

## Missional Church??

## Transformation Process??

*What is this stuff??*

This month's Resource Review features the first half of a two-part description of what is often called the "missional church" or "transformational church." As many of you know and have experienced through presbytery meetings and area gatherings over the last eighteen months, Palo Duro Presbytery, and several of its congregations, are engaged in the transformation process. Dale Ziemer of the Center for Parish Development in Chicago, Palo Duro's consultant on this transformation journey, offers this descriptive explanation to help all of us get a better "feel" for the missional church nomenclature and processes. ***Please photocopy the next page and share it around your congregation.*** Your presbytery Transformation Team wants all Palo Duroans to be aware of this process, and asks for your prayers in finding God's answers to the questions, "Who is Palo Duro Presbytery called to be?" and "What is Palo Duro Presbytery called to do?"

### What is "Missional Church" anyway?

The phrase "missional church" has entered the vocabulary of the church in North America. At a recent conference two speakers used this language but in very different ways. The pastor of a mega-church, Walt Kallestad (author of *Entertainment Evangelism*), described the endeavors of his "missional church" to buy a huge acreage to develop a campus for ministries to meet the self-defined needs of the "unchurched" in the suburbs of Phoenix, AZ. A later speaker, Jim Wallis of Sojourners, used the phrase "missional church" to describe the activities of his faith community which engages in ministry with the poor and homeless on the streets of Washington, D.C. As Alan Roxburgh, one of the authors of *Missional Church: The Vision of the Church in North America*, observed about the impact of that book: "In a very brief period of time a new form of language entered the common conversation of the church and diffused itself across all forms of church life. At the same time, it is still not understood by the vast majority of

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people in either leadership or pew. This is a stunning accomplishment: from obscurity to banality in eight short years and people still don't know what it means."

The ambiguity of missional language is built in. There is no one model, no one set of qualities or characteristics that designate a church (congregation or presbytery) as a "missional church." This is because missional churches are communities where people are discerning and participating in God's mission. As a dynamic process, the outcome of their discernment and participation will vary given their unique circumstances. At the

center of their life and ministry missional congregations spend time together, opening their minds and hearts—and imaginations—to the movement of the Holy Spirit through prayer

and worship, Bible study and conversation. At the same time, missional congregations engage in research and analysis regarding their missional context, asking "What are the factors and forces that are blocking the fulfillment of human life as intended by God?" Thus missional congregations do not withdraw from the world but neither do they uncritically embrace the standards of the world. As together they discern God's mission **and** discern the challenges of their context, missional congregations may shape their life and ministry in distinctive ways. Through the active illumination and inspiration of the Spirit, congregations are called and empowered for particular ministries within their particular situations utilizing their particular gifts.

The mission of the **Center for Parish Development** is to discover how the church in general and the local church in particular can learn to discern and participate in God's mission more faithfully and fruitfully and to provide counsel and resources to facilitate that transformational process. See the Center's website for more information and resources on the missional church:

[www.missionalchurch.org](http://www.missionalchurch.org)

In **Palo Duro Presbytery** we are on a journey together of missional transformation. The goal of the journey is to become a more faithful and effective presbytery community (of communities) discerning and participating in God's mission. That is the bottom line. On the journey, we will claim a common reality of "key issues" facing us (Spring 2007). We will vigorously engage in discerning God's vision and call for us (Fall 2007). We will clarify strategy and structure going forward (2008), living into God's vision for us (ongoing).

**Resources for congregations** are available as we as a presbytery make our way together on this missional journey over these months and years. Here are two:

(1) Bible studies online: Center for Parish Development studies are available free for use in Palo Duro congregations. Go to [www.paloduropresbytery.org](http://www.paloduropresbytery.org) and click on the Transformation tab. There you'll find downloadable studies, along with a Guide for Congregational Participation. Currently available are *The Biblical Mission of the Church in Palo Duro Presbytery Congregations: A Divine Calling* and *The People Called by God*. Be creative and use these materials in session meetings, Sunday School classes, men's and women's groups, young adult groups, with small group meetings, and anywhere you do Bible study.

(2) The *Center Letter* online: Palo Duro Presbytery has rights to disseminate the *Center Letter* to all of its churches and leaders. Published monthly by the Center for Parish Development, the 2007 series brings theology and practice together "Led by the Spirit, Learning to be Church". Each month is illustrated with stories and insights from the Center's partnership with churches who have participated in missional transformation.

To access the *Center Letter*, go to <http://www.missionalchurch.org/resources/login.htm> and type **spiritled2007** as both member name and password. Use for personal reflection and group discussion.

Elder Chuck Massey moderates the **Palo Duro Presbytery Transformation Team**, whose other members are:

Elder Joe Horn (Amarillo, Westminster)

Elder Liz Read-Massey (Bowie, First)

Elder James King (Brownwood, Union)

Elder Kathy Gilbreath (Lubbock, Westminster)

Elder Carol McClellan (Abilene, First Central)

Barbara Taylor (Palo Duro Presbytery Vice Moderator)

Elder SarahLee Morris (Presbytery staff)

The Rev. Howell Martin (Sweetwater, First)

The Rev. Sara Hodsden (Vernon, First)

The Rev. Davis Price (Lubbock, Covenant)

The Rev. Cliff Stewart (Abilene, First Central)

The Rev. Janne Brumbelow (Littlefield, First & Stated Clerk)

The Rev. Rich Schempp (Executive Presbyter)

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**Dale Ziemer** is our consultant and guide on the transformation journey. He has been with the Center for Parish Development for 17 years and is Managing Director. His background is ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and has served congregations in Wisconsin and Illinois. He enjoys outdoor wood construction, and gardening, especially perennials. He is always interested in "what's blooming when" in West/Panhandle Texas! See <http://www.missionalchurch.org/pages/staff>