

ahead



This disco used to be a cool cathedral

Or maybe we have that flipped: this cool church used to be a dying movie theatre. Read about one more example of a fellowship in a non-traditional space (apparently a growing theme amongst the churches in the Vision Ministries Canada network) in our story on page 5. This one's a church plant approaching things a little differently. We love to see that happening. And of course plants need prayer. So don't miss page 5.

50,000 sq. ft.

After 20 years in Pickering ON, Forest Brook Community Church moved to Ajax and celebrated in a week of special events in October. At the Grand Opening service on October 23rd, the Member of Parliament, other Faith leaders and former pastor Rod Wilson (now at Regent College) joined current pastor Don Palmer to celebrate the culmination of five years of planning, fundraising and construction.

The Forest Brook family now meets in a wonderful, new 50,000 sq. ft. facility. Check out more pictures and visit the church at www.forestbrook.ca. Iain Nichol, one of two originals who began Pickering Bible Chapel in 1982 is shown here cutting the ribbon with Don Palmer.



VMC and Erwin at Mosaic

Erwin McManus was a highlight, but there wasn't much that wasn't encouraging, when 35 or so VMC planters and potential planters (most of them in the picture to the left) attended Mosaic, the biennial Canadian church planting congress last November. Here's a bit of what Orillia Community Church planter Lawson Murray had to say: *extend my heartfelt thanks to the partners of VMC who financed my attendance ... I have been better equipped for ministry ... my heart has been stirred afresh with the misio deo ... my mind has been informed with biblical and practical principles ... my will has been strengthened.*

COMMUNICATOR: We understated it!

We need to take lessons from Ken Taylor. Not everyone who should have, understood what we said in advance about his excellent seminar on communication, which VMC presented in Oakville ON in November. Ken's teaching was exceptional. (Take note, people across Canada who will have a chance to see Ken at a VMC Leadership Development Day, sometime over the next couple of years). And Shaun Sparrow (son of Don Valley Bible Chapel pastor David Sparrow – shown far right) likewise inspired those who were there with a story of God's miraculous intervention through a Bible that kept his body (not just his soul) alive.





General Directions

Jay Gurnett
@vision-ministries.org

I received an e-message from Dave Patterson on December 29. It included a notice of "Discontinuance of Ministry at Central": Central Community Church in Kitchener ON will no longer be doing any of those good things it has been for the past five years. I remember the first discussions about sending CCC out from Lincoln Road Chapel in Waterloo. We had great hopes, felt confident that God wanted us - particularly those we were sending - to take back some more land from the enemy. And I have no doubt that the enemy was shaken by many powerful things that happened over the years at CCC.

Nevertheless, they have "discontinued."

I wish I could say this was the only experience we have had of relatively new churches not making it. We've "lost" five or six since Gord Martin first nurtured the beginnings of Cambridge Community Church in 1992. That's not a bad average, given the old rule of thumb that half of new churches don't survive past five years. We're grateful that God has protected the new churches we've been involved with. But losing any one of the fellowships we've helped nurture, causes a pain that doesn't easily go away. It almost makes me willing to put up with a core value of just "showing up" (like in the cartoon here). I'd put up with almost anything to keep a group going - even a lack of healthy godly commitment - as long as people kept coming.

So why do we keep pushing for new things if their demise can be so painful (and that pain is always a lot more real for people directly involved, than for us advisor-types)?

Well, Gord takes a stab at the fundamental reasons we keep pushing church planting and extension in his article on this page. We believe the Bible pushes us to push the advance of the Kingdom. And we're in very good company thinking this way. I was just reading the Wiedenest Declaration from the Brethren in Europe Conference 2005. Not enough space to explain who all this involved, but their joint vision is

- To lead people to Christ
- To help local churches to grow spiritually and numerically
- To plant new churches

The Declaration says that this group is *convinced that planting new local churches is a very effective way of long-term evangelism.*

Recently I got to be a fly on the wall at a gathering of leaders from Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. These folks have roots in an American restorationist movement not unlike the (mostly) United Kingdom Plymouth Brethren movement that is the root of many Vision Ministries churches. At the event I was at, those involved agreed together that church planting:

- Emerges from biblical convictions
- Is a healthy expression of Church:



"I don't know, Pastor. I think 'Showing up' is a very legitimate core value for our church."

2nd Thoughts

Gord Martin

gord@vision-ministries.org



A biblical basis for church planting & extension

Why this article? Now? Because from time to time we need to rethink our activities from a biblical perspective. And because those who attended the recent Mosaic church planting congress in Toronto requested it. Are our church planting and church extension priorities well rooted in Scripture?

