

# Walking Together: A Congregational Resource Event

*This keynote address was delivered by Bishop Pederson at “Walking Together: A Congregational Resource Event” held March 20, 2010, in Chippewa Falls.*

## “For the Sake of Mission”

*In our rapidly changing culture, the Christian church is at a crossroads—either we can “circle the wagons,” pine for the good ol’ days, and struggle to survive, or we can re-imagine ministry where our identity is deeply grounded in Jesus and mission is the purpose for which we live and breathe. Bishop Pederson will emphasize the formation of disciples who are sent into the world “for the sake of mission.” This crossroads is a time of opportunity as we witness and serve in the name of Jesus.*

The description of my presentation in the publicity for this event is exactly what I’ll talk about today: **“In our rapidly changing culture, the Christian church is at a crossroads—either we can ‘circle the wagons,’ pine for the good ol’ days, and struggle to survive, or we can re-imagine ministry where our identity is deeply grounded in Jesus, and mission is the purpose for which we live and breathe.”**

- I’ll talk about the changing landscape of culture and church.
- I’ll make a case for radical change.
- I’ll take a stab at what this new emerging church might look like.
- And, I’ll tell you why I am optimistic about the future of the missional church.

First, a brief look at the changing landscape of both culture and the church.



Duane C. Pederson,  
bishop, Northwest Synod  
of Wisconsin

## The Changing Landscape of Church and Culture

Phyllis Tickle in her book, *The Great Emergence*, says that every 500 years the church has to hold a rummage sale and clean out its attic. Five hundred years ago, there was a house-cleaning that happened at the time of the Reformation (1517). Five hundred years before that, the Great Schism took place that divided the Roman Catholic Church from the Orthodox Church, the split between Rome and Constantinople (1054), and the church had to significantly redefine itself. Five hundred years before that was the time of Gregory the Great, the period of the fall of the Roman Empire, and the beginning of the Dark Ages, that cleaned the Christianity attic of much of its Imperial trappings and centered it in a monasticism that would protect, preserve, and characterize Christianity during the next five



**Northwest Synod of Wisconsin**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

PO Box 107  
Chetek, WI 54728  
715.859.6810  
[www.nswwi.org](http://www.nswwi.org)

centuries. Each of these 500-year periods saw the intersection of radical change in the church *and* radical change in terms of the societal and historical context in which that change occurred.

Phyllis Tickle says we are now in another re-formation. We are at another 500 year mark. This is rummage sale time, and the church is emerging in such a way that it is beginning to clean out the attic of an identity that was aligned with the dominant culture. Christianity was woven into the fabric of the prevailing culture in a way that it **isn't any longer, and we are now adjusting to that new reality.**

With the sidelining of the church—a church that is no longer a significant force on the American landscape, a church in decline, a church often anxious about its very survival—new ways of imagining church are beginning to surface. **It's often called the "emerging church," a term bandied about a lot these days. But before we talk about the emerging church, let's talk a moment about the emerging culture.**

The changes that are taking place on this planet are unfolding in an exponential way. The speed with which change happens is unprecedented in human history. We know it, we feel it, we sense it, because **we can't keep up, and all the pieces of our lives seem to be scattering in different directions.**

What is emerging in our culture? Secularization, dramatic cultural and religious pluralism, globalization, a digitally Internet-connected world, information access with a few keystrokes, radically changing social constructs, biotechnology and genomes, change at a rate that causes whiplash, and more. And in

the midst of this, the church has been relegated to the periphery. We are no longer significant players in the culture, few are interested in joining our "family," and the church is but a mere footnote of an idealized past, a past that most of us miss dearly.

**This is what we're grappling with;** we feel and experience the change, change that we cannot control. As a

I was a good *member*,  
**but I wasn't taught very**  
well to be a disciple . . . .

In short, I was  
well trained to be part  
**of God's chosen frozen.**

new culture emerges, so too a new church is in the process of forming. A church that is discerning who it is and what it is to do in the midst of a rapidly changing world. It is grappling with its identity and its reason for being, and in that wrestling God is leading us into a new and different future.

