



THE
BIBLICAL
MISSION
OF THE
CHURCH

A resource for transforming your church toward God's mission

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the Center
for Parish
Development

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In order to fulfill its mission within a constantly changing world, the church must faithfully discern, critically reflect, and creatively interpret its religious heritage as it formulates and expresses a vision for the future. The cultural context in which the church carries out its ministry and mission has changed for North American churches. For nearly three hundred years church bodies enjoyed special privileges and broad support from a culture that believed in and honored the church. This is no longer the case. Church bodies find themselves today in a non-churched culture, a highly secularized culture that is indifferent to the church. The church has been culturally "disestablished" even while religious rhetoric flourishes.

As churches consider both the nature and quality of change appropriate for their ministry in this "post-establishment" world, taking the time for broadly participatory and prayerful study, reflection, and discussion is necessary. The entire faith community will benefit from engaging in guided study of foundational dimensions of Christian belief, commitment, and practice.

To help faith communities discern God's vision for the world and God's call for the church, the Center for Parish Development has created several study resources like *The Biblical Mission of the Church*. These resources involve people in substantive and accessible biblical study, social and cultural analysis, and theological discussion. The resources assume that only the people of God can discern the will of God, and that this can be done only as the people of God understand themselves to be part of a learning community and explore and share their faith as they envision a dynamic and creative future.

The Center for Parish Development is a learning community that fosters learning (disciple) communities seeking to discern and participate in God's mission more faithfully and fruitfully. Created in 1968 by a consortium of theological education institutions and regional and national church bodies, the Center brings multiple disciplines into conversation with classical theological disciplines in the service of the church. Its work is grounded in an ecclesial and missional model, drawing upon general systems theory and method, and more than 43 years of experience in contributing to the transformation of church organizations.



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4. *Jesus' Last Commission*

The content of the “good news” within the Gospel of Mark has been described in terms of the kingdom or reign of God. And the reign of God has been defined in terms of the overall story of the life and ministry, exorcisms and healings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus announces a new reality in which the poor, the diseased, the oppressed, women, and children have central places. The communities of faith at the center of the evangelist’s concern are challenged to form themselves in such a way that they represent something new in the world—the reign or rule of God. The Gospel of Mark calls for the development of alternative communities, communities which base their identity and their mission on belief in God’s new world order. The content and form of this new

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order, discovered in the narrative or story of Jesus Christ, does not fit easily within existing worldly structures. The meaning and purpose of human life—life within the realm of God’s rule—has been manifested in the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ and is actualized in the world through the practice of radical discipleship. The power of the kingdom is

power in action, power to heal, power to confront, power to transform. Within this context, the nature of the mission of the church—those who

would follow Jesus Christ—is shaped by proclamation, confrontation, and passion. Thus disciples of Jesus are called to the proclamation of the kingdom through service, suffering, and sacrifice.

BIBLE STUDY: Mark 16:14-20

- 1. Based upon your study of selected passages from Mark, what is the “good news” the disciples are to proclaim to the whole creation?**
- 2. For Mark, only as the disciples comprehend the “way of the cross” are they able to comprehend the message of Jesus. Where is the cross in your understanding of discipleship?**
- 3. While radical discipleship might have been appropriate for the church within Mark's time, what role should “servanthood,” service, suffering, and sacrifice play within the ministry and mission of today's churches?**
- 4. If the church were to adopt Mark's model of mission, what would be different in the life and practice of the church?**