The terms: church planting, church extension, drop-in centre, web-site, Sunday School, mission hospital, youth group, televangelist, Bible camp, soup kitchen, mission station, Gospel literature, blogging, etc. do not occur in the Bible. All these terms reflect methods of carrying forward the mandate Jesus gave his disciples.

The reason for starting new churches is to fulfil the will of God

God communicates with people so they may walk with him, for now and eternity

1. He put eternity in their hearts Ecc 3:11
2. The heavens he created declare his glory and daily pour forth speech to every part of the earth Ps 19:1-2
3. He established covenants with Noah and Abraham in order to bring blessing to the people of the earth Gen 9:9; 12:2,3
4. He established the nation of Israel to be a light to the nations Is 49:6
5. The Missionary Psalm: Psalm 96
6. In the Gospels, Jesus, the unique Son of God came to seek and to save those that were lost, to give his life as a ransom for many, to defeat sin, death and the devil by his death and resurrection and to prepare a place where those who follow him may be with him forever.

7. After his resurrection and just before his ascension He commissioned his followers to make disciples/learners of him, of all the nations. All four Gospels clearly state this fact.

8. The apostles understood. They said: we cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard, he ordered us to preach to the people and we were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Acts 4:20, 10:42, 26:19

9. In the Book of Acts, the apostles preached, made disciples, gathered together those who believed, appointed leaders/elders in every church to whom they delegated their apostolic mandate to make disciples of all the nations.

10. The history of the church is full of examples of those who have rediscovered the heart of God for people and have continued to make disciples for his glory.

The Biblical Mandate is Clear

1. It is the nature of God to be outgoing in His love, mercy and grace toward sinners.
2. It is his will that none should perish
3. The entire Bible breathes his outgoing concern for human beings
4. Those who know him and are workers together with him have the same compelling passion that the God of the Bible has.

Church Planting and Extension?

To plant a new church is to form a new expression of the Church of Christ.

It is motivated by a desire to see the priority of God for people accomplished anew; more people turning from darkness to light. How churches are planted may vary enormously.

If you as an individual are working in an environment where there are no known believers, then the communication of the good news to your surrounding community comes first. Those who believe are gathered for teaching and eventually the development of a church.

In a country like Canada the Gospel has been known and practiced for a long time. There are many churches, and even those who do not participate in existing churches are aware in general terms of what churches are about. So it's quite possible to start a new congregation: from an existing one, to gather people with kindred spirits from several congregations to launch a new church, or even to gather discontented believers who are not attending church at all to come together for spiritual healing and the formation of a new congregation.

But in all of this planting activity one thing is clear. The reason for starting new churches is to fulfil the will of God, that the people he has created with eternity in their hearts would turn and walk with him and with his people.

Since 1997, between 1500 and 2000 new churches have been started in Canada. That's wonderful!

At the same time existing churches are stretching to extend their borders. They are expanding their facilities, adding new services, starting satellite congregations, and even forming new congregations with a different style at the same site. All of this church extension activity is similarly motivated by the outgoing heart of God for the people he loves.

To be sure, there is sometimes mixed motivation for planting and extending, just as there is for those who don't plant or extend. We may not agree with all the methods, styles and approaches some of these churches take. But if the fruit is that sinners sin less, practice more righteousness and give glory to the Son of God, then we also should give glory to Him!

We are not capable of causing the growth of the kingdom but we do have a capacity for obedience and imitation of Jesus.

Let us commit ourselves this year to faithful obedience that reflects the heart of God in starting new churches and extending the reach of existing ones. Let it be said of us, it is like God is among them!

Still Pushing from page 2

- o Unity
- o Community
- o Servant leadership
- o Incarnational Community

- Is a culturally effective method of evangelism
- Promotes discipling/training of apprentices of Jesus
- Contributes to a diverse expression of the body of Christ
- Is part of our calling to "risk" all for Christ

All kinds of good reasons to plant churches (or to support a strong campaign of church extension/growth).

But whether it makes sense or not, whether it's biblical or not, it sometimes just doesn't appear to work. And that can hurt.

We have a poem from David Knight on page 4 of this issue. David agreed to let me print it, on the first anniversary of the death of his wife Mary Lynn. It's a powerful poem, about much more than grief. After our conversation last week, David sent me a copy of the sermon he preached the previous Sunday. To illustrate the importance of trusting Jesus with our lives, David reflects on losing Mary Lynn. He has lots of important things to say, but I was particularly caught by this line: *I learned how true it is that joy and grief mingle together ... Prayers of sadness would dissolve into prayers of thanks and trust – with tears still flowing.*

I was reading Stanley Hauerwas also last week. *The Gospel of John makes explicit what all the Gospels assume – that is, the cross is not a defeat but the victory of our God.*

We will keep pushing planting and extension. When things go bad, our feelings won't compare to losing someone we love. But we will experience some joy and some grief. This is the nature of living in this world, where we have no option, but to trust the Lord who won the victory.

