The Mission Matrix:
Mapping Out the Complexities
of a Missional Ecclesiology

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This article could have been subtitled: confessions of a church conference junkie! I enjoy attending workshops and conferences on all things related to mission. The nature of the topic doesn't really matter; the size of the sponsoring congregation is irrelevant; the speakers can be either famous, infamous, or the newest cutting-edge prophets of ecclesiastical change. Twelve-step programs for church growth strike my imagination as much as delving down into the remotest depths of inner-trinitarian relationships. I'm simply curious about *mission* from all perspectives.

On the other hand, I'm an unrepentant theological skeptic. I don't fully accept everything I hear at the various missiological watering holes. My training has provided me with a powerful hermeneutic of suspicion. I'm constantly complaining about the superficiality of the otherwise spectacular PowerPoint presentations at conferences, the lack of proper theological or biblical references, the disregard for the confessional tradition in which I was nurtured, and the nonpragmatic way that many presenters hold forth their ideologies. "These ideas will never work on the mission field, local or global," I mutter only slightly under my breath. At these conferences I can swing from optimist to pessimist in a matter of minutes. I never leave in a neutral frame of mind.

A good example of this experience was a conference I attended by the church

Congregations and pastors can become bewildered by the various definitions of and many programs for mission. A "mission matrix" can serve as a tool for a church to analyze its life and witness.

consultant Bill Easum. He was presenting the material from his then newest book, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, by Anyone.*[1] Given the title, I wasn't expecting a theological masterpiece. I was, however, immediately impressed by his notions of "permission-giving leadership" and the need for most congregations to sacrifice certain sacred cows in order to move forward with their mission. His talk was filled with deep wisdom for parish renewal.

At the same time, I was horrified about the results of his "research" that suggested that congregations still practicing infant baptism were more prone to mission malaise. Making a theological inference based upon sociological study was simply not acceptable. He seemed to be confusing categories. I wanted to ask him to talk about the relationship between baptism and mission. This connection was fundamental to my approach to missiology.

I realized at that moment how difficult it was to integrate all the new mission initiatives and theologies. I was constantly receiving new impulses without receiving adequate handles for building them smoothly into my own Reformation heritage. I felt blocked theologically and practically. It took years before the magnitude of the challenge became clear. I finally realized that I needed at least two things in order to move forward with my pastoral praxis of mission: (1) a more generous theological framework, and (2) a way to integrate the theology, ministry practices, and organizational theories into a usable organic whole.[2]

Theology of Mission ⟹(drives) Mission Matrix

Mission has become a powerful theological concept across denominational lines since the 1950s.[3] It has been energized by concepts and doctrines like the Trinity, *Missio Dei*, the kingdom of God, gospel and culture, religious pluralism, eschatology, and reconciliation. How was I to actually integrate these fascinating but divergent missiological fermentations? The multiple insights into global and local mission flowed over me in conference after conference like tsunami waves of wisdom. I was drowning in mission riches. I needed a system of orientation. The answer for me was the development of the mission matrix. This matrix is simply a grid of ecclesiological categories, driven by a theology of mission, with which congregational leadership can analyze their life and witness in a coherent way.

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[1]William M. Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, by Anyone* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

[2]See Richard Bliese, "Lutheran Missiology: Struggling to Move from Reactive Reform to Innovative Initiative," in *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 215–228.

[3]For an overview of this history, see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962); James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987); Gary M. Simpson, "No Trinity, No Mission: The Apostolic Difference of Revisioning the Trinity," in *Word & World* 18/3 (1998) 264–271; Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

A CIRCULAR THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEFINING MISSION DRIVES THE MISSION MATRIX

Mission needs to drive our understanding of ecclesiology.[4] Mission, nevertheless, needs to be defined in relationship to other doctrinal categories in order to gain enough clarity and precision to perform this "driving" role. Mission, as a theological concept, doesn't stand well alone. The word "mission" isn't a biblical word. Like the other famous nonbiblical word "Trinity," however, it has the unique ability to bring together in a coherent way multiple dimensions of the biblical witness. The Reformation tradition has struggled in particular with the notion of mission. Approaching mission from the tradition of the Reformation, therefore, at least four adjectival frames are needed in order to bring out the fundamental fullness of its meaning. Mission will be characterized in this paper by its relationship to church (missional), confession (confessional), gospel (evangelical), and vocation (vocational). Functioning together as a circular framework, they help define the mission that subsequently should drive a congregation's understanding of its identity, ministry, and organizational structure. Therein lay the initial foundation of a missional ecclesiology.

