

MISSIONAL CHURCH

COMPARISONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 3DM AND MISSIONAL NETWORK
MODELS



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Summary

A church seeking to be missional in its relationship to the social, religious, economic, and political environment will persistently pursue a culture of innovation. Its ability to do this will be dictated by the capacity of its leadership.

The missional capacity of a church is directly related to its capacity for innovation. Does it expect and welcome creativity? Does it understand its identity and *raison d'être* clearly and is it always seeking new ways to express these? If not, the church will be repeating practices, the reason for which no one can remember. However, by developing awareness and understanding of what it is doing and re-visiting its identity and purpose as a Christian Community, it will be better situated to allow new expressions. These, in turn, are more likely to speak powerfully to its own members and those outside its collective.

This innovative capacity is contingent on the traceable experience of growth in leadership at every level.

Therefore a missional church places great emphasis on the development of competencies in its leaders. These competencies include what might be termed “professional” as a subset. They are a part but not the greater part. Instead, an innovative culture calls for a leadership which is actively growing in character. The competencies needed are what might be called “personal” strengths more so than “professional”.

Discipleship is intrinsically linked with missional when we acknowledge that discipleship in the Christian understanding is understood more as “growing to be more like Jesus”. This Christ like-ness cannot be understood as a role performed in service of the organisation but as holistic experience in relationship to God, other members of the Community, and equally to others outside the Community. It is marked by character formation more so than the accumulation of knowledge as data.

This emphasis on leadership is not limited to Ministers of Word and Sacrament but includes all leaders. A church is unlikely to maintain a missional direction unless leadership at every level is given the same priority as Ministers, albeit expressed in different ways. The discipleship of an Elder is no less important than that of a Minister and the intentional character development of a small group leader no less than either. An innovative culture will value and prioritise leadership investment equally.

This report makes two recommendations.

First, it recommends moving beyond our present systems as Presbyterian Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand and reforming them in regards to the practice of collegiality and Supervision. Instead of Ministers meeting monthly with a Supervisor it is recommended Ministers meet in a small group made up of Ministers and Elders. This group would be led

by what some might call a “coach”. Their purpose and the group’s purpose is the same: to provide collegial accountability and ask the hard questions of one another.

The second recommendation is that any Parish Review includes the Minister and seeks to measure the innovation capacity of the church.

Introductions

The following Study Report came about after a visit of approximately two weeks to Sheffield in the United Kingdom. It is a reflection on what I observed and learnt and these are compared with the learnings gleaned as a member of a Missional Leaders Cohort run under the auspices of the Knox Centre for Leadership and Ministry.

The deficiencies of our present church culture are likely to be apparent to many. However problems are easier to identify than are solutions. It is easier to point to short comings than it is to offer answers. The report is not an attempt to do either but a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of two models for what might be termed “missional church”.

This Study does not set out to be an academic treatment of the subject but is the result of a visit to Network Church Sheffield in the United Kingdom during March 2013. This involved observation of two Learning Communities, a Training Weekend for Staff, Community Leaders, and Ministry Leaders of Network Church in addition to a series of interviews with 3DM staff and staff from St Thomas Philadelphia. Most of the subsequent material appears in the Observation section of this Study.

In the Discussion section these results are compared to the writings of people in the wider missional church and, in particular, the writings of Alan Roxburgh. Other writers are referred to as people making contributions in the resurgence of discipleship as a core activity of the congregation, its leaders and the place of “mid-level” communities or “Missional Communities in the context of St Thomas Philadelphia.

None of this would have been possible without the support so generously extended to me for this exercise and so I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Northern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and in particular Forbes Worn and the Session of St Andrews Church Whangarei. Without the encouragement of Forbes and my Session, along with the most generous financial support provided by St Andrews, this Study would not have been possible. I also acknowledge the Best Travel Fund for their support. In addition I want to acknowledge the incredible contribution made by the folk of 3DM UK and St Thomas Philadelphia. This Study was made possible through their warm hospitality and remarkable transparency. Special thanks to Rich Robinson, Paul Maconochie, Pip Martin, Toby Bassford and their teams. I also want to acknowledge Jon and Helen Bearn for sharing their home with me for the duration of my visit and for looking after me so well.

This Study is part of a process going back over many years and because of a long ministry journey on a personal level and as part of St Andrews journey as a Church. It goes without saying that neither journey is complete. Indeed, the journey for St Andrews has only begun and even though the place of discipleship and mission as core “business” have remained essential to my personal understanding of what the church is called to do in local context I came to the place as a pastoral leader saying to God “what am I supposed to be doing? I

don't know and I don't know where to get help". This comes as an uncomfortable disclosure but one I suspect shared by many pastoral leaders, particularly if they no longer see themselves as the professional servants of a religious organisation. We are supposed to be preparing God's People for the works of service prepared for them by the Master of the Church and if we accept the works of service to be essentially missional in nature this returns us to the Great Commission and the correlation between discipleship and mission. This then was the place I arrived at after much soul searching and study. Nor did I believe mission was to be reduced to simply social activism at one end or evangelism at another. My understanding of mission is contained in the term "the kingdom of God" and while this calls for some theological discussion it is not the purpose of this Study.

All that being said, my journey had reached a dead end. My conundrum was not theory and practice around the missional church but discipleship as a normal activity contributing to any church on a missional journey. The appreciation that was forming saw missional and discipling as closely related and interdependent. The problem was finding this praxis in a church context culturally similar to my own.

The point in which the dead end suddenly became a through road was early 2012 when a 3dm team lead by Rich Robinson held a workshop in Auckland hosted by the Baptist Tabernacle. This was a watershed moment for me personally and an amazing experience for the team from St Andrews who had very bravely been with me on the journey through our new small community development we refer to as "basic biblical communities". They were hearing what we had been talking about and trying to achieve for some years and here at last was the living example of another church that had developed unapologetically as a missional disciple making church. We were delighted to hear that 3DM saw themselves as movement in the belief that if you make a disciple you grow the church, but if you make a disciple who then can make disciples you grow a movement.

Observations

This section deals primarily with 3DM and the operation of St Thomas Philadelphia.

First, an explanation of 3DM, its relationship to Network Church and St Thomas Philadelphia because it may be confusing. It was for me. In going to the UK I was aware of the different labels but assumed they were all the same organisation. This proved not to be the case.