What this emerging church looks like is only beginning to take shape. The church is trying to **recognize itself in light of God's call to be a church of witness and service to the world.** It is crucial that we take a good long look in the mirror, because if we cannot recognize ourselves as a *missional church*, we'll only see the reflection of an aging, declining community who has forgotten who it is and why it existed in the first place.

I grew up at a time when the church held a respected place in the **community. I'm not sure I knew anyone who wasn't active in a church.** On Sunday morning, it was **assumed that we'd be in worship,**

not at the lake cabin or a soccer tournament. Membership for decades held steady or grew because boats from Northern Europe **deposited Lutherans on America's shore, fertility rates were high by today's standards, and Lutheran brand loyalty** meant that the vast majority of each generation would continue to be part of the community of faith in which they grew up—the same community that nurtured and raised me in the faith. It was a comfortable church, this church of my past. We were family, **we were stable, we didn't really need to do outreach** because we had more than enough members to sustain the church (besides, we hired the pastor to take care of such things). Mission meant collecting money for a worthy cause without much personal involvement, and we rarely dealt with anything that resembled diversity.

I was a good *member*, **but I wasn't**  
taught very well to be a *disciple*.

I learned that faithfulness meant being active in a church, not living out my faith in the world.

I learned the obligations of membership, but not much about being free in Christ to live for neighbor.

I participated fully in Bible studies, but I was not equipped to speak the story of Jesus to anyone outside of the four walls of our church building.

In short, I was well trained to be **part of God's chosen frozen.**

**Well, in case you haven't noticed, the boats aren't coming from Norway any longer, fertility rates are down, and our consumer culture sees "Lutheran" as one among many brands that they can take or leave—and most have chosen to leave.**

The church that I knew and loved is dying. We know this in our heart-of-hearts, even though many of us pretend that if we just work harder at being the church we once knew, somehow we can revive those days of full Sunday Schools, crowded pews, and youth groups led by a dynamic pied piper. And when **we're honest, we see that the old ways of being and doing church are not working very well.**

Reggie McNeal, who will be one of two keynote presenters at our next Synod Assembly, claims that **"many, if not most, church members have never experienced missional living. They have just experienced church"** (p. xviii).

It is becoming more and more clear to more and more people that **church as we've known it isn't a significant force for witness and service in today's world, and something new and different must emerge if we are to be faithful and effective to God's calling to be a sent people into a world that needs to know the grace of God in Jesus.**

Nathan Frambach in his book, *Emerging Ministry: Being Church Today*, writes, **"The [emerging church is not the mega-church 'model' nor the church growth approach nor contemporary worship nor generational ministry (whatever that is). It is not prescriptive; that is, it is not intended to be a mold, model, or formulae that others simply need to figure out how to 'tweak,' or, at worst, replicate and adopt . . . . The emerging church is cultivating communities of faithful innovation that are seeking to navigate the postmodern cultural landscape closely tethered to God's story"** (p 58).

Bottom line: the institutional church is in real trouble.

However, at this time, in this culture, perhaps **"being in trouble" is a good thing.** McNeal writes, **"As he hung on the cross, Jesus probably never thought the impact of his sacrifice would be reduced to an invitation for people to join and support an institution"** (p. 1).

**The "emerging church" is rethinking the institutional church.** And one thing is clear: whatever structure or order we use to organize our life together, it had better support and undergird the *real* mission of God, and not just perpetuate itself. Maintenance of a structure that supports mission is crucial to the life of the church and its purpose; maintenance for that which is **"thin" in mission is questionable at best.**

Some are already tired of the word **"missional"—a buzz word that's been around for about ten years.**

**Well, I'm going to keep using it until more have heard it, know what it is, and what it suggests for their faith and witness.**

**A Case for Radical Change**  
Reggie McNeal writes, **"The American culture no longer props up the church the way it did, no longer automatically accepts the church the way it did, no longer automatically accepts the church as a player at the table in public life, and can be downright hostile to the church's presence"** (p. 5).

