

Appendix J - How Should We Define the “Church”? **An examination of Two “Als” - Institution-Al and Mission-Al**



*You don't come or go to church rather
You are the church*

Introduction

As part of our ministry together, it is important to learn and grow in how what is happening in local congregations has changed over the decades. There is a fancy word called, “Christendom.” It is the historical reality that for many centuries the Church was the center of life and focus for most people and even communities/culture as a whole. Remember “blue laws” (stores, etc. being closed on Sunday)? Remember when it was allowed to sing Christmas carols at public schools and when no sports team would schedule games for Sundays? These are indicators of the fact that the Church has lost its “attractual” character and its place in society from which people base their lives. Because of that and many other factors, it is imperative to understand how that ONE shift has affected real people that you know as well as how YOU and ME look at ourselves as Jesus followers/disciples. At one time, it was perfectly normal to identify oneself by the name or denomination of a specific church. Now, most people in most communities have no idea what denominations are or even have any interest in interrupting the “flow” of their lives for engagement in spiritual formation and activity. “GOING to Church” is still important but “BEING THE CHURCH” in the community, each Jesus follower, is what makes sense as a strategy for a new age and a rapidly secularized culture.

I put together this study to give you a “taste” of one of the major issues in a revitalized or new normal for people who are involved in local faith communities (aka congregations). I would encourage you to read it and study it. It will give you a new perspective on ministry in the 21st century as well as how YOU can be a real difference maker for God in YOUR daily life.

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An examination of Two “Als” - Institution-Al and Mission-Al

As we begin, I'd like to urge you to consider the following - the idea of “influence” is an aspect of life that we daily deal with intentionally or unintentionally. Either we are influencers or being influenced on a daily basis. Marketers and pollsters (among many others) spend thousands of hours as well as billions of dollars trying to invent strategies on how to effectively influence you to either buy, sell, vote, move, act, watch, etc.

Reflection Question – Who are the top “influencers” in our world/culture today? How do they attempt to influence us? What are they attempting to influence us to do?

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be “salt and light”...influencers for the Kingdom. In fact, Jesus said clearly, no influence + no effectiveness + no “affectiveness” = “worthless” (Matthew 5:13). Kingdom Influencers are engaged in relationships...they are the living Jesus, they are incarnating the nature of God (in other words, “God so loved that He gave”), they are givers, they naturally look to have a Kingdom effect and affect on others. Jesus calls the people of God to be influencers NOT the “Influenced” because he knew that the

“influenced” are just that – consumers, wait-ers, the disengaged, those who can be “carried away” by pressures, trends, fads, and other’s habits/worldviews.

Reflection Question – How has our understanding of “church” shaped our individual beliefs in terms of being the “influenced” or “influencers”?

Let’s explore what it means to be “the Church”. I would like to specifically challenge you to think beyond the institutional defaults that we have inherited over the past centuries and to embrace an understanding of “Church” as mission...that being, that you ARE the Church (you just don’t attend or go to Church).

Reflection Question - Think of the word, “Church”...what are the first images that come to your mind (have an imagination beyond just “seeing”...look at that image carefully: let us not just collect information but let us process together, make sense of what we see – who, what, how many, how much, where, when, and why)?

How Should We Define the “Church”?

Big Idea 1 - The “Church” as Gathering or Community not as Institution.

I have been doing quite a bit of reflecting on how easy it is to understand the “Church” purely and simply in institutional forms. The reason is because that understanding is our default; at least, it is my default. In other words, think of the “defaults” in many issues/experiences/entities in life...for example:

- Microsoft’s PowerPoint presentation program defaults to text and bullet points not images (which is interesting in that most people learn and retain more information visually through pictures not by remembering words)
- Most musicians like myself who play electric guitar have an amplifier that defaults at 11 (that is supposed to be a thinly veiled reference to a rock and roll movie classic, “Spinal Tap”)
- An automobile’s engine default is what we call idling.
- A default in most relationships is selfishness and narcissism...in other words, we learn to love, share, given and enter into intimacy
- **Reflection Question - There are defaults in all sorts of things in life – what others can you think of?**

An understanding of “Default” is helpful because for most of us who are involved in the “Church”, our default understanding of it is that of the institution – the congregational setting. For most of us, we were all brought up with that image and experience and it is natural for us to think “church” and think institutionally. Many people assume the “Church” is a building...something firmly planted on a corner or in a neighborhood or even in a strip mall...something that embodies a professional religious staff, promotes and facilitates programs for its constituents, and has a specified budget to fund its religious services. The default of the definition of “Church” has been set for centuries primarily because of the translation of one word in the New Testament (in the 17th century King James Version Bible) that established a mindset that erroneously continues to this day.

