

Leading Your Church Missions Ministry in Style



by David Dougherty

This issue of *Mobilizer* magazine will feature a number of innovative ways that local churches are re-structuring their missions leadership in light of new realities. It may be tempting to admire a certain style of leadership and to try to impose it on your church. Yet I'm convinced that churches have distinct personalities. A church's past and present combine to cause it to favor certain styles of leadership, and to chafe under other styles. Wise is the leader who understands a church's unique personality and leads in a way that is in harmony with that personality.

In my experience, I've found that most churches favor one of five main styles of leadership. My list is not exhaustive; probably you can think of more. Yet as you consider your church, might it best be described by one of the following leadership styles?

1. Programmatic.

I believe that most churches that are attracted to ACMC are programmatic churches. In fact, most middle class, suburban American churches function under this type of leadership. Such churches tend to reflect and attract their surrounding socio-economic communities.

In recent years, the term "programmatic" has developed negative connotations in many progressive churches. I do not use it in the sense of outdated ministries that are no longer effective. Rather, I use it to refer to churches where the natural ebb and flow of the calendar year ushers different ministries to center stage at normal cycles during the seasons. The school year marks the bookends of the kids' AWANA ministry. A musical is presented at Christmas. The women's retreat occurs each October. The missions conference occurs in February. Short-term teams venture out each summer, and so on.

The programmatic church cyclically carries out its ministries. Well-defined teams are responsible for ensuring their part of the overall church year. Leadership occurs through the structure of teams or committees. Such churches value the development of goals and plans. The programmatic church, when it engages in missions well, is the place where a strong missions committee thrives. Short-term missions trips also fare well here, because the church annually anticipates the mass exodus of individuals and teams for the field. Unreached

People Group adoptions also succeed in programmatic churches, because their people have repeatedly rallied behind such a project. This type of church would say,

“We succeed in world evangelization by carefully planning the accomplishment of our goals.”

2. Bureaucratic.

Again, I have chosen a term loaded with negative connotations, but this is not the spirit in which I use it. Older, solidly evangelical churches that are rooted in their communities are often led in this style. One’s family’s history in the church is a major determinant of one’s future and ministry in the church. The bureaucratic church’s focus is on precedent: what has worked well so far? Written policy is quite important and guides most decision-making. Leaders in such churches tend to be benevolent dictators, in the good sense of the word. They insure future stability by wisely controlling and permitting new courses of action.

Such churches also usually have strong missions committees and often excel in missions education. They tend not to function well in partnership situations (such as with a sister church around the world) because of the uncertainty and flexibility required. The bureaucratic church would say, “We succeed in missions when we work in an orderly fashion and through time-tested methods and systems.”

3. Entrepreneurial.

This sort of church is usually populated with driven people who are leaders at work as well as in church. Often such churches are large and

located in affluent suburbs. The entrepreneurial church values creative individuals taking strong initiative. Such churches are usually pastored by entrepreneurs who are pursuing their own clear vision for the future. Leaders view their job primarily as equipping and releasing individuals for ministry.

Entrepreneurial churches do not feel comfortable being tied to working intensely in three or five limited sites around the world. They trust that God is moving their people to head out in multiple directions and into a variety of ministries. Their vision is not to accomplish a particular work in specific places, but rather to involve the congregation in multiple ways. Entrepreneurial churches particularly excel in partnership-driven ministry. Wycliffe Associates, for example, which pairs up individuals with ministry opportunities that match their skills and gifts, would be a highly attractive ministry to an entrepreneurial church. This type of church would say, “We succeed in missions when we release our members to fulfill their God-given calling.”

4. Charismatic.

By this descriptor I do not refer to a church’s theology or practice of signs and wonders. Rather, it refers more to the personality of the church’s pastor. In such a church, the pastor is so well loved, respected and trusted that any ministry he backs will gain wide support from the congregation. Such a pastor has a track record of discerning and announcing what God has for the church to accomplish. In no way is this pastor manipulative or cunning. The missions leadership team of this church would be foolish to initiate ministries that such a pastor will not naturally support. He

successfully leads when the congregation affirms his discernment of future direction.

This church's focus is on revelation - not new or extra-biblical revelation, but God's Spirit's continual and fresh revelation of the church's calling. Such churches tend to be highly flexible and prepared to change emphasis or direction of ministry. This church would say, "We succeed in missions when we've responded to God's call on our congregation." While such churches are not common, they are self-evident, and it is especially important to know when such dynamics are in play.

5. Pragmatic.

This church focuses on the results more than the process of ministry. Pragmatic leaders insist that the church will do whatever it takes to accomplish the end goal. They are constantly evaluating the church's progress toward the goal.

Pragmatic churches tend to excel in organizational partnerships in missions. They are often attracted to church planting, both locally and globally, because an established church is one of the clearest signs that a goal has been reached. Such churches also excel in unreached people

group adoptions, because successful adoptions require a clear end goal. Such churches would say, "We succeed in missions when we accomplish the objectives God has given us."

So which church is yours? It is important to note that no leadership style is right or wrong. A church (and its leaders!) should recognize its style and work in missions accordingly, rather than try to change to another, ill-fitting style. Change of styles is possible, but not without widespread support and serious intentionality.

Appreciate models that are different from yours, and draw from the principles they embrace. But appreciate how God has developed *your* church. Don't force a newfangled type of partnership on your bureaucratic church. Don't straitjacket your charismatic pastor with the three-year plan of a programmatic church. Work within your limitations and leverage your strengths. And above all, structure to lead missions in a way that complements your church's style of leadership, while anticipating what the future may bring.

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