At writing, Network Church consists of three campuses: St Thomas at Philadelphia, Kings Centre, and City: Base and is a separate although closely related organisation to 3dm UK. (City: Base has been given the freedom to decide whether it remains a base or becomes another church).

3dm shares personnel with Network Church and the premises it uses are owned by St Thomas Philadelphia. 3DM stands for “3 dimensional movement” and operates primarily as 3dm UK (now become 3DM Europe) and 3DM USA. Rich Robinson is the UK Team leader and Mike Breen leads 3DM in the USA. (It is worth noting that Mike Breen is the major author of literature associated with 3dm and is past Lead Rector of St Thomas Crookes and St Thomas Philadelphia. He is now based in the USA but maintains strong links with the leaders of St Thomas Crookes and Network Church both of whom were once his apprentices. This relationship probably continues but its exploration is not within the scope of this Study).

One further and related note is that St Thomas Philadelphia is the shortened version of the full name – St Thomas at Philadelphia. This church which is the most senior and largest of the three campuses that make up Network Church, was planted in the industrial area of Philadelphia in the city of Sheffield by St Thomas Crookes. A strong connection and partnership continues between Network Church and St Thomas Crookes.

St Thomas Crookes and St Thomas Philadelphia are possibly best described as an Anglican/Baptist hybrid. Network Church is Anglican/Baptist/House Church (Free Church) as Kings Centre was a fellowship based on house church (or Free Church) models before joining with Philadelphia as a second campus. This “flavour” is very evident in the present leadership. Paul Maconochie, the Senior Leader of Network Church, is originally a Baptist and Philadelphia at the time of my visit was in process, trying to find an Anglican priest who could provide the “Anglican” presence.

What might now be referred to as the 3dm “shape” in being church was born out of a journey taken by Mike Breen and others lasting approximately 20 years. I was very grateful for the transparency shown by Rich Robinson (who incidentally came to Christ through this ministry), Paul Maconochie and the present senior leader of Philadelphia Nick Allan. They knew both the ups and the downs of the journey and didn’t hesitate to talk about them. They were as open about the sometimes rocky path of these churches as they were about their own mistakes and struggles.

3DM UK (Europe)

As already noted, 3DM UK is closely related to 3DM USA but its sphere of operation is essentially the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand with some possible new moves being made in Asia.

Its work is through leadership huddles, “tasters”, and Learning Communities.

Tasters are events such as the one mentioned above held in Auckland in 2012.

Leadership huddles involves pastoral leaders and are delivered by internet (Google +, Skype) on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis. These are currently on operation through the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

Learning Communities are a limited number of churches, usually internally organised as cohorts of 8 -10 churches which meet every six months as they work together through four stages of development as missional churches. These stages as outlined by 3DM are: building a discipleship culture, multiplying missional leaders launching missional communities, and leading kingdom movements. The churches I observed in the two Learning Communities were a “mixed bag” including Baptist, Reformed, “Free” Church and Pentecostal groups. The two Learning Communities were at different stages of development.

The “3 dimensions” referred to in the label 3DM are “up”, “in” and “out” and refers to a common geometric shape, namely a Triangle. The Triangle is a shape among others 3dm refer to as a “Life Shape”. The use of “Life shapes” as a discipleship tool is intrinsic to what Mike Breen and Steve Cockram¹ refer to as a vocabulary essential to the language and therefore growth of a discipleship culture. The three corners relate to the three principles of up, in, and out. The Up is the relationship to God. The In is the relationship to others in the faith community, family, etc. The Out relates to the world and those presently outside of the household of faith. 3DM teach all were apparent in the ministry of Jesus and are essential to be a disciple.

Central to 3DM’s philosophy is the understanding that any missional movement which ignores the primary place of discipleship is doomed². Therefore, while St Thomas Philadelphia and St Thomas Crookes are well known in many circles as pioneers with what they call “Missional Communities”, they see mission activity as interdependent with disciple making and therefore place high importance on every leader being both part of a Huddle and leading a Huddle. Leaders are a disciple in this context and expected to disciple others. This activity is a critical part of the process of a church building a missional culture.

¹ [Building a Discipleship Culture](#), 2011.

² Mike Breen [Why the Missional Movement will Fail](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/). <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/>

It is probably useful at this point to discuss the place and operation of Huddles as they are heavily emphasised.

A Huddle is typically a group of five to eight people, meeting fortnightly and led by a more experienced leader. According to the emphasis I heard being made repeatedly, huddles were for leaders. I am part of such a huddle delivered by internet but it was valuable to watch other huddles meeting together while in Sheffield. The aim is the formation of character and competence in the leader while providing accountability for the participants as disciples and leaders. The process most often comes down to the questions “what is God saying to you and what are you going to do about it?” The important thing to note at this juncture is that neither the Huddle leader nor the group is there to tell the individual what it is they should be hearing or doing but facilitate the process and encourage the new learning.

Here we find another 3DM principle at work: “low control, high accountability”. The understanding is that the individual and the group need to learn to hear God for themselves. The leadership task thereafter is to help them find ways to obey what they hear and be “doers of the word”. In one talk given by Paul Maconochie I heard this expressed clearly when he told the particular Learning Community that it was not the responsibility of leaders to tell people what to do but to help people take action on what they believed they heard God saying.

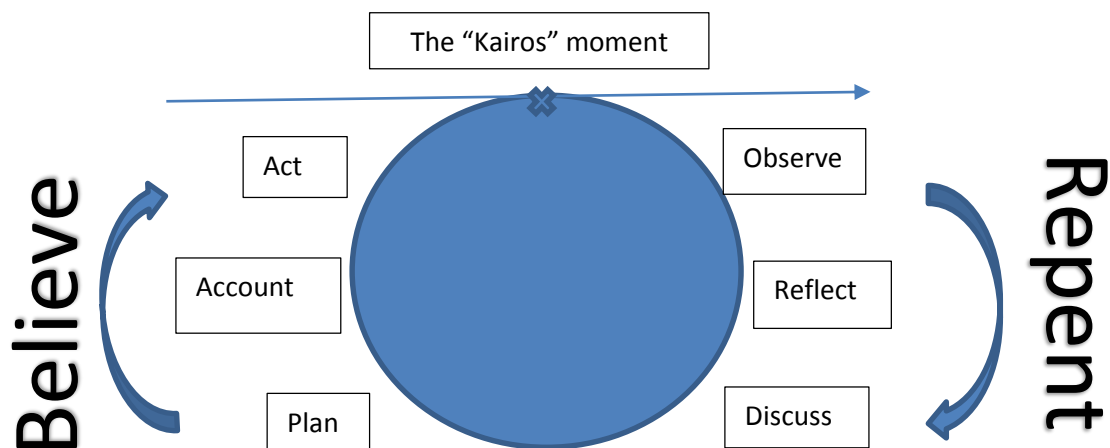
There was strong emphasis therefore on individuals and churches hearing from God. Perhaps because of this 3DM is developing what they call “prophetic learning communities”. Hearing from God has played a highly significant part in the development of the associated churches in the on-going life of St Thomas Philadelphia. Most major decisions it seems have been made not only on theological, philosophical, and organisational grounds but because of a “word” spoken and confirmed in many ways from the corporate whole of the church and leadership. They placed importance on the bringing of prophetic words but allowing the church as a whole to discern the application. This has the effect of allowing a “word” to be brought but making any directive element something for the community. Discernment is held therefore to be not only an individual ability and operation but more so a corporate one. (It is interesting to note from personal conversations with senior leaders that their appointments to their ministry roles appeared to have followed this pattern).

