

THINKING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada



Carl Wilson (left) shakes hands with Samson Javed (right) as Obaid Obaidullah and Siamak Shafti-Keramat converse in the background at the VMC Thinking Shrewdly Consultation April 27-29, 2017 at Creekside Church in Waterloo, ON.

From Every Tribe, Language, People, and Nation – Now?

BY GORD MARTIN

There was always a sense of awe as I listened to the beautiful words of Revelation 5 at the communion service in our church when I was a boy. The passage speaks of the Lamb, the scroll, the 24 elders, the new song and all those people purchased with His blood to be a kingdom of priests! People from every tribe, language, people and nation. How wonderful!

God called some of us to leave Canada and go to other peoples and languages. I lived and worked in Colombia with my family for four years. We had to adjust, learn the

language, and adapt to cultures that were quite different from our own. We chose to do this.

Today, the people of the earth are on the move. Many are fleeing violence, oppression, poverty, and are seeking a safer and better life. Many have come to Canada. Some of us adapt readily and even enthusiastically to this new world of ministry opportunity. For others, it's more difficult. We struggle to eat different foods, we strain to communicate, and find the cultural differences confusing. It was easy to be in awe when we heard the wonderful words from Revelation; it is much harder

to embrace their reality in the “now”.

At VMC, we have embraced the immigrants coming to Canada with anticipation – many of whom are already believers. The leaders among them are blessing us with their:

- Witness of God's delivering and saving power in their lives
- Eagerness to establish churches that reach out to their communities even though they have little or no resources
- Contagious, simple, and daring faith
- Deeply held Christian values

VMC has been deeply enriched by our relationships with New Canadians that God has brought to us. It began through our relationship with Ming Peng Gong, who was converted in Waterloo and

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Leaders of VMC affinity networks meet a few times per year as a group to pray, support each other, and learn to effectively serve among their networks of churches. (L to R) Indy Cungcin, Ming Peng Gong, Yonatan Hiruy, Gord Martin (VMC Staff member) Amani Katanga, and Siamak Shafiti-Keramat.

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

– Revelation 5:9 NIV

Every Tribe, Language, People, & Nation
...continued from cover

attended Lakeshore Bible Chapel where I was the pastor. In 2001, he was called to serve a small church in Toronto as their pastor. Today, they have eight services/congregations each weekend scattered all across Toronto.

In 2002, we had a phone call from Jay's Eritrean friend Dawit in Edmonton, who said that there was a good Eritrean man who had come from Sweden to Toronto to help a new Eritrean fellowship there. I called Yonatan Hiruy and so began a friendship that continues to this day. We now have connections with at least seven Eritrean and Ethiopian fellowships in Canada.

In 2006, I met Amani Katanga and his co-leaders, to discuss ways in which we might help them with their French-speaking Congolese church in Toronto. There are 17 or 18 small Congolese fellowships in southern Ontario.

In 2007, I received an email from Siamak Shafiti-Keramat, a Persian who was looking for help to plant a church in Toronto with five people. Our relationship has since

flourished and it's a great joy to connect with the members of this congregation today, all of whom are former Muslims. They are reaching out to pockets of Persians in Canada, Europe and even in Iran. We are now developing a strategy for effective country-wide ministry.

In 2008, I was introduced to Indy Cungcin by Tim Nielsen of Winnipeg. The Chin people were coming to Canada as violently persecuted Christian refugees from Burma/Myanmar. They needed help from someone who could navigate their denominationally sensitive waters. I have often helped Indy plan annual leadership training events.

In June of 2016 I met with these five brothers for the first time to discuss how each of them could cultivate and establish a network of churches; we have met twice more since then. These brothers are enjoying fellowship with each other and are also learning what it means to serve effectively among their network of churches.

At VMC, we are now connecting with Filipinos, Indians and more! Our network is looking like our country. Isn't that how it should be? Just like in Revelation chapter five!

The Saviours of "Organized Religion" in Canada

When Reginald Bibby wrote his book *Unknown Gods* 22 years ago, he predicted a depressing future for the Canadian church. When he revisited his work in 2015, he discovered he was quite far off target. "Catholics, for example, are building new churches in some parts of the country. Evangelicals increased their total numbers as Canada's population grew. The same goes for Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs."

"What I screwed up on—it sounds so naive looking back—[is] I didn't allow for the immigration variable," Bibby says. "The thing that pumps new life into religion in Canada has been this mammoth entrance not only for Muslims, but also Catholics."

Protestants, Sikhs and Hindus also benefit from immigration. Among those born outside Canada, almost 40 per cent embrace religion while less than 25% reject it. Compare that to Canadian-born—29 per cent embrace religion, while 27 per cent reject it. Writer Aaron Hutchins says, "In effect, organized religion in Canada has found its saviours: immigrants."

