



# THINKING AHEAD

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The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

## Why Focus Our Gospel Efforts on Cities?

BY MIKE STONE

As the first missionary strategist, the Apostle Paul focused on communicating the gospel message and planting churches in urban areas. He leveraged the influence of capital cities on their surrounding regions—cities such as Thessalonica (Macedonia), Corinth (Archaia) and Ephesus (Asia). He planted churches in centres of world commerce and Greek civilization, as well as cities on major roads or near seaports that attracted immigrants. Through the migration of believers, the gospel moved from urban centre to provincial periphery

and from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. Like a spreading flame the Good News eventually transformed the cultural practices and institutions of the Roman world.

Could Paul's approach for spreading the gospel have value in the twenty-first century?

Over the centuries, people have gradually moved from rural to urban areas resulting in vast social change. In 1800 barely 3% of the world's population lived in cities. By 1900 that number was still less than 15%. It wasn't until 2008 that cities accounted for 50% of global population and most projections suggest that before 2050 two out of three people will live in urban areas. Cities should matter to those interested in sharing the Good News with as many people as possible.

North America is the most urbanized continent on the planet. By land mass, Canada is one of the largest countries in the world, second only to Russia, yet 82% of Canadians live in cities. One in every four Canadians lives in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, a single urbanized area surrounding the west end of Lake Ontario.

Canada's three largest cities—Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver—represent 35% of the national population compared to their US counterparts—New York, Los Angeles and Chicago that account for only 16% of the US population.

If we long to see Canadians reached for Christ, we need to intensify our focus on cities with more prayer, a greater presence, more strategy, and increased resourcing of mission. This is necessary

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# Bridging the Gap: Including People from Diverse Cultures

BY GORD MARTIN

In my life I have been the stranger in a host culture and the person welcoming people into my country and community. My experience as a missionary to Colombia, as well as my travels to Africa and other parts of the world have given me a desire to work at welcoming people from other cultures.



*Binghai Zeng, a pastor with Toronto China Bible Church, and VMC staff member Gord Martin.*

But this is more than a personal mission. People all around the world are on the move as wars, famines and oppression force them to flee. As the Church in Canada, we need to figure out how to really include people from other cultures because they're here and more are coming.

I can tell you, there's a lot more to it than being friendly and learning to eat foods from different parts of the world. I have found that it takes 5 to 10 years of being in a relationship with someone before you begin to get a true picture of the differences between cultures.

## What VMC is Doing About It

In mid-December last year, I had a conference call with Andrew Karam of Mosaic Church in London, Siamak Keramat from The Spirit of Truth Church in Toronto and Binghai Zeng of Toronto China Bible Church. Mosaic is an intentionally intercultural church and Andrew is Canadian-born. The Spirit of Truth is a congregation of Farsi-speaking believers led by Siamak, who was born in Iran and came to Canada in 1998. Binghai

was born in China, came to Canada in 1989 and is a pastor with one of the congregations of Toronto China Bible Church—which worships in Mandarin.

During our conversation, we discussed the gap between immigrant planters/pastors and Canadian-born planters/pastors as we reflected on the following:

- How does this gap show itself?
- To what degree do immigrant pastors feel accepted or included by Canadian-born pastors?
- Apart from language and food, how are we culturally different? Do we also think differently spiritually?
- What are the things about Canadian-born pastors and churches that immigrant pastors/planters find the most puzzling?

In our conversation, Siamak and Binghai confirmed that there is a cultural gap. We also discovered that immigrant churches “do ministry” differently than long-established Canadian congregations. Some of the differences include:

- Canadian churches consider how to do ministry in a post-modern era while immigrant churches do not think in those terms
- Many immigrant congregations are made up entirely of first generation believers; people want to know the “Bible answer” to their many questions
- Immigrant churches are also helping immigrants settle in; which means pastors and leaders are asked regularly to help with translation, employment, housing, immigration, legal matters, how to relate to the police, social services, etc.
- Canadian churches and immigrant congregations have quite different approaches to leadership and conflict.

Other points of disconnection:

- Humour that is natural for Canadian-born people is puzzling to newcomers

- Talking about sports is relatively meaningless to many immigrant leaders

Siamak and Binghai felt that Canadian-born pastors didn't understand their ministries because they are so different from their own. They also commented, “When we go to a conference with Canadians we tend to stick together with our own people because we feel like outsiders.”

## What's Next?

We are planning to bring Siamak and Binghai to London, ON for a gathering with Canadian-born and immigrant pastors for a larger discussion on the same theme. We also intend to address this issue at Thinking Shrewdly 2018 this April with all of the participants at our consultation.

## What Can You Do

It's very important for immigrants to Canada to visit us in our homes and for us to visit them in their homes. We need to spend time together, eating together and listening to one another.