Full of joy and grief, on the cross.



A regular financial update from Vision Ministries Canada

- As it says in the little paragraph at the bottom of our masthead column (to the right), Vision Ministries intends to be completely transparent in how it uses and accounts for its use of money. The CCCC Seal of Financial Accountability at the top of the masthead can only be used by Christian organizations that have extremely high standards in this area. Our **Annual Report** will be available soon. Be in touch if you'd like a copy.
- We're also glad to come and talk about money directly. We'll visit finance committees, leadership teams or individual donors or potential donors. If you'd like a **visit with Gord Martin, Jay Gurnett** and/or **John Riley**, give us a call or drop us an e-note (all contact info is in the column to the right).
- All fall, we felt like we were having a slow start to our financial year (which began last June). We had lots happening (potential church plants, the Mosaic conference, networking, consulting to churches with good new ideas, new interns), but not as much money in hand as we needed. But the Lord was very good to us over Christmas. Lots still going on/ongoing needs of course, but we are so grateful to him for **his faithfulness**.



**VISION
MINISTRIES
CANADA**



The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada



Directors

- Bruce Fournier, Waterloo
- Doug Loveday, Lucan
- Dave Ralph, Guelph
- Mike Stone, Burlington
- Alan Veale, Ajax
- Tom Williams, Mississauga

Council of Reference

- Bill Armerding, Richmond, BC
- Tom Cowan, Vancouver, BC
- David Knight, Dollard des Ormeaux, PQ
- Ted McKellar, Sherwood Park, AB
- Bill McRae, Apsley, ON
- Greg Paul, Toronto, ON
- Hugh Rodger, Weston, ON
- Fernand Saint Louis, Beoeil, PQ
- Steve Tulloch, Waterloo, ON
- Geoff Tunnicliffe, Burnaby, BC
- Rod Wilson, Burnaby, BC

Staff

- Gord Martin, Jay Gurnett, Dave McClurkin, Allan Poyntz, Henrietta Koenig, Jeremy Horne, Paul Fletcher

CONTACT INFORMATION:

thinking ahead/Vision Ministries Canada
145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8
Phone: 519-725-1212 Fax: 725-9421
Toll-Free Telephone Number:
877-509-5060
Western Canadian Office:
877-710-5799
e-mail: info@vision-ministries.org
 Home Page: www.vision-ministries.org

thinking ahead is published 4 times/year by Vision Ministries in an effort to connect like-minded Christians and their local churches and encourage them to work cooperatively, especially in evangelism through church planting and church extension. Subscriptions are free, but VMC encourages supporters to send \$15/year to help cover costs (tax receipts are not given for subscription donations). Spending of funds received by VMC is confined to board approved programs and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved program will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where needed most. Gifts of \$20 or more are acknowledged with an official receipt for income tax purposes. VMC is committed to financial accountability; all accounts are audited by an independent auditing firm; financial statements available on request. We appreciate notification of double mailings, names for our mailing list, or if a name should be deleted. Publications Mail Agreement Number: 40016262. Articles may be copied for limited circulation without permission. Please include the credit line: "Reprinted from *thinking ahead* (1-877-509-5060)."

Will they ever believe?

Will he ever believe? This was going through my mind as I invited him to our ALPHA course. I had known Sean and Cathy for some time. Cathy was the one who professed faith. For many years she had been praying that Sean would at least come to church. He was happy to drive Cathy and the 2 boys on Sunday morning. But the Christian faith was not for him. He felt that in some ways he was a "Christian". He was christened as a baby in England where he grew up. He was a good guy. Family came first. He brought home the money. Looked after the boys when Cathy went to praise team practice.

I remember visiting Sean and Cathy, because it was the August before the church I was working at put on their first full-fledged Alpha course (supper and all). As we talked I prayed for the courage to invite him along. I had brought an Alpha invitation just in case the Lord opened the door. He did. I took out the flyer. He responded positively, said that he would consider it seriously.

I was pleasantly surprised when it was confirmed that Sean and Cathy were coming to our introductory supper. Cathy came so that she could keep Sean company. This was his first real entry into church for a long time. But there were no miraculous declarations of faith by Sean throughout the whole course. He even went to the follow-up course. He asked a lot of questions and made a lot of comments.

