

TOWARD A MISSIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT

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Theological Principles

The God of covenant and creation is defined by a mission of redemption and re-creation in our world – a mission that is embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ and realized through the moving of the Holy Spirit.

It is only on account of God's loving mission to our world that human persons come to know God and enter into relationship with God. Those who love God also love the world God is redeeming and are decisively located in that world.

The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and Son, is alive in the world, bringing about the renewal of human lives and communities and opening hearts and minds to the way of the risen Jesus Christ – his way of reconciliation, compassion, righteousness, justice, and peace.

The Holy Spirit creates the church, drawing women, men, and children together into the resurrection life of Christ, into the life of God, and into meaningful relationships with one another and with the wider human family. The Holy Spirit equips the church for service in the mission of God.

The Holy Spirit brings the church to life in a global context. Through conversations within the global church, especially, we learn what it means for the good news of God to be inculturated and we discover dimensions of the gospel we would never otherwise have encountered.

The church's worship, language, structures, and activities must embody, and be responsive to the fact that it exists at the point of intersection between the triune God of love and the world (women, men, communities, cultures) that is the object of God's re-creative work.

By the power of the Spirit, and in unity with Christ, the church is called to be a community that witnesses to the joyful and hopeful reign of Christ, and the church is invited to celebrate and support manifestations of the reign of Christ where it perceives them in the world.

Negations

The church is not an end in itself.

The church does not have life outside of the mission of God.

The church is not a sanctuary from the world.

The church does not exist in opposition to culture.

The church is not the sole locus of the Spirit's restorative work.

The church does not exist merely as a 'contrast society'.

The church does not have all the answers.

The relationship between church and culture

- The church must be aware of the ways that it has become enculturated and betrayed the gracious rule of Christ in the world.¹
- The church will exhibit a vulnerability and capacity for risk-taking that is appropriate to its union with a crucified and risen Lord.
- The church is and should become a community that expresses the life of Jesus Christ, the truly human one.
- The church must be open to learn from the wider culture about the truly human way, testing the culture's assertions about human life against the gospel and its traditions.
- The church is called to both appreciate culture as given by God and also to be a culture shaper – influencing culture in ways that enrich the shared life of humans in creation and community.
- The church must demonstrate hospitality to the surrounding culture, whether within the church's walls or outside those walls.
- The church must be prepared to receive hospitality from the surrounding culture and community.
- The church must have courage to take public action as it keeps its eye focused on the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ and the life to which all are invited in relation to the triune God.

Congregations and neighbourhoods

- Congregations should give evidence of openness, celebration, love, and deep faith in Christ, and do so before the eyes of watching neighbours.
- Congregations must become familiar with their neighbourhoods by living attentively, openly, and prayerfully alongside the individuals, families, businesses, and community organizations present there.
- The members and friends of congregations should make a habit of walking through their neighbourhood, praying for their neighbourhood, entering into conversation with those who live/work in the neighbourhood, and should become aware of the struggles, concerns, and joys of their neighbours.
- Congregations should seek to establish “threshold spaces” of engagement with the local community – spaces where the church is (often) neither the host nor in a position of power, but where the church humbly gives and receives hospitality.
- Congregations should work in careful partnership with organizations that manifest the reign of Christ in their neighbourhood.
- Congregation's should engage with their community to bring the hope, hospitality and healing of Christ to it.
- Congregations should seek to engage with the global context, to learn from and be shaped by the life of Christ as it is come to expression differently around the world.
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¹ The church's enculturation is manifested in its assimilation to: consumerism, materialism, individualism, technocracy, cynicism, and the need for control. See Hastings' *Missionary God, Missionary Church*, 62-64.

- Research on the demographics and history of a neighbourhood can be a valuable tool in getting to know the congregation's context, but should not and cannot replace the church's Spirit-filled, day to day loving and living in the neighbourhood.