But it's just not a matter of smiling and being friendly on the surface, we have to learn how to relate to one another at a much deeper level. It doesn't just happen, we have to be intentional.

As Christians, we have a high obligation to go to all nations, not just to passively watch them come to our country. We are not simply meeting and welcoming newcomers to Canada in social terms, we are engaging people that God loves. In many cases, we are meeting brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we share the deepest possible bond!

It's impossible to avoid this issue. Large numbers of people from all around the world are coming to our country. If we ignore this matter, we will be blind to one of the most significant issues of our time.

VMC doesn't have all the answers, but we are committed to intentionally bridging the gap for the sake of our siblings in Christ from other countries and those who don't yet know Christ. ■

# Visions and Dreams

BY DAVID KNIGHT

It has been a privilege to serve on the VMC Board for the past seven years. What a joy to watch as the ministry has grown broader in scope and deeper in impact. It encourages me even more that VMC is getting YOUNGER. I'm especially excited about our Young Catalyst program, which mentors young leaders. This new initiative focuses and enhances what VMC has been doing for years, and is vital for our continued effectiveness.

The prophet Joel tells us that the Spirit delights to foster vision among the young, "Your sons and daughters (who you might think are not yet



mature enough) will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams (not just reminisce about the good ole days) and your young men will have visions. Even on my servants, men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days." Joel 2:28-29

Vision Ministries takes this prophecy to heart; we are well-named. It is our mission to nurture the vision of young and old and to help them be channels of God's Spirit.

The story of Jacob's ladder is about a young man with a big dream—and big fears about his future. In a recent post on the Building Church Leaders website, William Willimon reflected on Jacob's dream. He notes that there were angels ascending, taking messages from earth up to the throne of God, but there were also angels descending. Angels were busy bringing messages down from heaven to earth. This implies not only that we have dreams of God but that God has dreams for us. Willimon says, "one of the things that makes Christian leadership a great way to spend our lives is that we are busy living out the dreams of God. ... You are an aspect of God's dream for the future."

I am praying that VMC will continue to help men and women, both youthful and mature, to dream God's dreams. I pray that he will help us to pursue those visions and to develop them by faith and perseverance into reality for the glory of God. ■

*Thank you to David for his capable leadership as the VMC Board Chair for the last three years.*

– Mike Stone



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# Ministry in a Rural Context: Church Profiles

## Kingdom Collaboration in Simcoe County

**Pinewoods Chapel, Angus, Ontario**

BY SANDRA REIMER

Though they work in different contexts—some urban, most rural—the nine congregations that belong to VMC’s Simcoe County Regional Network have a sense that they are part of a much bigger kingdom where God is at work.



*Pastor Kevin Mast from Hope City Church in Barrie (left) stopped in to visit Pastor Chris Atkinson during the construction of the new building for Pinewoods Chapel in Angus, ON.*

VMC’s Regional Network Coordinator for Simcoe County, Chris Atkinson, says the congregations in this group are active in their Central Ontario communities.

He mentions Elmvale Community Church’s summertime “church in the park” ministry, Hope City Church Barrie’s street ministry, and Intersection Church’s parent/child Christmas craft activity hosted at their local Chamber of Commerce.

The pastors of these congregations only meet in person quarterly, but they email and text each other frequently. “Being part of this network lets you know that you are not alone. It provides mutual support, guidance and vision,” says Chris, who is the pastor of Pinewoods Chapel in Angus, ON.

These co-labourers often share resources. When attendance surged at Hope City, Pinewoods Chapel gave them some unused chairs. The established congregations in the group are also financially, practically, and prayerfully supporting two church plants—Riverside Wasaga and Intersection.

The pastors also co-pilot challenges—like when the federal government decided not to fund summer workers who don’t agree with some of their moral positions. Several of the churches hire summer ministry workers through this program; so the leaders resourced each other to

speak out.

As the network coordinator, Chris helps to nurture church planters in the group. “I’m having breakfast with Josh [from Intersection] tomorrow,” says Chris. “I’ll find out how it’s going, pray with him and help him access VMC resources if he needs them.”

Chris gets excited as he talks about a bigger vision for the region. “Jay [Gurnett] and I have been dreaming about planting another 10 churches in the area.” One of the things Chris appreciates about VMC staff is their willingness to try new things—even if they fail. “VMC is very entrepreneurial,” Chris adds, “We learn just as much from failure as success.”

He also likes that there are not a lot “rules and hoops” to jump through to belong to the VMC network. “VMC provides a great collaborative environment. There is a synergy of ideas, expertise and resources.”

But what really stands out to Chris is VMC’s focus on “more and better churches”. He says, “That focus is at the heart of God’s kingdom.” Chris adds, “God desires for all to come to repentance (more) and he wants us to have an abundant life (better).”

