

# TAKING YOUR CHURCH MISSIONAL

What Does It Cost the Leader?

*by Lois Swagerty*

## **Article Summary**

Leading ones church in a missional direction may be easier said than done. Along with the rewards come risks—both personal and corporate. In an informal survey, church leaders identified 10 key areas of cost in taking their church missional. They answered the questions: What does missional leadership look like? What does it cost? Is it worth it?

## **Further Reading**

[Churches in Missional Renaissance: Facilitating the Transition to a Missional Mindset](#) by Stephen Shields

[Creating a Culture of Balance: A Mandate for Next Generation Pastors](#) by Pat Springle

Teenage girls stage an Extreme Home Makeover. A prison inmate promises his son he'll be a better father when he gets out. A cocaine addict turns around and feeds his neighbors. These are not scenes from reality TV; they are true accounts of what happens when followers of Jesus touch people in their communities with his love.

What do these stories have in common? They all happened because of the missional outreach of churches nearby. These stories and thousands like them are emerging from a missional renaissance wave that is sweeping across the world today.

As we follow the marks of God's handprint on this wave, we will consider some specifics of what it takes for church leaders to heed the missional call. What does missional leadership look like? What are the costs? And most important, is it worth the cost?

### What Is Missional Leadership?

"Missional is about a way of being the church in the world," says Reggie McNeal, author of *Missional Renaissance*. "It's not about a what; it's about a who. The missional church is the people of God partnering in God's redemptive mission in the world."<sup>1</sup>

Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life* observes that "The body of Christ has had its hands and feet amputated until all that's left is a big mouth. The world has heard us preach for so long—it's been word without deed. The missional church says it's word and deed."<sup>2</sup>

Leading a missional church requires a deconversion from "churchianity."<sup>3</sup> Reggie tells pastors, "If you're not gripped by the call of God to be engaged in the world on God's mission, you won't go missional. However, if you once answered a call from God to lead his people to change the world, your number just got redialed."<sup>4</sup>

Ministry leaders who are externally focused look for needs and opportunities in the environment around them, says Reggie. "They look for ways to bless and to serve the communities where they are located. Much of their calendar space, financial resources, and organizational energy is spent on people who are not a part of their organization."<sup>5</sup>

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Greg Finke, pastor of **Gloria Dei Lutheran Church** in Houston, TX, ([www.gdlc.org](http://www.gdlc.org)) describes one way that his people bless their community. “We have a group called the Holy Smokers who pull a humongous meat smoker on a trailer,” he says. “They’ll go anywhere to host big barbeque parties and smoke any kind of meat. I asked them to make smaller smokers so they could have more teams going out. They help foster environments where fun can happen, conversations can start and people can rediscover neighborhood.”



The Holy Smokers at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston foster environments where fun can happen, conversations can start and people can rediscover community.

“The missional renaissance is easier said than done,” says Greg. “Sometimes we find ourselves still tinkering with things as they are. It’s like tinkering with the old Chevy in the garage rather than designing a whole new transportation system. It’s based on leadership and passion from people who have experienced life change through the good news of the son of God. And when lives are touched by God and are given good leadership, more lives are touched.”

### INTERNAL TRIGGERS

Some leaders arrive at a missional focus gradually.

For Jeff Wells, senior pastor of **WoodsEdge Community Church** in Spring, TX, ([www.woodsedge.org](http://www.woodsedge.org)) the journey began by reading the book, *The Externally Focused Church* by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson. “When I read

the book, I thought, ‘We’ve been doing church all wrong,’” says Jeff. From there he took steps to change his priorities and focus.

“We’ve had pieces of being missional for years,” says Visionary Leader Dave Bartlett from **Orchard Hill Church** in Cedar Falls, IA ([www.orchardhillchurch.org](http://www.orchardhillchurch.org)). Orchard Hill has worked to serve local schools for the past 25 years. “When I first came to Orchard Hill I said, ‘God has called us to change our community.’ We’re a suburban church and we built a community center to serve our town. But now we want to take our coalition 10 miles away into the poorest community in our state.”

Laura Hoy, who heads up local missions at Orchard Hill Church, voices a similar journey. “I was involved in student ministry,” she says, “but I sensed God was shifting me into outreach and mission. I had a strong sense that God wanted to do more than just use me as a facilitator. Now we are forming a relationship centered, missional community. We partnered with a local organization called Shout to put on a hip hop concert in a really rough part of town. We use principles of indigenous leadership rather than just going in and serving and getting out.”

“I didn’t pick being missional,” says Pastor Lori Strang of **Redeemer Lutheran Church** in Toledo, OH. “It was something that happened in our setting. I’ve always been the lone voice in a sea of traditional thinkers.”