1. Missional

The church is missionary by nature. Just as God is a missionary God, so the church is to be a missionary church. This is the fundamental meaning behind the four attributes of the church confessed to in the Apostles' Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.[5] Each of these marks of the church points to the missional character of the people of God. The church's very posture of "sentness" creates a missionary dynamic in the world. God sent the Son into the world with a mission; the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son with a mission; and now the church, baptized in the name of this Triune God, is being sent on a mission in the world under the direction of the Holy Spirit. "Church *and* mission" was once the theological frame used by the ecumenical community in an attempt to address this dynamic. It was discovered, however, that the "and" already bifurcated that which could not be divided. That is the rationale for using the adjective today, missional. As Emil Brunner wrote, "The church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning."[6]

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[4] See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) 7f.

[5] See Charles E. Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 27–30.

[6] Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931) 108. The context of Brunner's famous sentence is illuminating: "The Word of God which was given in Jesus Christ is a unique historical fact, and everything Christian is dependent on it; hence every one who receives this Word, and by it salvation, receives along with it the duty of passing this Word on; just as a man who might have discovered a remedy for cancer which saved himself, would be in duty bound to make this remedy accessible to all. Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life. The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith. It is a secondary question whether by that we mean Foreign Missions, or simply the preaching of the Gospel in the home Church. Mission, Gospel preaching, is the spreading out of the fire which Christ has thrown upon the earth."

"Missional" points to the unique call of the church to be in, with, for, and against the world.[7]

2. Confessional

Mission can only be understood in relation to confessing Christ and, subsequently, confessing our belief in the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[8] Being missional without being confessional is like the seed in Luke's Gospel whose roots can't grow deep enough to survive the hostile environment around it (Luke 8:5–15). Confession involves public witness to God's promissory "yes" in Jesus Christ.[9] It is true *martyria* in that its public character can lead to persecution and death. The Reformation tradition recognizes in its *sola*s a certain uncompromising character to this public witness: true confession rests on Christ alone, faith alone, and word alone. Of these things Christians can be certain! The eschatological character of a Christian confession, however, also embraces ambiguity, testing, and constant correction. This dimension of the Christian mode of existence is expressed most directly in the Lutheran tradition by the *simul* (that is, the *simultaneous* nature of a Christian as both sinner and saint). The church is ever reforming and being reformed. Confession brings both certainty and humility to the church's practice of mission.[10] The Lutheran confessional tradition consequently affirms unity in the essentials, liberty in the nonessentials and, most importantly, charity in all things.

3. Evangelical

In the Reformation's doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, we find the most central—and embattled—*sola* of the reformed tradition. The Reformers recognized that this was the teaching of the church upon which all other teachings rested.[11] Because of its centrality, therefore, it is also the easiest to overlook or forget. Already at the Diet of Augsburg (1530) the Protestant confessors testified that the nature of promise (*promissio*) was the hermeneutical heart for approaching the entire scriptural witness.[12] This good news points to the promissory character of God's presence in the world. Mission embraces all of God's activities in the world; and these activities are centered on God's promises in Christ. Being missional and confessional has power therefore only when it rests firmly on the evangelical center.[13] This word *alone* makes up the Christian witness. Faith alone justifies because its character relies on God's promises in Jesus Christ.

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[7]Craig Van Gelder, "Missional Challenge: Understanding the Church in North America," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[8]Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[9]Robert W. Bertram, "*Confessio*: Self-Defense Becomes Subversive," in *dialog* 26 (Summer 1987) 201–208.

[10]"Bold humility" is the phrase used by David Bosch to characterize the new age of mission in his book *Transforming Mission*.

[11]See *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article IV. 29–74, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 125–132.

[12]See Martin Luther's argument for our "need of grace" in *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 255.

