

*Having recently attended a conference on missions and the church with a colleague of mine, the Rev. Chris Chandler wrote a piece from which much of the following article is derived and inspired. I submit it here for the larger church in the community of faith to consider for further reflection.*

As human beings, the Psalmist (139:14) in Scripture tells us that we have been fearfully and wonderfully made. And as members of the body of Christ, those Whom God has created and called out into being as the people of God have been readily set apart together for a holy purpose. The church of Jesus Christ is purposefully created and called out of Who God is – a sending God, the Father Who so loved the world that He sent His One and Only Son (John 3:16-17) into the world that the world through Him might be saved, and Who now sends us as His people. Jesus gives us, the church, this Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20) to go and make disciples of all nations.

Theologians speak of mission using the Latin phrase *missio dei*. They refer at times to the mission of God, or in another sense, the God of mission. You may have heard the saying, “Mission is not a program of the church.” Rather, mission is fundamental to our identity as the church. The church does not have a mission per se. Instead, the God of mission, the God Who is love (1 John 4:16) and Who is on a mission of love, has a/the church with which to accomplish God’s mission. As Christians, each of us is called to be a missionary in our respective cultural contexts. In a very real sense, mission is who we are. It is who we were created, designed, and who we are called to be and become more and more.

In Genesis (1:26) God says, “Let Us make man in Our Image, according to Our likeness...” If God is a sending/missionary God, then we who are made in God’s image according to God’s likeness will likewise reflect that sending/missionary identity. In fact, Jesus prays this for His disciples in the Gospel of John (17:18). “As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” This is the Lord’s prayer for us as His disciples who would follow in His footsteps. As one pastor put it, “God has created us in His Holy Image and so those who bear His Image are sent to serve His Mission, in the same way that Christ was sent to accomplish the Father’s purpose.”

There are three kinds of congregations. Those who don’t do mission, those who have programs to support mission, and those that are missional. The mission program church emphasizes sending and supporting; the missional church emphasizes being and doing. The mission program church is representative; the missional church is participative. The mission program church perceives mission as one expression of its ministry; the missional church perceives mission as the essence of its existence. We have not chosen God’s mission; God has chosen us for His missional purpose. As Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you to go, bear fruit that will last.” (John 15:16a) David Bosch in his book, *Transforming Mission*, writes that “Mission... is derived from the very nature of God... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church in to the world... a movement from God to the world; ...There is a church because there is a mission, not vice versa.”<sup>1</sup>

Mission is God’s purpose imparted to the church whom God sends into the world. In light of this, one might ask the question of one’s congregation: What does God desire for our church? What is on God’s heart? What would God have us do as individual members and together as Christ’s body? How should we structure our ministry to best accomplish God’s purposes? The question(s) can very well be applied to the body of Christ in the larger community of churches whereby congregations are together called to reflect and embody their missional purpose and identity as they participate and cooperate in the work of ministry alongside one another.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is much derived from a piece written by The Rev. Chris Chandler, Associate Pastor of Youth, Missions and Evangelism, Faith United Presbyterian Church, Medford, New Jersey in the *Seeds of Faith*

One church leader said, “Churches are very willing to change. They will make any change necessary to keep things the same!” May this not describe us as the church of Jesus Christ in Henry County as we aim to glorify God in our existence and calling as a missional people.

As Paul exhorted the Philippians (3:13-14a), “I do not consider yet to have taken hold of it myself. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching, straining forward toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal...”

Let us indeed, press on toward the goal, leaving the past behind, honoring it by not holding on to it, but forging ahead together in love to what God is calling us to in the better future God has in mind for us.

In Christ’s Service,

*Pastor Rex*