“I’m a missional person, but I never defined it,” says Larry Forsythe, pastor of **First Baptist Church** in Leamington, Ontario, ([www.fbclearmington.com](http://www.fbclearmington.com)). He started out working as a prison chaplain and then was asked to provide hospice care for a dying church. “It had six people and I was called in to close it down,” he says. “But I developed a friendship with them, left the chaplaincy and moved into the community.” Acting on pure instinct, Larry and his family reached out to the youth in their area. They started by hosting a barbeque and 12 years later grew into a thriving church.

## EXTERNAL TRIGGERS

Other leaders have missional ministry thrust upon them.

Vince Parks from Gloria Dei in Houston recalls, “Our sense of urgency came in the form of Hurricane Ike, who arrived in our city and filled

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most of our houses with a foot of water. When you have fish in your house instead of people, you learn that neighboring is a verb—which is what you’re doing when you share power, food and water. Most of our city was without power for 10 days.”

Pastor Greg Finke says the hurricane advanced a missional movement that was already starting. “We got a good two-year fast forward on it,” he says. “We stumbled on a daily e-mail called “Good Morning Church” which we began so we could reach out to our scattered people after the hurricane. We made the simple analogy that Gloria Dei was not a battered building behind police barricades, but Gloria Dei was scattered throughout the region. ‘Let’s go be church,’ we said.”

## What are the costs for the missional leader?

The costs of going missional are not printed on a price tag or posted on the church bulletin board. Rather, they emerge over time. Some costs are obvious while others are subtle. Some are clear and others are cloudy. Some can be painful. We will examine ten areas of cost for the missional leader of today.

## THE COST OF THE CLOCK

The shift from program- to people- development is time consuming. “It is the most difficult of the three shifts necessary for going missional,” says Reggie McNeal. “Helping people grow and develop is hard work; it isn’t something you start and finish in a 12-week course.”<sup>6</sup>

“It’s a long-term process,” says Kyle Pewitt, executive pastor at **Council Road Baptist Church** in Oklahoma City, OK ([www.councilroadchurch.org](http://www.councilroadchurch.org)). “Usually the pastor doesn’t stay around long enough to see it happen.”

“It takes time to educate people on their faith being a lifestyle rather than another thing they do,” says Lori Strang. And Lee Clamp, student minister at **First Baptist Church of Barnwell, SC**, ([www.fbcbarnwell.org](http://www.fbcbarnwell.org)) agrees. “You have to spend a great deal of time communicating the vision even when you feel like the people ought to get it. You have to spend time not assuming they will get it—it’s a time investment.”

Greg Finke emphasizes the time needed to disciple the few. “We underestimate the importance of time, life-on-life. We want it to be done quickly in a program. We want to have a point to ponder—30 minutes lecture, 30 minutes discussion, 30 minutes drive time there and back—and we want to make disciples in an hour and a half. It never has happened that way and it won’t happen that way, because it really is about what Jesus did in Mark chapter 3. We constantly see him leaving crowds so he can spend time with his disciples. And yet we try to gather up crowds and put the 12 in a small group for 90 minutes, give them a brownie and coffee and a booklet.”

Leaders must shift their schedules to live out what they are teaching. Lee recalls, “When I went missional, I was mentoring a young man who wanted to quit the football team because he didn’t have transportation. I had to ask myself, ‘Am I willing to take him home five miles every day after practice?’ When he got kicked out of his home, I ended up having him stay in my home. There are costs that come along with being a servant, but you have to out-serve your people. You can’t lead them if you’re not out in front.”

YOU HAVE TO SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME COMMUNICATING THE VISION EVEN WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE THE PEOPLE OUGHT TO GET IT.

Not only does the leader make a shift in time and priorities, but the church also embraces a whole different style of ministry. “I am hardly ever in the office,” says Larry Forsythe. “It’s big for the church to agree not to have you in the office. My congregation had to release my time to go out and help others.”



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she was still disruptive. One of the girls sat down with her and she fell asleep, so we got her a pillow and covered her up. People didn’t say as much. Next time she came, she went up front for prayer and gave her testimony. She said the only peace she has is when she comes to the church. She’s learning that the church is a safe place to come and sit. And the congregation is learning that Jesus came for the unsaved, not the saved.”

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It can also feel uncomfortable for a church to share its facilities with the community. Bruce Miller, senior pastor of **McKinney Fellowship Bible Church** in McKinney, TX, ([www.mcfbc.org](http://www.mcfbc.org)) notes that when a room or building of the church is being used by the community with the result that a church group cannot use the room for its meeting, there can be a clash. Likewise, when rooms on the church campus are used for outreach, there is an adjustment to be made in terms of ownership and turf.

Jeff Warren, lead pastor of **First Baptist Church** in McKinney, TX, ([www.fbc-mckinney.org](http://www.fbc-mckinney.org)) had to step out of his own comfort zone with regard to sermon content. “Even your preaching event starts to shift in a missional church,” says Jeff. “The price to be paid as a leader is that folks may start to think that you’re not preaching for them. Formerly, preaching was about exegeting the passage and teaching the details of the text. Now it’s more about action.”

