

Nathan C. P. Frambach, *Emerging Ministry: Being Church Today* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007) \$12.

To the vast number of uninitiated Christians, the emerging church perpetually remains a mystery of sorts. Try and try as one might to measure it, survey it, or attempt to define it, the emerging church ever eludes the analytical grasp. In this way the emerging church is much like a conversation. In this book, pastor Nathan Frambach enters into the emerging conversation to offer a particularly Lutheran voice and perspective. Having no interest in convincing the reader with a systematic treatise, Frambach, in true emerging style, engages us with his own story and, in the form of both parable and prose, challenges many conventional conceptions and assumptions of mainline church ministry. Indeed, says Frambach, gathering from his own lived experience, as a church “we need more stories, not more rules.” As Frambach appraises the contemporary religious scene, he finds that the church must rise to meet the needs of an ever-changing world where the Christian faith is increasingly global, decreasingly European, and less and less “traditional” in terms of both style and membership. Meeting the challenge of this era of unprecedented change demands that mainline churches must learn how to do theology in unaccustomed ways, discover how to genuinely relate to the new missional context, learn and practice fresh forms of communication, and discern and ask hard and honest questions about the purpose of the church.

Frambach resists the modern notion of thinking of the individual Christian congregation as a family and argues that this metaphor has the potential to diminish our imagination about what it means to be the church. An undue focus on the family called "church" may unwittingly yield a spiritual harvest of inwardly focused individualism where "personal relationships" with Jesus and isolated pieties tend to make a Christian community look more like a privileged club or clandestine organization than the harbinger of the good news that first called the church into being. What makes a Christian church community unique is not a focus on the family, declares Frambach, but focusing on and centering on God's gospel. This means that the church needs to move beyond doing evangelism as it has traditionally been conceived, and instead assume a wholistic lifestyle of evangelical living. Such evangelical living entails that church communities attend or deeply listen to the stories of others, observe and pay attention to the embedded spirituality that exists in people's lives, honor and take others seriously as persons, and understand that each person's spiritual path is unique.

It is precisely such practices of evangelical living that Frambach, as a curious and careful observer, sees happening in the church communities that identify themselves as emerging. And he is certain that the Lutherans and other "established" churches should learn from the emerging example. To this end Frambach provides a helpful summary of the ways that emerging churches effectively traverse the potentially treacherous cultural terrain of what he calls "post-whateverism." These include a view of worship as an organic process that depends not on title or status (to be or not to be ordained) but on role and gift; room for feedback and spontaneity in worship so it may be tailored to fit the life of a community in a given time and place; extensive use of a variety of visual, theatrical, musical, and kinetic arts; an emphasis on authenticity and "real" experiences; removing the dichotomous distinction between the sacred and the secular in both worship space and time; attending to humor and drama; learning the "sacred texts" of culture; joining and befriending the sufferer; creatively and experimentally mining of the depths of the Christian tradition; genuinely appreciating diversity; getting rid of conventional labels which tend to pigeonhole people; being open and honoring of those who ask probing and difficult questions; and being invested in the local church neighborhood and the particularity of a given social and geographical context. In this way emerging communities live the Christian life in a way that is "radically indigenous," adapting their understanding and practice

of church to fit their cultural and local environments.

Overall, Frambach provides a helpful and insightful summary of the contemporary emerging church conversation, and then ventures beyond this to imagine what a specifically Lutheran incarnation of that conversation might look like. At the end of each chapter Frambach poses helpful questions for reflection and discussion that make the book a useful and engaging resource that could be used by small group Bible studies or an adult Sunday-school class. As a provocative reflection on the import of incarnational living as the central reality of the Christian faith, *Emerging Ministry* attentively introduces uninitiated Christians to a crucial conversation in their midst and challenges them to rethink the meaning of ministry.

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