

A Compass Heading



Rather

Than A Route Planner...

Mark Brown

A Compass Heading Rather Than A Route Planner

This may seem like a strange title for my sabbatical paper, but it is very much the starting place for me as I look at the future of Granshaw Family Church in a theological light. For the past number of years Granshaw has grown and every time I thought the growth would stop, the growth continued. I as the Minister felt that I needed to be in control of the direction of the church and if I was honest, I wasn't. God was directing Granshaw and the Holy Spirit was taking Granshaw on a spiritual journey. I felt frustrated with God and needed to know where the church was going, (a route planner of where God was going.) Having spent time talking with friends at home and with Professors at Regent College, Vancouver, it has become clear that God was not going to give me a map but rather a compass heading, (go in that direction, head there.) But where is 'there', I'm not altogether sure, but this is a record of my theological reflection on where I believe God wants to take Granshaw Family Church and what we are becoming.

(Intro)

Starbucks is like a second home to me, but I remember the first time I walked into a Starbucks coffee shop. I could have espresso, latte, mocha, cappuccino, in a thimble size cup, a fat cup, a tall cup, or a china cup, I could have it with hot milk, warm milk, frothy milk, semi skimmed or full cream milk, I could add all kinds of extras on, like cream, marshmallows, flavours and at the end I could have my coffee, my way, just the way I want it, at a cost.

We live in a world that adores choice, our culture tells us we can have what we want, our way, just the way we want it. This includes the church. I saw a Christian cartoon which had a church notice board which read:

Your Way Church: The prayers YOU want. The hymns YOU want. The readings YOU want. The sermon YOU want. Everything as YOU want it... As a man walks past the Minister, the Minister shakes his head at God and says... "There's no

pleasing some people. He's moaning because he's the only one left in the congregation." ⁱ

We need to find a new way of doing church. A way that is not Starbucks, the way you like church to be, because church your way is like Starbucks, a costly affair in the end. It also cannot be like the cartoon or we end up doing church by ourselves and missing the corporate nature of fellowship. We must revisit the Bible and see how God wants us to be as a church. As Alan Hirsch puts it, "*We are having to rediscover for our church, the forgotten ways.*" ⁱⁱ

(Chapter One... What the Gospels say about Church)

When we look at the Gospels and what they tell us about the church we notice one thing above the rest, that the church is 'The Church of Jesus Christ.' He is the Lord of the Church and master of all that the Church stands for. Granshaw is His Church firstly and fore-mostly.

So Christ is our starting point. Augustine is helpful in reminding us, "*in becoming man Jesus did not lose anything... He added humanity to his divinity.*" In this hypostatic incarnation, Christ comes with a goal, he arrives on earth with a mission, to redeem mankind.

Jesus grew from infancy to manhood, lived with family, worked with his hands, had friends, attended parties, loved his mum and dad, felt the pain of being let down and lies. Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions and all the trials and temptations that we do and yet he was sinless, even on the cross he was without sin.

Yet I find it strange that all the major creeds miss out this part of his divine humanity. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed all declare that Jesus was born of a virgin and then skip forward to, died on a cross. What is missing is the missional life of Jesus. Jesus is the greatest missionary that has ever been. He left the culture of heaven and crossed over to the sinful culture of our earth and came with a mission plan. To rediscover this missional aspect of the life of Jesus is where I think God is leading us as a church family.

(Chapter Two...What the New Testament says about the church)

We find this missional life of Jesus embodied in Acts 2. As the Spirit of Christ comes upon the church, I see this very much as the commissioning of the church for service, in very much the same way we commission our leaders in the church for service within Granshaw. As the Holy Spirit works in a church and empowers the people to continue the ministry of Christ, or to put it another way the Holy Spirit gives us the power of Christ to carry on his mission on earth, we are to be Christ's Missional Church spreading the gospel on earth. Acts 2, gives us 8 characteristics for an authentic community of believers. We must first see how we measure up in Granshaw to Acts 2.

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1. The church at its core must be made up of regenerated believers. Unbelievers are welcome but the centre of the church must be, believing practicing Christians.
 2. Qualified leadership. Not only are the Minister and Elders to be competent leaders but the overall leadership structure must be biblical.
 3. Preaching and worship. The church must gather to hear the Word of God preached rightly and respond in worship of the triune God.
 4. Rightly administered sacraments. That the sacraments of baptism and communion are kept and administered well.
 5. Unity of the Spirit. That unity within the church is a high priority, this is only done in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 6. Holiness. That the church promotes holy lifestyles. This involves repentance and a Godly lifestyle. (As Steve Caldwell said in his interview, he wanted to be a God chaser.)
 7. The great commandment to love. The church must be a loving community that devotes itself to *Koinonia* (fellowship). This means seeking the well being of others before ourselves. This means seeing ourselves as part of something bigger, the family of God.
 8. The great commission 'to go' and 'make disciples'. The church is to evangelise its own community. This is done by the preaching of the Word of God, by the

faithful witness and living of the people of God and the prayers of those within the church.