Cathy's dilemma was not unlike Paul's predicament in Romans 9-11. Although he was the apostle to the Gentiles, his heart was always for the people of his upbringing, the Jews. Paul uses very strong language to encourage the Christians in Rome to evangelize the Jews. He wishes that he himself were cut off and cursed from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews (Romans 9:3). He prays for them that they will be saved and understand that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Jewish law (Romans 9:1-4). He states that God has not given up on his people, that Paul himself is a Jew.

Most of us will come across people like Cathy and Paul who desire people close to them to embrace Jesus Christ. Paul's response in Romans is to describe the process by which a person comes to faith. He does it by asking several rhetorical questions:

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Here we see a process that results in the conversion of people. Notice the verbs in each of these questions:

(1) Calling- (2) Believing- (3) Hearing- (4) Preaching- (5) Sending

A person is not able to **call** unless she believes the truth of what is shared with her. But she cannot **believe** unless she hears the truth uttered to her. But she cannot **hear** before someone preaches to her. But no one can **preach** until they are **sent**. Therefore when we are concerned about the evangelism of others we should not be concerned about what we are capable of saying. **We should be concerned about sending before saying.** My experience in life has always been that if we keep on praying for others, God will open the door for us to share our faith with them. God has the best plans for us in evangelism. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

So when the process is viewed from the standpoint of the person who brings the good news it looks like this:

(1) Sending- (2) Preaching- (3) Hearing- (4) Believing- (5) Calling

As we declare ourselves willing to be sent by God to someone, God will bring the resources we need to do that. **God takes his time to save them. God's time is not our time.** And while God is working on those we are trying to reach, he is also working on us. Just as Paul is working towards motivating the Christians in Rome to reach out to non-believing Jews, God works on refining us as we reach out.

Sean is faithfully attending church with Cathy today. He is still quiet about whether he has embraced Jesus Christ. But he is reading his Bible, and I suspect that he has made a commitment to Christ. If you ask Cathy whether 10 years ago she would have ever imagined that Sean would be a faithful church person she would say "not in my wildest imagination." She would also tell you that she prayed fervently for him and that she got close friends in the church to pray. And God did eventually answer her prayers and sent someone to preach so that Sean could hear.

This article is by Pye Chew, the Pastoral Staffperson at Richvale Bible Chapel in Richmond Hill ON. From time to time we're interested in publishing short pieces of biblical exposition, especially about evangelism and outreach. Contact thinking@vision-ministries.org if you have something you'd like us to consider.

One Flesh – June 27th

We became one flesh that day – sharing vows and rings
worn on our fingers witnessing dreams in our hearts;
We danced awkwardly, mingled longing and joy,
Truly one in ignorance and expectation,
Stepping into a journey neither of us understood.

We grew entwined with time,
sharing money and meals, head-colds and bed-sheets,
books and friends and holidays, building memories.

We embraced each other,
halved our DNA and pooled it, springing off-spring into life,
one flesh with them – and yet not,
bound to us yet unbound, signs of the mystery of one-flesh.
Conceived and created by us, yet - even more - received and discovered.

We knotted, tangled and wrestling, through life-shaping choices,
One-flesh strained by silence and under-cut by stand-offs unresolved,
Yet one in our resolve - *I will not let you go until you bless me.*

We prayed apart and together all the way
And when the world gave injury, we stood together,
prosecutor, judge and jury to the world.

So when the alien struck, we fought back in unison,
one-fleshed it with vehemence, practicality and faith,
with med-charts and foot-rubs.
Limping arm-on-arm,
embraced unstintingly by our extended body
one with us in grief and hope and love.

My dear, you mirrored the mystery of one flesh
Lying in your death-bed, inert,
body and soul held together by fragile whispers of breath
until the last sigh when flesh and spirit parted company
and un-made us both,
severing the cherished bond, splitting the atom,
releasing energies of affection
and paradox –
the fear of knowing face-to-face and the joy of being known at last.

David Knight, June 23, 2005

David Knight, a good friend of Vision Ministries, has been on the pastoral staff at Westview Bible Church, Montreal since 1995. David lost his wife Mary Lynn to cancer in January 2005. We find his reflections on love, loss, life, and the next life, draw us deeper into each of those.



