

# CARRY THE HOLY ORDERS

## MISSION AS MISSIONAL MANDATE

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*My uncle once told me that during World War II if an unidentified soldier appeared suddenly in the dark and could not state his mission, he was automatically shot without question. I wonder what would happen if we reinstated that policy today.*

—Laurie Beth Jones

IS IT A STRETCH TO THINK THAT KNOWING our mission is a matter of life or death? I don't think so.

Being confronted with the need to know one's mission would force millions of us to reexamine who we are, and what we're really about. It would save immeasurable amounts of money, tears, and heartache. Casual church attendance would drop. Volunteerism would soar. Leaders of large churches, small churches, house churches, organic movements, church starts, and small groups would be forced to exchange rhetoric for real and meaningful action. People who linger in the shadows, leading unfulfilled lives, would burst into the sunlight of kingdom possibilities and Spirit's power. Those who have never known what it's like to feel a passionate commitment to a cause would be catapulted from their couches onto the playing field, tasting the dirt, feeling the sweat and the sting of tears, and having the wind knocked out of them . . . and in the process become fully alive.<sup>1</sup>

Leaders in today's church carry holy orders from Jesus. As his body, we must champion the cause of the kingdom, ruthlessly avoiding what

Reggie McNeal has described as “mission amnesia.” The clarity and vitality of the saints that God has entrusted to your care depend on it.

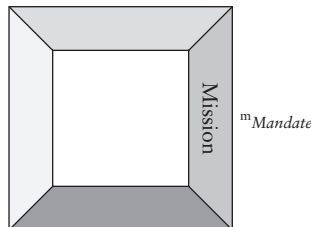
## Mission as Missional Mandate

The first side to our Vision Frame is the missional mandate (<sup>m</sup>Mandate; see Figure 12.1), defined as *a clear and concise statement that defines what the church is ultimately supposed to be doing*. The <sup>m</sup>Mandate answers “question zero”—the question before all other questions. Why do we exist? What is our *raison d’être*? The <sup>m</sup>Mandate is your church’s compass and guiding North Star. As such, it provides direction and points everyone in that direction. The mission as <sup>m</sup>Mandate is like the heartbeat of the organization. It should touch members on an emotional level and act like a cohesive force and binding agent.

From a biblical perspective, the church’s <sup>m</sup>Mandate is anchored in the “sentness” of Jesus Christ, reflected in the Great Commission as the church’s sentness into the world. Our mission lives within the boundaries of making disciples, teaching personal obedience to Jesus as Lord, and taking the message of the gospel to the Nations (Matt. 28:19–20). This makes our Bouquet Rule (Chapter Eleven) critical. From the garden of God’s timeless Word, we arrange a bouquet of truth—in this case the all-encompassing mission of Jesus—for our time and place. We don’t invent from scratch but articulate from Scripture. How do you remind people in your particular church culture that they are sent from God as missionaries everywhere, and every day? What words do you use to enlarge their imagination and ignite their heart for a redemptive focus?

One amazing snapshot of the radical call to live as sent ones is found in John 20:19–22. In this postresurrection appearance, the disciples are gathered in fear (“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews”; v. 19). Sensing their trouble, Jesus tells them not just once but twice: “Peace

Figure 12.1. The Vision Frame: Mission as <sup>m</sup>Mandate



be with you” (vv. 19, 21). Then Jesus gets outrageous. Immediately after pronouncing peace, he declares, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Can you imagine the disciples huddled up, doors triple-locked, windows barred, scared that any minute the bad guys will come crashing in? And Jesus comes in and basically says, “Guys, let’s go out there and get ’em!” Note that his words of peace were not for comfort’s sake; they were for *mission*’s sake. This is one of the precious few times (John says there was only three appearances) the Lord spent with the disciples after his resurrection. We have few words in red ink. In these fleeting moments, we see the deepest desire of our Savior: that his redeemed flock would unlock their doors and latch their hearts to a lost and dying world. In this gospel cameo, we see *missio Dei* transmitted in pristine form. So again I ask what words you use to remind people that your church is sent. What is your <sup>m</sup>*Mandate*?