When the Greek word, “ekklesia” was translated into English, it was translated “Church”...which, in most people’s minds at that time and even now, was primarily an institution. Unfortunately, that was not the meaning of the word in its specific context. “Ekklesia” is best translated, “called to gather” or “gathering/community”, which if you consider it, dramatically reshapes our understanding of what the bible discusses as “Church” as well as underscores the powerful words of Jesus when he said in Matthew 18:20, *“where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them”*. In this manner, the “Church” can meet anytime and anyplace. That wouldn’t preempt any meaning from what many of us regard as traditional Church...but it does expand our understanding of what Church can be as well as underscore how important we are in the “economy” of God.

Let’s state it simply - the “Church” is where Jesus dwells...it is a gathering of disciples where the presence of God fills those participating with possibility and power. So what shapes the “Church” in this instance? Jesus

does! That's why we have to take the time to not only clarify what "Church" is and can be but also investigate and define what it is to be a Church on mission – in other words, "mission" Al and Alice.

Big Idea 2 - The "Church" is defined by our Identity as followers of Jesus and is not defined by our church-based activities or membership in an institution.

Many people define the "Church" primarily by what the Church does, not who the Church is. Unfortunately, this leads to an understanding of the "Church" that defines it not by God's work, but by OUR work, leading to a view that WE build the "Church" instead of Jesus (through the power of his Holy Spirit). With this understanding, "Church" can become formulaic - anybody who simply implements the forms or activities of "Church" can call what they do the Church of Jesus Christ. This is "church" based upon OUR works and not Church based upon the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said he would build his Church, not us. This sometimes stems from a human-centered understanding of the Gospel (It is my decision – my work – that saves me) but it can also lead to a human-centered Church (It is all about what we do that defines us, not what Jesus has done).

Biblically, a follower of Jesus is defined by their "sentness" and obedience to the call of Jesus (revealed in and through life) not by attendance. A Christ-follower believes that God is on a mission and that we are to join him in it (Ephesians 1:3-14). Jesus never did say to "go to church and learn"...He did say to "follow Me and I will make you fishers of men". There is a subtle but profound difference in seeing oneself as a follower and not a member (membership denotes an "us vs. them", who is "in and out" mentality).

We must remember: *We Are Who We Are Because of What Jesus Has Done and Is Doing...Our Being comes out of His Being and Doing...and Our Being and Doing Proceeds from Our Being in Christ!*

Big Idea 3 – "Church" needs to be experienced by both Confession and Action.

Some people define the "Church" by what God has done for us, not who He saved, called, equipped and empowered us to be and to do. In this case, the Church is a confessional people who believe the right things and protect the purity of faith. Even so, the Church is so much more in the vision of God...we are called to be an obedient people who live, do, and have their being in what God commands as well as "incarnates" what God is like.

We need to define the Church in light of: 1) Who God Is and What God has done and is doing; 2) Who He has made and Who He is making the Church to Be; and 3) What He has saved, created, empowered her to do.

We aren't defined purely by what we do. We are defined by what God has done and IS DOING as Jesus Christ lives in you and me. What we do is based upon and motivated by what God has done and who God has making us to be. This is all the outworking of faith in God and the outpouring of power and life in Jesus. We must distinguish between defining a Church/faith community based upon what God has done and Who We Are because of and through His work AND describing how a Healthy Church/community lives out God's purposes showing herself to be God's Chosen and Redeemed People.

The Church is God's People (who we are) saved by God's Power (what He has done and is doing) for God's Purposes (the good works that as we live our lives in and through Jesus Christ we do.)

Big Idea 4 – Meet Institution-Al and Alice and Mission-Al and Alice

1. Meet Institution-Al (and Alice):
 - a. When Institution-Al and Alice think about Church, they think of the congregation, building, Pastor(s), programs and realities of their local church. They have a specific image of the church building in mind that they "come to" or "go to" on Sunday mornings for worship...they think of organization, commonality of the friends they have in the congregation...they think of altars,

friends, a calendar of activities and programs...they think of the church's sanctuary, its leadership structure, donuts and coffee after the worship service, songs and hymns, parking, ritual...they understand that there is a "80/20" rule of membership (where a vast minority of members of the institution do the vast majority of the work of the church)...the church has members and non-members (guests or visitors), their own special "insider" language that "we" understand... they know that their church is formed around a set of "our" beliefs that are differentiated against the others "out there"...for most institution-als and Alices, their church life encompasses one hour on one day a week .