Pray-ers, Prayer Groups, Intercessors

We **NEED** people to pray for
Vision Ministries Canada
church plants. If you or your group
are willing to adopt one or more
particular local church, please be in touch
with Jay at thinking@vision-ministries.org or

877.710.5799



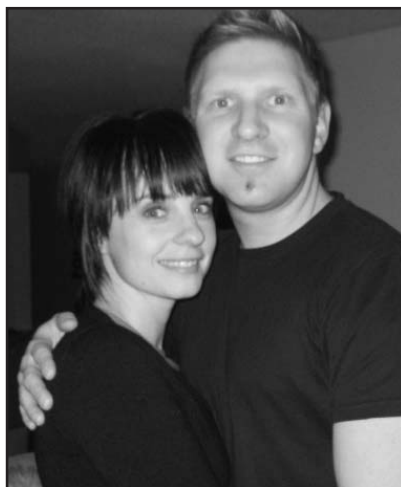
Dave Patterson
central@golden.net

Live, Love and Be Real. The Alternative is Faking It

The Gig, Kitchener, ON

I saw Disney's Narnia movie over the Christmas holiday. It was splendid! Gripping, graphical eye-candy embedded within compelling Christian allegory. But what I really appreciate is live theatre (I'd love to attend Tolkien's Lord of the Rings production presently on stage in Toronto). "Live" is just that – it's real, authentic, exhilarating! What our Christian walk and church experience is supposed to be like. Several Kitchener believers have banded together to declare this. They're calling themselves "The Gig" and they are praying that others will discover that the ultimate individual gig (live performance) should be a passion for God and for the things that matter to Him.

Leading this new church venture are Rob and Rebecca (Bec) Abbott. Rob grew up in Kitchener-Waterloo with a Salvation Army background. He got involved with drama early, mostly for the affirmation it gave him. He eventually graduated from Ryerson University with credentials in Theatre Performance and English Lit., then attended Bible College, where he met and married Bec (singer/songwriter, Juno nominated artist). Rob has journeyed from sowing his wild oats with the theatre crowd to a razor-sharp, pinpoint focus on serving Christ and reaching people through artistic expression. He has served on staff with the PAOC and Missionary churches and now has linked with Vision Ministries and multi-denominations to give birth to the Gig.



Rob and Bec Abbott

In January 2006, the Gig began to hold services at 11:11 a.m. in a former theatre in downtown Kitchener. Seeking to reach people from all walks of life in the city's core, the group has already made solid connections with the arts community and business sector (one significant company has invited Rob to be their corporate chaplain). So this unique gathering cites as a motto: "to gather to be real, go to love, and live to reveal."

Their passion is to "be" not to "do" church and their methods may seem a tad unorthodox. Each member seeks to establish deep, authentic relationships downtown (like a recent opportunity to serve and support a local Buddhist store owner). Services aim to have "liturgy meet the Arts". Thus, they are multi-sensory with teaching that draws out God's ultimate truth through current pop culture. And those services even risk live dialogue with alternative faiths. Gig leaders hope to have artists who play the pubs and clubs on Saturday nights come to express and explore faith issues with them on Sundays, regardless of their spiritual perspective. Rob acknowledges, "This won't be comfortable church for everyone; we're not just expounding truth, but asking hard questions" – at the clubs, on the streets, in the business sector and on Sunday mornings.

Sounds like a great experiment! Will it work? Well certainly the Gig has some key elements in place: Christ at the helm, solid prayer base, biblical leadership structure, warm community, passionate outreach and loads of "personality". To me, they uniquely comprehend what Eugene Peterson's The Message was driving at in his intro to Zephaniah: "We humans keep looking for a religion that will give us access to God without having to bother with people. We want to go to God for comfort and inspiration when we're fed up with the men and women and children around us. We want God to give us an edge in the dog-eat-dog competition of daily life... It is the sort of religion the biblical prophets are determined to root out ... (because) everything you do or think or feel has to do with God." The Gig gets that. May they do and think and feel passionately with their neighbours around them in Kitchener's city centre, to the glory of God.

PRAYING for church plants

New churches need people praying for them. So we print and re-print this list of the groups we know best and have had some hand in getting off the ground, so that none of us will forget them. We also intend to never forget that *It is the Spirit who gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. If you would like regular prayer requests from planters in your inbox, be in touch with us at info@vision-ministries.org*