The church's musical worship

- The church's musical worship (lyrics, rhythms, and melodies) should be such that it may be carried meaningfully into daily life.
- The church's musical worship should be attentive to, and to some extent mirror, the context in which particular congregations live.
- The church's music should make links with the questions, aspirations, and pains that are particular to a neighbourhood, city, or region.
- The church's musical worship should express the richness and depth of life in Christ – lament, hope, joy, service, justice, redemption, peace, reconciliation, resurrection, and grace.
- Musical worship should be open to the styles of various generations and contexts, without compromising the depth and range of Christian identity and tradition.
- The church should share musically with the community around it – listening for music that reflects the reign of Christ and working imaginatively to encounter the community through music.
- The church should be in touch with, and share in, the music of global Christianity – so that it can learn from and be shaped by the gospel's inculturation in other contexts.

Deep Church, Practices

- In its life together in Christ, and in the moving of the Holy Spirit in its midst, the church pursues and is shaped by particular practices.
- Christian practices must be rooted in the life shared in the risen Christ. And generic practices that are inattentive to the Spirit's moving and intention inevitably deny the freedom of the Spirit and reign of Christ.²
- Through its pursuit of spiritual practices, the church becomes a sign of the reign of Christ, and is drawn into the triune life of God.
- The church invites the wider community into its practices that they might discover Christ in community and through ministry of the Spirit.
- The definitive practices of the church are *baptism* (by which we are engrafted into Christ and receive our missional vocation) and the *Lord's Supper* (by which we live in the hospitality of Christ and are nourished for our missional vocation).
- The practice of *hospitality* is expressed as we prayerfully open ourselves, our lives, and our apartments/homes to each other, seeking to embody the hospitality

² In an important article, for example, William Willimon (one of the pioneers in the pursuit of practices for Christian life and community) points out: "It is acceptable to speak of Christianity as a practice in company who would not tolerate a conversation about 'Jesus Christ as Lord.' That should tip us off to some of the theological hazards of this approach." See "Too much practice," in *The Christian Century* (March, 2010).

- of God in Christ. As individuals, families, and congregations we must develop practices of hospitality, and let our spaces be hospitable spaces.
- Through the practice of *dying well*, the church witnesses to its hope in Christ, expresses sisterly/brotherly love in Christ, highlights its respect for the physical creation, and resists therapeutic interventions that deny our hope and life in Christ.
 - Through *sabbath keeping*, the church witnesses to the goodness of creation, refuses an instrumental approach to the environment, resists consumerism, and discovers the rest to which God invites all people in Christ.
 - There are many additional practices through which we, together, embody the resurrection life of Christ.

Leadership in the missional context means:

- Teaching and proclaiming the gospel of God's love in Christ, as this is set forth in scripture and as it has been lived and understood over time.
- Teaching and proclaiming the gospel in ways that speak to the realities of daily life and relationships, and that address wider cultural conversations.
- Exploring and identifying ways that a congregation's ethos or structure or self-understanding prevents it from faithfulness to its missional identity.
- Helping the church to discern its enculturation (its embrace of cultural elements that represent a refusal of Christ's reign).
- Prayerful discernment of ways the Holy Spirit is at work within the congregation and the wider community, manifesting the reign of Christ.
- Leading the church into the 'threshold spaces' of engagement with the wider community – demonstrating vulnerability and openness alongside a confidence in the Christ who leads.
- Helping God's people to interpret the culture around them and to discern its beauty and truthfulness, or acknowledge its unfaithfulness.
- Exhibiting imagination and courage (risk-taking) as the church continues to move toward faithful engagement within a renewed church.
- Inviting the people of God into ways of living and working and serving that manifest the reign of Christ in the world.
- Demonstrating the possibilities of imaginative risk taking – trusting that Christ is Lord of the church, and that the Spirit is alive, bringing the reign of Christ to the world in ever new ways and in diverse contexts.
- Inviting women, men, children, and families into spiritual practices that draw them into the triune life of God: prayer, sabbath keeping, hospitality, fasting, reconciliation, and dying well.
- Leadership within the church is not about managing people or processes or structures – according to the 'managerial,' controlling spirit of modern culture.