Dave Bartlett and his staff challenged the members of Orchard Hill Church to learn how to identify with the homeless, the poor, and those struggling to survive. They ran a six-week long event called Challenges for the Heart. The first week they asked each family to eat only beans and rice and to give the money to the poor. Subsequent weeks focused on activities such as AIDS relief, sponsoring a child through Food for the Hungry and meeting their neighbors.

### THE COST OF COMFORT

In his book, *The Present Future*, Reggie McNeal warns, “It takes enormous courage to give spiritual leadership in the North American church culture, because the church is increasingly hostile to anything that disturbs its comfort and challenges its club member paradigm.”<sup>7</sup>

One way the church may have its comfort zone stretched is when new elements of the community are welcomed inside.

“A young lady from the neighborhood came in when she was high on drugs,” recalls Cindy Milbry,

director of community outreach for Redeemer Lutheran Church in Toledo. “Pastor was doing the sermon and the girl disrupted the whole process. Someone said, ‘Let’s call the police,’ but I told them, ‘This is what the church is for.’ Instead I took her downstairs and fixed her a plate of food. The next time she came in, she wasn’t as high, but

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Orchard Hill Church called its members to identify with the poor by focusing on AIDS relief, sponsoring a child through Food for the Hungry and by meeting their neighbors.

Missional leadership means not only stepping out of your comfort zone, but also, at times, being willing to risk one's own personal safety.

Lori Strang recalls, "The first time I met Ben was during our prayer walks. He was higher than a kite—on crack cocaine. He promised me he would come to worship if I just left his front porch, and said that he was fearful for our safety at his house. Later that evening two young men were shot (not fatally) in his front yard. Three days later he showed up in worship on Sunday. He heard about the Feed Your Neighbor program, and he came to get food the following Thursday. Gradually, he transitioned from a taker to a giver, and now he even delivers some of the food on his bicycle to the older guys."

### THE COST OF CROWDS

Often, members will leave a church when its direction turns missional. Like the Copernican Revolution, some people are dismayed to find out that the universe no longer revolves around them. "Church members who don't go along with the vision will leave," says Lori.

"Eight years ago, 130 people left our church because of our external focus," says Dave Bartlett. "We went through a big turmoil before we even knew what to call it. The target was the youth ministry. When you start to reach messed up kids, it can cause messiness in the church. I was under the deception that if I worked hard enough and

loved enough and cared enough, everyone would come on board to see the missional vision."

"People leave the church because they think they built this church for themselves, and now we want it to be for the community," explains Bruce Miller, senior pastor of McKinney Fellowship Bible Church in McKinney, TX.

Rick Thompson, senior pastor of Council Road Baptist in Oklahoma City, OK, sees the benefit that can come even though people may leave. "When my wife and I first came to the church, we knew there were going to be a lot of people who wouldn't like our vision. There was an exodus, and that was hard, but the whole process was good. It was a crisis of identity for the church. Every person who left was a strong temptation to take personally. If you have your identity by the old measures of success, and you've got people leaving and saying negative things about you, it causes you to consider where you get your identity. It's a good struggle."

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### THE COST OF CONFLICT

Members who choose to stay can cause conflict. At times they rally against the leadership and try to re-establish old patterns.

"Much of the rub comes with the fact that people don't or won't change until they become intolerably uncomfortable," observes Lori Strang. "The pastor has to have some skill in dealing with conflict and remaining a less-than-anxious presence inside an anxious system."

A shift in focus can upset the balance in a church. "The cost I feel is a deep unrest and a threat to the fabric of the church," says one pastor. "You find it mainly in some of the members who want church

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to be a place apart from the world. They want to come in, sit down, be quiet, and listen. Anything beyond that can rock the boat.”

“Our senior pastor came in with a very specific vision of developing people to go and change the world,” says an associate pastor. “We had to examine all our programs and clean the cupboard. When you get rid of people’s pet programs, they don’t like it. None of us had ever been through a conflict at this level,” he admits. “People were far angrier than the circumstances warranted. There was even a group that met in secret against the pastor.”

“Recently I’ve felt like I’ve been paying a great price as a leader,” says another pastor. “The truth is that the vast majority of the people don’t get it. These are people that I love and I’ve been called to shepherd. They’re not coming along, but they’re not leaving. Nor do I want them to leave. I’ve been called to lead them to Jesus and his mission.”

Another leader confesses, “I’m getting some pushback from some of the seniors. They say, ‘What are you doing for us?’ They want an elevator, a new sidewalk, and more parking spaces marked for senior adults. Meanwhile, I’m thinking, ‘You are grownups, you can provide for yourselves, but these other people who we’re serving can’t.’ It really is a balance to maintain the relationships with one group while saying, ‘Go out and get ‘em!’ to the other group.”

