The Missionary Church has a rich history. It is one of the few movements that has retained its primary focus on church planting and evangelism. Perhaps it is our diverse roots in the Anabaptist movement. The history of the Anabaptist movement is a rich one. It dates back to the 16th century Europe. A movement of Christ followers had discovered the transformed life spoken of in the Scriptures. They were committed to pursuing biblical community at any cost. This group of Anabaptist was convinced that they needed to oppose the oppressive leadership that was prevalent in the European church. As this group read the Scriptures they determined that infant baptism did not reflect an accurate presentation of the biblical practice of baptism. They committed themselves to baptize only those who had given their lives to Christ and experienced a radical life change. This created quite an uproar within the church in Europe. This group of Christ followers were given the nickname, “Anabaptist” It meant to re-baptize adults, who had experienced the transforming work of Christ. Most of those who were baptized as adults had been baptized as infants. The decision to follow the Scriptures and oppose the European church practice of infant baptism resulted in the Anabaptist persecution.

We as Americans benefited greatly, as the Holy Spirit led many of these “Pilgrims” who were Christ followers that chose to journey from England to the shores of what we would now call the eastern United States. We know the iconic stories of these Anabaptists, “pilgrims” and the Mayflower. But the story is much broader than simply the Plymouth colony. The founders of this land were almost entirely motivated by the values of the early Anabaptist movement.

These pilgrims established a theocracy, where God would rule and reign in this new land. This group of Anabaptists later were referred to simply as, Baptist. Among these early settlers were groups that would later be known as the, Anabaptist sects referred to as Mennonite, the “German branch” of the Christian Alliance, and Amish. These were the early founders of the missionary church movement.

This movement called the Missionary Church, found its roots in the Anabaptist movement of Christ followers, called the Mennonites. These Mennonites were Christ followers who interpreted the Scripture very similar to their leader Menno Simons. Simons, was one of the early founders of the Anabaptist movement that brought the fragmented Anabaptist pilgrims together to form the powerful discipleship movement in the 16th century. This movement
was a stark contrast to the more complacent existing church. This movement originated in the region of Europe now known as Holland, Switzerland, and South Germany. These early Pilgrim worshipers were bonded together under the common values in Europe of honoring the Scriptures and following Christ. These Christ followers found themselves to be the target of persecution from the church in Europe. Many came to the conclusion that obeying Christ and adhering to a Biblical worldview was worth giving their lives for. Some were persecuted and others were martyred. One of these early disciples who became an early martyr in the movement was Conrad Grebel.

Others chose to pursue their religious freedom by furthering the pilgrim movement to the Americas during the 16th and 17th century. This group of pilgrims later discovered that in this new land, many of them had a different way of expressing what the Spirit of God was doing in their lives. The early Christ followers, that would become the leaders of the Missionary Church, had several things in common. They wanted to follow Christ, worship in freedom, and see the cause of Christ move forward in church planting.

One of the practices of the missionary church founders that resulted in their drift away from other churches was their desire to allow women to have a voice in the local church. This took the role of women speaking, and testifying to what God had done in their lives. In this era women commonly took no role of leadership in the church. The early founders of the Missionary Church held the role of women in high regard. However the emerging influence of American fundamentalism lessened the role of the brave women called the “Ministering Sisters” who had been so in the frontier church planting movement.

These Anabaptists could not embrace the militaristic, and warring mindset of the European church. These Anabaptist were known as a, “people of peace.” They focused on peace through community, but they emphasized the benefit of Pietism as providing a person with genuine inner peace.

The 19th century American Holiness Movement was one that emphasized discipleship, and Missional living. These early followers focused on the need for the deeper work of Christ in the lives of the followers. One of the early leaders, who had a significant influence on the founders of the Missionary Church, was A.B. Simpson. Simpson was raised in a strict Calvinistic, Scottish Presbyterian and Puritan tradition. His conversion of faith began under the ministry of a visiting evangelist from Ireland during the revival of 1859. In December 1873, at age 30, Simpson left Canada and moved to Louisville, Kentucky to assume the pulpit of
the largest Presbyterian Church, the Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church. It was in Louisville that he first conceived of preaching the gospel to the common man by building a prop of the Jewish desert tabernacle structure for the purpose of communicating the power of grace and the need for salvation. Despite his success at the Chestnut Street Church, Simpson was frustrated by the Presbyterian reluctance to embrace his burden for the lost, and the need to see a wider evangelistic endeavor.

Simpson was just one of the frontier American evangelicals in the 19th century who were known as, evangelists, revivalist, and social reformers who were activists. Simpson focused his energies on the revival movement of his time as a means to lead many to a relationship with Christ. He also had a heart for the lost person in countries where there was not a gospel presence. He was instrumental in leading many Christ followers to partner in a broad overseas mission thrust. Simpson has been dubbed the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance movement. He was a rare combination of evangelist who had a passion for the lost, and activists who wanted to see whole communities changed and transformed by the presence of the gospel.

The early Missionary Church leaders refused to restrict the movement of the Holy Spirit. They freely embraced the gifts and the movement of the Spirit of God. Their position on the gift of tongues was, don’t pursue the gift of tongues, but when the Holy Spirit comes on you don’t resist Him. This historic position was called, “seek not, forbid not”.

The early leaders of this movement were drawn to pragmatic innovation. At the time the use of four part harmonies in worship was considered modern and worldly. The early founders of the Missionary Church decided to embrace the volatile, and controversial practice using a more current style of music. This was done to better reach the youth of the culture. Daniel Brenneman made a decision to minister to a new generation in Indiana by using this and other potentially controversial elements.

