

Envisioning/ sharing our identity and calling through three shared practices

Missional practices over time shape what occurs inside and outside the congregation or a small group each week. For individuals, the missional practices shape what occurs on a daily basis. ***A missional practice is the repetition of acts or a series of acts for cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and ways of living as disciples and communities of faith.*** Missional practices help disciples, congregations, and new expressions of the church live into the way of Christ individually and in community.

Learning any new skill begins by taking small steps. Learning to play a violin feels awkward and strange at first. It is difficult to hold the bow properly and to get a clear sound when drawing the bow across the strings. It takes weeks and then months of daily practice before playing the violin begins to feel natural. Like first picking up a paintbrush to paint with water colors, initially it feels strange. It takes time for any new activity to feel natural.

The three shared missional practices of Dwelling in the Word, The Mission Prayer, and Sharing in the Round disrupt our established routine as disciples and as the church. They call us into new ways of understanding, ways of being, and ways of living Christ's mission!

Let's review the three shared missional practices at the heart of Leading Congregations in Mission:

Mission Prayer – Mission begins with encounter and is definitely disruptive. This prayer invites the disruptive promptings of the Holy Spirit that lead us into deeper and new relationships with God and others.

Dwelling in the Word – The power of this practice is when we do it attentively and inclusively in small groups. Something happens when we gather together in Christ's name and dwell (i.e. invest significant time) in the living Word of scripture. The Holy Spirit blesses us with new insights about ourselves, one another, and the world to which we are sent. Since this practice challenges us to read scripture as God's personal *invitation*, as individuals and groups, everyone can participate. There are no biblical scholars – we are all equal around the table!

Sharing in the Round – This is the most ancient of practices where we extend Christ's invitation and share Christ's hospitality with our family, friends, neighbors, and especially strangers. This practice helps us begin to live into the new way – Christ's way where everyone belongs and has a place at the table. This practice is about sharing in sustenance for the body (i.e. food) and sustenance for the soul (i.e. meaningful conversation). It begins to create loving and interdependent community (i.e. Zion) like nothing else can.

Challenge for Congregations and New Emergent Expressions of the Church

How do these three missional practices begin to shape the essence of what it means to be Community of Christ in contexts where people have largely turned away from both God and the church?

This is not about trying to “fit” these practices into congregational life or in the case of a new expression, locking into a model. These practices begin to shape how we gather as Christian community and how we are sent to be Christ’s presence of invitation, hospitality, and blessing in our families, neighbourhoods, towns, and cities. They place emphasis on the deeply relational nature of God and how we are called to be the embodiment of that loving relationship with others.

Thinking About the Missional Practices and How We Gather

1. Choose one of the three shared missional practices for further exploration.
2. Consider how the missional practice and the broader intent behind the missional practice might change a particular activity when you gather (i.e. worship, potluck, adult class, tea time, etc.). In other words how might you redesign this activity to fulfil the *intent* of the missional practice more fully?
3. Now refer to each of the trends below and consider how your redesigned activity addresses the three questions related to the trends below:
 - a. **Renewal:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry bring renewal for us *and* the “spiritual but not religious” who have turned away from God and the church?
 - b. **Relationships:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry lead us into deeper and new relationships with God, one another, our neighbours, and strangers?
 - c. **Relevance:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry help us embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities?