The Huddle environment is one of “high invitation and high challenge”. It is this same environment 3DM encourages in the culture of a church making the observation people are often comfortable in churches but not growing as disciples of Christ. This then points to a “high invitation” but “low challenge” culture. Using other 3DM ideas, they would be strong on “covenant” and weak on “kingdom”. (Covenant relates to our standing and relationship in Christ, Kingdom to our obedience, authority, and power as an outflow that relationship). However, another possibility is that the people are in a strong “high challenge” culture which encourages dismay, discouragement, and therefore inaction. This would make them

strong on kingdom perhaps but from a sense of duty with the sense of not doing enough or being good enough.

However, what this means in a Huddle is the presence of low control and high accountability. People are encouraged to share what is going on in their lives, not as the basis of psychological analysis but spiritual formation. The individual is encouraged by the group to explore the area of faith or practice that is in the spotlight and to decide what they want to do about it. Thereafter the group provides the element of accountability and support. My experience and observations to date suggest strongly that these simple practices and questions are very powerful in bringing change and growth to people.

The central tool or “vehicle” is the “Kairos” or learning circle. 3DM believes that because we experience something does not thereby imply we learnt anything. Both repentance and belief are composed of actions and not purely something at a cognitive level. They divide repentance into three actions – observe, reflect, and discuss. Believing also has three actions – plan, account, and act.



(Source: Building a Discipling Culture, Second Edition 2011. P71)

Entry to a Huddle is simple. It is by invitation only. A leader is not under obligation to make people members because they want or believe they should be. People are invited to join and free to accept or decline. Another important feature is the level of access accorded to members by the leader into his or her life. Many huddles are done over a meal following the “oikos” principle. Following the same principle, participants are invited into the daily life of the leader and their family. At the heart of this is a strong element in the 3DM understanding and teaching, that of imitation. Again using a triangle, they point out that church people are often strong on information but weak on imitation which then leads to innovation. Put simply, many disciples are more students of a theory than practitioners of a way of life and the missing ingredient is imitation/demonstration. They do not actually know what a follower of Christ is like because no one has shown them.

No leader is encouraged to lead a huddle unless they first have been members of one. This again touches on the imitation/demonstration principle.

Huddles and the vocabulary provided by Life Shapes are held to be critical to the building of a Discipling Culture. Breen and Cockram³ place heavy emphasis on language as an essential determinative for culture formation and quote Brinkerhoff, White, and Ortega⁴ when the latter says

A common language is often the most obvious outward sign that people share a common culture...For this reason, groups seeking to mobilise their members often insist on their own distinct language...and according to some linguists, languages not only symbolise our culture but also help create a framework in which culture develops, arguing that grammar, structures and categories embodied in each language influence how its speakers see reality. For example, because Hopi grammar does not have past, present, and future grammatical tenses, Hopi speakers think differently about time than do English speakers.

Interestingly, 3DM promotes use of a vocabulary and a set of practices centred on the idea of “oikos” for building this culture instead of a specific programme or set of programmes. This New Testament koine Greek expression is usually translated as “household” and the discipleship culture is a corporate one where disciples eat, pray, and listen to Scripture together. There is serious attention given to character and competency formation in the individual but all within the context of community.

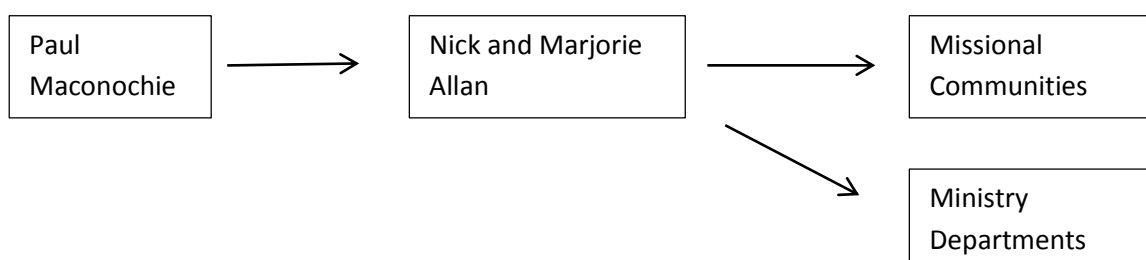
St Thomas (at) Philadelphia

As already noted, this church is one campus among the three comprising Network Church Sheffield under the leadership of Paul Maconochie with its own Senior Pastors (Nick and Marjorie Allan) and a large staff responsible for the various areas of the church’s life and ministry. (There is a kiwi connection as Nick is the son of Derek Allan, was serving as Senior Pastor at Hamilton Central Baptist during my visit to Sheffield). Nick and Marjorie were senior leaders at Kings Centre before their appointment at Philadelphia. Like Paul they are Baptists by background.

The structure and reporting lines of Network Church in relationship to Philadelphia can therefore be represented thus:

³ Building a Discipling Culture, (Second Edition) 2011

⁴ Essentials on Sociology, 2007 pp38-39



The diagram though is in danger of creating a false impression on one front. Missional Communities do enjoy a staff team that resources, encourages, and guides and this team is also one of the ministry departments. It does highlight the fact that Philadelphia is a large church with various ministries. However, it is stressed continually it seems to me that activity does not equal being missional and so it is very possible this church does not see a multitude of ministries as being indicative of anything except perhaps organisational bloat. Indeed, the ministry departments, while often with more than two or three paid staff are few in number. They included the Children, Youth, and Families ministry, the previously mentioned Missional Communities Department, Administration and Finance, Training, Forge Network (Students and Young Adults), and Vulnerable people which includes ministries like the aptly named HOTS (Healing on the Streets ministry).

