

Good News, Bad News, Missional Questions

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When I look at the 2006 denominational statistics, I see good news, bad news, and missional questions.

The good news is that we had 118,104 people decide to join our congregations last year. That's an average increase of 10.8 people per church. Over 24,000 people who are seventeen years of age and under joined. Over 33,000 decided to transfer in. And we organized thirty-four new churches last year.

The bad news is that even though 118,104 people joined, we lost 163,648 people, giving us a net loss of 45,544 people last year. That is an average loss of fifteen people per church. Of this number, almost 28,000 transferred out, over 34,000 people died, and we had over 102,000 "other" losses. We also dissolved fifty-six congregations.

Once you get past the good news and bad news, you realize there are a lot of missional questions in-between the lines. Are most of our churches still utilizing an attractional model of ministry? Are we stuck on "come and see," or are we beginning to shift to "go and do likewise"? Do we still believe that "if we build it they will come," or are we going out into the highways and byways? There is a lot of belly-button gazing going on here. These statistics are focused on internal issues, not external issues.

If we were to do a missional survey of the church, what kind of questions would we ask? Instead of asking what is God doing in the church, we would ask what is God doing in the world around us. Instead of asking how many members did we gain or lose, we would ask how many people did we send out in mission.

We would also ask:

- How many short-term mission teams did we send out?
- How many long-term missionaries did we commission?
- Are we stirring up the missional imagination of the people?
- How many missional experiments did we launch?
- What kind of adaptive changes are we making?
- Where are our people being creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial?
- How many English as a Second Language classes are we teaching?
- How many people of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are we connecting with?
- How many "strangers" did we welcome into our homes?
- How many widows, orphans, and prisoners did we visit?
- How many sick did we heal?
- How many communities have seen proof that we care?

This report shows that we are much more internally focused than externally focused. It shows that we put more attention on maintenance than mission. If we want to discover if

we are becoming more missional, we need a report that asks different questions. We need a report that looks for different answers. And we need a report that asks us to listen to people in the communities around us, so we can uncover where God is already at work.

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