



ALLELON
A MOVEMENT OF MISSIONAL LEADERS

ENTERING THE MISSIONAL CONVERSATION

WITH JOHN R. FRANKE

AN ALLELON RESOURCE

Introduction

“What is missional church?” It feels, to many, like an ill-defined concept that frustrates those who genuinely want to understand what missional church is about. [Allelon](#) offers a variety of [conversations](#) around the question of missional church that can be downloaded off this website. You’re not going to find a single, simple definition but a variety of ways of getting at the description. [John Franke](#)’s video presentation explains why a simple definition is hard to give – because missional is about what God is doing in the world, what the church has become in the West and how we need a spiritual conversion (not just a definition) in order to perceive what it means to become a missional church.

We invite you to listen to John as he outlines an understanding of missional church under four titles:

- God’s Missional Character
- Sending the church
- Europe’s Impact
- A Burning Question

Who is John Franke?

John is professor of theology at [Biblical Seminary](#) in Hatfield, PA. He holds the DPhil degree from the University of Oxford and is particularly interested in engaging postmodern thought and culture from the perspective of missional Christian faith in order to explore the opportunities and challenges presented for the witness and ministry of the gospel in the contemporary setting. In addition to teaching at Biblical, John has lectured and taught on the relationships between theology, mission, and culture in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand. He is actively involved in research and writing and in addition to publishing numerous articles and reviews he is the coauthor of [Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context](#) (Westminster John Knox Press) and the author of [The Character of Theology: An Introduction to its Nature, Task, and Purpose](#) (Baker Academic) and [Barth for Armchair Theologians](#) (Westminster John Knox). John serves on the coordinating group for [Emergent Village](#) and as co-chair of the [Evangelical Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion](#).

God's Missional Character

Read: John 20: "As the Father has sent me so send I you..."

1. **Mission is the character of God.**

- God is a missionary.
 - ▶ As it is the character and nature of a mother to love and care for her children so it is the character of God to be a missionary.
 - ▶ As it is the character of fire to burn so it is the character of God to be a missionary.
- Mission is not a project or program that God does because of something else; it is who God is.

2. **Where does this come from? Why do we say that mission is who God is?**

- The way Christians answer this is in their confession that God is Trinity.
- What does Trinity mean?
 - ▶ That the God who encounters us in Jesus is the God who is Father, Son and Spirit – the three in One.
- Why is this understanding of God so important and what does it mean for our understanding of missional?
 - ▶ As Christians we confess that from all eternity God is not a solitary ONE but a social fellowship of love.
 - ▶ From all eternity God has been involved in giving, receiving and sharing in a fellowship of love as Father, Son and Spirit.
 - ▶ This means it is God's very nature to give, receive and share love – this continual acting in love means that God is, from eternity, going out toward the other. Therefore, our God is a missionary God.

3. **The outworking of God's love as Trinity is to create.**

- Creation is the outworking of God's giving, receiving and sharing of love. This is where we say that God is, therefore, in His very nature, a missionary.
- We see this in the text we read at the beginning where Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that he has been sent by the Father for the sake of the world (See John 20:21).

4. **The church is the sign, instrument and witness of God's mission in the world.**
 - This is seen in the second part of the text we have read where Jesus tells his disciples that as the Father has sent him, so he sends them (John 20:21).
 - The church's nature and character is to be a sent or missional church.

Sending the Church

1. **The church is the expression of God's mission in the world**
 - The Father sends the son.
 - The Son sends the Spirit.
 - The Father, Son and Spirit – send the church for the world

2. **The local church is, therefore, the local expression of God's mission for the world.**
 - Each local church is called into life to be in its very nature God's missionary people in that place.
 - This means that mission is not just a:
 - ▶ Program
 - ▶ Project
 - ▶ Line item in the budget
 - ▶ Something a few do on behalf of the rest somewhere else
 - ▶ One among many different activities.

3. **The local church is anything but this missionary community – why?**
 - To a large extent the structures, organizations, habits, attitudes and assumptions of the churches in which we've grown up have been shaped by the formation of the church in Europe hundreds of years ago.

Europe's Impact

- **Our experience and understanding of church is based upon a European-shaped enterprise** even though churches in North America have been separated from Europe for hundreds of years.

- **In Europe, for a very long time, it was assumed that everyone was a Christian of one form or another.** Therefore, church structures, practices and habits were formed in a context where everyone was a Christian and the focus was on training and caring for them (Calvin's Geneva is an illustration of this).

- **Our structures come from the way the church was formed in Europe under particular kinds of circumstances and social organizations.**

- **Mission, where it existed, was usually outside Europe.**

- **This form of church life came to be called Christendom;** it was a time when the church enjoyed a unique, protected life. It involved some of these elements:
 - ▶ The church was at the center of society, as important as political and commercial life. For a long time it controlled political and commercial life – it was both the public and private shaper of society.
 - ▶ The Church was a place to which people came and in which they formed all their life.
 - ▶ Western culture and church culture became synonymous.
 - ▶ Later, beginning in the early 17th century these relationships changed. The political and commercial separated themselves from the control of the church so that in the West the church gradually lost its control over the *public* side of life. It continued to hold control over the *private* side of life for quite a long time.
 - ▶ The church, though, continued to function as *if* it were at the center of the culture. This is what we call a *functional Christendom*.

- **Implications of this Christendom:**
 - ▶ Christianity had become church-centered. This is, the church became an end-in-itself and the central words of Jesus to be a missionary people were lost.
 - ▶ It was assumed that the ways churches needed to operate, structure and be was this Western, Christendom church.
 - ▶ Mission, therefore, had become a program done by a few somewhere else. It was one element of a church that was focused primarily on practicing its European-based structures, habits and styles.

- ▶ There was a loss of focus on the nature of the church as God's missionary people in their local contexts. This central part of the story got lost for most people.

- **Today, we need to re-think this basic story in a number of ways:**
 - ▶ Mission is not an activity of the church but its nature and character.
 - ▶ The church is not the goal – the Gospel of God is the goal of the church.
 - ▶ The church is not an end in itself or a social club for certain kinds of people it is God's presence, life and witness in and for the sake of the world.
 - ▶ The church is about God and mission not European culture.
 - ▶ We need to rethink the church and ask how we form a *missional church* which will involve our attitudes and beliefs about what God is doing in the world as well as an openness to change our structures, programs, habits and practices so that mission becomes our very nature.

Burning Questions?

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

- Are we willing to follow the example of Jesus, who did not consider equality with God a privilege to be asserted, but instead let go of his position, emptied himself and became a servant?
- Are we prepared to change from a church with mission to a missional church?
- Are we prepared in our schools and teaching to shift from a theology with mission to a missional theology?
- Are we willing to let go of the desire to assert the privileges of the past as:
 - ▶ Local churches?
 - ▶ Church leaders (Ministers, Bishops, Executives, etc)?
 - ▶ As schools of training and academics

Can we learn to do this in order to discover together how to form missional churches?

- These questions require more than academic or intellectual assent; they are a spiritual challenge calling us to a difficult kind of discipleship and learning.