in the family of God. (John 1:11-13; Rom. 12:10-16; Eph 5:1-2)

Missionaries

God's family is also sent like the Son by the Spirit to proclaim the good news of the kingdom – the gospel – and fulfill the commission of Jesus. A missional community is more than a bible study or a small group that

cares for other believers.

A missional community is made up of Spirit-led and filled people who radically reorient their lives together for the mission of making disciples of a particular people and place where there is a gospel gap (no consistent gospel witness).

This means people's schedule, resources and decisions are now collectively built around reaching people together. (Matt. 3:16-4:1; Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8; Acts 13:2)



Servants

Jesus is Lord and we are his Servants. A missional community serves those around them as though there are serving Jesus. In doing so, they give a foretaste of what life will be like under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

Living as servants to the King who serve others

as he served, presents a tangible witness to Jesus' kingdom and the power of the gospel to change lives.

A missional community serves in such a way that it demands a Gospel explanation – lives that cannot be explained in any other way than by the Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus. (Matt. 20:25-28; Jn. 13:1-17; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:16)

Disciples

We are all learners of Jesus our rabbi who has given us his Spirit to teach us all that is true about Jesus and enable us to live it out his commands.

Jesus commanded us to make disciples who believe the gospel, are established in a new identity and are able to obey all of his commands (Matt. 28:19-20). The missional community is the best context in which this can happen.

Disciples are made and developed: 1) through **life on life**, where there is visibility and accessibility 2) **in community**, where they can practice the *one anothers*, and 3) **on mission** where they learn how to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

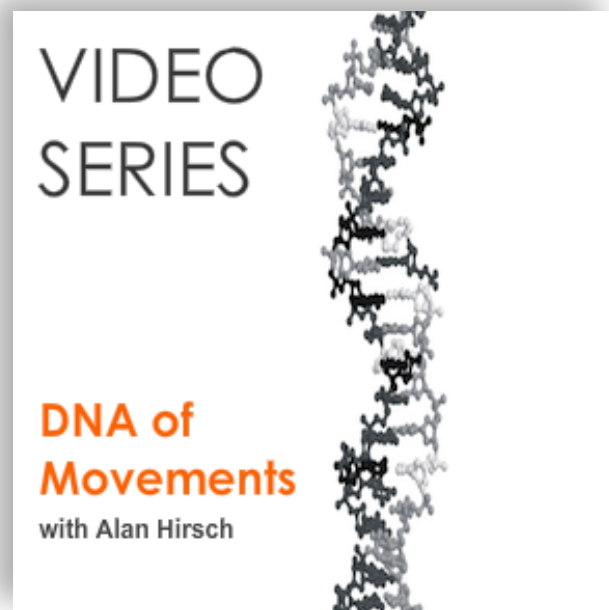
Alan Hirsch

Missional Communities: Movemental Ecclesia

I have a constant refrain now that goes something like this: that many of the problems of that the church now faces can be actually be resolved simply by thinking differently about the church and its God-designed mission in the world.

In other words, by changing our metaphors, or paradigms of church, we can change the game. The name I give to this “different paradigm” of church is simply apostolic movement. Its not new, in fact it’s ancient, and it describes completely the fluidity and dynamism of the spiritual phenomenon we see evidenced in the pages of the New Testament itself.

Some churches are now beginning to reframe themselves as movements, and they are unleashing the sheer power of New Testament ecclesiology as a result. This is the church as Jesus intended it to be...a Gospel empowered, unfettered people-movement, perfectly designed for nothing less than the transformation of the world and the destruction of the forces of evil (Matt.16:18).



<http://vergenetwork.org>

If we understood ecclesia properly, and began to appropriate its meaning, then many of the problems we now face will be resolved. I will reserve what is said here to just two aspects of the term, both of which have significant paradigm shifting power.

Thinking like a movement

First, the word ecclesia encapsulates a very dynamic social force and manifests in a multi-dimensional way. I can't find a better word in our current nomenclature, than to simply call it movement, or more technically because I like precise language, apostolic movement.

By engaging this movemental view of ecclesia, we cannot simply limit ecclesia to that of a local church with a distinctive shaped building and a certain denominational preference and style. It is much more wide-ranging than that. Well of course, the church in the Bible is a people-movement right across the Empire!

Thinking like a movement has massive implications for missional church. I believe that this helps us unlock the meaning and potential of church in our day.

A gathering of the wise

Secondly, the word has other very important meanings. In its original usage by the Greeks themselves, an ecclesia was not just an assembly or a gathering, as many suppose. If that's all Paul wanted to convey, he could have used agora and panegyris as well as heorte, koinon, thiasos, synagoge, and synago, all of which refer to an assembly.

Rather, the word ecclesia had a distinctly political (polis = city) aspect to it. In fact, it wasn't a religious term at all, and neither was its original use limited to a religious gathering. In Paul's time, an ecclesia was a gathering of the elders of a community. In smaller villages and towns

across the Roman Empire, local elders would gather regularly to discuss and deliberate over a variety of social and political dilemmas facing the community.