By describing the idea of mission as <sup>m</sup>*Mandate*, I am not encouraging a wholesale swap of terminology. Rather, I want to infuse clearer meaning in the often used language of mission. Therefore I use them interchangeably. What are the benefits? First, it allows the “missional” adjective to inform the church’s understanding. Using the word *mission* itself may crack the door to be confused with “missions.”<sup>m</sup>*Mandate* more clearly subsumes everything that the church does as part of Christ’s mission, not just our two-week service projects in the third world. Second, it is a personal word that connotes transfer of authority. The Latin literally means to give into one’s hand. The image is of one passing the baton or of Jesus handing you holy orders. It is not just a piece of paper you carry but the authority of Christ himself, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (as he reminds us before pronouncing the Great Commission; Matt. 28:18). Third, the word *mandate* directly implies obedience or disobedience to our Lord’s command. Sometimes when we describe “mission drift,” the edge is taken off the reality of defiance. We can’t slip into seeing our commission as a “Great Suggestion” (like the bumper sticker that says, “Jesus is coming; look busy”). Finally, the word *mandate* can be broken into the words “man” and “date.” This breakdown, though totally arbitrary, is useful in that it reminds us that our time is limited and that God has set a date specifically for our lives (“teach us to number our days”; Psalm 90:12), and for mankind (“It is not for you to know the times and date the Father has set for his own authority”; Acts 1:7) So our <sup>m</sup>*Mandate* reminds us that mankind-on-earth is dated. As a leader you do have someone holding a gun to your head; the enemy is time. We don’t have forever to make disciples as we take the gospel to every nook and cranny of the planet.

### *Stoking Redemptive Passion: Your Primary Growth Challenge*

Jesus modeled an amazing redemptive passion in his earthly ministry. In Luke 9:51–55, we witness a pivotal moment. Luke the physician records that Jesus “set his face to go toward Jerusalem.” This idiom, repeated twice, conveys the unwavering focus of a man on a mission, in this case a Savior with a destination. The emphasis is on Jesus’ redemptive resolve to reach the cross. Nothing could stop him. In fact, the surrounding passage shows us that this redemptive passion offended the worship preferences of some (v. 53) and that his own disciples, his core group, were still suffering from mission drift (v. 54).

In discussing barriers to growth, most churches lose sight of the taproot issue: the redemptive passion of their people’s hearts. Someone once said that a thousand people hack at the branches of evil for every one that hacks at the root. Turning the statement around for church growth, I would say there are a thousand who fertilize the branches for every one who fertilizes the root. When it comes to growth challenges, leaders jump too quickly to the branches: parking lots, seating capacity, finances, staff, and so on. But when God’s people are deeply stirred with redemptive passion, the church becomes an unstoppable force, hurdling other barriers with ease. The question then becomes, What is keeping your people from strengthening their redemptive heartbeat?

I can’t answer that question for your church. But the probability is that you don’t have a mission, your <sup>m</sup>*Mandate*, designed to stoke redemptive passion. If your clear and concise mission does not wave an unmistakable evangelistic banner, nothing else will. Remember, it’s question zero. It’s the primary cue for your church’s culture. As such, it will either guide a missional movement or validate a missions department.

To be an effective tool, the <sup>m</sup>*Mandate* must counteract the “gravity inward” of Christian fellowship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the church is only the church when it exists for others. What keeps your church focused externally? Who do you think the most important person is to the Coca Cola company? The consumer? Which one? The coke drinker? Nope—it’s actually the Pepsi drinker. Missional leaders need to polarize this same reality for their people. It should be clear that the most important people are those *outside* the church. Neil Cole sums it up well when he reminds believers, “If you want to reach people for Jesus, you’re going to have to sit in the smoking section.”<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever seen a warped plank? To straighten a board, you can’t just put it in a frame to hold it straight. You have to put it in a frame that holds the wood bowed in the opposite direction. Likewise the <sup>m</sup>*Mandate*

should keep the church mind-set bowed in the redemptive, outward direction, applying opposite force to inward tendencies and temptations. In a similar way, Bill Hybels encourages leaders to apply a disproportionately greater emphasis on evangelism at the beginning of the day in order to have a balanced church at the end.

