



## THE MISSIONAL CHURCH, PART II

In Spring 2006 we wrote in this publication about the “missional church.” We were detailing a method of church planting that we were considering for use in the Czech Republic. The article quoted from our book *Three Things You Can’t Do in Prague* and emphasized the strategies and techniques we had read about that seemed to work in starting new churches, using the model of a mission rather than of a full-fledged church, giving the local Christians the opportunity to themselves bring the missional church to maturity.

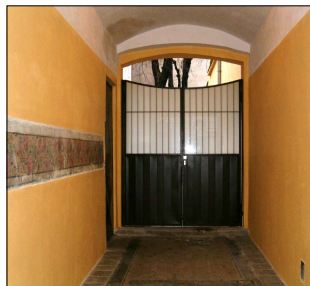
As we continue to refine our vision of what we will do to further God’s work in our ministry in the Czech Republic, we are expanding our knowledge of what works in church planting. This article continues the examination of church-planting by enumerating the characteristics of a missional church.

### A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

We’ve been members of four small, mission-type churches. The first three were Episcopalian; the fourth, Lutheran. What these mission churches had in common in

a strong feeling of ownership and deep personal commitment by the members, evidenced in these characteristics:

1. They are relatively small in physical size and very modest in architectural style (making for easy, inexpensive upkeep).
2. No more than about 50 families are committed, contributing members. Everyone knows each other, face-to-face.
3. The pastors either have second jobs (are “moonlighting” as ministers), are semi-retired or are willing to accept very modest salaries.
4. The laity (regular, non-ordained members) are extremely active in every aspect of the church, acting in the majority of leadership roles for the various ministries and administrative functions.
5. The pastor’s wife is visible and approachable. She and her kids are



“hands-on,” involved in just about every part of the church.

6. The laity are highly committed to the continued existence of the church and meet each new challenge with a “can-do” spirit, relishing particularly tough situations. Adversity just seems to strengthen their commitment.
7. Money is always tight, so the laity tithe their time, talents and energy to run the church. You can find them on stepladders, painting and caulking; on typewriters, creating lists of congregations members and bulletins; in the kitchen (however primitive) cooking and serving covered-dish dinners; in the little multi-purpose rooms, teaching VBS or Sunday School or sitting on the floor with babies in their laps.
8. Criticism of the pastor is minimal, as everyone can see exactly what he or she is doing, and understands how his or her time is stretched to the limit.
9. The congregation has fun and likes to be together. They look for every reason to have a baby shower, a Sunday School picnic, or a fellowship dinner.

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Sara and Jarda Tusek at Christ the Redeemer Church in Ponte Vedra, Florida

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## THE TRUE MISSIONAL CHURCH

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10. All ages intermingle. At picnics the old people sit in the shade while the kids run around among them, chased by their long-suffering parents. The teenagers are there, laughing and joking. The atmosphere is merry and light-hearted.

11. The life of the church depends on every single person. If anyone is not at church, his or her absence is keenly felt.

### COMMUNITY

All the above traits, added up, equal community. The true missional church is a dedicated community of believers, united in a common purpose. It's a particular kind of community, one that's not rigid or fixed, but that stretches and morphs in response to the people who are its core and reason for being. In a very real way, the people ARE the church.

There's a spirit of excitement and possibility in a successful missional church. Dead tradition has no power there, but new, living traditions are being lovingly established in every activity of the church.

There's room for the individual. The eccentric person, far from being shunned or relegated to a back room, is often in the thick of things, dispensing his or her pecu-

liar brand of wit and/or wisdom. People can breathe freely, knowing they're not being categorized by others based on their clothes, their car or their bank account.

The level of trust is very high. Behavior is regulated not by contracts and canons but by good will and generosity. With people interacting so closely, each person is transparent to his or her fellow Christians. There's no point in trying to cover up failure or hide personal sin, as everyone sees each other clearly.

Members behave as Christians not because of written creeds or rules, but because they are important to each other and don't want to let each other down. The kind of spying and tattling that may mar large organizations is not often encountered, as the constant close contact builds a spirit of forgiveness and compassion among the members.

### TRUE SHARING OF THE MISSION

If we hadn't been members ourselves, we wouldn't believe that the true missional church is possible. Sometimes it's hard to grasp that people can consistently act with kindness, concern and selflessness toward each other, as together they pursue the

greater goal of making their church a vibrant, Spirit-filled demonstration of Christ's love.

Yet we have been part of such missional churches. We do believe that people can accomplish great things for Christ in spite of (or maybe because of) having very modest resources. A lack of rigid standards and expectations for "how things must be" seems to give birth to vital churches on fire for God. As our alter egos Knut and Gudrun observe in *Three Things You Can't Do in Prague*:

*The new presentation of the Gospel should be one that favors local vision over denominational conformity, informs persons about the truth of God's Word rather than conforming them to religious institutions, and transforms them toward purposeful and dedicated service to Jesus.*

True missional churches are those that embrace each member in brotherly love, distribute meaningful work to every lay person, appreciate their pastor's hard work, trust God to supply their financial needs rather than pressuring people to give money, and have fun together. These churches shine with the light of the Gospel. They are the only churches that can reach a dark and dying world.