Larry Forsythe divides pushback into two categories: healthy and unhealthy. He notes a healthy resistance that comes from trying to change direction too quickly. “It’s about accountability—a chance to stop and consider the weaknesses in your plan,” he says. “This type of pushback helps to develop you by listening to

the voice of the people. Unhealthy pushback worships the old model, the old system, and tries to thwart the purposes of God and the missional effort. It doesn’t have a heart for Jesus.”

“The biggest thing to realize is not to model yourself on the traditions of the past, but on Christ—what he did, how he would love people and talk to people. And that gives validity to the model,” says Lee Clamp.

THE COST OF CRITICISM

Pastors who lead their church in a missional direction may become the target of criticism. “It comes back against the senior pastor as personal attacks,” an associate says. “People question his personal integrity, leadership ability and even his salvation.”

“As a leader, you have people who question what you are doing,” says Lee, “especially when the church scorecard is based on programs and people. When you are concerned with kingdom growth and you spend time reading to a child whose family may or may not come to the church, they question what you are doing. They ask, ‘Why aren’t you in the office?’ They wonder if it is a valuable thing.”

Lori Strang says, “The pastor often has to take the heat for failures. I think one of the costs is walking outside the boundary of what people in your own tribe believe ministry entails. It also involves crossing boundaries to help those who are really in need. We had to move one of our families into a homeless shelter who were incapable of transporting their animals to the humane society. They were terrified to do it themselves. They were very much in need of ‘Operation NOAH’—which was what we called going in to rescue the animals and deliver them to the society.” But such efforts are not always applauded.

“Tough love in a neighborhood of drug addicts is also a cost,” she adds. “It’s important to speak up for grace even in the midst of unseemly situations, even when you receive flack from people for doing that.”

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Programs—or the lack of them—can also come under fire. Rick Thompson recalls, “When I first began to articulate the vision, we redefined some of our measures. Some of our programs were no longer considered to be important, which was interpreted by some other churches in the area as a step backwards. We had to endure gossip in the Christian community about where our church was going. Change always creates anxiety, and there was a lot of that going on.”

A pastor’s preaching may come under attack. Jeff Warren says, “When you move away from a more exegetical approach to preaching, members who’ve been believers for a long time feel as if you’ve become less biblical. Now we spend more time on the application of the

text with interviews, stories and videos. In a missional church it’s critical to see how the text is being lived out in the world. It’s a real shift, and I’ve discovered it’s a precarious thing. Clearly the content and interpretation of the Word of God is critical but in a missional church you never stop at knowledge alone. It’s more important to show how to live it out.”



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Well-known personalities are not exempt from criticism. Pastor Rick Warren of **Saddleback Community Church** in Lake Forest, CA, ([www.saddleback.com](http://www.saddleback.com)) recruits thousands of volunteers around the globe to battle adult illiteracy in North America, AIDS in Africa, and many other causes. He envisions a billion Christians mobilized around the world to dispense everything from medical care to agricultural tools. Such an ambitious missional agenda has made Warren famous—and controversial.<sup>8</sup>

“The rage against Warren has come from both liberals and conservatives,” says Steven Waldman, cofounder of the religious web site beliefnet.com. Warren says, “You’re never going to please everybody. I don’t need to agree with somebody in order to love them. I don’t need to agree with somebody in order to help them either.”<sup>9</sup>

#### THE COST OF CASH

Finances are one of the first areas to feel the pinch when a church shifts to a missional outlook. Dave Bartlett says, “Eight of our top 10 donors walked out, but our budget still went up, so you know that’s God!”

Often the bottom line behind the pushback from the congregation can be traced to two underlying concerns: What kind of finances will the people we reach bring into the church? And how will we meet our budget if we reach out to the under-resourced in our community?

Bruce Miller notes that the shift to missional focus can cost the church budget in funds that formerly were given to an “in-church” ministry, but which now are being given directly to service organizations in the community.

Along with the shift in focus comes a shift in finances. This is where the rubber hits the road in the missional shift. “Whereas formerly we were

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## How can leaders spread the missional virus?

- *Be intentional about celebrating stories. Vision leaks. –Kyle Pewitt*
- *Locate the catalysts in the congregation and put them in charge. –Lee Clamp*
- *Deploy your youth ministry. Use the social networks of teens. –Stephen Burnette*
- *Challenge your families with ways to identify with the poor. –Dave Bartlett*
- *Preach it from the front. –Jeff Wells*
- *Go and do it yourself, then hand it off to those who get excited. –Larry Forsythe*
- *Pick the forward-thinking members who have credibility with their peers. If they begin to talk about it, it will spread. –Adam Knight*
- *Adopt a new church covenant. –Rick Thompson*
- *Lead by example. Mentor a high school kid. Become a soccer coach. –Reggie McNeal*
- *Leverage your recovery ministry to show people reality. –Clint Chamberlain*
- *Show pictures of hungry children to motivate your congregation. –Dave Masters*
- *Share “Stories from the Seats” for four weeks after Easter. –Dave Bartlett*
- *Ask yourselves continually, “How can we love others?” –Greg Finke*

sending so much money for missions around the world, we instead shifted some of those dollars to our own missional initiatives,” says Jeff Warren. “For the past two years we’ve had 30 international and domestic mission trips each year. So our dollars have shifted to help our own people fulfill the God-given mandate to take the Gospel to the world. As a result mission dollars toward institutional expression may be reduced as many are leveraging their resources toward their own personal hands-on missional engagement.