- 1992** 1. Cambridge Community Church, Cambridge, ON
Rob & Helen Heintz, Dave & Gladys McClurkin
- 1994/1998** 2. Elim Bible Fellowship, Arkona, ON
Dave & Sandie Daley
- 1996** 3. New Hope Community Church, Waterloo, ON
Steve & Deb Tulloch
- 1997** 4. The Cornerstone Community Church, Barrie, ON
5. The Bridge, Bancroft, ON - John & Flo Coles
6. Quinte Bible Chapel, Belleville, ON
Ken & Mary Lou Wiles
- 1998** 7. Bethany Gospel Chapel, Regina, SK (replant)
- 1999** 8. Brant Community Church, Brantford, ON
Andy & Theresa Flatt
9. Strome Community Church, Strome, AB
Brian & Pat McGaffigan
10. Orillia Community Church, Orillia, ON
Lawson & Karen Murray
- 2000** 11. Grace Multicultural Community Church,
Edmonton, AB - Dawit & Seble Isaac
12. Comerstone Church, Elnorslie, PEI
Rusty & Vanessa Fulp
13. Community Bible Church Ilderton, Ilderton, ON
Scott & Esther Dakin
- 2002** 14. Bow Waters Community Church,
Calgary, AB (replant) -
Doug & Kari Siewert
15. Heavenly Light, Toronto, ON
Yonatan & Bethlehem Hiruy
16. Lifegate Bible Church, Windsor, ON
Colin & Ruth Heaton
- 2003** 17. Southview Christian Fellowship,
Edmonton, AB - Stan & Becky King
18. Elnora Bible Centre, Elnora, AB
Dave & Ruby Broadhead
- 2004** 19. Toronto China Bible Church
(in North York), Toronto, ON -
Ming Peng Gong & Tian Mei Wang
20. LifeSpring Christian Fellowship,
Waterloo, ON - Bruce Mills
21. *church without borders*, Vancouver, BC
Dan & Sharon Williams
- 2006** 22. **The Gig, Kitchener, ON -
Rob & Bec Abbott**

Picturing Growth

Dan Williams of church without borders in the Vancouver area, shares a picture or two of how things have been going.

In a non-traditional church-planting model such as the one being pursued by *church without borders*, the measures of success are sometimes challenging to identify. There is no game-plan, formula, textbook or timeline. Planting a network of house churches must begin with subtle-to-profound attitude changes. What does it mean to “do church” when there are no committees or programs or facilities to run but merely the consistent call to be neighbourly and invite others to break bread with you in your home? Well, what it means is to be neighbourly and invite. That is job one. And two, and three.

So do we measure the glacially slow changing of attitudes in a slowly expanding pool of people as massive success or frustratingly incremental improvement?

Yes, attitude shifts are success. But tangible signs of growth are also nice.

We do have two “snapshots” from 2005 to pull out of our “church wallet” and offer with some sense of delight about our growth in the Lord, and in numbers.

First, we celebrated our first baptism. In a home pool, of course. In the fun atmosphere of a summer house party. There is nothing like the sound of worship music on the back patio.

Second, we had our largest “outpost” gathering (which we call commonSpace) so far. It was a special thrill to lead communion in our usual meaningful but informal way with 20 eager faces in a circle, people of all ages packed into a tiny kitchen, waiting to be served the Lord’s Supper, and then to tuck into a great potluck meal. Heaven anticipated.

The details of this scene were all great: newcomers, kids so quiet and attentive you could hear a pin drop, a ring of teens in the background, three staff ready to teach right after dinner. It felt full, and promising.

Our dream-goal is to have four such outposts well-established in Greater Vancouver by the end of 2006, a fully functioning “model network” that will pave the way for replication in a growing movement in years to come.

Please pray that He will bring the increase.



Dan Williams



Vision Ministries Canada Leadership Development Days

March 18, 2006

9:00 a.m. – 3:59 p.m.
Capilano Christian Assembly
9333 – 50 Street, **Edmonton AB**



Dr. ROD WILSON

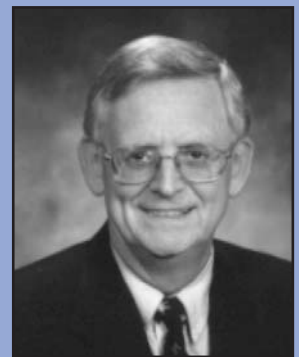
President of Regent College
Vancouver BC

Growing Leaders our Churches Need

- Holding Grace and Truth in Balance
- Embracing Thinking and Feeling
- Understanding Power, Authority and Servant Attitude
- Being Worldly Wise and Thoroughly Biblical

February 25, 2006

9:00 a.m. - 3:59 p.m.
Lambrick Park Church
1780 Feltham Road, **Victoria BC**



Dr. ROY MATHESON

Chartwell Baptist Church
Oakville ON

The Supernatural Side of Ministry

- Supernatural resources
- Supernatural guidance
- Supernatural healing
- Supernatural and demonization

Lunch is provided / No registration fee / Offering will be taken

To Register

877-509-5060 (toll free) • Email: info@vision-ministries.org • Web site: www.vision-ministries.org

Interactive seminars for elders, pastors, spouses,
ministry leaders, deacons, youth leaders...
and other tenacious servants of Jesus!