Philadelphia campus covers a large area and consists of a number of separate buildings such as a Conference Centre (also doubles as the worship centre), a Teaching Hall, and an administration/training building. The structure of St Thomas Philadelphia can be represented in the following way.



Source: Nick Allan, Purely pragmatic? The understanding of God, mission and church behind St Thomas Church Philadelphia, Sheffield. 2012)

The church faced making some unwelcome financial decisions due to a seventy thousand pound deficit in the 2014 - 2015 financial year.

The last observation is important in that it was clear Philadelphia does not hold itself up as a church that has arrived. Both Paul and Nick were quite open about the financial as well as other challenges including the effect of new leadership and the state of the Missional Communities. This courage is to be commended in light of the fact Philadelphia is effectively the “flagship” for a movement. The leadership were aware of deficiencies and were prepared to make operational changes even when these would fly in the face of the literature.

One example is the size of Missional Communities. Mike Breen describes a Missional Community⁵ as

... a group of 20 to 50 people who exist, in Christian community, to reach either a particular neighbourhood or network of relationships.

This was also the understanding at Philadelphia until recently where now the size is revised to 15 – 25 adults. It is quite possible for a Community to grow larger but a group approaching 25 adults will be consulted regarding their plans for multiplication.

Two realities seem to have contributed to this revision.

-They may be reasonably successful as “fellowship” groups but without any intentional vision for a particular neighbourhood or network.

Second, Communities are led by volunteers, not paid staff and talking with a Warden who had previously led a large community highlighted the stress of providing pastoral care to so many people alongside family and employment demands. This raises a number of reflections around structure and different leadership types and will be picked up in the Discussion section. What is useful at this juncture is that Philadelphia and its leadership do not feel obligated to be “doctrinaire” but make those reviews and therefore obey their central tenet of being a learning community.

They are possibly aided in this by their inherited DNA.

As we already noted, Philadelphia was a plant of St Thomas Crookes and any understanding of that church’s history provides a vivid picture of innovation and a willingness to experiment. Philadelphia and Network Church appear to be continuing in this tradition treating only as sacred the call to oikos and being a disciple making church. (I was tempted to add “missional” but in their minds, you could not be disciple making and fail to be missional).

⁵ What is a missional community? <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable/>

Before moving to a more in-depth description of the Missional Communities at Philadelphia it is important to look more closely at the Children and Youth ministry as these are also common to many churches.

Children and Youth

The Children's Ministry is divided into children, youth, and families. (As noted above there is also a Student and Young Adult ministry separate to this. This ministry is effectively in the shape of Missional Communities and these groups are served by a separate staff from those serving the other Missional Communities of then Church). The primary difference from many churches is that a great deal of the activity takes place off base and in homes and community facilities around Sheffield.

Sunday attendance by children (pre-school to 11 years) fluctuates around 100 – 130. This follows the number of adult attendees which is approximately 700 a week. The reason for these numbers is the "orbit" of Missional Communities (below). However a great deal of activity is taking place via "God's Gang" gatherings meeting in homes and "targets", larger gatherings using community facilities. In every case these ministries are led by volunteers, typically belonging to Missional Communities, and resourced by staff at the base. Both the God's Gang's and Forge are missional, intentionally reaching out to children in their area. They are led by Community members with a vision for this work who also visit every child and their family on a weekly basis. The Community is encouraged to develop connection with those families and welcome them into their fellowship depending on the choice and openness of the families concerned.

It is very worth noting here that Philadelphia has more than one couple who has given up what might be termed a "middle class" lifestyle and gone to live in the Council Estates. These equate to our State Housing areas but with even greater a concentration of population. Their approach is incarnational, simply living among these communities with their first approach a general assessment of the needs around them. This has typically led them to begin with the children as there is a large population with very little to do. However, the social and economic context aside, children and youth ministries are seen as positive areas of missional activity.

As with all other ministry departments, children and youth (called "Forge") is seen as facilitating, guiding, resourcing, and encouraging. Sam Parker the leader of Forge made the observation that it was what was done during the week by way of input into the children which impacted Sunday and not the other way around. She believed there was a qualitative difference in children who were part of either or both God's Gang and Targets in their ability to deal with spiritual challenge and minister to others in their peer group.

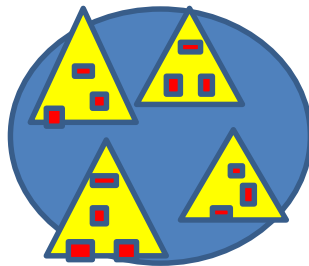
The only downside she mentioned (although I did not hear her describe it in those terms) to the ebb and flow of Sunday attendance was that the use of small groups was made

somewhat difficult because there was no way they consistently would have the same children on a weekly frequency. As mentioned above, the orbit of their families Community impacts their attendance.

Missional Communities

Certainly, in the UK context at least, Missional Communities are what makes Philadelphia well known if not famous. These are the church “scattered” compared with the Sunday Service which is defined as the “Temple” or the church “gathered”. Philadelphia and 3DM point to the Book of Acts in providing this model as the disciples met in homes and in the Temple. They are not a home church movement therefore. They value both contexts but emphasise the difference each context makes to a disciples development. The home or the oikos or the Missional Community provides the connection and fellowship held to be essential to formation. The Sunday event is something that needs be done well but is limited to providing a mass worship experience and teaching. (It was unclear how much the Sunday Service is reserved as the place the Sacraments are celebrated and even though Philadelphia is strongly rooted in the Anglican tradition there was no Communion the Sunday I attended. However, neither did I witness a breaking of bread in the Communities.)

Missional Communities contain small groups and accountability relationships. Small groups or “cells” are between six to ten people. Accountability is two people or two couples. The structure appears to be:



3dm and therefore Philadelphia talk about four “spaces”. These are sociological constructs which are seen mirrored throughout church history but more importantly in the Gospels where Jesus has an “inner circle” (Peter, James, and John), a personal space (the twelve), a social space (the community of disciples, and a public space (the crowd). These correspond to the four areas represented by accountability relationships, the cell or small group, the Missional Community, and the gathering of Communities (or as I heard one senior leader, the Tribes) in the Sunday celebration.