For the past two years First Baptist Church of McKinney has had 30 international and domestic mission trips.

“The big challenge is for members to give to the church’s budget and to the many mission trips and experiences,” Jeff continues, “Our total giving to missional initiatives is way beyond where it’s been in the past but some are saying we’re doing too much and it’s hurting our more traditional mission offerings. Some say we’re doing too many mission trips. I suppose you’ve made a significant missional shift when some think you’re doing too much missionally! What’s happening is your dollars are just not coming through the same channels. For years we’ve been mission-focused, but now that mission is at the center of all we do, we have a new scorecard. Dollars are starting to shift- they land in other places. At the same time your unified budget can be impacted because many would rather give to externally focused ministry. They’ve decided, “It’s not about us anymore and my giving will reflect that.”

The flip side of the problem can be positive, however. Outreach Pastor Adam Knight of University **United Methodist Church** in San Antonio, TX, ([www.uchurch.tv](http://www.uchurch.tv)) says that the reduction in giving allowed his church to refocus on vision and clarify its priorities. They subsequently raised an additional \$300 thousand to fund missional projects; including bringing on a full-time staff person for special needs ministry.

First Baptist Church in Barnwell, SC, takes an all-in approach to money. “The whole purpose of having it is to give it away,” says Pastor Stephen Burnette. “At some point you have to ask, ‘What are you going to do with all your buildings?’ You build more buildings and you’re stuck having to maintain them for the next 100 years.”

Finance Chairman Dave Masters describes what happened when First Baptist Church of Leamington, Ontario committed \$4000 of its budget to community outreach. “We went to a nearby school and asked the resource coordinator what she needed. At first she had a hard time believing we would ask, because she was used to people coming and telling her what they wanted to do, not asking what was needed.

“They had a Special Ed class that wanted to go to the bowling Olympics. The school board would pay their way, but they couldn’t give them the practice rounds to qualify. So we got a bus and took them bowling. There was one autistic boy who said he didn’t want to go, but when he got the bowling ball in his hand, he was thrilled. It turned out that the grandparents of another student in the class were members of our church. Afterwards they told everyone, “Our granddaughter got her first strike!” And it cranked up the other members of the church.”

### THE COST OF CAREER

Related to budget concerns is the possibility that missional leaders will lose their jobs. “I think the shift from church-based to kingdom-based ministry scares pastors the most,” says Lee Clamp.

“I wonder, ‘How am I going to get paid?’ If the funds start to come from different sources, I may need to become bivocational.”

Stephen Burnette voices a similar thought. “If you take Reggie McNeal’s concept of decentralized church, there’s no need for a paid clergy. It’s a financial threat.”

The concern is real and it can lead to alarm. Reggie explains, “A lot of times people can’t hear the missional message because the background noise of fear is so loud, they can’t hear what the Spirit is trying to say to them. So I talk about alternatives.”

Some will earn income from secular sources. Others may be able to gather grants to fund their work. Still others will have individuals who will invest in them and their ministry projects.

In Missional Renaissance he says, “Not everyone will have to find new jobs to go missional. Many current church leaders will be able to maintain their current employment while leading their congregations to join the missional renaissance. Many who want to earn a full-time living in ministry will need to think of themselves as portfolio managers. They will need to have multiple income streams, as opposed to the congregational support model.”<sup>10</sup>

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### Five questions to keep your vision on track

Greg Finke uses a simple tool called The Five Questions to keep your church members accountable to one another. The questions focus on what God is doing *now* in a person’s life:

1. How did you see God at work in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you in his word this week?
3. What conversations are you having with pre-Christian people?
4. What good can we do around here--and how can we get soem of our neighbors in on it?
5. How can we help each other in prayer?

McNeal advises leaders to increase their marketplace value. “Perhaps you’ll keep your church job and be able to go missional. Maybe you won’t. Neither choice is automatic. But you should prepare for either scenario. The key is to be employable. Take on-line classes. Make the necessary sacrifices to put away some transition cash. Too many clergy feel trapped in their church jobs because they can’t afford to do anything else.”<sup>11</sup>

“Many clergy will not be able to make this transition in their current church roles,” Reggie warns. “Consequently, they will move into the marketplace for employment in pursuit of their call to be missional leaders. Some will discover that their personal identity is tied up in their clergy role. This will precipitate a crisis that will become life-defining.” But the upside is, “Those who grapple with this issue and come out well will experience great release and freedom to serve.”<sup>12</sup>

### THE COST OF CALLING

Many leaders will have to redefine their calling. Pastor Lori Strang calls it the “decentralization” of the pastoral role. She explains, “For years we have trained our congregational members to come to the pastor when the system becomes off-balance—a personal problem, a complaint, a boiler issue, a janitorial issue. Becoming missional means spinning off small satellite clusters of folks who offer their assets to the larger group. It is a cost because people have grown accustomed to running to the pastor. Redefining the call of the pastor finds new ways of working together, with Christ—not the pastor—being the centrifuge that keeps the system turning.”