SEE complete article www.macleans.ca/society/life/what-canadians-really-believe/ ■

New Canadian Finds Jesus in Canada

Originally from Iran, Ramtin's search for God led him to Spirit of Truth Church in Toronto. Unable to believe that Jesus is God, Ramtin prayed for



clarity. One night, in a dream, Jesus said, "I ask only one thing from humans, that is not to sin. But everyone follows their own desires." Touched by the sorrow in the Lord's voice, Ramtin repented. After this, he gradually began to understand the Bible and he accepted Christ guided by Pastor Siamak Shafti-Kermat. Ramtin and his wife Leela had been married for 15 years, but were unable to have children. In the fall of 2016, they renewed their vows in a Christian celebration of marriage. This summer, they will welcome their first child!

The Life-saving Power of the Cross

Dave and Shaina Morgan live and lead a church plant in the poor Whalley neighbourhood of Surrey, BC. Eden Whalley was launched in partnership with Granville Chapel in Vancouver, VMC, and The Message Trust from England.

Formerly on the margins himself, Dave has compassion for broken people. In May, Dave told attendees at Thinking Shrewdly about walking in his neighbourhood with a friend when a homeless man called for help. "My friend has not breathed for 10 minutes," he told Dave. They pulled the lifeless man from his temporary shelter and began chest compressions to try and revive him. Suspecting a drug overdose, they got someone from a nearby agency to administer Naloxone. Still nothing.

Paramedics arrived and took over life-saving measures. Dave silently prayed, sensing that the Spirit was going to act in this desperate situation. "Get the body bag," said one of the paramedics



as they conceded defeat. Suddenly the man sat up and took a breath. The crowd gathered was shocked. Realizing that God had intervened, the man accepted Christ that same day. "The power of the cross changes everything," says Dave. ■



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WE WORSHIPPED.



WE TALKED AND TALKED AND TALKED.



OUR FEARLESS LEADER MIKE STONE





THINKING SHREWDLY KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Effective mission requires listening to the needs of the neighbourhood and multiplying our efforts through our neighbors in collaboration with others.

—Joe White, Pastor of Neighborhood Church in Fresno, California

Mission, Multiplication, and Network

BY JOE WHITE

Neighborhood Church is a VMC-sponsored church plant just outside of downtown Fresno, California in an under-resourced area called the Jackson Neighborhood. Our aim is to love the people in our 8 x 12 block radius and to seek the neighbourhood's renewal.

Three missional strategies—a small business, a non-profit, and a weekly gathering—function together to foster well-being and renewal. Our mission isn't imposed by the church, these initiatives are a direct response to what our neighbours have identified as their

needs. We started a small business that employs residents who struggle to find employment. The non-profit renovates blighted housing. Our weekly Sunday gathering meets at our local elementary school and works to combat cultural Catholicism.

But how does all this work get done?

Here's the key: our mission requires commitments to multiplication and networking. Our church is intentionally self-limiting. As a staff, we don't organize much beyond our weekly gathering. Instead of doing all the work ourselves, we multiply by mobilizing and equipping neighbours to run with missional

initiatives that improve the well-being of the neighbourhood. We have 21 weekly projects happening—something every day of the week.

Effective multiplication requires a high regard for collaboration and networking. We partner with VMC and a handful of other local churches and non-profits to seek the wellbeing of the Jackson Neighbourhood. It's true that "many hands make light work." Effective mission requires listening to the needs of the neighbourhood and multiplying our efforts through our people in collaboration with others. I believe this is the future of the church in every neighbourhood everywhere.

Dual Citizenship: Canada and the Kingdom

BY STEVE MACDOUELL

What might it look like for the church in Canada to embody an alternative narrative in our national context? This is a question that keeps me up late at night. I think that the following two shifts might help us to be the subversive, countercultural people that God calls us to be.

A Shift from Productivity to Presence

As products of Western culture, Canadians value productivity. The people that we celebrate the most are typically the people that we see as the most productive—or at least the busiest. Our fixation on being productive can have a way of hindering our ability to be fully present with the people around us. What if our faith communities

created more space to be disrupted by—and present with—our neighbours? When we are present with our neighbours, we create space for relationships to be deepened, our hopes and longings to be shared, and for the presence and activity of Christ to be discerned together.

A Shift from Abstract Inclusivity to Robust Hospitality

In Canada, it is easy to see how polarized and disconnected we are from the people that we deem as different than us. While inclusivity can end up being abstract and intangible, hospitality demands our very presence around the tables of our neighbourhoods; it invites us to be present with those we don't understand, those that we have demonized, and those that think differently than us. What if our



faith communities committed more time to the practice of hospitality around the tables of our neighbourhoods? Hospitality creates the kind of space where enemies can become friends and where we can be sensitive to the work that Christ is already doing in and amongst our neighbours.