McNeal describes our reality well, and when you hear him at the Synod Assembly, he will pull no punches. Yet many of our congregations pretend they are still part of the dominant culture and think that *if* they are just appealing enough, or *if* they work hard enough, or *if* they get the right pas-

tor, or *if* the younger folks would just buck-up and assume some responsibility, or *if* people would just give more, or *if* they could just get more folks to volunteer, or *if* they enlist the latest fad or slick-packaged program filled with promises— that somehow they will not only survive, but thrive.

In other words, the church we seek to **"beef up," is the church in which I grew up, and *this church* is not the church that is needed for the world today.** Too many of our efforts are guided by nostalgia and, frankly, belong to the lore of days gone by. Some congregations behave as if they are still in the 1950s, while the rest of the world has radically changed and transformed. If, however, the world ever returns to **the '50s, those congregations will be well positioned to carry out mission!**

Sadly, this is part of a deep denial and a significant reason many communities of faith have not re-imagined their life together.

**They're working hard to "hold it together," when perhaps they ought to "let go" and see where God might take them.**

Most congregations are sinking. The decline of churches—including mega-churches, conservative churches, evangelicals, mainline congregations, you name it (even the Southern Baptists, non-Hispanic Catholics, and Mormons are posting losses)—is pronounced and steady. The decline has been unfolding for at least the last 40 years.

In that decline, what have we tried to do? Chase after the latest church fad, snazzy program, or fail-proof **initiative in order to "bring 'em in."** **We've dabbled in contemporary worship to be more appealing, tried**

to compete with the culture by being entertaining, sought to be seeker-friendly, marketed our services to appeal to the self-interest of those we want to attract, purified **the church according to “correct” doctrine. You name it, we’ve tried it.**

**Yes, we’ve tried everything. We are** always on the lookout for the next best thing, the magic bullet that will stem the decline, fill the pews,

The decline continues, the offerings diminish, frustration mounts, and a hankering for the good **ol’ days is heightened.**

All of it leaves us exhausted and discouraged.

provide more financial resources, keep the teenagers, and make the institution thrive. In short, we have done everything possible to **maintain church as we’ve always** known it.

**Frankly, for most it hasn’t worked** very well. The decline continues, the offerings diminish, frustration mounts, and a hankering for the **good ol’ days is heightened. All of** it leaves us exhausted and discouraged.

**Reggie McNeal says, “You can build** the perfect church—and they still **won’t come. Church leaders seem** unable to grasp this simple implication of the new world—people outside the church think church is for **church people and not for them”** (p. 10).

So, the answer *isn’t* to do more of the same church, but in a better way—we’ve already done that to the max. The answer is to become missional. The answer *isn’t* to try to get

**others to become part of “our family;” the answer has more to do** with the community of faith moving out of the church building and engaging others in everyday life. If **we can’t or won’t make a Spirit-filled move beyond ourselves, we’ll** be stuck—stuck in further decline and frustration.

I encounter very few congregations **who don’t laud their fellowship as “friendly” because, they say, “we are like a family.” Well, if you are** part of the church family and know everyone, it certainly *is* friendly. Families know how things go (like the liturgy, when to stand up or sit down, where the restrooms are, and the catchy but non-descriptive names of the numerous groups within the church), and families have their own special language (like ELW and LBW and WELCA, or narthex, sanctification, and eschatology). In Chicago, I know a family who has watched every episode of *Seinfeld*, **and when I’m with** them, they quote lines from the TV show in certain circumstances.

**They all laugh, and I don’t have a** clue what they are talking about.

**If you aren’t an insider, then you are an outsider. It’s very hard to** break into a family because families are close, tightly knit, and unified, such that it tends to exclude rather than include. Thus, church life has come to mean nurturing, preserving, and perpetuating the family, rather than a community of faith that seeks to orient itself to the neighborhood and beyond. Because we love the closeness and security of the church as family, we rarely venture beyond the family into something that might resemble mission.

**McNeal again, “The North American** church is suffering from severe

mission amnesia. It has forgotten why it exists. The church was created to be the people of God, to join him in his redemptive mission in the world. The church was never **intended to exist for itself.” . . . “God is pulling end runs around the** institutional North American church to get to people in the streets. God is still inviting us to join him in mission, but it is the invitation to be part of a movement, not a **religious club”** (p. 15-16).