As Reggie McNeal says, “Your sense of call, your sense of self, and your sense of well-being will all be tested during transition times.”<sup>13</sup> “A whole different kind of leadership is required—one that

is organic, disruptive, personal, prophetic, kingdom-focused and empowering.”<sup>14</sup>

Rick Thompson describes this change in calling. “Leaders are shifting away from being the doers and concentrating on leadership development. God puts the passion in people—we’re not going to do it for them. Well-meaning churches have had the hired gun mentality, but now we are equipping people for works of service. It’s a transition from catching people to releasing them, and getting people to see their own personal mission.”

One of his members, Steve Green, president of Hobby Lobby, has a passion for his employees who are unchurched. He knew he couldn’t get them to come to church, so he took church to them. He started a church at the nearby middle school for his employees and their families. It was all birthed out of the vision of becoming missional.

Another member, Kathy Beokman, has a heart for at-risk teenage girls in crisis pregnancies who are kicked out of their homes. She set up a nonprofit corporation and acquired a facility. Her dream is to build multiple facilities that will take in teenage girls, give them job training and counseling for survival on their own. Kathy comes from a similar background. She saw that the system is broken and wanted to create a faith-based organization to offer emotional, physical and spiritual healing. “It’s an example of God stirring her heart; it’s her passion,” says Rick.



Gloria Dei in Houston, TX, has neighborhood missionaries who simply make friends with their neighbors.

## REDEFINING THE CALL OF THE PASTOR FINDS NEW WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER, WITH CHRIST—NOT THE PASTOR—BEING THE CENTRIFUGE.

## THE COST OF CHARACTER

Missional leaders must exhibit strength of character. “I had to step up my prayer life,” admits Lori. “I realized that others’ prayer lives were ahead of mine.”

“You actually have to do what you want to see happen,” Reggie says. “Leaders have to live the change they seek. This is not easy; it requires ruthless self-management.”<sup>15</sup>

“Part of the new reality is that leadership is becoming more personal and less positional,” he says. “It doesn’t mean that positions aren’t important, but who you are as the leader is becoming increasingly the matrix for people to make decisions. ‘Imitate me’ (I Corinthians 4:16)

was the apostle’s call to leadership training. This was not hubris in Paul. It was the height of accountability.”<sup>16</sup>

How does the leader’s character have to change? “We have to lead in living a new life,” says Greg Finke. “I realized I needed to stop talking about this and live it. So I’m leading

by living and telling the stories and learning how to stay out of the way.”

“Most senior pastors I know who call themselves missional are still as busy, programmatic and disconnected from deep and real relationships as ever,” he says. “We’re just using the word missional now. Once I realized I was in that same kind of web, I could start to think outside of the box more quickly.

“I’ve been leading our staff to begin taking up practices of doing less and being with people more. We have what we call neighborhood missionaries. Their job is to make friends with their neighbors. It’s based on the simple concept: Love your neighbor. What if Jesus actually meant that? We ask, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ We make up an impressive program to be a neighbor to somebody we’ve never met before, when all the time God has already put us by the people he wants us to be with.”

Such personal authenticity literally requires a heart transplant. “We do not share the heart of God with the world because we do not have the heart of God,” says Reggie. “This heart transplant does not occur by participating in church activities. It comes from being in a vibrant, growing relationship with God.”<sup>17</sup>

## THE COST OF CONTROL

Giving up personal control is a crucial ingredient in missional leadership. “Going missional is really about deployment, not control,” says Kyle Pewitt. “As leaders we need to stop trying to control the passion of the people and release them.”

“The cost is surrender,” says Dave Bartlett, “and walking where you don’t know where you’re going. We used to do a lot of strategic planning to figure out what we thought God wanted us to do, and at the end of the year, what he did wasn’t in our plan. So we just quit. We need to learn to see how he leads and go that way.”

Judy Marshal, pastor of **Harvest Vineyard Church** in Waterloo, IA, (<http://www.harvestvineyard.net/>) tells a similar story. “God put us in a building with a strip club and drug house and tattoo parlors, with street walkers. We fixed up the whole place and started doing ministry. We thought it was our bright idea. We kept stumbling into what God was doing, and a church grew out of it.”



Harvest Vineyard Church serves Thanksgiving dinner for their neighbors.

