

April 2008

Dear North Shore Fellowship,

Are we a church on mission? We sure want to be. The original vision for North Shore Fellowship was to fill a hole in this part of the city for a missional, gospel-centered church.

But what kind of **missional** church are we to be? Allow me to suggest a term that I believe best honors our original vision and mission—an **incarnational** church. An incarnational church is different than many of our previous church experiences of **attractional** church. You may have no idea what the first term means. And you may think I am inventing the second term. But what does it mean to be incarnational? And how is it different from an attractional model of church?

In their recent book on church planting, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, authors Frost and Hirsch suggest that instead of planting missional communities often we plant Sunday services. They describe such church plants as **attractional** in the following way.

By anticipating that if they get their internal features right, people will flock to the services, the church betrays its belief in **attractionalism**. It's like the Kevin Costner character in the film *Field of Dreams* being told by a disembodied voice, "If you build it, they will come." How much of the church's traditional energy goes into adjusting programs and their public meetings to cater to an unseen constituency? If we get our seating, our parking, our children's programs, our preaching, and our music right, they will come. The missional church recognizes...that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into that host community as salt and light.

This insightful work proceeds to argue that a better approach to being a church on mission is to be **incarnational** rather than **attractional**.

Incarnational means that we *live among* and *become like* those with whom we long to enjoy Christ. In fact, Jesus himself pictures it best. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (*John 1:14*). The Apostle Paul embraces Jesus' mission of bringing the gospel to all peoples by also practicing his model of incarnation. Paul claims, "*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings*" (1 Cor. 11:22-23).

An **attractional** model of church is very different from an **incarnational** model of church. For example...

Attractional

Mission done primarily at church building
Mission done by professionals
Mission requiring outsiders become like us
Mission focused on performances and programs
Mission is cleaner and quicker
Mission tends to institutionalize

Incarnational

Mission done expansively where you live
Missions done by members equipped by leaders
Mission requiring us to become like outsiders
Mission flowing through fellowships and relationships
Mission is messier and slower
Mission grows in vitality and effectiveness

Our hope is to become an **incarnational, missional** church. Would you join us in this hope? We invite you to come talk about how this fleshes out at North Shore **this Sunday** in a **Town Hall Meeting** during the Teaching Group hours at both locations – *9:45 in the sanctuary at our Mississippi Ave. campus, and 11:00 at our Woodland Ave. campus*. Come join us as we consider further the mission of North Shore Fellowship.

Grateful for you,

Gary Purdy