

Simply put: Christ's mission in 75 words or less

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [March 9, 2004](#) issue

A good friend of mine dropped out of seminary, entered the business world, became a successful executive recruiter and migrated finally to management consulting, at which he is an expert. Big corporations retain him to help them think imaginatively about their businesses. One of his activities is assisting business leaders in writing mission statements that enable everyone, from CEO to maintenance worker, to understand the primary purpose of the enterprise.

In other words, he is in a very real ministry. One of his rules is that whatever the size and nature of the enterprise, the mission statement must never exceed 75 words. (Preachers throw away 75 words clearing their throats or moving from one paragraph to the next.)

Mission statements vary in quality, of course. Usually what's important is the disciplined process of defining and saying what one is doing. That's true for churches. Writing a mission statement can help a congregation discover that it is investing a lot of energy and resources in activities that don't have much to do with its purpose.

Whatever you conclude about Rick Warren's enormously popular books, *The Purpose-Driven Church* and *The Purpose-Driven Life*, he has certainly helped us all to think about our purpose or mission. The purpose statement at Warren's church is 36 words. A quick New Testament search turns up a number of purpose statements for the church. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20: "All authority has been given to me . . . Go therefore and make disciples . . . to the end of the age." That's a crisp 49 words. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ"—2 Corinthians 5:17-20—is too long at 95 words. My choice is 1 Corinthians 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it"—just a dozen words.

Among topics on the agenda for many churches this Lent is Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*, which is viewed by some as an unhelpful and highly selective presentation of Jesus, by others as a great way to introduce Christianity. The debate about the film has made me think of something Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu said once about the purpose of the church. The church, he said, should be an audiovisual of God's reconciling and unifying purpose in Christ: "God saw our brokenness and sought to extricate us from it—to bring us back to our intended condition of relatedness. . . . God sent Jesus who would fling out his arms on the cross as if to embrace us." That says it well. And in fewer than 75 words.