[13]Carl E. Braaten, *The Flaming Center: A Theology of the Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

4. Vocational

It is often pointed out that the Reformation's impact rested on two fundamental insights, that of justification and of vocation.[14] If the Lutheran tradition can be said to be hyperfocused on the former, it is similarly true that it has consistently avoided the latter. Vocation attends to the Christian participation in the "care and redemption of all that you [God] have made."[15] The teaching on vocation spans every kind of worldly relationship and transforms them into missionary agencies for how God loves the world. These relationships include the civil, familial, churchly, and occupational.[16] Likewise, the teaching on vocation hints at a missional theology that includes the entire scope of God's activity in the world (that is, preservation and redemption; blessing and salvation). Consequently, every call to mission is a call to a new discovery of one's vocations in the world, flowing from a heart of thankfulness for God's generosity in Christ Jesus.

The reference to a circular, theological framework refers to how these four theological concepts of missional, confessional, evangelical, and vocational function together to define mission within a Reformation context. Other theological concepts might be added to the circle.[17] The key is that one concept leads and depends naturally on the other. One cannot talk about mission without including the church's confession of faith. A church's confession is centered in its understanding of the gospel. The evangelical heartbeat of the gospel gains expression through the vocational callings of Christians in the world. Grasped together, these four frameworks form a generous theological foundation for building a missiology relevant in addressing both local and global contexts. They also form a basis for constructing a mission theology that can drive all dimensions of the mission matrix.

THE CHURCH IN MISSION

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[14]James A. Nestingen, "Justification, Location and Vocation in Luther's Reformation," in *Living Out Our Calling at Home* (Saint Paul, MN: Centered Life, 2003) 15.

[15]This is an insight borrowed from Edward Schroeder (in personal conversation), referring to the Offertory Prayer in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 68, 88, 109.

[16]Marc Kolden, *The Christian's Calling in the World* (Saint Paul, MN: Centered Life, 2002); Richard Bliese, "Living Ambidextrously in the Real World," in *Living Out Our Callings in the Workplace* (Saint Paul, MN: Centered Life, 2004) 5–31.

[17]Gary Simpson, in a presentation to the Gospel and Culture Network meeting at Luther Seminary in October 2005 entitled *A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church*, uses five theological categories: *promissio*, *communicatio*, *communio*, *confessio*, and *vocatio*.

The Mission Matrix: How to Analyze a Church from the Perspective of Mission

The core biblical witness for the church in mission develops a common theme: the church is a new kind of community baptized into the Triune God's activities in the world. The biblical picture of the church's existence in and for the world is nevertheless quite complex. This picture includes an identity tied to the triune God, special activities that are almost limitless in scope, and organizational images that change constantly. It should not be a surprise therefore that Paul Minear in *Images of the Church in the New Testament*[18] identified ninety-six images and analogies to refer to the church in mission. Interestingly, the writers of the New Testament did not try to synthesize these multiple images. This biblical diversity presents Christians with both a challenge and an opportunity. How do we provide a usable framework that is faithful to the diversity of the whole biblical witness and also effective within numerous contexts throughout North America and the world?

A flexible framework for grasping the diverse facets of the church's mission mandate begins with an understanding of the church's very nature. The church's ministry and mission flow out of its nature. Craig Van Gelder describes the dynamic this way:

> The issue is not so much our ability to focus the ministry of the church, or our ability to analyze and renew existing church structures. The more basic issue we face is the very way we think about the church. The critical question is, What is the church? To answer this question, we must understand that the church's nature is unique, and that this unique nature is the result of the work of God's Spirit in the world. Understanding this unique nature provides the necessary perspective for addressing the ministry and organization of the church.[19]

Van Gelder begins with a call to understand the church's nature, the very depth of its spiritual DNA, as "missional." He builds on this starting point and then suggests a threefold categorical framework to describe particular dimensions of this missional character: nature, ministry, and organization.[20]

- *Nature*: The church *is* what it is called to be. This category of nature defines the "is" of the church. The church's identity is determined by what God has called the church to be.
- *Ministry*: The church *does* what it is. The church's activities flow out of its nature. The biblical witness also testifies to how the early church's various ministries emerged from its self-understanding.
- *Organization*: The church *organizes* what it does. The "how" of ministry does not take an inferior position in Scripture. How the church structures itself for mission reflects its service to the gospel.

