

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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The starting point for Missional engagement should always be the recognition that Mission is a project of God. The notion of Missional Church arises from the acknowledgment that Mission is the invitation for us to participate in what God is already doing, and has been doing from eternity. This is critical because churches have often fallen into the temptation of thinking that mission could be about shifting things around, developing mission and vision statements, changing furniture and the décor of the sanctuary, and other such superficial alterations. The notion of missional church in my opinion is an opportunity to do much more than that. Through this movement we are called as Christians to review our vocation and interrogate what it means to be church in the circumstances we live in. I would like to offer some proposals for your consideration.

First, we are called to wrestle with the spirit. Being a Christian has for many people become a part-time habit that competes with other life challenges. It is about going to church when you have the time and you are not crowded by the many activities that form our lives. However, if we are to move from where we are, we have to re-root (re-establish) ourselves in the fundamentals of our spiritual journey. For us to engage in the wrestling with the spirit, in the way Jacob did throughout the night we have to take seriously our faith. In our search to be faithful to Jesus, the Galilean, we do have to disentangle our Christian faith from the marketplace of choices. Somehow we have to accompany the few that remain in our churches, and have not yet bailed out as many have done, to become real disciples and not pretenders. The wrestling with the spirit approach is about liberating us from 'nominal Christianity' that is a scourge to the western Church.

The Reform pioneers gave us the ecclesiological dictum, *ecclesia semper refomanda* (the church is always reforming). And this reforming activity can only happen when we reignite the spiritual offices that enable us to be tuned to the leading of the spirit. In a world where we have been so conditioned to trust only the mind (logic) it is going to be a challenge to embrace the heart and the soul as important components of our *creatureliness*. However, essential to the reforming of the spirit we do have to learn again to allow our hearts to speak to the mind and together

to our parent in heaven. We need a different kind of reformation. A reforming of the soul and heart of the church.

The reforming action of the spirit also includes placing the Bible at the centre of our communal life. Again the reformers left us tremendous legacy in asserting that our Christian vocation is rooted primarily in the reading of scripture, and for our purpose I shall say re-reading of scripture. One of the cardinal theological propositions of the reformation is the statement *sola scriptura*. Yet we are in a state of near Biblical illiteracy in our generation. We might be the worst generation of the last century when it comes to Bible literacy. This is going to be a serious impediment to the church as she seeks to grow in missional orientation. My submission is that we need to go all out in popularising the reading of the Bible again. Perhaps we need to employ multi-media strategies that will appeal to different generations both in the church and in society. It is possible for us to make the Biblical narrative interesting, engaging and relevant to the struggles of our generation.

The second dimension of the spirituality of listening is what Dr Sharon Watkins has aptly called spirit-filled conversations. It is an opportunity to develop a new way of speaking with and to each other. In normal human interaction we pass each other going through the motions, supposedly listening to each other, when in fact we might be hearing without understanding. Spirit filled listening demands of us to tune into a different frequency. It requires us to acquire a new kind of discipline that involves attributes such as humility, feeling the stirrings of the spirit in the other as well as the aptitude to allow ourselves to put premium in understating others rather than we being understood. I affirm the conversations you have had in the last several months through which you have created spaces for different voices within the Christian Church to emerge. It is of critical importance that your missional journey is driven and anchored on a spirituality characterised by active listening. This way the notion of missional church will be expressed as a movement of the spirit rather than a bureaucratic process driven from the top. It would be like a fire which is difficult to put out because its flames will proliferate at different places and at different times. The fire of the gospel will be lit by the charisma of the youth, the older folks, your music groups, children and all God's people who are part of the movement called the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. It will be a repeat appropriation of the prophecy of Joel, as had been done by Luke following the Pentecost story.

'In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.

And I believe the climax of Luke's appropriation of this text is when he attests in verse 21;

And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

I believe we should be invitational in our approach. All the members of the Christian Church, the local churches and organizations ought to feel the new energy and impetus of this process of seeking to follow Jesus in a new way. We have to build momentum such that all those that are part of the Christian Church would not want to be left behind. This does mean we have to invest in ways that will speak to the minds and hearts of those who will hear and read your messaging. Further, it is often necessary to have people in all the different expressions of the church who are able to excite and cajole others. The vision has to be clear to all, as Yahweh said this to Habbakuk 2:2;

Write down the revelation  
and make it plain on tablets  
so that a herald<sup>□</sup> may run with it.  
For the revelation awaits an appointed time;  
it speaks of the end  
and will not prove false.  
Though it linger, wait for it;  
it will certainly come  
and will not delay.

The point is for a denomination such as yours you have to begin with the right place. As we have already said earlier we are only invitees to the missional project. At the 1998 World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare, Dr Kosuke Koyama did an amazing Biblical reflection on the parable Jesus tells about a rivalry between two siblings. In the parable

the younger sibling demands his share of his heritage. He jumps the gun by not allowing his father to die first, he simply demands his share and once it's given to him, migrates to a far away country. Whilst there he becomes the ultimate consumerist and ends up squandering all he had. Perhaps the country he was at had experienced something similar to the economic bubble of 2007. However, ultimately he comes to his senses and he returns home in a state of impoverishment. When he is still at a distance his father see his need, his pain and he runs to meet and kiss him. And Kosuke Koyama remarks that we worship a running God, a God who goes ahead and meets us in the world, and might I add who meets us in the trenches of struggle.

Another point I would like to raise with you is this; we do have to find ways of reversing the harm that has been done to the mind of the Western Christian. In times past the basic mentality was that the church would do this and that for those that were being evangelized. The posturing was, and to some extent still exists, such that it is the church that will do things for different communities. Consequently, the Western Church does not know how to receive the kindness and ministry of others. This is a serious spiritual disorder. It gives and does all manner of projects for those in the so-called third world. However, it is an important lesson to learn to know that none of us are self-sufficient. We need to receive the grace and service others. We need the neighbourly warmth of our Muslim sisters and brothers, of the immigrant, and of your partners in the world church.

Congregational churches often do the mistake of reducing the mission of the Church to the local. I believe that we should never separate the local from what happens in your state, your country and in the global village. Our struggle to be faithful disciples of Jesus should influence and be influenced by the movements of the spirit in and around us. For example those of us who live at a distance from you, and yet are impacted upon by the policies of your political leadership are asking ourselves what the church's response to the pronouncements and posturing of your new administration. How does Christian America reconcile the building of walls of exclusion with that haunting question in the New Testament that says 'who is my neighbour?' What is the position of the Christian Church regarding the threats to expel so-called illegal immigrants? For many people in the world the election of Donald Trump, the Brexit vote and the resurgence of right wing parties in Europe marks a heightened era of intolerance, xenophobia and racism that is troubling. Many Christians have voted for these movements that say we want America and Europe

only for white folks and Christian conservatives. I am troubled that nearly sixty million Americans voted for Donald Trump who is unapologetic in his bigotry and derogatory appellations towards black people, women, Latinos and people with disability. These issues ought to be troubling to us if we are serious about following Jesus, the Galilean, whose vision was for the Samaritan, the Jew and the gentile to live in communion with each other. I know that many of you might be thinking the silly season of electioneering is over so you ought to get on with your life. However, my view is that you just ushered in an administration that contradicts all that we have been told about America. What the Pilgrim Fathers and Mothers dreamt about were justice for all, a system by the people and for the people, and equal opportunities for all. In my humble opinion all this has been falsified in your recent election. The rug has just been pulled from under your feet. What does this mean for your witness, and your search to be faithful disciples of Jesus?