THREE SIGNS OF HEALTHY CHURCHES

Bill Hybels once said, “There’s nothing like the local church when it’s working right.” I think we would all agree, but what are the signs that it is working right? What would you list as the qualities of a healthy church that brings delight to Jesus, the Head of the Church? What should church leaders look for that will give them a sense that the church is on track?

Natural Church Development, a diagnostic tool that we use at Vision Ministries, lists eight health characteristics. They are like the soil in which a healthy plant grows. The NCD assessment is useful to help a church address the soil to ensure its health.

But what external signs are there that say, “It’s working?” What should I look for as a leader in the church where I attend? I’ve thought a lot about that. I have come to the conclusion that there are at least three primary signals that are symptoms of good health.

1. The thrill of changed lives is a regular occurrence.

Recently I witnessed a transformation like few I have seen before. I watched a man change before my very eyes. The lights went on in his mind. A fresh sparkle appeared in his eyes. A fresh smile was on his face. Jesus had found him. His wife told me later that the change was so dramatic it was like being married to a different man.

I cannot tell you how much that experience affected me. It is hard to put into words the sheer thrill and exhilaration of seeing someone finding hope and joy and peace in Jesus for the first time. Even as I write this my eyes are moist with gratitude. I am thankful for the privilege of seeing a miracle. When that is lost to a church it soon dries up and everything is listless and predictable and void of power.

2. The path of the Christian life.

Some of us have been on the path of the Christian life for so long that it has become mundane; the sense of adventure is gone. When the church has lost its passion for loving God and its passion for true community, there is not much left but a dour and empty faith.

I love a church where the elders speak in joyful tones about the church, even when they’re not at elder’s meetings. It’s a good thing when people laugh at themselves and the sound of humour is heard in the pulpit and the pews and the hallways of the church. The church that laughs together stays together.

3. When preaching moves from information to inspiration.

God is interested in lives that reflect the character of Jesus. God’s Spirit does that! God’s word describes this character: “But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT). I love God’s word. I love its practicality and the way it changes lives. I love when it is taught in a Spirit-anointed way and lives are transformed. But when it becomes simply a transfer of information with no application, its impact is lost. When God’s word is no longer a two-edged sword and does not produce the fruit of the Spirit, the church becomes impoverished and unhealthy.

Healthy churches feel alive! Healthy churches are constantly concerned about lost people. Healthy churches work hard at making our walk with God a joyful adventure. People in healthy churches continually strive to live out the character of Jesus as they relate to one another and as they touch their communities with the fragrance of Jesus.

LOOKING FOR OPENNESS

In this article, Mark Anderson of Marineview Chapel, Vancouver, expands some of his thinking about spreading the Good News in hard ground, which he introduced last issue as a new way of seeing.

Marineview Chapel is located in a community with one of the lowest church attendance rates in Canada. When our well-educated neighbours ease their SUV through their hedgerows and the door to their double garage comes down, it reads DO NOT DISTURB. The greatest barrier to planting and growing churches here is a lack of social openness.

It is not that they don’t have friends—they usually do have an established social group—they’re just not hungry for any of the other benefits being part of a larger community usually offers. Experienced and well-resourced church planters hit a brick wall here because of people’s skeptical reluctance to engage in new relationships. Our neighbours are friendly, but leery of making any kind of social commitments ... so all the traditional outreach events from crusades to church BBQ’s to Alpha courses just don’t work. If we’re waiting for them to show interest as a spiritual seeker looking for a good church, we’ll wait a long time.

And yet, we believe that Jesus is at work.

We have been praying that God would allow us to see what He is doing and where He is moving in the lives of these precious people, who seem so far from church. As we invest time to build genuine relationships with our neighbours, we realized we need to get beyond simply seeing them as “unsaved,” “seeker,” or “believer.” Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them.” The decision to open our lives is key. So, we’ve started paying close attention to degrees of openness in three categories:

How open is this person to me **Socially**? Are they:

- Cool and indifferent?
- Able to commit to a one-time coffee on neutral ground?
- Willing to invite me into their home or some other part of their life?
- Eventually finding value in getting together regularly?

Patiently and honestly building relationships with friends and neighbours I genuinely enjoy is the critical first step in my desire to share who Jesus is in my life.

How open is my friend **Spiritually**? Are they:

- Deeply cynical about religion?
- A blank sheet spiritually?
- Mildly invested in a homegrown mix of ideas they have picked up from others?
- Willing to explore?
- Aware of a spiritual dimension to their life and intentionally desiring growth?