- b. Institution-Al and Alice are shaped by the phenomenon of "Christendom"...they are accustomed to the institutional marketing that happens within the organization to encourage participation...they struggle with what is becoming more and more prevalent in local churches, a consumer mentality (dominated by issues like church shopping, the proper feeding/caring of the membership, etc. over/against what other churches may/may not be doing)...for many congregations in the 21st century, there is talk about the "good ole days" when the congregation was bigger, when people were more involved and when there was a proliferation of young people attending...and for most, "mission" means money that he/she gives to missionaries and mission efforts of the denomination...in addition, ministry is something that the Pastor does and/or that is the responsibility of the ministry teams/committees of the congregation.

2. Meet Mission-Al (and Alice):

- a. When Mission-Al and Alice think about "Church", they think about themselves. Yes, they are involved in a local faith community (that is an important part of their overall journey of faith as a follower of Jesus) but they see themselves primarily as one "sent" to the world to disciple others. They are primarily "invaders"...they see the Kingdom of God as one that isn't walled up in a building but is embodied in their heart. They are inherently "dangerous" in that no one can marginalize them based on location, programs, buildings and budgets...they are the deployed followers of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit of God with life for the purpose of sharing life wherever they go...in other words, they seek to be able to take/incarnate the Spirit in the middle of real life.
- b. Mission-Al and Alice live outreach not just talk about it...they are available...they are "doing church" in public places. Yes, they are choosing to be involved in a local congregation (faith community) for support, prayer and encouragement in what his daily life is all about, but they understand to the core of their being that their "business" is living out the Great Commission of the Kingdom of God (to "go and make disciples)...because of this, they understand and are challenged to live their spirituality 24/7...Jesus is not only their Lord but their lifestyle. In living their lives, they avoid insider language choosing to enter the culture/world of people they know and relate to regularly in words and stories where there is shared meaning...they seek to understand the story of others and to live their faith and share their life. Mission-Al and Alice don't have a "we/them" mentality...they avoid the sentimentality of spiritual language...they seek to be authentic, they can't risk being hypocritical, and they can freely engage in the symbols/language/discourse of the culture. In other words, they embrace grace in common culture. They understand their vocation as a Christian vocation...they see mission as the definition of all of life and, to quote Hugh Halter, they "participating in the natural activities of the culture around us with whimsical holiness." In this manner, "Church" is something they ARE...they define mission personally...it is their identity. They do not see the world as an enemy but see their followership in Jesus making an impact on those who need to experience life at its fullest "in Christ".

3. Some implications of being Mission-Al/Alice on Discipleship and Disciple-making

- a. The Holy Spirit's purpose is to unleash the Disciple that lives within you – Every "spiritual blessing" you have been given, the power of the Holy Spirit, gifts, passion/heart of God is incarnated in you – we are all to be "little Christs" in our lives.

