Missional Communities: Equipping Churches to Reach Their Local Context.

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Abstract
In the Northeast region of the United States, surveys suggest church participation is steadily declining. We contend that a primary reason for this decline is that churches...
have become insular and exclusive, leading to a failure to meet the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of their communities. The problem raises the question, "How do churches move beyond exclusivity to engage in relevant ministry within their local communities?" Throughout the Bible, God is the initiator of a relationship with humanity. God created Adam and Eve, and set out a redemptive plan to restore them to right relationship when their connection to God was frayed by sin. This is seen with Noah and the Ark, in the land of Ur as God begins a new nation with as God sends Jesus to be the Messiah. After his death and resurrection, Jesus sends his disciples into the world to reveal his Father's love. Throughout human history, sending (missional) God has sent people into communities to participate in God's revelation. There is a contingency of church leaders who argue that the term "missional" is a philosophy of ministry rather than a theological understanding of a sending God. But the church is the body of Christ, the presence of God in local communities, and it has the capacity to bring the full expression of God's mission to a broken world, how do churches reengage their communities as missional communities are best positioned to make the gospel tangible and to overcome exclusivity. They understand their local contexts spiritual gifts of their congregations. The thesis of this dissertation is that local, missional communities are the primary vehicle for reengaging congregations with their context. Included in this dissertation is a group study guide (Artifact) to be used by groups of twenty to fifty people, that equips leaders to identify spiritual gifts within their missional community, and trains the group to understand and minister within their local context.

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