There are between 35 – 45 Missional Communities operating at Philadelphia according to Lindsay Lonchar. Lindsay has a varied background with organisations such as YWAM but considers leading the staff team for Missional Communities a great privilege and challenge.

There are many more Communities but Lindsay's team are responsible only for the adult Communities while Youth, Students and Young Adults come under their respective ministry departments. The total is around the 100 mark. The reason for the range is simple: as Lindsay explained the situation is always fluid. New Communities begin, others end or are multiplied. The average life cycle of a Community is four years but can be twice that. Lindsay explained that a Community led by someone with pastor as their "base ministry" usually tended to have a greater longevity. This may sound very positive and in many ways it is. The base ministry of the leader is held to affect the culture of the Group. There are differences between one led by a person who has apostle as their base ministry compared with someone who has pastor. So, while people may feel very cared for in a Community led by a pastor, it is more likely an apostolic base ministry will multiply and "plant" out new Communities. (The concept of everyone having a base ministry is picked up in the Discussion section).

Some Communities have lasted ten years but the key is leadership. Philadelphia places high importance on leaders as key and they demonstrate this by reserving Huddles for leaders and regular well organised and fully catered leader's weekends a regular fixture on the church calendar.

Other factors contributing to the ability of a group to grow are practical issues like the size of the home in which they meet. The oikos principle encouraged in Philadelphia means that a home must really be big enough for people to eat together and this places some restraint on the size. One way in which this is met is to encourage regular participation in small groups or "cells" coming together as a full Community once or twice a month.

The potential leaders of a Community are required to have a well-defined vision for who they are trying to reach. It is not enough for prospective leader's to want to form a group so they can enjoy the company of others. Their leader's role in this is not to find a "target" for them but encourage their listening to God and ask sometimes hard questions that help focus what they believe God is saying. Typical questions are "who are the people around you?", "and what is it you see happening in your neighbourhood or network?" These are not so much "tuning" questions as they are starters for the process. A senior leader is also likely to ask questions like "why do you think God is saying this or that to you?" and thereby add another level of analysis and refining.

Lindsay made the interesting comment that telling people what to do is considered "social engineering". This is something leaders are discouraged from doing and it begins in the formative stages of a new Communities life. Leaders are asked to set out and decide their own approach to their Communities life and ministry and then encouraged to share it with the wider church to see if there are others who want to walk with them in their vision. There is therefore a huge amount of space given for people to seek and hear from God and then make plans. Where senior leaders then aid and abet the Community leader is in/by providing expertise and information in planning and accountability

Once the direction is set and the machinery is in place, the staff team and coaches hold the Missional Community leader accountable for the latter's decisions. (This again is sourced in the 3rd principle of "low control, high accountability").

Only 40% of the present Missional Communities are over small group size and this is a matter of concern at the staff level. There is also a general reluctance to multiply.

One of the factors of which Philadelphia became aware was the lack of leaders to huddle others as Missional Communities started to proliferate. The huddles had been led by senior people, usually always staff members but the huddles became far too large and so the decision was made to bring in and train non staff members as "coaches". The coaches, unfortunately, treated many of their leaders as "friends". That is to say the huddles were very friendly but this worked against the coach asking hard questions. Lindsay commented that you cannot take your foot off the missional pedal, even in a missional church.

Maintaining intentionality for reaching others is not easy, even in a church like Philadelphia which sees people coming to faith on a weekly basis. (Most conversions are happening via the Sunday Services and on a weekly basis therefore the question was how many were due to the ministry of Missional Communities? Only approximately 30 people have come to Christ via the MC's in past year, less than half of those in Services. However, Nick Allan acknowledged it is hard to trace how many of those Sunday conversions have MC connection as there is no process for doing this.)

These Communities make all decisions related to their corporate rhythms and this includes attendance at Sunday Services. This is referred to as the Community "orbit" and it is possible for a Community to only attend on a monthly basis whereas others might attend three weeks in a month.

Philadelphia's history shows there have been times of both "scattering" and "gathering". Presently, due to leadership changes and their sense of a need to re-focus on elementary practices like huddles, the church leaders have encouraged a time of gathering. They point out this will change and they will be encouraging a scattering in due season. Both scattering and gathering impact the frequency or shape of a Communities orbit and while the leaders do have freedom in the life and ministry of their groups it is accepted they are part of a greater whole and need to follow the lead given by congregational leaders.

As strongly suggested by the full Philadelphia organisational map (Appendices), there is much more to the ministry than Children, Youth, and Sunday "base" activities. Philadelphia has developed an extensive outreach to the poor and marginalised once again using the missional community approach. The umbrella name used is Restore and a count of the various enterprises covered by this ministry department shows some fifteen activities ranging from food provision, to prison ministries and a Half Way House. Restore ministries also use "allotments" to provide food for people in need and as a way of encouraging the long term unemployed by providing a way in which they can contribute.

In concluding this section a number of elements stand out for discussion.

One of these is the fact that Philadelphia, while being probably considered the “flag ship” of the “3 dimensional movement”, is reviewing the appropriateness of some central practices. These are the size and operation of Communities and how to provide huddles contributing to leader character and competency formation. The former faces challenges in growing groups beyond small group size, retaining a missional “edge”, and being able to multiply into new Communities. The latter is challenged by an apparent danger to the overall church’s “DNA”. It was noted for example that Life Shapes were not widely understood past the level of the present ministry and Community leaders. A number of factors appear to be contributory but a major one is the reality of a church people naturally “check out” when shifting to Sheffield or looking for a new church home. The congregational leaders certainly make it clear in oral and written communication that features like the Sunday Services have their place but it is the Communities which define Philadelphia. There is no way to ensure people buy in to this vision but the effect is to weaken the essential DNA, that which makes this fellowship and network different.

Another important element is represented by the term “missional”. What is a “missional Church”?

The term “missional” in relation to our understanding of the nature and therefore task of the church is not a new one. It may be traced in development from the writings and teaching of Leslie Newbigin and now taking up a very prominent place with writers and practitioners like Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren. However, as Roxburgh and Boren has pointed out, missional church may be no easier to define than the Kingdom of God.⁶

⁶ Introducing the Missional Church, 2009

Discussion

As already noted, defining a missional church is not a straightforward exercise. As a term, “missional” is sometimes used as a comparative. It seeks to make itself something other than “attractional”. Writers appear to be proposing that a missional church is not an attractional church while at the same time admitting a church which is missional will be attractive⁷. The assertion on the other hand is that attractional church cannot be missional. The former is seen as staying and gathering rather than going and scattering. The attractional church is configured to the development of programmes, religious “goods and services” that both attract and retain new members.