The Bible then gives us a little extra information, saying that God added to their number daily those who were being saved.

So that's what the church IS, but what is the church TO BE? The church has to bring the message of Christ to the world in its own culture. So what exactly is the culture into which Granshaw lives and works?

(Chapter Three... What is our Context and Culture?)

The 20th century was marked by an ideological and philosophical shift. The shift was from a movement form known as, 'Modernity' or 'Modern Era'. This involved a shift from community importance to the importance of the individual, and was seen to have started with the enlightenment movement in the 1700s. This also filtered into the church as it became more individualistic, it's all about me and what is right for me. So rather than me being part of something bigger and participating in the worship of the church, it became about me coming to church to be served. Even our evangelism became about individual service. I am a sinner and need God to forgive my sins. But evangelism is much much more than God simply supplying my need for salvation, there is a responsibility that comes with becoming a Christian, but that we will look at later.

The shift moved from, 'modernity' into what has been called, 'Post-Modernity', or the 'Post-Modern Era'. This can be defined as the erosion of absolute truth, with the phrase being used, "I tell you my truth, you tell me yours." This has filtered down into the church of the later 20th and early 21st century with what has been labelled, the emerging church movement. This is trying to be a new expression of church-life for a post-modern generation. Mark Driscoll puts it very well; *"The post-modern world could have a new definition of church, one in which church is understood as a community of Christians and non-Christians who live together without distinction, without leadership or discipline or doctrine, trying to emulate the character of Christ without stressing the gospel requirements of repentance of sin and faith in Jesus that enables the life of*

Jesus to be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. At best, we may be on the cusp of a new kind of church for a new kind of Christian. At worst, the proliferation of many small sects and cults under the banner of the emerging church may already be well under way.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This warning helps me see that a missional church must not become like the culture around it but rather must bring the message of Christ to the culture. We must be, 'in' the world, but not 'of' the world, but not 'out' of the world either.

Our post-modern culture tells me there are no moral or spiritual absolutes anymore, what is right for you, is right for you. So to say, "The Bible is God's Word", or "Jesus is the only way to heaven", are wrong to the post-modern mindset, they will say, "well that's only your opinion." Everything is subjective.

So how can our church do the mission of Christ in this non-moral and non-Christian culture?

By becoming a church based on fulfilling the mission of Christ to the world. Bill Hybels, senior pastor at Willowcreek Church, says, "God wants to change the world through the local church." We do this by becoming a church with a mission, in other words becoming a missional church.

Chapter Four... So what exactly is a 'Missional Church'?

This phrase, 'Missional Church', has appeared in the last few years. Lots of books speak about, 'being a missional community', but very few can put down on paper what this actually involves. In my reading the idea comes directly from the teaching of Jesus who after his death and just before his ascension said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matt 28 v 19 - 10: see also Mark 16 v 15 -16 / Luke 24 v 46 - 49 / John 20 v 20 - 31 / Acts 1 v 5 - 8)

Jesus speaks of evangelizing, building up Christians and planting churches. That I believe is a good definition of what Christ wanted his church to be. Sounds too simple, the tricky bit is to strategize how to carry out this mission of the church in today's increasingly non-Christian context and intolerant culture.

When I was growing up I would hear people talk about being an 'evangelical church'. Sadly this seemed to mean bringing people into church or an event, and it was limited to doing 'attractational ministry'. Yet Christ left his culture to come into our culture, for mission. So we must adopt the emphasize of Christ, our church must go into the culture in which we live. So how does this involve a change of mindset in the church?

Ed Stetzer and David Putman express the core of the shift to missional thinking like this:

- *From programs to processes*
- *From demographics to discernment*
- *From models to mission*
- *From attractational to incarnational*
- *From uniformity to diversity*
- *From professional to passionate*
- *From seating to sending*
- *From decisions to disciples*
- *From additional to exponential*
- *From monuments to movements*^{iv}

Tim Keller, Minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York and a big influence on my thinking says, "*The Church will have to learn how to become 'missional'. If it does not do that it will decline or die.*"^v

Chapter Five... So what are the key elements of a missional church?