Neighborhood disputes, arguments over estates of deceased persons, communal responses to natural disasters—these were the kinds of things the council of elders would consider. Today, this might be similar to a meeting in the local town hall of a group of community leaders.

In other words, an ecclesia was a gathering of wise community leaders, brought together by their common vision for the harmony and well-being of the wider community. Ecclesia in this sense, was really a community-within-a-community whose very purpose was to add value to that community.

It brought wisdom to the village. It helped the village be a better village. They were members of the village, and their destiny was as connected to the prosperity and peace of that community as anyone.

Isn't it interesting that the base, raw material he uses to develop his vision for us, is that of a group of people adding value to their village; people who bring wisdom and blessing to the entire community, not just delivering religious services on the weekend?

If we allow this to soak in, we will begin to see ourselves very



It's not so much that the church has a mission, it's that the mission of God has a church.

— Alan Hirsch

differently...as sent (missio) by Jesus into the villages of which they're already a part. The destiny of Jesus' people is tied into that of the broader community in which they exist. They are there to add value, to bring wisdom, to foster a better village.

In short, to participate with the work of Kingdom of God going on all around them.

The language in our best theology is that a church exists as a “sign, symbol, and foretaste, of the Kingdom of God.” It's a scratch-and-smell experience for the people around.

When people rub up against the church, a Kingdom aroma should waft from it; they should catch a glimpse of life as God intended it to be lived in the first place.

And just so we don't forget, the reach of the Kingdom of God is not just local; it is regional, universal, in fact it is cosmic in scope. It's a big purpose and thinking about it in this way changes the game.

Felicity Dale

Missional Communities: Intentionally Small, Rapidly Multiplying

All over the world God is using intentionally small and rapidly multiplying families of his people to bring extraordinary numbers of people into the Kingdom.

Here in the United States, unless the Lord intervenes, we are only a generation away from being a post-Christian nation. (Research shows that only 4% of Gen Y, the oldest of whom turned 30 in 2010, is in church regularly.) For the first time since this nation was founded, church is no longer at the center of society; it is rapidly becoming irrelevant.

For centuries, we have had an attractational model of church. (“Come to our church meeting. Come and hear our special speaker.”) And thankfully, over the years, many have met Jesus this way. But God has always intended church to go—to be missional.

He asks us to join him in what he is doing outside the walls of our buildings—whether that is our church buildings, or, for those of us involved in simple/organic/house churches, our homes.

Missional communities are patterned on the principle of going, so they meet where life happens. They are families of God’s people, centered on Jesus, sharing life together, and intentionally reaching out with the Good News of the Kingdom.

Within a missional community, Jesus as head of his church is a practical reality. Their core skill is listening to Jesus, and responding to what he tells them. They share life together—for them, church is neither a location nor an event, but a series of relationships, firstly with Jesus and then with each other.

The groups are small enough to obey the “one another’s” of the New Testament—to love one another, bear one another’s burdens, teach and admonish one another etc. Understanding and obeying God’s Word is their daily practice.

A missional community intentionally reaches out into the harvest in order to make disciples of not-yet-believers. Making disciples is key; Jesus will build his church. The group as a whole may focus on one particular harvest field, or it may equip and encourage each of its members to involve with their own circles of influence.

Living a 24/7 Kingdom lifestyle will have an impact on “the kingdoms of this world”—business, media, the arts etc.

A missional community does not seek to get ever larger, but rather to multiply itself by releasing its members into the harvest.

Mission is at the very heart of the Godhead. God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16), and as the Father sent the Son, he now sends us (John 20:21). We, the body of Christ, are ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, joining God in his mission to reach a world that so desperately needs to hear the Good News.



<http://vergenetwork.org/effective-evangelism>

JR Woodward

Missional Communities: The Sent People of God

To understand what a missional community is, we must first ask the *who* question. The moment we begin to think of a missional community as simply a combination of different activities or functions, we can be seduced into placing too much confidence in our own strategies instead of simply being *who* God has made us. The *who* gives power and direction to *what* a missional community is and does.

One of the central messages of the New Testament is that God changes us by changing our identities, our sense of self-definition. Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth.” Peter declares, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Paul starts many of his letters reminding the people of God of *who* they are in Christ, before he calls them to *do* anything. So what is the *who* of missional communities?

A sent people

Missional communities are a *sent people* who connect with God, do life together and receive power from the Holy Spirit to partner with God to accomplish his purposes in our neighborhoods and in the world. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

We see throughout scripture that God is on mission. God is a sending God. He took the initiative to pursue us, coming into our world, seeking,

wooning, calling and restoring. It was the Father who sent the Son, and the Father and Son that sent the Spirit.

Missional Communities are defined by their identity. They are not so much groups of people *with* a mission, as much as they *are a sent people*, sent to be disciples of Jesus in the world and for the sake of the world.

They are mid-sized groups [20 - 50] living out their “sentness” together in specific missional spaces; learning to live in the way of Jesus; bringing God’s love, forgiveness, compassion and justice to specific people and neighborhoods.

Missional communities carry their worship of God into every moment and space of life, from the marketplace to the neighborhood, bringing the blessing of Christ with them.

