

simplicity, and prayer.”

The Cedar Riverside neighborhood consists of immigrants, refugees, punks, artists, homeless people, students, activists and professionals. It is the most densely populated square mile between Chicago and Los Angeles, containing close to 9,000 economically and ethnically diverse residents. More than 2/3 of the neighborhood is low-income or live below the poverty level.

The community life of Missio Dei centers around three households in which some of the members choose to live. Missio Dei is an expression of the “new monastic” movement in the church planting field. In the tradition of new monasticism, the members of Missio Dei commit themselves to a rule for their common life. The preamble of this rule says,

Missio Dei is committed to Jesus’ way of peace, simplicity, prayer and hospitality. Missio Dei lives to embody Jesus’ presence—particularly in this neighborhood. Members of Missio Dei commit themselves to three things: centering their lives on Jesus Christ, being present to the neighborhood, and sharing their lives with one another.

On Saturdays from noon until 4:00 p.m., the community participates in what has come to be known as the “Hospitality Train.” The community loads up their bike trailers with fresh ingredients and high-quality cook-

The Church in Mission: Native and Stranger

Many churches in the West have become institutionalized to the point that the preservation of the tradition, or institutional identity, competes in influence with the needs and opportunities presented by the context of mission. On the other hand, attempting to normalize Christianity in the wider society has caused the church to reflect cultural attributes that may very well be “unchristian” in the name of “relevance.”

Missiologist Andrew Walls (1996) suggests that the effectiveness of the church in mission will depend on managing two principles that are in tension with each other. The first principle, the *indigenizing* principle, suggests that “the Gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is at home with the Gospel” (pp. 6-7). The other principle is the “pilgrim” principle which suggests that “the Gospel will also put us out of step with society” (p. 8). In the past, the church has been tempted to define its mission by imposing one or the other of these principles as the defining mode of operation. Holding these principles in tension, though difficult, leads the church in mission away from social and cultural conquest on the one hand, and isolating irrelevance on the other. In the dialectic of these two principles, we find that the church in mission will be both *distinctive* and *engaged* (Murray, 2000).

When mission is not conceptualized in this dialectic, we might consider how churches will regress into stagnation by examining four possibilities where distinction and engagement are concerned (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Four Types of Churches Based on the Interaction of Engagement With the Context and Distinction From the Context*

	Low Distinction from Context	High Distinction from Context
High Engagement with Context	High Engagement Low Distinction (Church as Therapeutic Spa)	High Engagement High Distinction (Mission at the Center)
Low Engagement with Context	Low Engagement Low Distinction (Church as Coffee Shop)	Low Engagement High Distinction (Cloistered Convent/Amish?)

Indistinct from the context yet disengaged with the context. This model of church might be caricatured as “coffee bar church.” In this model, the doors are open to everyone with the promise that each person can cus-

tomize what the church is serving to each one's particular tastes (think here "double soy, half caff, mocha latte with chocolate sprinkles"). The customer comes in from the street, gets her take on the Gospel and is sent out to continue down the same path of life she has chosen. The church in this model reflects all the cultural thirsts of the culture while effecting no moral distinctions in the lives of those who patronize it and no hope for changing the world beyond the church's threshold.

Indistinct from the context and engaged. This model of church might be caricatured as "day spa church." In this model, the church projects the hope for an idealized life lived by the idealized person. So the church advertises that everyone should come and participate in the hope that all

church has been focused by recent decades of declining denominations (p. 30). According to church historian Layne Lebo (2001), one historic denomination finds itself wrestling with the tension of retaining the foundational values upon which the denomination was based while at the same time responding to a context that is asking for new forms. Lebo raises the question of competing influences in historic denominations. Which factor will be the dominant influence and shaper of the church's work: identity or mission? This question describes well the crucible in which denominations function in a post-Christendom context. Missional

Core Commitment #1: Trusting Narrative Ways of Knowing

At Missio Dei, the members of this new monastic community have adopted a “rule” by which they commit themselves to three things: centering their lives on Jesus Christ, being present to the neighborhood, and sharing their lives with one another.” By its very definition a “rule” is an absolute orientation of the heart that precedes all other commitments. The life of the church will be a Spirit-empowered dramatic participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the world (Guder, 2007).

Karl Barth said that the church is “directed every day, indeed every hour, to begin again at the beginning” (quoted in Kroll, 2008). Our beginning points determine the shape of our reality. In our time there are many competing ways of knowing. Since the Enlightenment experience, reason, and the scientific method have enjoyed god-like power in our society. The scandal of the cross, however, is that we have this God who did this unreasonable, unimaginable and unprovable thing: God became flesh and dwelled among humans, lived human life, and died human death. Though the church has often been tempted to conform her strategies to what statistics tell us and what science has “proven,” the future of the church in mission can never be based primarily on empirical, evidence-based prescriptions. The church that seeks to embody the life, death and resurrection of Jesus learns how to be in the world by dwelling on and re-enacting his story.

