

2008

# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Stephen H. Cook



## Growing in missional ministry

**M**y computer's spell check application has a real problem with this word that we have been bandying about of late in our communities of faith. Every time I type "missional," a red squiggly line appears to alert me that I have made an error in my keyboarding. Suggestions for what I must have meant are kindly offered — words such as mission, visional and fissional (I need to look that one up!). But missional is the word of the day around many churches — whether Microsoft knows it or not.

Coming to terms with what missional is (and is not) is an essential first step for any congregation seeking to grow in this approach to ministry. Members accept the fact that embarking on the journey toward missional living is not equivalent to adding another program to the church calendar. This is not the sort of thing that is inserted between the handbell group's rehearsal and the youth Bible study on Sunday evenings.

A missional approach to congregational ministry exudes every element of the church's life. In the setting where I currently serve, we have begun to ask questions about how the various parts and pieces of the puzzle that is congregational life move us in the direction of loving God more deeply. This deepening love for God then translates into a deeper love for our neighbors and ourselves. This is what is at the heart of missional ministry: loving God and living like we do.

Not surprisingly, many who embark on the missional journey find that not every-

thing the church does reflects this approach to ministry. Tough questions have to be asked, and difficult decisions must be made. The rules by which we Baptists have operated for so long that govern how we gauge success (i.e., numbers, numbers and more numbers) must change. Missional ministry is not easily measured or quantified. How does one affix a value to a woman putting her passion for throwing parties on a pie graph? But when the residents at the nursing home have parties given for them in which the only objective is to embody the love of God we share, how can one say that growth is not happening?

Growing in missional ministry may sound like a misnomer if the expectation is that embarking on such a journey will add members to the church roster. It may or may not. A missional mindset is not consumed with such calculations. A missional approach to the practice of faith is so devoted to deepening relationships with Christ and others, pursuing Christ's purposes with intentionality, that new horizons of ministry opportunities begin to open.

From the experience we are living into now, I can say this is slow work. *It's Time!* from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has been an invaluable resource for assisting with the organization, planning and development of ideas that have helped us carry on important conversations as a congregation. We have started from scratch, beginning with learning the word my computer does not like.

We have put in place a steering team of lay leaders who are passionate about living missionally. These folks have helped coordi-

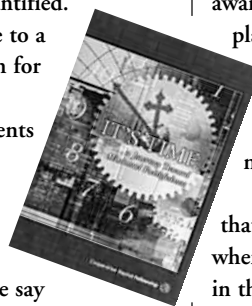
nate church-wide educational and worship initiatives, worked with publicity and prayer efforts; and have overseen hands-on projects to provide opportunities to illustrate our belief in incarnational ministry in our community.

What is emerging for us is a growing awareness that every person has a part to play and gifts to give in making Christ's presence known in our world. We have made a commitment that we will strive to be Christ's hands, feet, heart,

mind and voice to every person every day. To learn more about how we might do that, we have visited with people in places where they are making Christ's presence felt in their own communities. We have gone not to copy or to duplicate their ministries, but to learn of their successes and setbacks; to humbly recognize that we who are the body of Christ are called to work together in service to this world that God loves so much.

We are engaging community leaders who are helping us understand better the immediate context in which our congregation is situated. We are learning to put aside our preconceived notions about what those "out there" need, and developing relationships that allow us to stand alongside our neighbors and serve together. We are moving beyond a model of program-based missions focused on charity to a missional approach that values solidarity.

There is no end to the missional journey. There is no certificate of completion that comes once a person or a church takes up the task of taking this unrecognizable word seriously. But there is no mistaking that the move toward a more intentional approach to loving God and God's people is the sort of thing that should never end. **BT**



**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with Baptists Today and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Stephen Cook, pastor of First Baptist Church in Danville, Va. Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.