## The Look of a Changed Church

If, then, some dying and rising is under way, and if God is bringing forth an **“emerging church,”** what does such a changed church look like? **My crystal ball isn’t any better** than yours, but here are a few things that I ponder when imagining the church God might have in mind for us.

### Spiritual Formation

I suspect that the emerging church will include a rediscovery of the spiritual practices and disciplines **of old. What is “old” will be “new”** for us. A significantly deeper spirituality has everything to do with **our “identity”**—with knowing who we are and whose we are.

**We’ve spent decades teaching our people how to be “members.”** Just look at the contents of our new member packets: events and activities, the church calendar, offering envelopes, organizational structure of committees, listing of programs, a picture directory so that you know other members, etc.

Nearly everything in the typical new member packet, seeks to maintain and up-build the club, the institution, to strengthen and perpetuate itself. And in the process,

there is very little passion about Jesus, or who he has made us to be and what he has called us to do. There is little or nothing about deepening faith, spiritual practices, Scriptural immersions, or faith maturity.

**Thus, most know they've joined a church, just like they join any other organization, when what they need to know is that they've joined a mission movement that is grounded in a Savior who gave his life away for the world and who calls them to do the same.**

This is biblical. This is basic. Our identity as disciples, not members, will point us in missional, not institutional, directions. This is biblical and basic.

There are basics when it comes to **“identity” and “mission.”** A missional church will emphasize spiritual formation, to know biblically who you are as a child of God and what you are called to do as a disciple (not as a member, but a disciple sent into the world). The missional church will have a vital interest in nurturing a mature faith that is deeply grounded in bread and wine, Bible, prayer, relationships, and service in the name of Jesus. I think faith mentoring will be a prominent part of spiritual formation; we have an adult population that is largely spiritually dry. The home will be at least as important as church in faith formation. We know this partnership is crucial to steeping children and youth in a relationship with Jesus. Spiritual formation will have everything to do with knowing the story of faith so that we can tell the story of faith to others.

In short, spiritual formation is missional preparation.

Radical Re-Imagining  
Watch this brief video clip:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc9bA-hvqHU>

This guy has significantly re-imagined bowling! As we think **about church, we're going to need** to think about radically new ways of being and doing. Re-imagining church will require creativity, change, risk, and trusting that God will reveal new ways to connect the saving grace of Jesus Christ with a chaotic, complex, changing world.

**Here's one example of re-imagining church.** Steve Bouman is the Executive Director for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission of the ELCA. **Here's how he** describes the missional church:

*Every member is a missionary.  
Every pastor is a mission director.  
Every congregation is a mission outpost.*

This is a very different way of thinking about members, pastors, and congregations—they are missionaries, mission directors, and mission outposts.

How does such a description prompt you to think in new ways? Does this describe you, your pastor, and your congregation? This will be the kind of re-imagining that will inform and give shape to the emerging church.

Missional Leadership  
Leadership matters. Leadership matters *especially* during this time of rapid cultural change in a church that is seeking to emerge as a force for mission instead of a gasping-for-breath institution on life support. Leadership matters.

During my time at seminary some 30 years ago, I was trained in theology, preaching, and teaching; along

with a few pastoral skills that would enable me to lead and serve well the institutional church. But **I've spent most of my years since** that education shedding myself of that which *merely* serves the institutional church. The institution must serve mission, not the other way around. **If leaders don't understand this, they will continue to lead into dramatic decline. We will always have “institution,” but that institution must provide the ground from which mission is done, rather than the roadblock that prevents mission from happening.**

Every member  
is a missionary.  
Every pastor  
is a mission director.  
Every congregation  
is a mission outpost.

These days, we need leaders who look more like the leaders in the book of Acts than CEOs of church organizations. We need mission directors, not program managers. Leaders will need to join the fray of figuring out the emerging church, struggle to determine what that means for the community they serve, equip people to live outside the church building, deepen faith for discipleship, and discern how God wants them to engage their particular mission field.

Many of our current leaders need to enter the treacherous waters of abandoning much of the way they have led. They will need to attend to their own spiritual formation, ditching that which merely perpetuates a declining institutional church, risk engaging the world in missional ways with their people,

and expect angry blowback in the midst of transformation.

