

Church planting: worth the bother?



“A hi-light is the spiritual growth of Christians who'd been in a stagnant state”

Gord
Martin

Last week I heard a troubling, cynical statement. "If the churches I know are any indication of the norm, why would starting more of them make any real difference in terms of evangelism?" My ears tingled as I listened and thought of the new groups I knew. With trusty telephone in hand I called the ten congregations or groups from our circles that have started since 1990. My questions were: What have been the hi-lights since you began? What evangelistic impact do you think you're having? Here's what they said.

Jack Earls of Faith Chapel in Armstrong (that's about as far from Toronto as Florida) said, "We've come to have a real ministry to professionals who come here to help. When they've given all they have to give and are on empty, we find them willing to reconsider God. Last Sunday we had eighteen out, three were native people. Work among them has been difficult due to the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church and the revival of native religion." Is it worth it? Ask those burnt out professionals!

A real highlight at the Cambridge Community Church was having 135 people out for their grand opening Sunday. They'd started with just nine families. Rob Heintz says numbers are down during the summer, but they've had about 100 visitors from the community since that opening Sunday. About nine families have continued to come. Several have come to know Christ and others have been renewed in their walk with Him. Invitations are going out to the community about upcoming sermon series, support groups offered and current activities. There are usually visitors every Sunday.

In Home Christian Fellowship is a house church in Elmira. John Kelly and his wife Ruth provide high intensity care for 30-35 people who come to their home each Sunday. Many have led very chaotic lives and hadn't dreamed they'd find what they needed in church! About one person per month has been coming to Christ for salvation. John and Ruth hope to see other similar groups start in the region.

Kintor Chapel, just east of London, has big name speakers every week: Charles Stanley, John MacArthur and Chuck Swindoll just to name a few! It's all by video. Once, a month they publicize a meeting in a local public school with a special speaker or video. Just now there are four people Joe Ebert is in touch with who seem close to salvation.

Port Sydney Bible Chapel is a church with a big focus on ministry to children and youth. Although they have only 25 to 35 on Sunday mornings, they have 50 children and about 15 teens in their weekly clubs. In June a seven year old girl died in a tragic accident. Members of the Chapel ministered to the family. Now they have responded to the Lord and have been attending services regularly.

Maranatha Bible Fellowship rented a former Insurance building on the main street of Watford this spring. Larry Teeple reports that new growth in the lives of believers has been a big plus. He said, "Yesterday we had seventy people, our highest attendance so far!" They are praying for the salvation of five men whose wives attend regularly, and are planning an outreach to boys and young mothers this fall.

Sanctuary is a new fellowship in the former Central Gospel Hall in downtown Toronto. It's an outreach to the inner city. It is very informal, and if you were there you'd see 30 to 40 people enjoying worship, singing and a very real brand of fellowship. Paul Abrahams says, "It wouldn't seem very church-like, but it's a place where people are seeing the reality of Jesus."

Elmvale Community Church is another group with a major focus on ministering to children and youth. About 65 meet on Sunday mornings but during the week their kids and youth clubs reach about 200 young people. Currie Phillips says people there are thrilled to be a part of this new group. Some who were previously sitting on the fence spiritually, are blossoming!

Chesley Bible Chapel began in January of this year after a series of home Bible studies

with John Martin. They are meeting in a former Mennonite Church and have an attendance now of over 60. Stan West says, "We're the only assembly in all of Grey and Bruce counties that isn't hard to get into". So far, a primary hi-light is the spiritual growth of Christians who'd been in a stagnant state.

Forestview is a daughter church of the Shoreacres Bible Chapel in Burlington. Paul Bancroft told me that 75 to 80% of those attending on Sunday mornings are in small group Bible studies during the week. He added

that they are focusing strongly on life-style evangelism and are using the Living Proof video series as a primary means of training. Evangelism is coming along slowly, but interest is high. This spring they were averaging about 140 people in attendance.

Is church planting worth the bother? I can tell you that despite the ups and downs of new beginnings, the people I've been talking to are convinced. Aren't sonic of you a little jealous? Maybe it could happen in your community. Maybe you...?