Some authors have described missional in being "a church that proclaims the gospel...where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Christ, [where] the Bible is normative...[and] Christians behave Christianly toward one another"⁸. However, as Taggart⁹ points out, these are hardly unique. As she says,

We would find that most churches agree that they too share these ideals but are sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing to bring them to reality.

Frost and Hirsch in *The Shaping of Things¹⁰ to Come* venture three characteristics of a missional church: incarnational ecclesiology, messianic spirituality, and apostolic leadership while Steve Taylor¹¹ sees people in the missional/emergent church placing value on being artistic, blogging, experiential, participatory, questioning and visual. This same author notes the tendency of these churches to be “white and middle class” and expresses the hope these characteristics will be overcome but possibly his most telling comment is that EM (Emergent Missional) is “open ended”, resists “defining ourselves” and is unsure of themselves even as a movement.

This all tends to underline the difficulty of offering any firm definitions.

Some authors point out that what might claim to be missional may in fact be attractional but using a missional “programme” as one of its many religious “products” to attract new members.

Again, missional is forced perhaps to define itself by what it is not and what it does not want to be is attractional and programme orientated. Missional seeks ways of going rather than encouraging people to come. It sees the very nature of the church as being missional and

⁷ Breen <http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2010/12/09/can-a-church-be-missional-and-attractional/>)

⁸ Gibbs E. Graham Cray (reporting team chair) et al., [Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context](#) (London: Church House) 2004. Online: http://cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/mission_shaped_church.pdf. As quoted Taggart D. [The Emerging Missional Church: A Swot Analysis](#). Australasian Pentecostal Studies. Web Journals

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ http://www.emergentkiwi.org.nz/archives/a_to_z_of_emergent_church.php

while incorporating worship and evangelism sees neither as the primary *raison d'être* for its existence. In short, a missional church is something different to what is commonly identified as being a church.

However, Breen and Cockram¹² argues the term “missional” is meaningless unless it is linked to disciple- making. They go so far as to say

...we don't have a missional problem or a leadership problem in the Western Church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission¹³.

This is significant for the fact that Mike Breen, as we know, was the Lead Rector of St Thomas Crookes and St Thomas Philadelphia which achieved recognition for its innovation of moving from missional small groups to missional communities. We cannot therefore say he is without some credentials in making the comments he does. He goes further in his assertion that a missional church without a discipleship culture will ultimately fail in the way a car will with only wheels but no engine would¹⁴.

If Breen's observations are correct it implies no talk of missional church can be separated from the development of a discipling culture.

What then are points of convergence and divergence between 3DM, (using the experience and observations made of St Thomas Philadelphia), and the model proposed by Roxburgh, Boren et al?

Firstly, the place of language.

Roxburgh and Boren¹⁵ make the observation:

Language is the way we create worlds; it's what we do to make a culture...

However, here they seem to be talking about the development of a different narrative rather than the adoption of a distinct vocabulary as 3DM appears to propose with the use of their Life Shapes. Roxburgh and Boren suggest the development of a new imagination as being the precursor for a 'missional narrative' whereas 3DM sees a discipling “language” as instrumental in forming a discipling culture with mission being the natural result. With Roxburgh and Boren discipleship is something that proceeds from the missional narrative.

¹² [Building a Discipling Culture](#), 2011

¹³ Ibid p13

¹⁴ [Why the Missional Movement will fail](http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2011/09/12/why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/). <http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2011/09/12/why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/>

¹⁵ 2009, p142

However, a second element on which there may be more commonality is the source of a new language and therefore culture. Both approaches place great importance on leadership.

Breen¹⁶ asserts

Missional leadership is not simply discipling individual people, but it is leading larger groups that disciple and train leaders in a cohesive, organised way for God's mission in the world.

The 3DM approach places huge emphasis on the leader's huddle and the use of the Life Shapes in providing a vocabulary. However the aim of these huddles is character formation and the development of "rhythms" in the leader's life. The point to be made here is that the 3dm approach is not to make a better evangelist but a disciple and this necessitates growth in competency but, most essentially, character.

The character of the leader is also important with Roxburgh and Boren with the latter saying¹⁷

First, we must recognise that leadership...flows out of who the leader is as much or more than what he or she does.

They, along with Romanuk¹⁸ stress that the formation of a missional environment and culture is dependent on the character of a leader.

The primary element in cultivating a missional congregation is the personal character of the leader, those traits and habits that must be present if anyone is to lead an organization through adaptive, discontinuous change...

However, while 3DM appears to offer a concise way to go about this character development through the huddle process; Roxburgh et al do not do so. Their focus is certainly on the capacity of leadership as a crucial element in the development of a missional culture and call for a number of attributes in the leader but offer no practical tools for their development. The Missional Network¹⁹ does encourage collective learning in missional leader's cohorts such as the one run by Knox Centre for Christian Leadership and Ministry and led by Rev Dr Mark Johnson and certainly the character of the leader is picked up in the 360 survey being used. However, much of the survey focuses on specific ministry practices and appears therefore to be more heavily slanted toward competency.

It is however fair to draw a parallel between 3DM and Roxburgh et al in their insistence on the development of rhythms in a leader's life as marking a critical contribution. Indeed, it is

¹⁶ [Multiplying Missional Leaders](#), 2012

¹⁷ [Missional Small Groups](#), 2010. p164

¹⁸ [The Missional Leader](#), 2006. P114

¹⁹ <http://www.themissionalnetwork.com>

this area which provides the most striking similarities. The 3DM vocabulary and the observed practice of Philadelphia stresses corporate and personal rhythms of prayer, scripture, Sabbath keeping, and hospitality. The Life shape associated with this is the Semicircle²⁰. The maxim used here can be best summarised as “work from rest, not rest from work” and points to the opening chapter of Genesis in arguing the first “task” confronting humankind was the Sabbath. Before beginning work they were to rest. Breen and Cockram²¹ therefore recommend a pattern of Sabbath Keeping which finds its expression, not only weekly, but daily and monthly.

In the area of communal habits I noted that there are two compulsory “daily office” for Staff. They are first thing in the morning and again at midday. Using the Moravian Prayer Book all staff are required to stop work, come out of their respective offices, and join together in the portion for that time. No exceptions are made for people visiting the Office. They either join in or wait.