While there are many more shifts to ponder, I'm convinced that Jesus will continue to do fascinating and disarming things as we become more present and hospitable in our neighbourhoods.

THINKING SHREWDLY KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The Legacy of the Reformation

BY JEAN MARC PRINCIVIL

As Evangelicals, we have been shaped by an emphasis on: Sola Fide (faith alone), Sola Scriptura (Bible as the final authority), Solus Christus (Christ alone), and Sola Gratia (Grace alone). The “solas” are Latin slogans that summarize the basic theological principles of the Protestant Reformation between 1517 and 1648.

Some of the Protestant Reformers also advanced the Church’s understanding of the Trinity. We are so smart, we say this is the Trinity: one God in three-persons. Sometimes, we zoom it so big, we miss the whole point. In the Trinity, there is the revelation that God is a family. There is a perfection of love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God not only revealed himself as Father but also as the Son who redeemed us to make us Christ’s siblings. When you love, you give the best of yourself and that’s what God did—he gave us Jesus. God is crazy about you.

There is a bully that is after the family of God. This bully is Satan. He first destroyed the family in the Garden of Eden. Our relationship with our Father was broken. But Jesus is our big brother – he overpowers the bully and defeated him once for all on the cross. Yes! Jesus came to reconcile us with our Father.

God created us so he could share his love with us as his family. The Church is not like a family, it is a family. The Church is not a building, it is a not program. The redeemed are siblings. We are here on earth to show people what it looks like to



Jean Marc Princivil spoke about the need to understand the church as a family.

live in the kingdom of heaven. The Holy Spirit has affirmed and provides the bond of love that keeps us (members of the family of God), the Church united, strong and different from any other family.

As we look to the future, we need to understand and to assume our true identity as the Church in order remain faithful to the Reformers’ principles. ■

CHURCH PROFILE



Tim Hyjek, Creekside Kitchener Campus Pastor

BY HANNAH AGLER

“Where is God leading us?” For some time, the leaders and congregation of Creekside Church in Waterloo, ON have been seeking God’s direction. With an ever-expanding congregation, the church sought to alleviate their “growing pains,” while making themselves more accessible to their community.

One Church, Multiple Campuses

A search team was formed to find a location for a satellite church. Eventually, they settled on a space in a Kitchener plaza. This second, centralized location is more convenient for attendees who were coming in from the nearby cities of Kitchener and Cambridge. It also makes room for more people. “This has been a dream of ours for a long time,” says Kitchener campus pastor, Tim Hyjek. “I’m thrilled that it’s become a reality.”

On February 26th, Creekside’s Kitchener campus held their first service, which can only be described as “electric.” After seeing such a long-awaited vision take shape, there is truly cause for celebration. Since their grand opening, the Kitchener site has held two services every Sunday and is thrilled to have a consistent turnout. “God has been blessing us in terms of numbers; this has wildly exceeded our expectations,” says Tim.

Though Creekside’s Waterloo and Kitchener locations have many differences, like building size and surrounding community, the two sites intend to stay true to their motto, “one church with multiple campuses.” Tim explains, “No matter which building you worship in, you’re a part of the Creekside family.”

Starting a satellite church is no easy feat. “We want to keep people excited about what God is doing here,” says Tim. “We’re praying for people to not just get involved, but stay involved.”

According to Tim, this church plant has been a “wild and crazy time in the life of Creekside.” As they establish themselves as “two campuses and one church,” they’re constantly looking to God for guidance on how to establish themselves in the most effective way. “We can’t wait to see God move and see how He will bless us.” ■

VMC News & Events



Pastor Matt Craig, DVBC

Toronto MMF Group Supports First Projects

“We’re breaking new ground,” says Matt Craig, pastor of Don Valley Bible Chapel and leader of VMC’s Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) Toronto group. MMF has co-funded three projects since forming two years ago.

About 15 to 20 Christian leaders connected with the VMC network meet regularly to share ideas, pray, and support each other. “We’re beginning to establish a regular rhythm of meeting together,” says Matt.

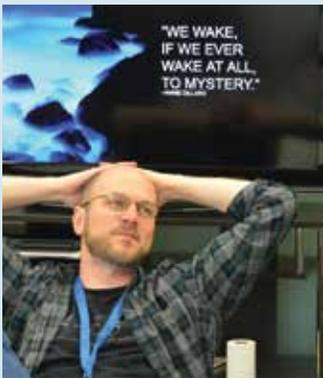
The pastors collaborate in many ways, such as speaking at one another’s churches. Matt has also sent people from his multicultural congregation to meet with ethnic leaders who have partnered with MMF Toronto. “If there are specialized needs, I know I can refer people to a pastor who speaks their language.”

MMF Toronto recently collected more than \$5,000. The group chose to donate the money to three of the many possible projects that the associated leaders are involved with. MMF gave towards Bobby Alexander’s expenses as he travels back and forth to an emerging church plant in London, Ontario. Originally from India, Bobby also serves as an evangelist among several Indian churches in Toronto.

