



October, 2011

*Called by God and sent by the Living Christ, we the Northwest Regional Christian Church intentionally engage with one another rejoicing in our diversity and shared gifts, deepening our spiritual life, building true community, acting courageously in ministry and mission, and sharing God's good news with a fresh voice and a new song. We seek to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)*

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8*

As we contemplate vision and mission, there are a huge number of potential social justice issues that we might choose as our special focus. Picking just one of these and really becoming deeply involved in it creates the possibility not only of having a much greater impact, but also of we ourselves being transformed. Here is just a partial list, excerpted from the book *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World*, by Mae Elise Cannon:

**List of Social Justice Issues** Abortion • AIDS • Capital Punishment • Child Soldiers • Class Systems • Consumerism • Disaster Relief • Domestic Abuse and Violence • Drugs and Addiction • Environmental Justice • Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide • Female Genital Mutilation • Genocide • Globalization • Health Care • Homelessness • Human Rights • Hunger • Immigration • Incarceration • Microfinance • Physical Disabilities • Poverty • Prostitution • Refugees • Religious Persecution • Sex Trafficking • Slavery • Urban Decay • Water • White Privilege

Frederick Buechner, in his book, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, says: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

This vocation, or calling by God, is what we need to discern. Looking at the place where our church is located, and seeing which of these issues is a real need, and which touches

our hearts and matches our gifts, could lead to a profound engagement in mission that would both change us and change the world, helping to bring about the realm of God.

## **BOOK REVIEW: MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES**

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8*  
*Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*, by Reggie McNeal (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011)

The idea of missional church has been spreading rapidly, and dozens of books on the topic have been published since the first book by that title published in 1998. The missional church concept is being adopted by Christians of every stripe, from evangelicals to mainliners, from megachurches to house churches. Our Disciples of Christ denomination has made it a priority in many ways. Not only did they offer a learning track on missional church at this year's General Assembly, but they also announced a new ministry called The Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, and we in the Northwest Region will be one of their first pilot project groups.

The idea of missional church can be understood in the light of Jesus' saying, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." We are a people sent to be the light of the world, and to be the salt of the earth. We are sent to demonstrate and embody God's realm here on earth. We are sent to love God and to love our neighbor. We are sent to bring good news to the poor. We are sent to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

Many of the books on missional church or missional communities are theological in nature, but this one is not only eminently practical, but it consists largely of inspiring descriptions of missional communities. As the subtitle makes clear, not all of these look like churches in the conventional sense, but all are involved with living the gospel and witnessing in the wider community around them. I found this an exciting book, one that I strongly recommend.

To give you an idea, I will give a summary of Chapter 5: "Mission Houston: Missional Communities for Spiritual Formation and Community Transformation."

Mission Houston is a missional community in Houston, TX. It began four years ago this month with a group of 18 people who came together for a three-day retreat. It was based on two ideas—first, that the church needed to be making more of a positive impact in the community beyond its walls, and second, that personal transformation results in and accelerates community transformation. They had two questions: "What is a disciple of Jesus, and how do you make one?" and they ended up putting together a process of deep spiritual formation called *Faithwalking*,

People come because they have met others who have been transformed by this process. It begins with a 3-day retreat, called Faithwalking 101. When that is over, participants are invited to participate in a 26-week small-group experience called Faithwalking 201,

which is further supported by weekly conversations with a personal transformation coach. These experiences not only ground participants in spiritual practices of solitude, worship, prayer, fasting, study, confession, giving, and celebration, but also prepare them to join or establish a small missional community that both continues the spiritual formation process and also focuses on community transformation through the group's contribution to the common good of the city.

Their purpose of these small missional communities is to serve a need or people group for the long haul, not just work on "projects"—to enable the outer community to experience the realm of God coming on earth as it is in heaven. At their meetings, they focus both outwardly, with questions like, "What are the needs? Are we reaching our goals? What things are we measuring? What adjustments need to be made?" and also inwardly, with questions like "Whose story haven't we heard? Can we do that over a shared meal? Is there any conflict we need to attend to? How are we each holding up under this load?" and "How can we pray for one another?" These communities too have a coach who supports them in their process and makes sure they are accountable, including seeing how each community has decided to develop metrics for measuring its activities and impact. The model that underpins their strategy and process has three components: Radical obedience, which leads to a missional life; a reflective life, where you increasingly co-create the world with God, and authentic community, which leads to shared vision.

In these last four years, Mission Houston has held fifteen additional retreats with 191 participants, who have given birth to over thirty missional communities, many of them focused on children and their needs. So far, all 30 of these 30 communities are still going.

View the entire blog at <http://musingsonmission.disciplesnw.org/>