Hospitality and eating together is very evident as a practice and is not solely a practice for leaders and provides the third element. Most of the huddles and Communities I was privileged to observe included food and the invitation of others to a meal is encouraged among the Missional Communities and households of Philadelphia.

It takes no exhaustive survey of the Missional Literature especially that of Alan Roxburgh to see very similar rhythms at work. Roxburgh and Romanuk²² lament the absence of basic rhythms in leaders and in referring to what they call ‘the habits and practices of Christian formation’.

...our work with pastors shows they have never been formed in these disciplines and practices that shape them as leaders (for example, indwelling scripture as a listening process using Lectio Divinia...)...Other examples of such practices are regular fasting, silent retreat, and hospitality to strangers.²³

Therefore both Roxburgh and similar missional church authors place emphasise on what someone else might term “Christian Practices”. (Their reason for this description in contrast with the term “spiritual practices/disciplines” was that the latter are often interpreted as something done by individual disciples while the experience of the People of God understands them as corporate). As Roxburgh and Romanuk²⁴ intimate these are obviously personal practices but belonging to the community as a whole. Moreover, their communal and public practice is in itself missional. As Boren²⁵ points out

²⁰ Building a Discipling Culture: Huddle Guide, 2009. p20

²¹ Building a Discipling Culture, 2011

²² 2006

²³ *Ibid.* p 34

²⁴ *ibid*

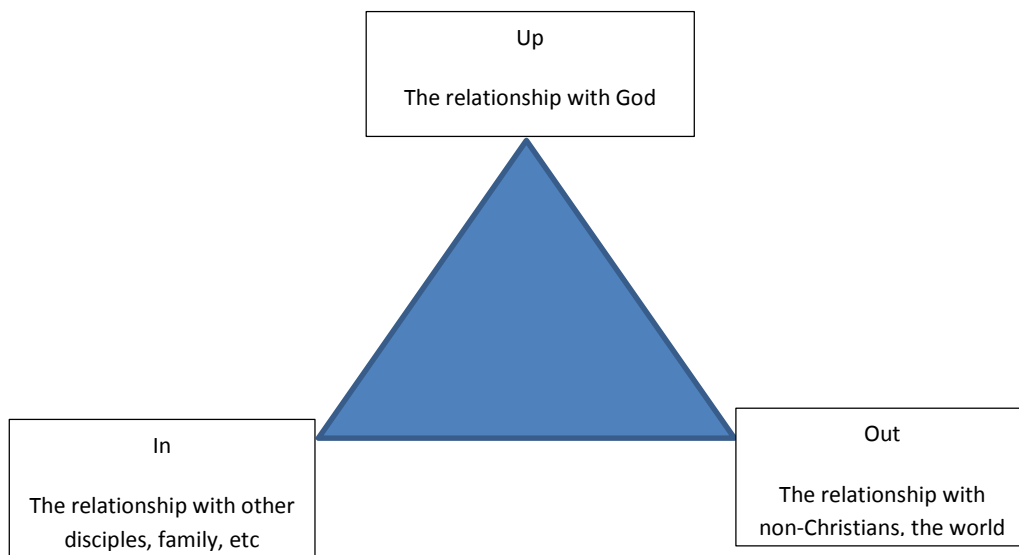
²⁵ 2010. p 64

As I observe the way normal people apply the spiritual disciplines in their lives, I see that most people apply them individualistically. Community is often one of the disciplines alongside others. I would like to invite us to think differently: community is actually the context in which we do the disciplines. Spiritual formation is not something I do alone and then contribute to the community.

He had previously stated²⁶ that

Living missionally depends on how we relate to God and how we relate to one another as much as how we relate to those outside the church.

In making these statements Boren and 3dm are definitely on the same wave length. In the case of 3DM and Philadelphia's this is picked up by the relationship triangle with its three points of Up, In, and Out.



(The Triangle comes with a set of questions under each heading to help assess each area. The aim is to help the individual find balance in their life as they seek to be like Christ. The Triangle is also used to assess group health, identity and other categories.)

From this we can say there is a high level of consensus on the priority of a presence of different rhythms in the life of a leader and community and that their presence and practice is part of what being missional means.

²⁶ Ibid. p 63

Perhaps the greatest apparent divergence is in how a church moves from the classical attractational model to a missional one. And yet, even in this there are some points of agreement.

It is probably essential first of all to understand Roxburgh and 3DM have different starting places.

As we noted, Philadelphia was a church planted by St Thomas Crookes. To say St Thomas Crookes was your typical Parish Church would be far from the mark. Not only was it an Anglican/Baptist hybrid but it had a history and reputation for experimentation and innovation. (A useful summary, albeit from his own point of view, is given by Mike Breen²⁷).

Therefore the daughter that is St Thomas Philadelphia inherited much of the parental DNA and subsequently, through the loss of its worship centre, (something over which Mike Breen had already heard God give warning), and the problem with small groups trying to be missional, led to the development of mid-sized groups with input from people like Bob Hopkins. The culture was already one of experimentation and innovation.

The innovation most clearly associated with Philadelphia's missional nature is the Missional Community. Hopkins and Breen²⁸ detail this development and point to the writings of Joseph Meyers²⁹ in the latter's assertion that four types of social interaction are needed. The four are intimate space, personal space, social space, and public space. As again noted above, the Missional Community corresponds to the social space. The contention is that a small group is "small enough to care but not big enough to dare". Further, the small group is greatly challenged in penetrating the sub cultures that make up modern society.

The growth of such a gathering as the Missional Community however impacts its meeting environment and leadership. How is a lay person with all the pressures of life and occupation meant to cope with this? It was this problem which confronted the lay leader mentioned in Observations and we have already noted the move to a smaller community.

Perhaps what is highlighted in this experience is the importance of a capable and recognisable leadership cadre within the Community. Missional Communities are usually built beginning with a nucleus and leaders are meant to be on the lookout for potential leaders who can lead the small groups as the Community develops. If this was made common practice perhaps in the way one of the original "clusters developed talked about by Hopkins and Breen and the Community met less frequently than weekly would it be possible to lessen the burden carried by a Community leader(s)?