### *The Golden Thread of Redemption*

Think of the <sup>m</sup>*Mandate* as the golden thread of redemption that weaves its way through every activity in the organization. For example, Morgan Hill Bible Church's mission is "connecting the disconnected into a vital relationship with Jesus Christ." The golden thread means that whether you are leading a bible study, changing a baby's diaper, rehearsing for worship, standing in the grocery store checkout line, typing in your cubicle, or watching your son's soccer game, you are at that moment connecting the disconnected into a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Mission is everywhere! When someone gets it for the first time, it is like throwing a giant electric switch whereby *everyone can be energized* by mission and *everything can be organized* for mission. It is this electricity that enables the brick maker to do tedious work with tireless energy. The big picture of the beautiful cathedral stays alive in the mind's eye.

**THE MISSION STATEMENTS OF YESTERDAY.** The easiest way to embarrass a pastor is to ask him to tell you his mission statement. Most don't know it. Why? The average mission statement has these characteristics:

- Too long (twenty words or more)
- Too generic (all things to all people)
- Too technical (focuses on theological content and accuracy)

These attributes render most statements useless and irretrievable from the leader's conscious.

Let's use an older mission statement from one of my clients as an example. Here is their previous mission, which contains *seventy-seven words*:

We exist for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment: Seeking to love God with all of our being and others as ourselves, we will strive to worship God together in peace and unity, share the Good News of salvation through Christ with our community and throughout the world, encourage individual Christian

growth and service, and provide for the needs of individuals through social ministry as the Holy Spirit leads and gives power.

This mouthful kills memorableness and short-circuits cultural electricity. Statements like this end up framed and forgotten, for two primary reasons. First, the team that developed it didn't understand the "weight load" of a mission statement. A mission statement by its nature is a relatively small container. It's more like a serving tray than a three-quarter-ton pick-up. It is intended neither to carry a theological treatise nor to communicate strategy. It is a synthesis; therefore it communicates your big idea with a few small words. The greater the mission, the more simply it can be stated. The second reason this type of mission statement fades into obscurity is that too many people are involved in crafting it. Too many opinions lead to too many words and too many complex sentences. One time, the pastor of a large church shared proudly that eight hundred people worked through their visioning process. (I call a group this size a "conjunction factory.") After asking permission to put him on the spot, I asked him to tell me the resulting mission statement; two minutes later he was still stuttering.

Let's take a look at the same church's mission after a makeover—fifteen words. This statement surely has more clarity, more simplicity, and more impact:

We exist to lead people into a life-changing, ever-growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

If your church has a current mission statement, does it resemble the one before or after the makeover?

**THE MISSIONAL MANDATE OF TODAY.** Every church needs a compass to set its bearing. As the missional church reorients identity to "be the church," certain characteristics are necessary. The *Mandate* should:

- Remind the church that it exists primarily for those outside
- Eliminate an us-versus-them mentality with outsiders
- Emphasize the reality of "being the church" twenty-four, seven
- Reinforce the lifestyle of engaging in relationships and conversation with others
- Connote process for both evangelism and discipleship
- Highlight features of the Kingdom Concept

As your team carefully considers the words it uses to define the <sup>m</sup>Mandate, evaluate each term. Hold it up as a gem to the light, turning it to look for just the right nuance. Explore how the language reinforces or detracts from the bullet points given here. Remember, you are shooting for the five C's: clear, concise, compelling, catalytic, and contextual. This may sound like a tall order, but I have seen some remarkable articulations of a church's <sup>m</sup>Mandate capturing these ideas. Here are some good examples:

Colonial Heights Baptist: *“Inviting everyday people to experience Christ in every way.”*

Life Church, Portland: *“Guiding self-reliant people toward a Christ-centered lifestyle.”*

Faithbridge United Methodist: *“To make more and stronger disciples of Christ by being a bridge of faith to people every day.”*

First Presbyterian, San Antonio: *“Renewing minds and redeeming lives with the steadfast love of Jesus Christ.”*

Bannockburn Baptist: *“Guiding generations to passionately follow Christ, one home at a time.”*

Trinity Lutheran: *“Encouraging more life in Christ, one life at a time.”*

Bandera Road Community Church: *“To lead people who are far from God to be fully devoted followers of Christ.”*