## THE COST IS SURRENDER, AND WALKING WHERE YOU DON’T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING.

“Sometimes we make plans and shape them into a movement. But here we felt we were chasing God, and he was moving faster than we were,” says Jeff Warren.

Author Henry Blackaby says that God invites us to find out where he is already at work and join him in it. But it can cost us our agenda. “You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what he is doing,” says Blackaby.<sup>18</sup>

Giving up control brings with it the risk of ambiguity. Says McNeal, “It moves us to a place where our work is never done.”<sup>19</sup>

But Greg Finke minimizes the price. “The leaders actually have to admit that they don’t know what they’re doing. I don’t see that as a cost, but some would.”

“You have to struggle with your own personal idolatries,” says Rick Thompson. “When everyone around you is measuring success in a certain way and you decide your model will be totally different, you have to redefine how you’re going to talk to yourself about how you’re doing. It requires a reorienting of your personal ambitions and also a strong sense of community.”

Giving away control can also mean giving away your church’s moment in the limelight. McKinney Fellowship Bible Church and First Baptist Church



When McKinney Fellowship and First Baptist gave away control, buzz about a non profit in the city spread like wildfire as other churches joined hands to carry out the vision.

know firsthand what it feels like to give up the glory of having their names attached to service projects in the community. They handed off their wildly successful Scare Away Hunger event on Halloween night as well as their local Garage Giveaway program to a newly formed nonprofit organization called 3E.

But it was not a loss. The buzz about 3E spread like wildfire around the city and other churches are joining hands to help carry out its vision. Its goals are anything but modest: to feed all the hungry, clothe all the needy, shelter all the homeless, free all the addicted and educate all the children of McKinney, TX.

YOU HAVE TO  
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### Personal concerns

Going missional sometimes takes a toll in personal areas of a leader’s life such as emotions, family and spouse.

Feelings of isolation are common. One pastor reports that he feels extremely lonely among his peers because of the large number of colleagues that don’t understand. “I try to talk with them about the missional movement and how it resonates in my heart, and they just don’t get it,” he says.

Larry Forsythe notes the cost in time spent away from his family. His role in training Barnabas type leaders in the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec often takes him away from home. His mission trips to Haiti and Mexico also keep him away for long periods.

Another pastor shares his concern about the effects that conflict over the church’s missional vision has had on his wife. “On the personal level, it’s been difficult for her to connect to church members and love the people who are coming against the head pastor and myself. She has no desire to plug in anywhere in the church.” In his wife’s words, “It is hard to love people. I want to be part of the community, but I feel resentment at the same time. I’ve probably missed out on relationships with some really wonderful

people. Whereas ministry used to feel energizing, now it feels draining. I find myself being guarded,” she says.

She speaks of the emotional toll that church conflict takes on her husband day in and day out. “Instead of doing the things he’s gifted at, he spends his energy on the critics. There’s not as much of him left for the rest of the family.”

### Is missional leadership worth the cost?

After counting the costs, it may seem that the compensations are few in comparison. But the same leaders who spoke of risks also spoke of great rewards.

Lee Clamp says, “I spend 10 hours per week coaching middle school football—not because I like football, but to engage the culture who is not coming to our church. We are getting off the campus and touching kids who would never come. It’s more than just sitting around doing a Bible study—it’s about putting feet with faith and being the church to the community.”

“A group of high school freshmen girls in our church ‘adopted’ a family with four children,” says Lee. When they saw the girls’ bedroom, they decided it needed an extreme home makeover. Our girls put on a spaghetti dinner and raised

\$500. Then they went shopping at the Goodwill, bought furniture and painted it bright colors with polka dots. While one of the group took the kids out to play, the others took out the old furniture, repainted the walls and brought in the new furniture. When she saw her new room, one of the children just sat on her bed and cried. It transformed them, and it transformed our kids,” says Lee. “Later, at Christmas, they gave the kids new outfits and read the Christmas story to them. They served their way into the hearts of these young children.”

“The more we are external, the more the people love it,” says Lee. “We cannot get ahead of them on being missional. Anything we do, they respond. Sometime it seems as if the pastors are lagging behind the people in the pews in getting that we are all one body, we’re not competing. Christians get it that we’re all one church. After Hurricane Ike we were taking meals and bags of ice to people. We had great opportunities to give ourselves away. It was galvanizing!”

Pastor Stephen Burnette finds the “early adopters” in his church and puts them in charge of things. He says, “It seems like there are at least 200 folks who want to make a difference.” Then they take those stories and tell them within the larger group. “Eyes light up,” he says. “Suddenly the rock hits their heart.”



Before and after pictures – A group of high school girls at First Baptist of Barnwell redecorate a room in a needy home.



Highschool girls at First Baptist Church of Barnwell serve their way into the hearts of a family they adopted.