Equipping in the context of life

Missional communities do life together and equip one another to:

1. Live Out Our Calling
2. Walk With God
3. Incarnate the Good News
4. Pursue Wholeness in Community
5. Inhabit the Sacred Text

Answering the *who* question gives power and direction to the *what* question. Living out our identity as a *sent people* – to specific groups of people – is the core of *what* a missional community is all about.

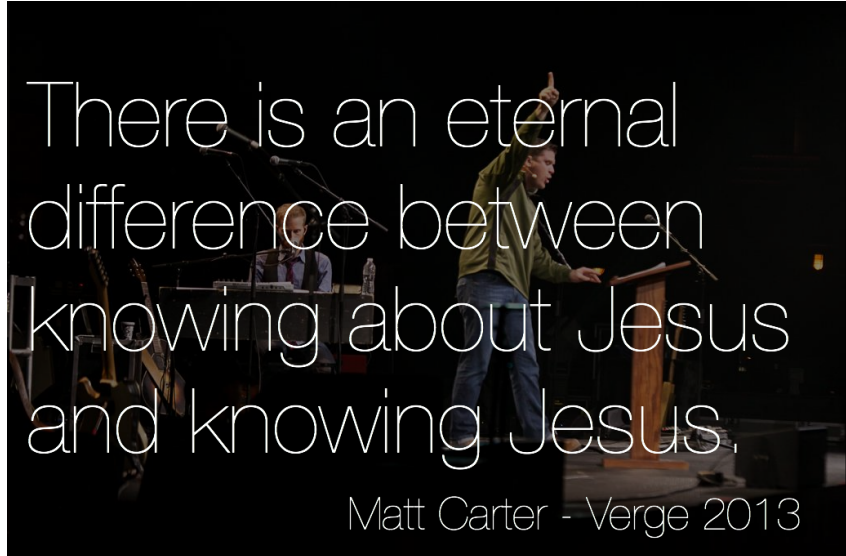
Matt Carter

Missional Communities: Gospel-Centered Missionary Teams

Missional communities will vary across contexts, but they must be rooted in gospel; identity first, then methods and theory. What we've found is that if Christians love the gospel, they'll be willing to do incredible things for the sake of making Jesus known to those around them.

At The Austin Stone, we are playing this out in both groups from traditional bible studies and groups being launched as missionary teams into the harvest.

Our methods come from our ultimate aim of conformity to the life of Jesus, not necessarily to a certain pattern or formula for Christian living. Our target in sanctification must be determined by our Christology – basically, “What is Jesus like?”



There is an eternal difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus.

Matt Carter - Verge 2013

From traditional to missional

Traditional American piety typically aims at developing the inner life and leaving the outer life to church events. We're trying to lead our MCs to grow both inwardly and outwardly *as a group*.

As we look at Scripture and also at how our people are wired, we've conceived of a few simple practices that have been especially helpful for groups that are transitioning from a Bible study or small group mentality.

Each is an expression of what a MC should be doing in the natural rhythms of life.

2 missional practices

For the outward focus of our groups (the *missional* part of missional community), there are two primary practices we suggest:

- Regularly engaging in a “**3rd Place**”, somewhere neutral and natural that your group regularly gathers to enjoy each other and cultivate what Hugh Halter calls “inclusive community.”
- Seeking opportunities for **Service**, which happens when groups seek opportunities to meet the needs of and bless people in their pocket of town or around the city. In other words, serving the “least of these.”

As we engage one another in these places, we prayerfully and intentionally start inviting our lost friends to join us and provide space for them to belong before they believe.

In this way, the community apologetic is beginning to be lived out through creating a natural place where those outside the community of faith can meaningfully experience the life of Christ lived out amongst those who believe in Christ.

2 communal practices

For the inward focus of our groups (the *community* part of missional community), there are two primary things we ask of our groups:

- Rather than depending on professionals, we want groups **pastoring each other** in the mess of life. This is really just a function of believers on mission living *more life together*. Depending on the situation, we may need to comfort, rebuke, encourage, forgive,

etc. This isn't always easy, but we see the gospel on display as group members begin to die to self and love each other more.

- Finally, we're often asked the question "where do I go deep?" **LTG's** (Life Transformation Groups) are something you'll recognize from Neil Cole. LTG's are groups of 2 or 3 people committed to confession, Scripture, and praying for lost friends. This is the place for important high-bar personal depth, and accountability to discipleship that is based on our obedience, not simply growth in knowledge.

To meet or not to meet

Finally, we value a regular **Missional Community Meeting** that serves both the outward and inward depth. It's a time for the group to share a meal together and hold a "low-bar"—no minimum amount of Bible or theology required to participate in meaningful discussion—Bible study.

We hope that the relationships we cultivate with those far from God would make this their next step with us toward consistent engagement with the life of our community.

As we have begun to live these practices out, we become more convinced there is no magic formula. These are simply tools for groups to use, not to measure themselves by.

We have seen, however, that as these practices are adopted within groups, the mission will enrich the community and the community will reinforce the mission.