These early innovators blazed a new trail to be more culturally relevant. These early leaders also insisted on adapting to the new frontier culture by the use of English instead of allowing the churches to remain focused on their pre-immigration culture. These leaders focused on seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit by conducting lengthy prayer meetings, and camp meetings. They were committed to sending missionaries to reach the lost. They also embraced inner
city ministries and aggressive church planting around the turn of the century. Some of the earliest and most effective church planters in the late eighteen hundreds were women who were nicknamed the "ministering sisters". Innovation, and being culturally relevant, are two qualities that the missionary church has always embraced. Solomon Eby, a Canadian, who was an early founder of the Missionary Church, accompanied Brenneman. Eby teamed with Bremen in the early revivals. William Gehman was also an early Pennsylvania founder of the Missionary Church.

The Missionary Church Association was organized, in 1898 with JE Ramseyer as its president.

There was a need to teach the youth of the culture to think in Kingdom minded ways. Leaders like J. E. Ramseyer established early institutions of higher education. Ramseyer was known as the founder of the Ft. Wayne Bible Institute, a central piece of the training for young Missionary Church leaders.

Missionaries introduced changes to foreign cultures, but their cross-cultural experiences changed them just as profoundly, and ultimately transformed their sending churches as well. The urgent missionary impulse has led in astonishing directions. The drive to evangelize and start new churches meant there would always be a steady stream of new converts who lacked a heritage of Anabaptist acculturation. This resulted in churches that related to popular culture.

There was a group in the 19th century who coalesced into what is now known as the Missionary Church who experienced salvation in a way, which transcended their previous understandings of tradition-bound religious conformity. This radical new birth focused group prompted a more emotional expression of the phase and promoted a more activist lifestyle. Many of their home congregations soon found this activist and evangelistic focus to be too threatening to tolerate. In 1947 the United Missionary Church first used this new name and established a new college (named Bethel College) to train up these young Christ followers that same year.

These new believers, insisted everyone must personally experience the second birth, including older, well-established church members, were expelled from the churches of society’s marginal outcasts (to paraphrase H. Richard Niebuhr), “...they thus became outcasts, doubly alienated from the world they knew.”

Sanctification and healing became additional experiential pillars, of this movement and these proved no less divisive for some groups, causing further
splits as well as precipitating new alliances. Finally, these bodies were nearly all fascinated by prophecy and driven by the notion that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was linked to the urgent task of the Great Commission (see Mt. 24:14 & Mk. 13:10): hence the Missionary Church identity.

At first believers within [forerunners to] the Missionary Church thought of themselves as more genuinely Anabaptist than the Mennonite churches, which had removed them from fellowship. One reoccurring quality of the missionary church has been, that they will leave any group that does not remain focused on Scripture and the mission of church planting. This group has refused to be drawn in to excessive political movements. They have chosen to keep from involving themselves in political skirmishes and war, because this is a distraction to the gospel, and to living lives that honor Christ.

Leaders such as D. L. Moody, the 19th century evangelist who founded the Bible Institute of Chicago were front edge leaders in the movement to reach a lost culture far from Christ. The early Missionary Church leaders were greatly influenced by 18th century holiness movement leaders from England, such as John and Charles Wesley. God used these leaders to bring about a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit, and spiritual awakening in the new country of America. Other less known leaders such as Eusebius Hershey, were also instrumental in taking this awakening to the nations. Hershey was the 1st International missionary from the Missionary Church. World missions are an important focus for the Missionary Church. There are well over 500,000 new Christ followers evangelizing their countries in churches that have been launched by the Missionary Church planting efforts internationally. The name of this international missions organization is, World Partners.

Some of the Missionary Church pacifist who protested the war languished in prison during WWI, and they later helped lead the way in appealing for government recognition for conscientious objector status. Some of the core values that they continue to insist on are: that everyone must personally experience the second birth, to embrace the great commission, honor the authority of scripture, Baptism by immersion, and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

In 1952 the Pennsylvania district broke away from the Missionary Church over the issue of church polity. In 1969 two groups merged together. The United Missionary Church and the Missionary Church Association merged to form what we now know as the Missionary Church Inc.
In 1987 the Missionary Church of Canada was founded as a separate entity from the Missionary Church. This was an effort to allow the greater evangelization of our neighbors to the north. Soon after that in 1993 this newly formed movement created a new merger in Canada that produced the Evangelical Missionary Church that was able to launch two new colleges, the Emmanuel Bible College and Rocky Mountain Bible College.

It would seem that the Missionary Church, which began her existence rather tenuously as a radical outcast, has continued to appear on the evangelical scene. Different from so many groups that focus on controversies and political issues, the missionary church has retained a relatively low profile, focusing primarily on church planting and evangelism. They also believed that central to church planting was the work and leading of the Holy Spirit. They were on the leading edge of the American Holiness movement. They believed that the work of grace was essential for a person to be made aware of the move of the Holy Spirit but is subsequent to salvation.

The Missionary Church, has occasionally stumbled into view after having grown up, at least from the historic perspective, as the wild child of Anabaptism, in a wilderness of other church traditions, far from the nurturing, peaceful communities where she was born. She no longer speaks the language of her forebears. She has given voice, to a new age of church leader and church planter.

1. Send the completed exam as an email attachment to hpcourse@mcusa.org
2. Or snail mail to H&P Course, PO Box 9127, Fort Wayne, IN 46899-9127.