1. A missional church not only believes the Bible to be true but live out all the Bible teaches. It affirms the fundamental truth; the sovereignty of God, that humanity is made in the image of God and has fallen due to sin entering the world, the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Jesus, the penal substitutional work of the cross, the work of Satan in our world, Heaven and hell as real places, The only way to be saved is through the saving work of Jesus Christ. I like Mark Driscoll's comment, "*A missional church is always, only, solely, fully, passionately, uncompromisingly, wholeheartedly, unwaveringly, and continually all about Jesus as God, Saviour, Lord, Hero, Hope, and Friend.*"^{vi}

2. Missional church practices and preaches repentance. At the centre of Christ's message while on earth was the need for believers, unbelievers and religious people to repent of sin. For believers, repentance leads to a knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim 2 v 25) and leads the believer into the grace of God. For the unbeliever, repentance means a change of thinking about God and the coming into a living relationship with Christ. For the religious people, (and by this I mean people who do not see the need for salvation and are involved in churches) repentance comes as quite a shock for folks like this, as they realize their self righteousness is not enough before a Holy God. This kind of person is hard to reach with the concept of repentance because everything within them says, "I go to church, and I am ok." Church doesn't save anyone, only Jesus can do that.

A missional church firmly confesses its imperfections and past sins and its ongoing struggles and failures. We need to focus on the forgiving grace of God that repentance brings us into. Repentance leads to a relationship with God.

3. A missional church is involved in the culture of its community. It's important to understand that we have been placed in our time and culture for a purpose. Acts 17 reminds us of this, that God not only created us, but determined where we would be born and into which culture we should be placed. So for Granshaw God has determined that we should live, work, bring up families and minister in the Moneyreagh area.

But what is Moneyreagh like? Well a farmer before planting looks at the soil into which he will plant. If the church wants to take the mission of Christ seriously it too must look at the soil, the culture into which it hopes to plant the seed of the gospel. Granshaw must understand the people and community it hopes to reach. 3 simple questions can be asked here.

(1) What are the Social Perceptions? (eg) Everyone on East Enders splits up, therefore relationships are destined to fail.

(2) What are the Moral Sins that need addressed. (eg) Bill Clinton confessed to sins only after he was caught, therefore you're only guilty if you are caught.

(3) What are the Theological Errors in the culture? (eg) Everyone good goes to heaven only bad people go to hell, therefore I am a good person and will go to heaven.

So what does this mean for Granshaw? It means that the Minister, leaders and people of Granshaw must not only be 'Missionary Minded', taking the gospel into the culture in which God has placed them, but also, 'Missiologically Minded', people who watch their culture with a theological eye. Looking for ways of bringing the church to the people in meaningful ways. This is exactly what Paul does on his missionary journeys. Acts 17, Paul goes straight into the culture of Athens to find bridges into which he can bring the gospel.

(NB) I believe our starting point is that we must truly believe that the gospel is that dramatic, life changing, powerful act that the Bible claims it to be and that the church is a joyful, loving authentic family of believers that people want to be like.

If we want to be 'Missiologically Minded' Christians we should move outside our comfort zones by, watching You Tube, to see what our culture watches. We should watch TV programmes about our culture and read magazines that our not ones we would buy. We must listen to our kids and teenagers about what is the meaning of church and faith to them. Also we should wisely surf the internet to see what's out there. (A word of warning about this, for every one web site that is normal, there are 5 pornographic web sites, be careful)

The days of, we have the truth come to us, are gone. A biblical and missional church seeks to bring the good news into the culture it finds itself.

4. A missional church seeks to engage with the culture around it. Jesus did this. The church that I grew up in still exists in lots of places and yet it belongs in a different era that no longer exists. It struck me while clearing out the attic one day as I found my old files from university. There I discovered essays written in pen with tipex white out all over it. Even my hand outs were printed out on a type writer, and it become clear to me we have moved from manual to digital very quickly, the world I knew at university some 15 years ago has gone.

The church seeks, it seems, to constantly want to live in the past unchanged, this world no longer exists. We must keep the best of what has gone before and seek to move with the culture, if we want to reach the culture of today. I like 'Youth For Christ', motto; '*Fasten to the rock, geared for the times.*' Paul puts it very well in (1 Cor 9 v 19: "*For though I am free from all, I have made myself a*

servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win them.”)

The theological term for this is 'Contextualisation'. To put this word simply it means that Granshaw and the Christians in Granshaw need to be aware of the culture around them and the context into which their family, friends and neighbours live, so they can bring the gospel in a real and meaningful way to them.

