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MISSIONAL CHURCH SERIES

The missional church conversation continues to grow in importance in providing for many a fresh way into rethinking what it means to be church in our rapidly changing context. This Missional Church Series by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. is designed to contribute original research to this critical conversation. This series will make available contributive monographs as well as edited volumes produced from specially designed consultations.

The Missional Church in Context

*Helping Congregations Develop  
Contextual Ministry*

*Edited by*

Craig Van Gelder

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## Contents

Preface	vii
Contributors	ix
Introduction: Engaging the Missional Church Conversation	1

### SECTION I

INTRODUCTION	9
1. How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation about the Missional Church in Context <i>Craig Van Gelder</i>	12
2. The Missional Congregation in Context <i>Scott Frederickson</i>	44
3. A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church <i>Gary M. Simpson</i>	65
4. Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church <i>Mark Lau Branson</i>	94

SECTION II

INTRODUCTION	127
5. Corps of Discovery: A Twenty-First-Century Contextual Missiology for the Denominational Church in the United States <i>Terri Martinson Elton</i>	130
6. The Possibility of Transforming the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (GAPCK) into a Missional Church <i>Joon Ho Lee</i>	161
7. An Old New Church in the Marketplace: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) into the Twenty-First Century <i>Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier</i>	189
8. A Contextual Missiology for the Southern Baptist Church in Taiwan: Reviewing the Past and Envisioning the Future <i>James Tzu-Kao Chai</i>	219

*Preface*

The missional church conversation continues to make a vital contribution to thinking about congregations and their contexts. This conversation is now in its second decade, and new insights are continuing to emerge. A primary issue that the church confronts in our context today — in the midst of the emerging postmodern context — is the need to re-examine and re-envision what it means to be church. It is the issue that the missional church conversation keeps inviting us to address.

This conversation had its primary beginning with the work of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin and the publications that came from him during the decades of the 1970s through the 1990s. His focus was on the relationship of gospel and culture, and the particular context that he sought to address was the late-modern culture he experienced in England when he returned in his retirement from global mission and ecumenical work in the 1970s. Newbigin helped to develop a particular Gospel and Culture programme in England in the 1980s, and that soon found its counterpart in the United States, where it became known as the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN).

What is proving to be a seminal publication, *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (1998), was written by six missiologists of the GOCN in the United States. The “missional church” conversation has now spread into many venues and has provided language that is being picked up by numerous denominations and faith traditions. It is clear, however, that the use of the word “missional” often