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[18]Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).
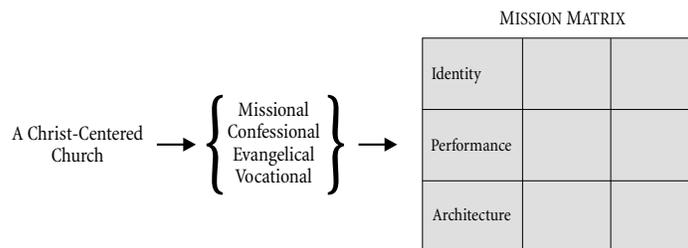
[19]Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 24.

[20]Ibid., chaps. 5–7.

What is fascinating is how the aforementioned four theological categories defining mission (that is, missional, confessional, evangelical, and vocational) affect each of these three categories of the church: nature, ministry, and organization. For example, the missionary character of the church touches not only the church's nature but also its ministries (for example, evangelism, worship, social outreach, education, and healing) and its organizational structure (for example, missionary societies, orders of ministry, church polity, and constitutions). They are, therefore, interrelated concepts. For the purposes of the mission matrix, I have changed these latter three categories by using the following terms that are interdependent in character and scope:

- Identity (that is, *nature*): How does the church, or a particular congregation, define its very existence?
- Performance (that is, *ministry*): How does a church or congregation engage the world and itself as a function of its identity?
- Architecture (that is, *organization*): How does a congregation or church build or organize its ministries and activities in order to structure its life together? (Or, how should form follow function?)

Each of these categories is complex. The mission matrix tries to map out this complexity in a simple grid. This is never an easy assignment. As speakers and theologians lift up themes for renewal in the church, the mission matrix helps identify which categories are being addressed and, conversely, which categories are being overlooked. To use a college metaphor, most speakers on mission *major* and *minor* in addressing the categories of identity, performance, and architecture. The mission matrix simply helps to distinguish categories.

The central point here is that all three categories for understanding a missional ecclesiology are interdependent. Identity affects performance and vice versa. Performance is impossible without a good architecture supporting it. Finally, a church's organizational structure should be based upon its understanding of its identity. Form follows function. But function and form should both follow identity. When they work together, they thrive together. Or, as many congregations experience, when identity, performance, and architecture don't function in sync, they don't function well at all.

MISSION MATRIX

A Christ-Centered Church → { Missional Confessional Evangelical Vocational } → [Identity / Performance / Architecture grid]

Let me now add one additional element of complexity to the matrix above. The more that I listened carefully to the mission experts, the more I realized that

each approached the three categories of identity, performance, and architecture in separate ways. Each perspective was helpful, but each perspective was different. In the area of identity, for example, some speakers would emphasize the need for a congregation to build a mission narrative. A community's story (like an individual's biography) reveals its identity in the deepest way possible. Other speakers, in contrast, emphasize the power of theological insights for determining identity. Each church sets the groundwork for its very existence by outlining in great detail its theological vision. Finally, the character of any congregation has a spiritual dimension to it. You can sense this character almost immediately within the worship experience. It is this spiritual identity that people refer to most often when they describe their congregation. Therefore, when viewed as a whole, a congregation or church's identity is expressed through the arenas of narrative,[21] theology,[22] and spirituality.[23]

The same complexity also applies to a church's performance. Speakers will often use the three categories of context,[24] systems,[25] and ministry[26] to describe what we have been referring to as a community's mission performance. The category of context usually comes first. When a church moves forward with mission, it does so initially based upon a keen grasp of its context. Context shapes every ministry in fundamental ways. Second, the context of any ministry is always determined by the internal and external systems governing the work of the congregation. Systems theory has become a powerful tool in the hands of congregational leaders in recent years. Nevertheless, systems theory is complex. Its genius is mapping out all the dynamics of how organizations interact with their environment. Finally, context and systems analysis come together to support specific ministries or vocational choices. Consequently, a church's performance relies on context, systems, and individual ministries or vocations.

Finally, a church's architecture is the way that its life and activities are built

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[21]The role of narrative is becoming an important theological category. See James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

[22]Theology is often the driving concept behind our ecclesiological understandings. See Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*; Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*; Cheryl M. Peterson, "The Question of the Church in North American Lutheranism" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2004).