Lay Leadership and Community I suspect we will have fewer, highly trained, expensive church professionals in the future; and of those, many will be bi-vocational. I think we will see the significant rise of lay leadership—not unlike the laity strength of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi—where the entire community is missional instead of being pastor-centered. The mission of God belongs to *all* the baptized people of God, not the professionals who carry out **“church” on behalf of others.**

Closely related to laity actually owning and carrying the ministry that is theirs in the first place, I think the idolatry of church buildings will be challenged. If Phyllis Tickle is correct that this is another 500 year marker in time, and the church is having a rummage sale, it is very possible that our obsession with our church buildings will be one of the things that needs to be part of the transformational house-cleaning. Our buildings are killing us—they have become a primary idolatry that significantly gets in the way of our being missional. Buildings do not allow us to be nimble. Store fronts, house churches, preaching points, and satellite communities may be the way of the future, because with **diminishing resources, we won't be able to fix the roof, pay the heat bill, or maintain the cemetery.** We need to ask if massive, expensive structures are remnants of days gone by, or if they still play an important role in reaching out in the world.

It will be difficult to do institutional house-cleaning, because like a hoarder, we will stubbornly hold on

**to what we've known, and institutional forces will resist discarding anything that threatens it.**

Emerging Church Will Cause Crisis Within congregations there will be a huge cultural shift, if we are to become missional in orientation, **and it won't be easy. The demise of institutionalism will only be by kicking and screaming, and there is much that probably needs to die.**

We might not have all the answers for the emerging church, but let's at least ask the right questions.

Resurrection into a missional **church probably won't happen** unless this death takes place. Make no mistake—there *will be* (and is) a clash of values and vision. This time of transition will be filled with conflict.

**McNeal again, “Member values clash with missionary values. Member values are all about church real estate, church programming, who's in and who's out, member services, member issues (translated: am I getting what I want out of this church?). Missionary values are about the street, people's needs, breaking down barriers, community issues (translated: am I partnering with God's work in people?)” (p. 65).**

Such a reorientation will often be difficult and painful—but then, dying and rising always are!

An Optimistic Missional Future

No presentation on this topic is complete without referring to Loren Mead, who nearly 20 years

ago wrote *The Once and Future Church*. When his book came out, many thought he was crying that the sky is falling, but his prophetic words still resonate with truth today.

**Mead writes, “First, our present confusion about mission hides the fact that we are facing a fundamental change in how we understand the mission of the church. Beneath the confusion we are being stretched between a great vision of the past and a new vision that is not fully formed. Second, local congregations are now being challenged to move from a passive, responding role in support of mission to a front-line, active role. The familiar roles of laity, clergy, executive, bishop, church council, and denominational bureaucrat are in profound transitions all around us. Third, institutional structures and forms developed to support one vision of our mission are rapidly collapsing. I argue that we are being called to invent or reinvent structure and forms that will serve the new mission . . . I believe that we are being called to be midwives for a new church” (pp. 4-5).**

The more we steep ourselves in these three questions, the more Spirit will nudge us to be mission-oriented:

Who are we as the people of God? **It's the identity** question.

What is God calling us to do as the people of God? **It's the purpose** question.

What will it look like if we live out our common purpose in this particular mission context? **It's the vision** question.

We might not have all the answers **for the emerging church, but let's at least ask the right questions.**

**Let's make sure we know which di-**

In Rouse and Van Gelder’s book, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, they chart the shift that is underway, giving some understanding to the emerging church (p. 23):

FROM:		To:
Maintenance	→	Mission
Membership	→	Discipleship
Pastor–Centered	→	Lay–Empowered
Chaplaincy (Self)	→	Hospitality (Others)
Focus on ourselves	→	Focus on the world
Settled	→	Sent

rection the arrows in the chart (above) point. The arrows point from maintenance to mission, not the other way.

This chart could serve as a primer for conversation, study, and transformation in every single congregation. It could be a starting point for Council retreats, small group study, staff deliberations, and intentional efforts to discern God’s future. It pushes us into deeper conversation about whether our structure supports mission, or whether our mission supports our structure.