As our relationship grows socially, the completely real and unforced spiritual side of my life is something my friend is going to appreciate and hopefully grow curious about. The spiritual openness I long to see in them usually grows on the foundation of time invested in a relationship of mutual learning and respect.

Finally, How open is my friend to **Community**? Are they:

- Cynical and suspicious of any organization that will demand something from them?
- Doubtful that a faith community has anything of value to offer?
- Even aware of the benefits of being a part of an intentional community? (Many young adults today have never considered this as a possibility!)
- Open to occasionally attending a gathering with my church friends if it is of particular interest?
- Firmly committed to the life of a local body of believers?





Tommy Douglas

Scary evangelicals

A fine little article made it to the pages of the Vancouver Sun in September 2005. **Michael Davenport**, a research scientist who attends St. John's (Shaughnessy) Anglican Church asked if he could have the chance to respond to a series of articles published the previous July, warning people about Evangelicals. The editors of the Sun eventually agreed to give him a full page – and he used it very well. In completely accessible prose, and sprinkled with cultural references, well-known names like greatest Canadian Tommy Douglas, and a clear thinking-person's understanding of who evangelicals are and what they generally believe, he encouraged a more objective understanding of us, and made a gentle case for mere Christianity, that would catch most of our friends.

Worth checking out an e-version of the article
An Insider's View of Evangelicals, at

<http://www.christianity.ca/news/commentary/2005/09.004.html>

We always need names

We always know about 10-12 churches across Canada, that are looking for pastoral staff. We usually know about 25 people who are looking for positions. This means we don't have enough positions or people to be very good at matching. If you, or if you know someone, who aspires to full-time church work, contact **Paul Fletcher** at paul@vision-ministries.org or **519.669.4569**.

Inlumino

A group of folks connected to Bethany Chapel Calgary or to **Neil Stephenson** who is part of Bethany, present a half-dozen lectures a year in a series titled **Inlumino: Dialogue on History, Culture and Faith**.

The series which has developed over the last couple of years deserves its descriptors: relevant, challenging, intelligent, engaging, inspiring, illuminating. The January 2006 presentation *Is Science Broken? And How May it be Fixed?* was by **Walter R. Thorsen**, who was Professor in Theoretical Chemistry at University of Alberta, and Adjunct Professor, Philosophy of Science at Regent College for more than 25 years. Walter is also part of Bow Waters Community Church, a VMC church plant.

More information at www.inlumino.ca

or contact Neil at

stephensonneil@hotmail.com

Matheson, Wilson and TSII

We have at least three exceptional events that we're presenting across Canada this spring. You can find more information about Leadership Development Days planned for Victoria and Edmonton, in display ads on page 6. But don't just skip the ads. These are the very best quality seminars. Exceptional teaching, great food, encouraging connections. Don't miss them.

And principal leaders at churches in our network are encouraged to come hear John Stackhouse and Peter Roebbelen, and to help us learn how to work better together, at **Thinking Shrewdly II** in Waterloo ON from May 4-6.

Contact info@vision-ministries.org

for a printed or e-copy of the brochure for this event.

Openness from page 7

When seen in this light, we begin to understand the length of this journey of many steps which someone "very-far-from-church" has to take **before making any contact with an organized church outreach event**. Paying attention to God opening them up ***Socially*** and ***Spiritually*** helps us to see positive change in our friend along this journey.

I believe Jesus when He says in John 4:35 that the fields are ripe for harvest. But my friends aren't turning their lives upside down en masse to appear regularly in the pews of Marineview at 10am every Sunday ... from where they are, that step is too big.

In that same verse, Jesus tells **me** to open my eyes and see, so I honour my friends with the assumption that God is actively working in their lives ***Socially*** and ***Spiritually*** in preparation for openness to participation in a faith ***Community***. My friend may never end up at Marineview's worship service, but I remain committed to sharing Jesus by living out the difference He makes to those around me. As my friends get to know me, they will get to know Jesus ... and I'm counting on Him to grow in them a hunger for community that He can use someday some way to build His Kingdom.

ALWAYS WANTED TO VISIT ISRAEL?

NOW IS THE TIME

Paul Fletcher

is leading another tour to Israel

September 6-20, 2006

This trip will include a very extensive tour of
**Israel, plus Petra, Jordan, and
Mt. Sinai, Egypt.**

For more information contact

paul@vision-ministries.org

or phone **519.669.4569**



145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses
To Above Address

Publications Agreement

Number: 40016262