[23]Allan Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990); Anthony Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

[24]Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004); Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998); George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church: A Blueprint for Survival* (Nashville: Word, 1998); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford, 1997); Tex Sample, *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches: A Key to Reaching People in the 90's* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).

[25]Ichak Adizes, *Managing Corporate Lifecycles* (Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999); Martin F. Saarinen, *The Life Cycle of a Congregation* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1986); Friedrich Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004).

[26]Books on ministry would touch on every aspect of congregational ministry, including stewardship, evangelism, worship, public outreach, preaching, and teaching.

together to make a whole. A community's life together always reflects a complex order. Conference speakers address this organizational complexity from the perspectives of local wisdom,[27] organizational theory,[28] and leadership.[29] A church's architecture is based first upon local wisdom and culture. Every community passes along deep wisdom over many years about how to "be together." This wisdom forms over time a community's culture. After local wisdom and culture, a congregation draws on organizational theory to structure itself. Over the years, these theories have shaped church organizations in basic ways. Finally, leadership is a key ingredient that shapes the organizational life of any community. How often we hear the insight: the three keys to the church's mission are leadership, leadership, and leadership.

AN INTEGRATING MATRIX

The picture painted above has become complex, maybe too complex for any practical application. That was my conclusion after visiting many conferences and workshops on mission. When I put all the insights together, I became confused. The mission matrix is a way to deal with the complexity of being the church in mission. It builds together identity, performance, and architecture in ways that can deal with all their complexity.

	1st Order Analysis	2nd Order Analysis	3rd Order Analysis
Identity	*Narrative/Bible*	*Theology/Bible*	*Spirituality/Bible*
Performance	*Context*	*Systems*	*Ministries/Vocation*
Architecture	*Local Wisdom and Culture*	*Organizational Theory*	*Leadership*

The key to reading the mission matrix is as follows:

Ecclesiology is driven by theology of mission. Therefore, the mission matrix is driven by a christology that unfolds the missionary character of the Triune God (see the figure on page 243, above). This missionary character, as outlined above, involves missional, confessional, evangelical, and vocational dimensions. The resulting missional ecclesiology will be expressed with at least three areas of focus. A

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[27]One should remark how often local wisdom and culture are not referenced in books. One powerful exception to this rule is Richard J. Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[28]It is fascinating to recognize how much literature on organizational theory is borrowed from the business world and applied to congregational life. See *The Organization of the Future*, ed. Frances Hesselbein et al. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); Warren G. Bennis, *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997); James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001); John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).
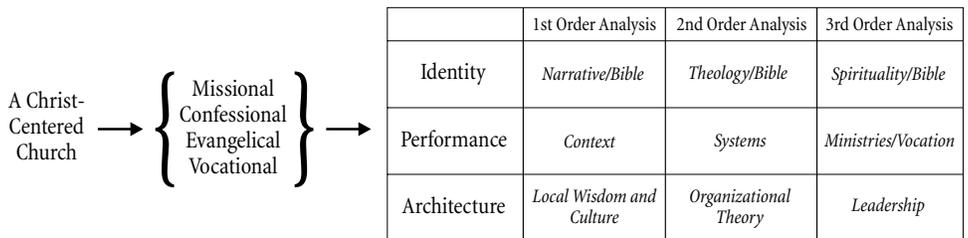
[29]Warren G. Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1989); John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991); Kennon Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

church's identity in mission (top line) begins with the community telling its story in narratives. These communal narratives should be informed by the biblical narrative. The theology of a church or congregation will emerge out of its communal narrative in dialogue with Scripture. Narrative precedes theology. This is vital to understand. Theology emerges from a community's story. Finally, a community's spirituality, or its faith life, will flow out of its theology. Spirituality is determined by theology. Thus, we read the movement of the matrix at every level from left to right.

A congregation's performance in mission (second line) grows out of its identity. Performance is first determined by context. The context of any church or congregation will be one of the chief determinants to forming its life and ministries. A more nuanced reading of the larger context of a church or congregation, one that involves the internal and external environment, points to systems theory. Systems theory asks how a congregation as a system interacts with its environment. Finally, a concrete ministry of a congregation or church grows out of both its context and system. This dimension of performance can also touch on the whole area of vocation as people discover God's various callings on their lives within their various contexts and social locations.