The following YouTube clip provides a two-minute summary of everything I’ve said thus far:

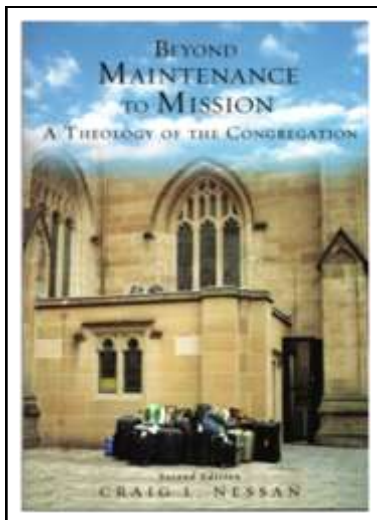
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK\\_sd68](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK_sd68)

[A two-minute explanation by Jeff Maguire (and friends) of what a “missional church” is. Thanks to common craft for the inspiration, Brian Hurst for the art, and blimp pilot Cole Beshore for special effects.]

I love the cover of the book by Craig Nesson that you’ve been given. It pictures a bunch of suitcases out in front of a church. This is a great image of the missional church—packing lightly to go out into the world; gathering together ultimately for the purpose of being sent.

Your participation here today is intended to orient you to who you are and what you do as congregations—*identity* and *mission*.

“Identity” and “mission” are the two guiding concepts that give shape to Nesson’s entire book. This material and my words ought to shake you up. It should be troubling to you, because much about the church as we now know it needs to die, because it simply doesn’t witness to and serve Jesus very well—not in this time and in this place, and certainly not as long as the church is an institution that seeks to preserve and perpetuate the club, the tight little, self-satisfied family. In this dying, no doubt God will bring forth new life as we re-imagine the church and give shape to the emerging church in an emerging culture.



I confess that much of the dying hurts, hurts badly, because the expression of church that’s dying is what nurtured me and gave shape to my identity and calling decades ago. But I am absolutely convinced—if for no other reason than to look at my two adult sons—that the way the church witnessed to me 40 years ago has failed miserably when it comes to two young men whom I love. Thus, if those things precious to me because of sentimental attachments need to die, may death be swift, so that our identity is more firmly planted in discipleship and our purpose more deeply rooted in mission.

We *do* live in a time of decline for the church we once knew. But I am optimistic that God is now doing a new thing (even if we haven’t figured it out), that God is already at work in the world (with or without us), and that God will show us the way (once we get out of the way).

Here’s how Nathan Frambach invites us into God’s future: “. . . I hope to spark some imagination and prompt conversation among people like you—Christ followers, the people of God—on mission, God-spotting, picking up the trail of the Holy Spirit, and helping pave the road to the church that God intends. And perhaps gradually, without even noticing it, we will live into God’s promised future” (p. 10).

Be engaged in the emerging church conversation, wrestle with what it means to be part of a post-modern church, continually ask “identity” and “mission” questions, take risks, tee a few people off, die and rise, and trust that God’s mission does indeed bear fruit worthy of the kingdom.

“Walking together for the sake of mission in God’s world.”

## References

- Bennethum, Michael D. *Listen! God is Calling!: Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2003.
- Daubert, Dave. *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2007.
- Frambach, Nathan C. P. *Emerging Ministry: Being Church Today*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2007.
- Fryer, Kelly A. *Reclaiming the "L" Word: Renewing the Church from Its Lutheran Core*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2003.
- Larson, Gary. *The Complete Far Side*. Volume I and II. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing. 2003.
- Linn, Jan. *Reclaiming Evangelism: A Practical Guide for Mainline Churches*. St. Louis: Chalice. 1998.
- McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., published by Jossey-Bass. 2003.
- Mead, Loren. *The Once and Future Church*. Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute. 1991.
- Nessan, Craig L. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2010.
- Pastor and People: *Making Mutual Ministry Work*. Editors Laurie J. Hanson and Ivy M. Palmer. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2003.
- Rouse, Rick and Craig Van Gelder. *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2008.
- Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 2006.
- The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. Editors Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 2005.
- Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008.
- Chart from Rouse & Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*  
**Premise:** “. . . that becoming an effective witness to the gospel in today’s world—becoming a missional congregation—requires us to revision the way we are the church in order to more faithfully do church” (p. 23). There is a shift underway in understanding what the church is and does.
- Understanding God’s Mission and How We Participate in It**  
Summary from Rouse and Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation* (pp. 43-53)  
**Identity:** *Who are you as the people of God? You are called by God, fed and formed by Word and Sacrament, and sent by the Spirit into the world. Thus, fed, formed, and sent means that congregations are missional by their very*

nature. The church cannot be otherwise, or it ceases to be the church.