- b. The bible makes it clear - you cannot be a disciple without being a missionary. In an institutional context, discipleship is usually associated with morality and participation in a local church's ministry. Discipleship is not about membership – it is about life!
- c. Disciples don't settle for Christianity "lite" – **what should we faithfully expect of a follower of Jesus in a church?** Some churches only expect a member to commune once a year and/or given one recordable, financial gift to be a member in "good standing"...is that really what the Christian life is all about? Really? What does Jesus "expect" from a follower of His?
- d. Jesus used the metaphor of a seed often...as a seed contains the full potential of a tree – so the tree contains the full potential of the forest – it is all there in the seed in the first place. **What does that mean within the context of being a disciple?**
- e. Alan Hirsch tells the story, "If you lived in China and came to know Jesus through the movement of Christ – they would have told you that they expected little ole you to one day have the privilege of starting and leading a community of faith and that this is one of the joys and privileges of following Jesus – there is a potential movement in every believer." **How does that strike you?**
- f. People who ONLY see their identity from an Institution – Al/Alice perspective are inherently only consumers – **should we be creating consumers? What is the difference between being a consumer and a disciple?** Bottom line, we need to stop thinking of church as service provider, product, something that exists for our personal benefit...and start seeing the local church as a missionary training center.
- g. Mission isn't a form of church or something that a disciple "does"...it is a label or a description of how a church or a disciple actually LIVES! It is how the life of Jesus is being lived out in the lives of people who follow and love Jesus.
- h. Transfiguration story is Jesus' attempt to combat the human tendency to "institutionalize" life – Jesus had to force the issue – get back to reality!
- i. Missional definition
 1. Key – follower of Jesus is defined by sent-ness not by attendance - Believes that God is on a mission and that we are to join him in it - Define self as Follower NOT Member (membership denotes an "us vs. them" mentality)
 2. Key - Deliberately does NOT demonizing culture
 3. Key - Connects to Jesus via mission NOT via doctrine
 4. Key - Seeks to be a person of peace in the Community
 5. Key - Freely establishes Networks of ministry vs. Antagonistic relationships with other ministries (us vs. them, "my sheep") Gracious with Existing Institutions - NOT Antagonistic/Apathetic
 6. Key - Externally focused - Outreach isn't a program but a lifestyle - Culturally engaged and immersed
 7. Missional Paradigm = story of God's action in human history - God so loved that He gave...our story needs to be about OUR action in human lives
 8. First task of the Christ-follower - Discipling Others
 9. "The great commission is not about 'evangelism'...it is not just about the transfer of vital information...but rather the transfer of the very life of Christ through the medium and message of our own discipleship."

10. Is Discipleship only for those who are already “IN” the church? How long were disciples being disciplined until they “got it” that Jesus was God? Lord? Continuum below:

Pre-conversion discipleship.....Post-conversion discipleship

11. For the Jesus Follower, our role is to disciple them - whose business is it to convert them?

j. Some thoughts regarding our examination regarding the difference between the Institutional and Missional paradigms:

Issue	Institution	Mission
People outside the church	Those to the reached	Neighbors and friends
Spiritual activities	In church programs or private devotions	Everywhere has that potential
Missions	Money sent to support “them”, committees, structures, denomination	Us
Worship	Services conducted at building	Lifestyle
Learning	Dependant upon Professionals	My responsibility
Great commission	Evangelism	Discipleship
World	Enemy	Mine
Church	Building and Programs	ME and you

4. Measuring Missional Living – Cutting edge for me/Growth edge

Traditional Church Measurability:

- Number of people involved, attending, participating in church-related activities
- Number of people coming to worship services
- Number of Church activities on calendar
- Amount of Money received in the offering
- Number of Church-centered opportunities for growth
- How intentionally the church Staff is devoted to program management
- Traditionally, Ministry has a Scorecard - how many, how often, how much...in other words, we reward church activity, we evaluate the deliverability of programs, and we are often defined by our organizational goals...in other words, we evaluate from a quantitative basis.

Non-Traditional, Mission/Discipleship Lifestyle Measurability:

- Number of Relationships that people are intentionally cultivating in and outside of the church.
- How Disciples of Jesus are maturing in their faith - in other words, how is transformation occurring in their lives.
- Number of People released into service to the Kingdom of God - in and outside the church
- How Personal discipleship development is impacting people within the disciple's life (marriage, business, family, friend, neighborhood relationships).
- How intentionally the church Staff is devoted to coaching people in discipleship
- Number of stories shared of connectedness and incarnational relationships
- Non-traditional measurements have a different Scorecard - they may or may not improve the organization's bottom line, they are focused on life change and are qualitative in nature
- Amount of time spent debriefing people engaged in community service
- Amount of time spent in leadership meetings talking about discipleship development
- Time reallocated to people development from reconfigured programs
- Progress on simplification of the church calendar by scheduling fewer events, meetings, and programs to free up time for people development efforts
- Time spent celebrating faith stories
- Number of life story interviews included in sermons connecting ideas to people’s experience and application
- Number of growing relationships with people who are not followers of Jesus
- Number of relationships with people who are not church people

- Number of personal relationships with other community leaders
- Intentional study plan that includes periodicals, books, blogs, websites, and podcasts for cultural exegesis – seeing the harvest field
- A plan to debrief the cultural lessons regularly with other people
- Number of venues for intentional personal service in the community
- Number of hours in personal service in the community each month
- Number of life-mentoring relationships
- Regular commitment to debriefing your personal life with a personal support group
- Number of stories of external, missional experiences used in your sharing