This is a challenge to Granshaw church, how can we provide a church that is welcoming to those from a church background and those from a non-church culture? I wish I had the answer to this question. Safe to say, that a church that does not look at the culture around it and enter into that culture in a meaningful way is not reflecting the life of Jesus, the mission of Paul and the church of the New Testament. We must ask the hard questions about dress, tattoos, piercings, plastic surgery, music styles, use of technology in church, proper entertainment, smoking, drinking, use of language, homosexuality, the internet (blessing or curse), and 101 different questions that will arise in our church, if we are to be a missional church reaching the people in the culture we now find ourselves in.

5. A missional church loves the different. By this I mean that not only must the church love the normal and ordinary believers, but sometimes the church is guilty of trying to win the 'way outs' of our culture and forgets to love the here and now's, the faithful ones of the church. We must do this without question, but if we wish to please God and be a missional church we must reach out to those who are different. Now what do I mean by different? I mean those who do not fit neatly into our Presbyterian mould, those people who are 'off track' with the church. This often includes many outside the church and some within. Those who are single or divorced, those who are widowed or have a disability. Often church can seem like you have to be happily married with kids to get in. A missional church knows something, that Jesus' mission to mankind was especially to different ones, the ones who did not fit and the church was to be a place of safety and love. In Granshaw we seek to be a family church, but not that you must have a family to come in, but, that you will find a family to be part of, that you have a place within that church family, you have a part to play should that be a spiritual granny of spiritual kids, a spiritual teen or loving spiritual uncle or

ant. A missional church has a place for everyone and a responsibility by all who call themselves Christian.

6. A missional church lives differently. We are first and foremost citizens of heaven and we live with Jesus as our King. This will bring us into conflict with a lot of things outside of that Kingdom. This must be accepted as being part of the calling to be a missional church. And so we must be prepared to live differently. Here are some ways in which we must live by divine rules.

- We must love those against us
- We must live God honouring marriages, practicing abstinence before marriage and enjoyment with and only with our partner.
- We must celebrate children as God's blessing to us. The Bible connects sex, marriage and children in a way that the culture we live in does not.
- We must hold to certain Biblical principles; abortion is wrong, adoption is good, homosexuality is wrong, living a pure life is good.
- We must guard our language and its content, for as James reminds us such untold damage is done by our mouths.
- We must love and serve those around us, this means showing kindness, mercy, generosity and forgiveness. This calls for us to live such lives as it blesses the people around us.
- We must enjoy our lives above all people because we above all people know what it is to be set free.

Granshaw must become a place that is genuinely different from the area around it that people see that the church live a different way, that has such an attractive quality that they long to come in and see for themselves the difference.

7. A missional church must preach and teach its people to be missionaries. A missional church must show people how they can share Jesus to their culture without, the cringe effect. Mark Driscoll, put it very well; *"tragically, the need for the missional church is incredibly great because evangelism seems to be a dying ministry. Liberals tend to think evangelism is not necessary since they falsely assume generally everyone is heaven bound, while conservatives are*

huddled up in their church busy preaching to the proverbial choir instead of leading them on a mission to reach people in their local culture."^{vii}

The researcher bears this fact out; *"Church leaders are becoming less evangelistic. A survey of ministers in 2005 surprised the research team. Over one half (53 %) of ministers have made no evangelistic effort at all in the past six months. They have not shared the gospel. They have not attempted to engage a lost or unchurched person at any level."*^{viii}

With the rate of decline in our church, not just in Northern Ireland but in the Northern Hemisphere, we are in a battle for survival. What can we do to change this state of affairs? I believe Peter in (1 Peter 3 v 15 -16) tells us. Peter describes the missional lifestyle that Christian's should have as, loving Jesus as Lord above all things and living in relationship with lost family, friends, neighbours and those whom we work with and share our lives with in such an authentic way that they are compelled to ask questions about Jesus. Also a missional church should have taught its people to such a degree that the bumper sticker, "don't follow me, follow Jesus" does not apply to them because if you follow them they will natural lead you to Jesus. One way in which this can be seen is in our younger people, a missional church will openly encourage its young people to serve the body of Christ locally and on mission teams giving them all the support it needs. In this way the church benefits as its young people get fired up about living and serving God and living a God honouring lifestyle. This stays with them and benefits the church as they filter into leadership later on as adults.