For the church, the Scriptures provide a narrative-based way of knowing. Christians have traditionally constructed their understanding of reality through the big story (a metanarrative) that names “God” as the really real. In the Scriptures, this God is presented as the one who has been most fully revealed in the Word made flesh, that is, Jesus (John 1:14). The New Testament presents Jesus as the full way of knowing God in the Gospel and Epistles. Jesus said, “If you know me, you will know the Father” (John 14:7). The witness of the Colossians concurs: “In him the

present], because we believe that Jesus is creating these things, and doing these things, and his kingdom exists, and this is what it looks like. We're trying to live that, we're not trying to just go off and do our own thing because of some sort of individual belief.

Commitment # 2: Witness Shaped by Holy Hospitality

In our postmodern privatized society that idolizes the individual, we tend to think that it is normal to want to be left alone, especially where religion is concerned. This is a place where our world needs to be demythologized. The grand narrative of Scripture presents human need and desire differently. People don't want to be left alone. They want community. They want communion and engagement with an ultimate being. Part of reflecting God's image is a desire to reflect the communion that goes on in the Trinity. It's easy for us to think, "Nobody wants to die alone." The belief that people want to be left alone is more a sign of our brokenness. The point of God's mission is to reconcile all things by breaking down walls of hostility and joining all people together into a dwelling place for God's Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-21).

In Luke 10:1-24, we see the means by which Jesus trained the Twelve for mission. The disciples are sent out with no personal resources. (This is *not* the same as pretending you don't have strengths or giftedness or for that matter interests.) They are to accept the hospitality of the stranger and announce "peace." They are to "get hosted." One of the most radical things about this story is that the hospitality of the *stranger* is the platform for witness. The disciples are to announce that the kingdom of God has come near. Then out of the observable need revealed because one has been hosted, one offers a sign of God's reign where reconciliation, healing, restoration, and wholeness are desperately needed. At Missio Dei, the Van Steenwyks gave attention to God's *preceding* mission resulting in the church's decision to dovetail with existing initiatives in the community rather than creating new ones. Amy Van Steenwyk reflects on the community's deliberate choice to rely on the hospitality of the stranger as the platform for witness: "Instead of starting an ESL [English as a Second Language] course or program, I volunteered at one already in existence. Instead of starting our own [bike] cooperative, Jason works on bikes and builds bikes at an existing bike cooperative." By allowing themselves to be hosted in their contexts through means already in existence, these church leaders are experiencing exponentially more avenues for relationships than if they were creating a limited number of church-initiated and owned ministries. These leaders see the hospitality offered in their context as the means of discerning where God is

working and how they can align their witness with God's purposes.

Hospitality is often described in missiology from the perspective of hosting the stranger into the church's space (Barrett, 2004; Guder, 1998; Keifert, 1992, 2007). But hosting the stranger into the church's space often reinforces a pattern where the one who enters the space of "the regulars" will always remain a newcomer (more on this under commitment #3).

In analyzing collected stories from developing congregations, one discovers a common understanding of three-dimensional hospitality within which Christian witness best happens (see Figure 3). Two of these dimensions of hospitality are rather conventional: (1) demonstrating hospitality in the common life of the church members and (2) welcoming the stranger. But there is another dimension of hospitality that *precedes the other two* and can easily be overlooked when churches are being planted: a prior commitment to receiving the hospitality of those in the context in which one is planting the church. Says Jason, "Before you plant a church you need to submit to the neighborhood for awhile first. So ideally, someone should just work and live and hang out in the neighborhood for at least a year before they even start doing anything tangible as far as ministry so that you really understand where you are and, by extension, what God is doing."

Being received by the stranger is the first movement of a church whose mission is aligned with God's mission. Figure 1 implies that without the prior commitment to receive the hospitality of the stranger, the mission of the church will default to transactional rather than transformational forms of ministry.

Figure 1. Dimensions of hospitality of the church in mission.

Why is it important—and Trinitarian—to see receiving the hospitality of the stranger as the first movement in mission? Because it ensures that God's offer of reconciliation is non-coercive. That is, for our offer of redemption to be aligned with God's intention, the invitation to be reconciled to God must be freely offered and freely received. (See Table 3 for a comparison of how three-dimensional hospitality tips the church's witness away from transactional witness to transformational witness.)

This becomes a question-posing gathering of people. When the Republican National Convention was being held nearby, Homeland Security officers questioned them, suspicious that they may be plotting some kind of terrorist attack during the convention. So the folks of *Missio Dei* served up plates of food to them and invited them to join in the fellowship—and they did. Somalis, Anglos, Hispanics, young, old, wealthy, poor, refugees, homeless people, and government officials were all at a table of peace. Where else in all the world is that happening except where the kingdom has come near? One can imagine Jesus full of joy in the Holy Spirit, praying to the Father, when He looks on this scene.

What is needed if the church is to keep mission at the center of her being and purpose is to seek fresh expressions of the new humanity rather than building groups of like-minded people. The church in mission is not cloning ideology. The church in mission, through creative witness,

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