

The Missional Way

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the missional way. As we seek to obtain a grasp of what “missional” means and, more importantly, what it means for *us* at Wieuca Road Baptist Church, we are moving closer to our church-wide mission: *becoming a community with a heart for God and a heart for others from the heart of Buckhead.*

The purpose of this document is to help us: 1) understand the definition of missional; 2) get a sense of *how* we already are missional; and 3) figure out *why* we should become more missional. Allow me to recap.

☺ **What:** In defining missional, we borrowed a phrase from Bo Prosser, Coordinator for Congregational Life at CBF: missional means “using one’s passions on purpose to be Christ’s presence in the world, whether anyone joins our church or not.” I underlined the key words in this sentence I want us to emphasize.

One’s passions: The missional way is about *personal* passion. Missional theology teaches us that *every* baptized believer is called to participate in the mission of God in the world. But, in an article I wrote back in March entitled “People and Programs,” I lamented that in church, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. I speculated that the reason for this is that only 20% of the people who attend church are passionate about the programs offered.

For some people, using one’s passions on purpose means simply continuing the great job that they are already doing through an existing program. But for others, they long to serve but can’t find a way to offer their passion through a church program. So the church must help them discover and use their gifts to be the presence of Christ in the world. For instance, it may mean we ask people not to serve on a church committee in order for them to say yes to their passion for sports and serving as a community team coach. It means reflecting upon what they are passionate about and finding a way to use those passions to incarnate God’s love, peace and mercy in our broken world.

On purpose: The missional way also involves using our personal passions with *intentionality*. We actively look for ways to connect the things we love to do with the people God loves.

To be Christ’s presence in the world: We give of ourselves to others because that’s what Jesus did. We use our passions on purpose to serve others freely. Of course we hope it may lead them to become a part of our family of faith because we want them to use their own passions on purpose, too. But even if they don’t join our church, we will not stop being Christ’s presence to them.

☺ **How:** Wieuca is living missionally in so many ways ~ and has been for over 50 years! These articles have brought attention to such diverse expressions of missional living in our church as our BCM toy drive; our yearly work with Habitat for Humanity; working with at-

risk kids in Grant Park; working with the BCM food pantry, THRIFTique, and money management program; teaching English to Internationals; getting together to work at the Stewart Center in Reynoldstown; gathering supplies for a medical mission trip to Honduras; continuing and augmenting our tradition of mission support in Liberia; equipping Sunday Schools to serve at Atlanta Union Mission; becoming a part of the Wieuca Disaster Response Team; and providing the resources for a Mexican girl to receive an education in Reynosa. The *how* of the missional way is as diverse as the passions and gifts that each of us brings to our church as an offering to God. Well done!

☺ **Why:** So why ought we follow the missional way? At a theological level, this is an understanding that the church is commissioned to be the abiding presence of Christ until he comes again in glory. As Christ's body, missional communities are called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God. The distinctive characteristic of such communities is that the Holy Spirit (God's empowering presence) creates and sustains them. Mission, then, is not a secondary function of the church, but the primary focus.

The mission of God is to bring *all* of creation back into wholeness and redemption. Jesus himself, as God incarnate, is the most perfect expression of the mission of God. He spent the majority of his time and activity focusing on God's coming kingdom. He came to seek and save the lost. He came on behalf of the sick, the poor and the outcasts. He came to save the world. His gospel, and therefore the Christian message, is *Good News* for the whole world.

As children of God and as the body of Christ we also are called to participate in God's mission. That is why we are missional.

The Missional Way-- FAQ

Q: How is *missional* different from *missions*?

A: *Missions* signify those specific activities we intentionally involve ourselves in to bring the gospel to places or situations where it is not heard and to create a Christian presence in a place or situation where there is no such presence or no effective presence.

Missional signifies the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world. So *missional* describes an orientation or way of being in the world that is central to the function of the Church as a sign and instrument of the reign of God that is to come. *Missions* are one of the means by which the church functions as just such a community.

Q: Does being missional mean that we don't want people to join our church anymore?

A: That is not what it means at all! In fact, missional churches are some of the fastest growing churches in the country right now. The question is one of focus and intention. As the great missiologist David Bosch writes in his magisterial treatment of a theology of mission, "The Church's missionary involvement suggests more than calling individuals into the church as a waiting room for the hereafter." So we don't exist as a church *so that* people will join Wieuca Road Baptist Church. Rather, people will join our fellowship if they recognize that our focus is on building the kingdom of God. Again, Bosch writes: "If

the Church attempts to sever itself from involvement in the world and if its structures are such that they thwart any possibility of rendering a relevant service to the world, such structures have to be recognized as heretical.”

Q: How do I know if what I am currently doing at church and in the community is missional or not?

A: Ask yourself these questions: *Does the way I live my life create a living experience of Jesus for those around me? Am I using my time purposefully in the service of rendering God's kingdom manifest on earth through acts of service, justice, mercy and love?* If you answered yes to these two questions, congratulations...you're living the missional way.

Q: How does the missional way relate to other areas of the church (worship, spiritual formation, fellowship, evangelism)?

A: The missional way is all encompassing; it touches upon all that we do as a church. Leslie Newbigin, another missional theologian, writes that the missional way “is an acted out doxology; the Church's mission began as the radioactive fallout from an explosion of joy.” Therefore, whether we sing in the choir, teach a Sunday school class, volunteer at BCM, or host a dinner party for folks in our neighborhood, our focus should be about using our passions to give others a living experience of Jesus.