**Purpose:** *What is God calling us to do as the people of God? Our purpose arises from our identity because what we do is always connected to who God has made us to be. Given our identity, asking our purpose always plunges us into missional questions about how we will witness and serve in the mission context we find ourselves, how we will identify what God is doing in the world in which we live, and how we will serve, not ourselves, but our neighbor in the name of Jesus.*

**Vision:** *What will it look like if we live out our common purpose in our particular mission context? This is where the church defines how it will engage in God’s mission for the sake of the world, how we as disciples will live out our faith in daily life, and how the church will participate in the transformation of communities. Vision always directs itself to a specific ministry context, always with God’s vision for the neighbor and the world in mind.*

### **Summary of Reggie McNeal’s Six New Realities**

*From A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation (pp. 21-22)*

#### **New Reality One: The Collapse of the Culture Church**

No longer can it be assumed that most members of the community are members of a congregation. Nor can it be assumed that most people in the community have an understanding of the teachings of the church. Surveys indicate that a majority of people are biblically illiterate.

#### **New Reality Two: The Shift from Church Growth to Kingdom Growth**

For too long, many congregations have focused on growing by simply adding members who transferred from other congregations and through the bearing of children. They have failed to follow up on one of the most important tasks prescribed by Jesus himself—faithfully bearing witness to the kingdom of God—which normally leads to the growing of new disciples. Congregations are called to be about making disciples in relation to God’s kingdom, helping people grow in their faith and equipping them to participate more fully in God’s mission in the world.

#### **New Reality Three: A New Reformation—Releasing God’s People for Ministry**

Congregations have done reasonably well in recruiting and training people to serve the needs of the institutional church. What has suffered is the broader participation of many congregations in God’s mission in the world, especially outreach to those of no faith, little faith,

or other faiths within a congregation’s own local context. Luther’s idea of the priesthood of all believers was that all Christians are called in baptism to carry out their vocational ministries in daily life—in all arenas of life, including in the workplace, the community, and the home, as well as in the church. All God’s baptized are the frontline missionaries for the gospel in their local contexts for the sake of the world.

#### **New Reality Four: The Return to Spiritual Formation**

How do we adequately nurture people in the faith and prepare them to live out their lives in the world? A congregation must take seriously its responsibility of cultivating spiritual formation. It must attend carefully and intentionally to the work of helping Christians experience spiritual transformation, so they can live out their faith with courage, confidence, and hope. Congregations are to help the body as a whole, as well as groups of believers and individuals, exercise their spiritual muscles. As such, a congregation serves as a “spiritual fitness center.”

#### **New Reality Five: The Shift from Planning to Preparation**

Congregations are often so preoccupied with meetings for the sake of planning and discussing policy that people are hungry for experiencing the Spirit’s leading and are searching for opportunities to engage in “hands on” ministry. There is some value in considering the Nike slogan of “just do it” in regard to giving people permission to try new things as they actively discern the Spirit’s leading in their midst. Congregational structures need to be designed to promote such *permission giving* and cooperation among church leaders and members, resulting in empowerment and support for the ministry of all God’s people in the church and in the world.

#### **New Reality Six: The Rise of Apostolic Leadership**

Congregations need visionary leaders who are committed to bearing witness to God’s kingdom, who are not seeking primarily the building of the kingdom of their own congregations. Such leaders must learn to think *outside the box* and be open to the leading of God’s Spirit. The fields today are also “ripe for the harvest” (John 4:35), so bold, Spirit-led, God-fearing leaders are needed to lead the church into a new, exciting future—a quest that becomes a journey of transformation.