

MISSIONAL CHURCH IN PRACTICE

Giving the Church's Staff and Buildings Away

By Dwight Zscheile

When the Dutch Reformed congregation in Doornpoort, a suburb of Pretoria, South Africa, completed its first building in 2000, they knew that God must be calling them to something more. Planted in 1990, the church now has 2,500 members, with an average age of 35. For the first nine years of the congregation's life, they were focused on buildings. Then they began re-envisioning their identity and purpose in a changing environment.

Senior pastor Marius Nel says, "The zone we serve is unique in that there is no other church building in the entire area we are serving. It is just a suburb. There are no schools, elder homes, nothing. When we started to ask what God is calling us to do in our local area, the change was profound. We stopped thinking about what could we do to grow this congregation and instead began to adopt an outsider's perspective—how can we serve the community?"

Through Partnership for Missional Church, the congregation's leaders began to explore what a fundamental rethinking of identity might look like for their church. "The deep theology of mission being not just one project but the whole reason for your congregation is something that we believed and latched onto," Nel remarks. "We didn't want to add a few more programs to the church, but to change the deep culture."

Today, the job descriptions of the five pastors are mostly focused on community ministry, not work within the congregation. Nel says, "One colleague specializes in pastoral counseling, and he does more than 50% of it for people not in the congregation. I have started a service on Thursday for real estate agents since houses

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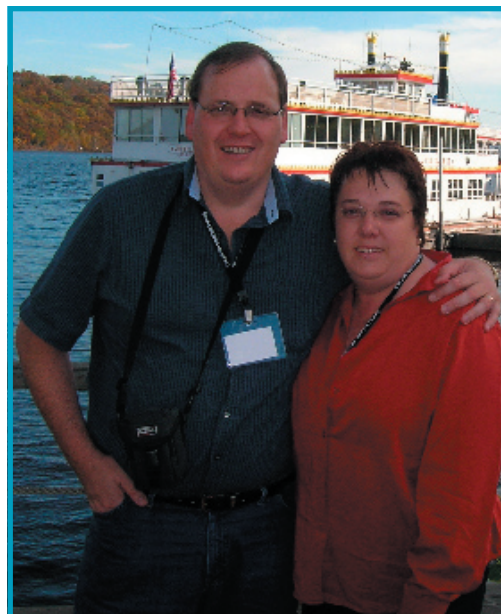
are shown on Sundays and they can't come to church. Up to 70 people attend. We give our time away into the community." Moreover, they enlarged their building to reflect this philosophy, with the idea of giving the facility away to community use.

In the process, the congregation has begun to become more racially integrated, and they have started a multicultural service and small groups. As Nel describes it, "We have had a deep identity shift in the congregation. I

saw someone go around removing all the 'not' signs in the building—that person has grasped something of this change."

While Nel had been exposed to many of the ideas undergirding missional church through

South African missiologist David Bosch, translating them into concrete reality was a challenge. He notes, "This is a theology that has been taught in faculties but not practiced. What Church Innovations has helped us with is to grow gradually into living it."



Marius and Jampie Nel are Dutch Reformed pastors in Doornpoort, South Africa, whose congregation has been transformed through Partnership for a Missional Church.