8. Finally, a missional church is difficult. Once a church sees the need to become a missional church, a struggle begins both with-in and with-out. The struggle with-in begins on several levels, but comes down to a change of mindset, which is always a source of great contention. To become a missional church people have to move from a place of safety, to a place that takes them out of their comfort zone, into new territory. This is a very difficult move for many in our churches who have watched their world spin out of control and want their church to remain constant and safe. Yet in changing our mindset to become a missional church we move closer to the New Testament church. Nearly all of the N.T. letters are taken up with this very theme, helping the church

focus on what is the mission of God to the world, which at its very bottom level is; to seek the welfare, repentance and salvation of the broken, sinful and lost.

Not only is missional church difficult because of a change of mindset in the church but it also is difficult because it involves risk taking, making changes and working through the messiness of all that comes through your church door.

Chapter six... Conclusion

As I have read and sifted through all kinds of material for this paper. It seems to me that Granshaw seeks to be a 'Missional Church', to be a haven for the broken hearted, a place of rest for the tired soul and a place of love, laughter and joy where Jesus must be found. It seems to me that God has been shaping Granshaw into a family of Gods people who wish to reflect His glory into the lives of others. Granshaw is far from perfect and has a lot to do to become a true missional church, but I believe that God's compass heading is in the direction of 'becoming a missional church' as I have set out in the chapters before.

I have on my study wall a picture which to my mind reminds me of Granshaw Family Church. It is the famous photograph of the Portrush Lifeboat going out into the storm with the waves coming over the top of the boat. To my mind Granshaw (and by Granshaw I mean everyone who is committed to the core values of Granshaw Family Church) goes out into the storms of the world around them, into difficult situations, into the culture around them and rescues people from the storm and brings them into the safety and peace of the harbour which is the church family.

In all my reading I have seen two mistakes that I believe the emerging missional church is making; firstly, there is very little mention on the centrality of prayer in the life of a missional church. For me without prayer being one of the central pillars of a missional church it does not fully reflect the missional life of Christ or the heart of God. I believe that we as a church need more opportunities to come and pray together as God's family that meet at Granshaw.

Secondly, I feel that the centre of a missional church is having an authentic community of believers, who live out the family values of the bible. A place that is real, relevant, exciting, enjoyable, biblical, caring and friendly. I have spoken

to many people who have told me stories of talking to their friends about Jesus, and then saying that their church is the last place they would bring them to. If we are going to reach into the lives of those outside the church we must have an authentic community to point to and say, come and see it lived out, come and see people who have found something very real and live it out. Speaking to lots of non-church goers, it is not that God has put them off church but that church has put them off God. This must not be the case for Granshaw.

So if we are a bible teaching family church with prayer at the heart of our worship of God, seeking to take the mission of Christ to our culture as our driving theme, and if we as a family church love and care for the 'who so evers' who come to us as an authentic family of God, we will be going in the direction, the compass heading that God wants for our little church.

You may be wondering what all the fuss is over the name 'missional church'? I believe that it is an important term which speaks of an intentional biblical direction or course that we as a church are taking. Tim Keller, the minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, makes for me a life-changing statement on why it is important to be a missional church.

"One of the reasons much of the American Evangelical Church (One can also say the same about the Northern Ireland Evangelical Churches) has not experienced the same precipitous decline as the Protestant Churches of Europe and Canada is because in the U.S. there is still a 'Heartland' with the remnants of the old "Christendom" society... In conservative regions, it is still possible to see people profess faith and the church grow without becoming a 'missional'. Most traditional evangelical churches can still only win people to Christ who are just like them, traditional and conservative. But this is a shrinking market. And eventually evangelical churches ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of Christendom will have to learn how to become 'missional'. If it does not do that it will decline or die... We do not simply need evangelical churches, but rather 'missional' churches." ix

I believe this to be a true statement and can be used about the state of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Our church is declining at such an alarming rate, it is getting an older church with fewer and fewer younger people coming and many churches are content with maintenance rather than mission.

And so I did not find my AA route map taking me from here to there neatly with all the bends in the road clearly marked out, but rather I found a compass heading and a direction that I believe God wants us to go, that we in Granshaw are becoming a 'missional church'.

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- i Christianity Magazine (May 2009)
 - ii Alan Hirsch (The Forgotten ways. p12) 2006
 - iii Mark Driscoll & Gary Breshears (Vintage Church p55) 2008
 - iv Ed Stetzer & David Putman (Breaking the missional code p206) 2006
 - v Tim Keller (The Missional Church / www.redeemer2.com / resources) 2001
 - vi Mark Driscoll & Gary Breshears (Vintage Church p221) 2008
 - vii Mark Driscoll & Gary Breshears (Vintage Church p232) 2008
 - viii Thom S. Rainer (The dying American church p219) 2006
 - ix Tim Keller (The Missional Church / www.redeemer2.com / resources) 2001