Bob Hundley, a retired engineer in Barnwell, SC is one of the catalysts in the congregation. He works with a second grade boy, the youngest of seven children in a poor family, who has not been doing well in his schoolwork. Bob began to mentor him, focused on his reading and spelling and gave him an incentive. "If you get an A on your spelling test, I'll take you out for a McDonald's Happy Meal," Bob promised.

The first week the boy made 100 on his spelling test and his teacher was floored. The next week Bob didn't give an incentive, but he came back and asked again, "What did you make on your spelling test?" "I made 100 on it!" said the boy. Bob said, "Really? I'm going to go check with your teacher on that." So he went and asked the teacher. She said, "I don't know, I haven't graded it yet, but I'll grade it right now. She sat down and graded it and said, "He made 100." And the little boy said, "Told ya!"

Stephen notes the potential consequences of small acts of service. "My wife and I have three children we're mentoring right now," he says. "I asked a third grade boy, 'What do you want to do when you grow up?' 'I guess I'd work at McDonalds,' said the boy. He had no vision of anything beyond that."

"I said, 'There's nothing wrong with that. But how would you like to own McDonalds?' To begin to see his horizons expand is big. If we can take a boy like him and multiply it and break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy, then he will grow up and

become a dad who reads to his kids, and his kids will have a different life and it will ripple out for generations."

Clint Chamberlain, a pastor from Council Road Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, tells what can happen when members are released for mission.

"Joe went into the prison system and installed the Quest for Authentic Manhood program from Robert Lewis ([www.mensfraternity.com](http://www.mensfraternity.com)), and brought in mentors to men who've never had any male role model in their lives. He talked one of the wardens into letting the inmates worship with their families once a month. He saw God stirring the hearts of the men when a huge inmate, like the gentle giant in *The Green Mile*, came into worship. After the message, Joe saw the man with his wife and son and heard the man weeping. The man cupped his son's face in his hands and said, "I'm sorry for what I've done. Son, I will teach you what a biblical man looks like when I get out."

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Greg Finke insists that missional leadership has not been a great cost to him personally. "I've aggravated many more people just with my preaching than I have with going missional," he



Lee Clamp mentoring a student at the primary school using a computer program that helps with reading.

says. "It's like what Jesus did, coming in and proclaiming the kingdom and telling the stories, and you can see the lights go on in people."

## THE COST IS VERY SMALL BECAUSE IT GETS US BACK TO BEING FAMILY AND ENJOYING PEOPLE.

"The cost is very small because it gets us back to being family and enjoying people," he says. "We actually are happier as a family because we have said no to a few more things. We have one night a week that is family night, one night is date night, one

night is neighbor night. There are four other nights left if you want to be insanely busy. Our people are tired of being busy. So as we have begun to suggest to our folks to be less busy with church activities, it hasn't been met with great pushback."

"We were convinced that the most important ingredient in getting to know your neighbor is fun. So we asked, 'Why can't the Christians in the neighborhood be known as the source for fun?' We went into the neighborhood and threw a barbeque. Eighty people showed up. We had a couple more events over a course of nine months. The whole neighborhood was coming alive."

"Now we're ready to take the next step of providing a redemptive environment where we can talk more about the important parts of our lives. We're going to start a group, Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage, a DVD series from Mark Gungor ([www.laughyourway.com](http://www.laughyourway.com)). It will be fun, but it also provides a safe environment to talk about something that builds value into our lives."

"Every week we come together and basically ask the Five Questions (see sidebar), and talk about our plan for getting to know our neighbors. The introverts do it their own way and the extroverts throw parties and we just let the kingdom of God have its way."

"It's exciting many people. They're saying, 'I thought that's what being a Christian was all about!'"



Gloria Dei in Houston, TX, is seeing their neighborhood come alive as they create a fun environment for community to happen.

## Taking the gamble

"Going missional sounds risky, doesn't it?" Reggie McNeal. "That's because it is. You will bet your life and ministry on it. But you may also discover that committing your life to the missional journey will help you find it."<sup>20</sup>

To pull it off will require a reallocation of every resource the church and church leaders employ—from prayer to people, from calendar to calling, from finances to facilities—and everything in between.

"Does this sound hard? You're right—it is. ...But those who participate in the missional renaissance do not think it too high a price to pay to experience the kingdom wave."

"We always try to complicate things," says Greg Finke. "But Jesus said, 'Here's what it's really all about: love God and love your neighbor.' Is that really what it's all about?"

What if it were?





LOIS SWAGERTY



REGGIE MCNEAL



ERIC SWANSON

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Leadership Network welcomes your response. The primary writer is **Lois Swagerty**. Editorial advisors were **Reggie McNeal**, Director of Missional Renaissance Leadership Communities for Leadership Network, **Eric Swanson**, Director of Externally Focused Churches Leadership Communities for Leadership Network, and **Warren Bird**, Director of Research and Intellectual Capital Support for Leadership Network. Contact them via [gary.dungan@leadnet.org](mailto:gary.dungan@leadnet.org)

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Leadership Network’s mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

*\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*

## ENDNOTES

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