Finally, a church's life functions like the architecture of a building; it is structured around three focal points of concern (third line). Local wisdom and culture form the first dimension of a church or congregation's architecture. They are always the starting point for determining how a community should build its life. Culture and wisdom always have a local character to them. Secondly, organizational theory will inform many of the formal dimensions of church polity and order. Structures are flexible and change in response to culture and need. Finally, leadership decisions flow out of the organizational needs of the church or congregation.

THEOLOGY OF MISSION DRIVES MISSION MATRIX

	1st Order Analysis	2nd Order Analysis	3rd Order Analysis
Identity	*Narrative/Bible*	*Theology/Bible*	*Spirituality/Bible*
Performance	*Context*	*Systems*	*Ministries/Vocation*
Architecture	*Local Wisdom and Culture*	*Organizational Theory*	*Leadership*

A Christ-Centered Church → { Missional Confessional Evangelical Vocational } →

Naturally, all of these dimensions to the mission matrix can work either for or against God's mission in the world. This matrix only organizes the various ways to address mission within a church or local community. It serves to help analyze a church or congregation. Mission momentum can begin with identity and work down to architecture. However, one can also see congregational renewal begin with architecture or performance. In other words, the dynamics of mission can

work in various ways. The matrix can reveal, however, whether it is mission that is driving a congregation's identity, performance, and architecture. If these three dimensions of the church's life are not in sync, there will be problems. Mission is an interdependent reality where identity informs performance informs architecture, and vice versa.

> *"the chief advantage of the mission matrix is to provide*
> *an overarching way to categorize all the mission insights*
> *that are emerging today in the church"*

Adding one additional dynamic about the movement of the matrix from left to right is important. The first row of categories (from top to bottom, that is, narrative, context, and local wisdom and culture) reflects what will be called here the first order of congregational analysis. The second order of analysis thus includes theology, systems theory, and organizational theory. The third order of analysis involves spirituality, ministry (vocation), and leadership. To understand how these various levels of congregational analysis work, one can use the analogy of a tree with roots, a trunk, and branches. The roots, in this analogy, involve the first order of analysis in the mission matrix, that is, in order to understand a congregation fully, one always begins with the first level of categories touching a congregation's narrative, its context, and a grasping of its local wisdom. These roots must be healthy in order for the tree to thrive. The trunk of the tree, in this analogy, represents the systematic elements of a congregation's life, that is, its theology, its systems, and its organizational structure. Finally, the third level of analysis, the one that is easiest for visitors to see or experience (like branches), involves a congregation's spirituality, its ministry (and vocations), and its leadership. The matrix is designed to be read from left to right. This means simply that leaders should not immediately move to third-order conclusions about their community's life without first asking both second- and first-order questions.

IS A COHERENT PICTURE OF A MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY POSSIBLE?

The mission matrix was designed to serve as a tool for a church to analyze its life and witness. Is mission driving our community's life? What is our mission theology? How is this theology influencing and shaping our communal identity, performance, and architecture? The goal of the matrix is to simplify some of the complexities around the functioning of any missional ecclesiology. It is best used to analyze a community's life and ministry.[30]

The chief advantage of the mission matrix, however, is to provide an overarching way to categorize all the mission insights that are emerging today in the church. Some speakers lift up theology; some emphasize pragmatic theories of or-

[30]Prescriptive decisions about the future need additional tools for a congregation's discernment process. Nevertheless, the matrix can assist any congregation in moving from analysis to prescription.

ganizational structure. Context dominates many conferences, while leadership is the focus of others. The result, finally, is that few give an overall vision as to how all this material fits together. This situation can lead to frustration or confusion. The matrix can assist church leaders to listen to all the literature and ideas that are emerging, knowing where these ideas fit into a larger framework of a missional ecclesiology. Few speakers or books try to map out a holistic picture of a missional ecclesiology. The matrix, therefore, can assist congregational leaders in knowing the strengths—and the oversights—of any mission program, book, or conference. In the complex environment of church life today, this small contribution can lead to major insights about the missional character of any local congregation. ⊕

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