MMF Toronto also supported Pastor Siamak Shafti-Keramat as he works toward publishing a biblically based 12-step manual that he wrote in the Farsi/Persian language. Siamak uses the manual with Farsi-speakers in the Spirit of Truth Church and in the wider community. Pastor Yonatan Hiruy of Mt Zion Worship Centre received MMF funds for his outreach to Eritreans in the Peel Region.

Matt feels like they are just “scratching the surface,” but sees great potential for further collaboration among leaders in MMF Toronto.

Empowering Young Catalysts



VMC Church planter Randy Hein (pictured left) with a group of “Young Catalysts” (pictured below) at the Thinking Shrewdly consultation. During the Friday evening public session, attendees gave \$4,500 to support VMC’s work with this group of men and women in their 20s who are open to the Spirit and active in God’s Kingdom. These young adults are from churches in the VMC network. Randy is spearheading this initiative and says, “there are wonderful things ahead.”



Want to be inspired and equipped at the Church Planting Canada Congress in Montreal October 24-26?

Contact Jay Gurnett at jay.gurnett@vision-ministries.org or 780-566-9211 about attending as part of the large Vision Ministries group. Reduced rate, and subsidies may be available.



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A Nourishing and Magnetic Centre Unifies

BY MIKE STONE
Executive Director, VMC

It only took a handful of conversations at Thinking Shrewdly to be reminded of the eclectic nature of our partnering network of churches. The two hundred plus pastors, planters and catalysts that gathered in Waterloo at the end of April represent ministry contexts that are quite varied—from urban and suburban, to small town and rural. Our churches are separated by vast distances and shaped by the distinctives of regional life. Some gather thousands to a worship service while others congregate with a few dozen. Models vary from multi-site to parish and from house church to regional big box. Some embrace ancient liturgy while others prefer CCLI's top 40. Some listen to Tom Wright and others give more weight to Don Carson.

With these varied expressions of what it can look like to be the people of God how will we continue to be a single, unified partnering network of churches with a shared set of commitments?

Nearly four decades ago, anthropologist and missiologist, Paul Hiebert introduced a fresh way to imagine what it means to belong to a church. He says there are two kinds of groups. The first kind is defined by firm boundaries (bounded set) that delineate who's "in" and who's "out". The second focuses on cultivating a nourishing and magnetic centre (centred set). A farming illustration explains the difference. Some farmers build fences to keep the herd together while others know that a well with a good water supply is just as effective.

For the last twenty-five years, the Vision Ministries team has served and

influenced its constituency with an intuitive understanding that wells matter more than fences. Our network has been shaped more by centred set than bounded set theory. Partnership agreements have their place but signed pieces of paper will never be the ultimate source of cohesion.

So what kind of well are we digging?

As a network we will keep Jesus at the centre. While it may sound simplistic and won't distinguish us from other church tribes, it should protect us from subtle syncretism in a culture characterized by religious pluralism. While remaining thoroughly Trinitarian, this focus on Jesus is an acknowledgement that Christ is the zenith of God's redemptive activity in history. God is rescuing us through his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—the entire Christ-event, not just the cross.

We also believe the church has a place at the centre. Though perhaps out of favour with mainstream society, the church continues to play a crucial role in God's redemptive purposes—particularly in its local, visible expression. Never to be equated with God's kingdom, it is the principle sign and instrument of the kingdom, and remains the primary conduit through which God intends to bless the world. This primacy is not a license for presumption but rather an invitation to cultivate a fresh affection for the church, who is still the bride of Christ.

Beyond the cohesion fueled by a commitment to Jesus and the communities that bear witness to him, our sense of togetherness as a network is rooted in a

culture shaped by six shared values:

Relational—leaders are connected by a genuine love and care for each other and congregations are connected by a mutual and sacrificial desire to see others flourish.

Missional—God is always the initiator in mission; we will discern the ways that he is uniquely inviting our church to participate with him.

Entrepreneurial—we will learn by doing and avoid the paralysis generated by mere theorization and endless talk.

Collaborative—among a diversity of churches, various agencies and across denominational lines we will transcend our differences and find fresh ways to work together for greater kingdom impact.

Team-Oriented—flourishing is dependent on our capacity to draw on the diversity of personalities, passions, competencies and experiences God has gifted to our network.

Biblically & Theologically centred—we will avoid polarizing debates, seek common ground on which to foster understanding and create space for those who differ.

Without fences a few will always wander off, just as others are wandering in. Yes, there are significant differences among our churches, not just in degree but in kind. However, we believe that a centre focused on Jesus, his church and the way of life described by these six values is more than enough to unite us as a partnering network of churches on mission together in Canada. ■

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