

# PIONEERING CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIANS

By T. J. Malinoski

From the title of this article, you might think you are about to read of Cumberland Presbyterians from the past, individuals who have carved new frontiers which have shaped the identity of the Church as we know it, or individuals who have influenced and impacted our congregations, ministries, polity, theology and institutions. This article is not a journey into the past but one to get us thinking about the present and embark toward the future. Are you a Cumberland Presbyterian who is seeking new frontiers to impact the world and shape the identity of the Church? Could you be a Cumberland Presbyterian pioneer?

The Kingdom of God is constantly seeking new frontiers, looking for new cultures, and seeking new generations to be reached with the gospel of Christ. One way we can pioneer into these new frontiers is through new worshipping communities. A worshipping community is essentially three things: it is a community for those *who do not* know Christ; a community for those *who want to* know Christ; and, a community for those *who already* know Christ and need a community with which to worship. You might be thinking, “that’s the purpose of my church” or “that’s why we have new church development.” If you are reflecting in this way, you are right. Our congregations and new church developments are spaces for those who do not know, want to know, and already know Jesus Christ. Yet, there is complexity in each setting and obstacles each congregation and new church development faces. Just scratching the surface these include limited funding, lack of leadership, lethargy, remote locations, and a multitude of questions without a single answer or “one size fits all” solution. Nor are there specific plans or strategies which can instruct us in every aspect of how an existing congregation or new church should do ministry or what it should look like.

What if we shift our focus? From a pragmatic point of view, it is understandable we are reluctant to invest time and resources into specific plans and strategies, into an existing congregation or new church, without guarantees. There is no guarantee a new or existing church will be a decent representative of the denomination and, more importantly, will be a community that helps build the Kingdom of God. What if we shift our thinking from the complexities and difficulties of *doing* church to the actual *need*: creating communities for those who do not know, who want to know, and already know Jesus Christ. This is where Cumberland Presbyterian pioneers can make an impact.

A pioneer can help provide as many opportunities as possible for as many people as possible to hear the gospel of Christ. A pioneer can gather a group for worship, study and fellowship opportunities. A pioneer can start a worshipping community. You may want to counter the focus on new worshipping communities by saying, “I do not have the qualifications, gifts, and skills needed to make it work. I do not have the training and education to provide the necessary leader-

ship to pioneer a community for worship.” There are a variety of leadership gifts which can help you start a worshipping community. A worship community allows you to lead from *your* strengths. You get to gather people who respond to your particular leadership style into a worshipping community open to being led by your gifts. While there are a variety of gifts, there is one essential skill, you must love people more than you love the staples of what we think of as church. You must love people more than you love liturgy and music. You must love people more than you love stained-glass windows or phenomenal curriculum. You must love people more than you love crafting and delivering messages. You can pioneer a worshipping community if you love God and are a professing and practicing Christian. Therefore, a Cumberland Presbyterian pioneer can be a minister, an elder (or neither), young, young at heart, male, female, fully employed, part time, semi-retired, or fully retired.

The features of a worshipping community are as unique and diverse as the Kingdom of God. It meets at times suiting the people. It is a community in which you get to wear comfortable clothing. It is a community where you sit next to people who live and think differently than you. You can meet in your living room, your back patio or porch, the public library, a school room, a neighboring church facility, a rental space, or a hotel conference room. A worshipping community meets where it is feasible because the purpose is to create a space where we get to pray, to have Bible study, to eat together, to share time, possessions and space together, and to get involved in the needs of the community.

Starting worshipping communities is the frontier leading toward great discoveries. When you start a worshipping community, you are pioneering on a journey where you are privileged to share the gospel with others. It is a space in which you can practice love, reconciliation, and hospitality in your community. By so doing, a new frontier for Cumberland Presbyterian ministries will become visible. **MM**

How do I pioneer a worshipping community?  
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