

Imagining Missional Gatherings/Presbyteries

Some people have begun imagining what it might look like if we developed more formal and ongoing relationships of congregations that wanted to gather around how they could be more missional in their communities. What would it look like if we could create some missional presbyteries? What would that experience be like and how could it help our local congregations? We believe that the basic unit of mission is the congregation and that presbyteries exist to encourage missional churches. How could this happen?

This could happen if the presbytery leadership came together to focus its time and energy on cultivating an environment that was spiritual, missional, and relational. Spiritually, the presbytery would gather to engage in the historic spiritual disciplines of the church – prayer, dwelling in the Word, fasting, solitude, quiet reflection, Sabbath, etc. A primary purpose of the presbytery would be to help people grow in their relationship with the Trinity through a renewed engagement with the narratives of the Scriptures. Missionally, the presbytery would gather to learn about the context where God had placed them. They would listen to stories of experiments of hospitality and welcoming the stranger in their neighborhood. They would discuss where they had seen God at work and what they were learning from that. Relationally, the presbytery would gather to build up one another in the Body of Christ.

Ministry is inherently relational. It has always been about the relationships. But, sometimes we unconsciously move away from relationships and into programs and quick fixes. The presbytery is made up of people who make a commitment of time to develop the relationships with their colleagues in ministry, so that together they may participate in the kingdom of God. The time commitment and the right attitude within these relationships can lead to the development of an authentic, covenantal community, which is more important than learning the latest tips and techniques of the trade.

A missional presbytery is one that cultivates certain kinds of conversations. A missional presbytery emphasizes the importance of listening – listening to God, listening to the community, and listening to one another within the church. A missional presbytery brings people together for discussions around questions like:

- What is God up to? What does God want to do?
- Where is God inviting us to join the Trinity in mission?
- Who is our neighbor?
- Who do we discern the answers to these questions?
- Who can help us with this?
- Who can we partner with?

A missional presbytery is one that cultivates a culture of experiments, pilot projects, creativity, and innovation. A missional presbytery never starts a new event by calling it “The First Annual...” A missional presbytery does not presume it will be successful with its initial attempts. A missional presbytery knows that we learn by doing.

We learn by failing. We learn by trial and error. We step out in faith, trusting Christ to teach us as we go. We have an attitude of humility, knowing that we may have discerned the moving of the Spirit incorrectly. But, we don't allow that to keep us from doing anything at all.

A missional presbytery encourages people to fail. It is not wrong to fail. It is wrong to try something and not learn anything from it. As long as we are part of a learning covenantal community, we can begin to act our ways into new ways of being, as we discover new habits, attitudes, and behaviors that God is leading us into.

A missional presbytery takes Luke 10 seriously, where Jesus sends out the 70 disciples into every town and place where He Himself intended to go. We are a sent people. We are intended to be in motion, not stationary. We were intended to be in peoples' homes, breaking bread together, receiving their hospitality, and announcing the coming of the kingdom of God.

A missional presbytery takes Jeremiah 29 seriously, where the prophet tells the Israelites in Babylon, "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...for in its welfare, you will find your welfare." If God loves our communities, what would God want us to do to show this love to our communities? If we could bless our communities without asking for anything in return, what would our communities most need from us? A missional presbytery would ask these questions.

A missional presbytery does not begin with the needs of the institution. The missional presbytery begins with God. It begins with the nature of God. It begins with the mission of God. Everything else flows from that. Our presbyteries can develop a new culture, a new flavor, and a new tone. They can become a place that helps to advance the mission of God and the Kingdom of God for the whole world of God.