

Missional, emergent church movements place premium on church starting

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The missional church and emergent church movements are sweeping through many aspects of religious life—including church planting. While both most often are tagged as movements, they also function as foundations for birthing new congregations.

“It’s easier to start with missional DNA than to transition an established church,” said Milfred Minatrea, director of the Irving-based [Missional Church Center](#).

Most of the literature about the missional church movement seems to focus on transitioning—usually focusing on established congregations seeking to become more relevant and develop a more outward focus. Minatrea spends about 85 percent of his time working with transitioning churches.

But, he believes, the missional movement’s strength is in new church plants. “They have a greater chance of success. ... They are more adept at getting new believers to see themselves as God’s missionaries,” he said, which is the missional DNA—focusing outward.

Minatrea points to [NorthWood Church for the Communities](#) in Keller as a church that started with missional DNA and birthed several congregations. The church also is a training ground and network for church planters.

NorthWood’s pastor, Bob Roberts, has written several books, including [The Multiplying Church](#), and is recognized as a leader in church multiplication. Roberts repeatedly emphasizes throughout the book that churches start

churches.

He notes that as the movement has become popularized, the word “missional” has lost its original intent. In a blog post that also appears in his book, Roberts wrote, “When it (‘missional’) first came around, it communicated ‘missions is who I am and who we are as a people. ...’

“A better word for ‘missional’ today is ‘relevance.’ Most people using this are saying we are living incarnationally in our community. ...

“So what is ‘missional’? It’s living incarnationally beyond your own culture. ... Living in your own culture is a given. I don’t think you are really missional unless you are four steps removed from your own culture.”

Often described as missional, [All Souls Church](#), a Baptist General Association of Virginia-affiliated congregation in Charlottesville, has grown from its start as a house church in 2009 to include several “small communities,” said Winn Collier, one of the church’s founders. Those small communities are embedded contextually in several communities.

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“I think All Souls could be viewed as a missional church, and many would describe us that way,” he said.

Although they do not use the description themselves, they want to be part of God’s redemptive mission. “God is always on mission to love and restore. We hope we are joining in that,” Collier said.

The church sees its context as “all sorts of people” but particularly is drawn to “cultural creatives ... people who are artistic, progressive, socially conscious and spiritually open, though at times antagonistic toward organized church,” it notes on its website.

The [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#) expresses and acts on its missional

imperative to be the presence of Christ. “From a missional perspective, we encourage every church to be part of a new work,” explained Bo Prosser, CBF coordinator for congregational formation.

“Participating in God’s mission is our understanding of being missional. We believe God calls churches to start churches. We believe CBF’s role is to partner with churches to help them catch this vision.”

The missional movement as an approach to church planting has gained momentum for three reasons, Minatrea said.

First, younger church planters see the missional approach as more relevant. “They naturally have an affinity...to gravitate toward it,” he said.

Second, “churches that start as missional churches value reproduction,” he added.

And third, it crosses denominational lines.

“What was heavily Baptist and Presbyterian early on has spread across to other denominations. ... Others are seeing the heartbeat,” he said.

Although most often characterized as an emergent movement, the Acts 29 Network calls itself a “trans-denominational peer-to-peer network of missional church-planting churches.”

While it emphasizes churches planting churches, its training and networking focus on church planters. The network also partners with congregations that want to begin new work, assisting them with training and resources.

The network focuses on church planting across denominational lines but partners only with church planters who agree with its theological position—Christian, evangelical, missional and reformed.

The Acts 29 Network offers assessment of individuals who believe God is calling them to become church planters, and its training “boot camps” are open to the public.

It reaches across global boundaries as well, providing “boot camps” and other training and assistance in other countries.