²⁷ <http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/how-i-chose-movement-over-mega-the-story-of-sheffield/>

²⁸ *Clusters: Creative Mid-sized Communities*, 2007, Electronic Version 2012

²⁹ *The Search to Belong*, 2003

Ralph Neighbour³⁰ says that the optimal “span of care” with leaders is no more than 1:5. That is, no leader has care of more than five other leaders thus limiting a Missional Community or its equivalent to one Community leader and five small group leaders. The Community leader, in turn, is coached and cared for by a staff member, who again, should not oversee more than five but it is likely this could be increased due to their fulltime capacity.

What may also be present in this equation is the “base ministry” of the leader(s). A leader with a strong pastoral gift might perhaps be less inclined to create borders around accessibility and point people to their respective small group leaders in the first instance. A leader with a base ministry of say an evangelist, prophet, or apostle would produce a different culture. However, their strengths are also their weaknesses and would impact other dimensions of the community’s ability to replicate leaders and therefore multiply.

While Hopkins and Breen trace one of the influences on the development of Clusters as being the cell church in Singapore (influenced by Ralph Neighbour et al) it is possible the structure of the cell church and the differentiation of ministries at the cell and cluster level may have gone missing as the Philadelphia story unfolded. In the cell church model the first stop for pastoral care is the cell “pastor” or leader. The matter is only referred to the cluster leader in the instance that it is beyond the experience, skill, or resources of the cell leader. The ministry priority for the cluster leader is not the individual members of the cluster but the care and coaching of the cell leaders.

3dm and Philadelphia are the first to note they have made mistakes and in this area they note two factors likely to prove contributory.

First, Philadelphia went through a season where the missional communities were too scattered for too long. This had an effect on both staff team, leaders, and the wider church. In the words of Rich Robinson³¹

The team was run ragged, we lost a sense of being connected as a wider body, the central services suffered and the MC leaders were unsupported and overstretched.

Secondly, and again according to Rich’s assessment, they moved too quickly into innovation.

Again there are positives to this but some things, such as peer huddles, only work for a few years and then need to be pulled back to the core DNA/vehicles to stop things becoming too fractured with new leaders and new vision. At points we have moved too fast, released too early etc – so the leader or MC struggled.³²

³⁰ [Where do we go from Here?](#) Revised Edition 2000. p232)

³¹ Personal email 28/03/13

³² *ibid*

The starting point for this journey is however not the same in every instance. The concern for Roxburgh and others is moving a church with a very different history and culture and in doing this they stress it is impossible to move straight to experimentation. Instead a lengthy process is called for. This as we have noted is not the case with Philadelphia as they were “born” with a very different DNA to the typical programme orientated, attractional church, but a process is very much part of the process encouraged by 3dm and used by Philadelphia. By moving churches through a four stage development a process of reflection and action is encouraged. The culture itself is the concern and not the redesign of structures or the implementation of a programme. Experimentation comes later in the process after reflection on the lives of the people in the subject church and their potential neighbourhood or network.

Conclusion

The question behind the Study was “where to start?” Not so much on where do I start in relation to this report but where do I start as a pastoral leader. Would it be better to follow the approach recommended by Alan Roxburgh and others under the Missional Network banner or take up with the assumptions and methodologies of Mike Breen and 3DM? This did not prove to be as clear cut as I assumed it would be. I had thought they represented two entirely different and competing approaches to the question of moving a church from the model we are most familiar with to one of “missional” but I no longer believe this to be the case.

For one thing, both 3DM and the Missional Network underline the primacy of a cultural shift. Neither model suggests a simple overhaul of structures but engagement with how the organisation of the church understands itself and its reality.

Second, both approaches place significant emphasis on the development of leaders. Not, however, in the usual areas of ministry competency (e.g. preaching, pastoral care, administration, etc) but in their character formation. In each model it appears that ministry is seen to flow from personal rather than “professional” competencies.

Thirdly, both take process seriously. There is no suggestion from 3DM any more than there is from the Missional Network that you can “transplant” one model to another context. The 3DM experience, even though it flows from a more innovative culture than many mainline churches, shows a “work in progress” and not something that has already been attained.

No effort has hitherto been made to present a theological basis for either the vision of missional church promoted by Roxburgh et al or for model of Philadelphia and 3dm. However, this is not to say one does not exist.

Nick Allan³³ in his Master’s dissertation for the University of Sheffield echoes the familiar theological maxim that the understanding of the Church must be founded in the nature of the Trinitarian Godhead before going to quote Karl Barth and his assertion that

...mission is an activity and characteristic of God’s nature³⁴

As Allan concludes, this places missiology within the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than as part of ecclesiology or soteriology³⁵. Quoting others who built on Barth such as Newbigin and Bosch, Allan reminds us the triune God is community ‘focused beyond itself’. God is a sending God and our participation in mission is founded upon this irreducible rock. It is this

³³ Purely pragmatic? The understanding of God, mission and church behind St Thomas Church Philadelphia, Sheffield. 2012

³⁴ Ibid p12

³⁵ ibid

centrality of the nature of God which prohibits what Alan Hirsch calls the “evangelistic-attractational model” and demands instead a “missional-incarnational model”.³⁶

In their introduction to *The Missional Leader* Roxburgh and Romanuk have this to say.

God is about a big purpose in and for the whole of creation. The church has been called into life to be both the means of this mission and a foretaste of where God is inviting all creation to go. Just as its Lord is a mission-shaped God, so the community of God’s people exists, not for themselves but for the sake of the work.

Their point of view is clear and in concert with those expressed by Allan. It is very safe ground to say 3dm/Philadelphia and Roxburgh et al are coming from the same places theologically. However their methodologies both converge and diverge.

They are both aware of the cultural milieu in which we swim and so encourage reflection and experimentation. I was interested to observe the processes of one church involved in a Learning Community. They has been asked what they intended to do with their new understandings in their context and the options were arrived at were varied but predictable. They all involved meeting some need as they saw it but the watershed moment was when one woman in the group contributed how she had spent time listening to another woman outside the school their children attended. This was confirmed when the 3DM leader in their concluding comments on the day reminded everyone of a simple principle encapsulated in a something children are taught in crossing a road – “Stop, Look , and Listen”. That summed it up as he went on to explain that we tend to rush into a context and decide what people need without taking the time to listen to people talk to us about their lives, thereby giving clues for missional interaction.

He could have been quoting from *The Missional Church* and we might be sure Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren would offer a hearty amen.

³⁶ (A. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*. Brazos Press, Grand Rapids MI, 2006. Chapter 5 pp 127 – 148 as quoted by N. Allan 2012).