Grace Point Church: *“To lead unsaved people into a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.”*

Westlake Hills Presbyterian: *“To invite people into God's larger story as we follow Christ together.”*

Crozet Baptist Church: *“To encourage people in our ever-expanding community to follow Christ with ever-increasing passion.”*

The MET: *“Connecting people each day to the real Jesus in a real way.”*

### *Capturing God's Mission to Be Captured by It*

One irony of trying to capture God's mission in a meaningful <sup>m</sup>Mandate is that the mission ought to be continuously capturing us. This fact, by the way, should motivate you to spend adequate time in distilling just the

right words. We want to state a mission that can perpetually nourish a sense of God's calling to us. This emphasizes our attribute of "compelling" (the Resonance Rule). Did you sense this dynamic when you read the statements just above? Milfred Minatrea highlights the largeness of the <sup>m</sup>*Mandate* when he writes:

As author John Steinbeck was preparing to embark on a journey across the United States, he described the nature of the trip with these words: "We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; the trip takes us." Missional churches understand this statement. They have not chosen God's mission; God has chosen them for a missional purpose. The initiative for mission lies in God. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16). The impetus for mission resides in Christ, who invites the church to become His missional body.<sup>3</sup>

Having raised the bar on articulating your mission as <sup>m</sup>*Mandate*, let's turn to some practical tips for developing your own.

**BOIL DOWN YOUR CURRENT STATEMENT.** Most churches have some form of mission statement. Don't read this chapter and just decide to chuck it. Better to look at what you have first and make it as clear and concise as possible by removing unnecessary elements. One you have boiled it down to purest form, run it through the five C's. Do this as a leadership team, and decide together whether you need to start from scratch, tweak the existing statement, or use the boiled-down statement as is.

**START WITH THE A TO B STRUCTURE.** To best capture the five C's in the shortest synthesis, I recommend trying the A to B structure. "State A" represents the people or the context to which the church is sent. "State B" represents what we are becoming as followers of Christ. The advantage of this framework is that it can communicate movement, incarnation, process, and completion with efficient use of words. Here are a few of the church missions that I listed previously broken into this format:

A	B
Everyday people	Christ in every way
Self-reliant	Christ-centered lifestyle
Far from God	Fully devoted follower
Ever-expanding community	Ever-increasing passion
Unsaved	Relationship of full devotion



The best way to experiment with this format is to brainstorm a list of ideas for state A and state B separately. After you are finished, compare the lists and look for any ideas that contrast meaningfully. Sometimes it is difficult to articulate state A explicitly; it can be left implicit. For example, the implied state A of “inviting people into God’s larger story as we follow Christ together” is “small living.” The tension between small living and God’s larger story drives the identity and missional heartbeat of the church.

**KEEP REVIEWING THE FIVE C’S.** As the team collaborates, it is imperative that you have the five C’s on a white board in front of you. As potential ideas arise, evaluate each statement with every C on a scale of one to five. Resist the temptation to evaluate a mission without referring to one of the C’s. For example, one statement might be more clear and less compelling; another might have a catalytic punch to it even though it is not concise. Talk through the give-and-take of each C until you make your final decision (remember the 100–80 rule from Chapter Seven?).

### *Teaching for Practice, Not Knowledge*

When I give my final exhortation to groups defining their <sup>m</sup>Mandate, I remind them that Jesus taught people to act; the emphasis was *practice* over *knowledge*. He did not discuss the ins and outs of forgiveness; he simply told them to forgive “up to seventy times seven.” He didn’t teach them a course on life-changing bible study; he commanded them to “feed my sheep.” As Mark Twain said, “It is not what I don’t know about the Bible that bothers me; it is what I know.”

We will all stand before Jesus someday. As a leader, you will be held accountable for your words of guidance. I fear for pastors who lead as if Jesus will be giving out an IQ test that day. Taking our cue from the Savior, I believe it is clear that he will be measuring not how much we know but how well we loved. The test is not IQ but EKG; he will note the strength of redemptive passion in the people we led. We desperately need words that will move them into God’s grand mission. The <sup>m</sup>Mandate that you articulate and lead from is your primary missional tool.