# Longevity at a Church is Valuable

## Westlock Chapel, Westlock, Alberta

BY HANNAH AGLER

Though Westlock, Alberta is home to only about five thousand people, Tim Gurnett, co-pastor of Westlock Bible Chapel, insists that working in a small church in a rural town has its advantages. “The intimacy of Westlock allows us and neighbouring churches to collaborate; not to mention, you run into people you know wherever you are!”

As one of the largest congregations in town, Westlock Gospel Chapel has cooperated with nearby churches on Easter and Advent services. Recently, they held a joint service to celebrate the town’s 100th birthday. Tim has been a pastor at Westlock since moving from northern Alberta in 1990 with his wife Liz. “I’ve discovered that longevity at a church is a valuable thing,” says Tim, who co-pastors with Andreas Tabert. “People know me and trust me—this deep level of confidence takes time to develop.”

*“The intimacy of Westlock allows us and neighbouring churches to collaborate; not to mention, you run into people you know wherever you are!”*

The congregation, which sees around 180 people on an average Sunday, partners with nearby Bethel Bible Camp each year. The younger members of the church get to go as campers, while older youth and adults have the opportunity to volunteer. “Many children who go to summer camp become regular attendees at Westlock,” says Tim.

The church remains active in the community throughout the year as well. They collect boxes for Operation Christmas Child, offer an Awana Club attended by more than 100 kids/week, host Alpha courses, and hold community movie nights several times per year. The latest movie night filled Westlock’s auditorium—and only a third of the attendees were members of the church.

“Many youth that I get to work with will move away for school or job opportunities and not return,” says Tim. “It’s a drawback for us. But, it helps you to learn that a large part of ‘small town life’ is training people to join the greater church body.” Something must be working as Westlock prepares youth to serve the universal Church. This past year, of the 21 youth who graduated from high school and the Westlock youth group, 10 went to Bible College.

Though it may not be a booming metropolis, Tim loves life in Westlock. “The pace is slower, and the people are so friendly,” he says. “I truly feel that I’m called to be consistent where I am.”



Liz and Tim Gurnett. Tim pastors Westlock Bible Chapel in Westlock, Alberta.

## God at Work in Rural Manitoba

### Wayside Chapel, Grand Marais, Manitoba

BY COURTNEY VANROOTSELAAR

Wayside Gospel Chapel in Grand Marais, Manitoba is always seeking ways to reach out to its community. “Our mission is to go and make disciples of all nations,” says church elder, Chris Boyle. “We don’t need to cross an ocean to reach all nations. Our mission field is just down the road.”



Situated in a diverse rural area that includes two First Nations communities, many thriving young families, and a gated retirement community—Wayside tailors its outreach to meet the region’s unique needs. Rather than thinking of the community as made up of different groups, Chris calls it “O.N.E. (Our North East) Community” and says, “The Wayside community needs Jesus Christ.” Stepping out of the “old-fashioned

conservative church” mold, Wayside reaches out in fresh ways. They invite teenagers, including non-believers, from the local school to join their praise bands. They also partner with local social service agencies to offer a weekly play group for single parents and their kids. In addition, the church offers a Christian twelve-step program to help people recover from addictions while finding freedom in Christ.

“Jesus spread his message of hope [by meeting] people’s human needs, and in the process introduced them to a Saviour,” says Alex Cross, who recently completed his ministry after pastoring for 19 years at Wayside. As they respond to the needs of the community, Wayside ultimately hopes to show people Christ.

Being in a rural setting has its challenges. Wayside is currently searching for a pastor, but finding it difficult to draw candidates away from urban centres. Alex says, “It takes a lot of trusting in the Lord to be successful in rural ministry.”

The church continues to trust and to open its doors to the community. Alex says they invite people in, baggage and all, hoping to show that their church is a place for everyone, a place where someone looking into the sanctuary would exclaim, “Wow! Is that what church really looks like?” and would be met with an emphatic, “Yes! And you are welcome!” ■

# 2017 Annual Report

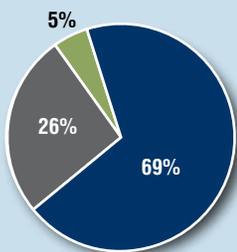
The VMC team is privileged to support the kingdom endeavours of such a vibrant network of churches. We were inspired as you followed the Spirit to share and embody the good news in your communities. Thanks to those who pray, give and “roll up their sleeves” in the pursuit of more & better churches. Lives have been rescued from darkness, homes healed and communities transformed by the power of the gospel. To God be the glory!

– Mike Stone/ED, VMC

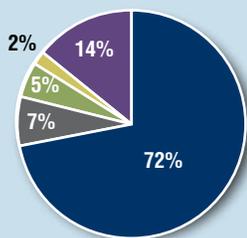
## Highlights from 2017:

- 190+ registered for Thinking Shrewdly (national consultation); 20% more than last year and second highest registration to date
- VMC played a catalytic role in planting 17 new churches (the most in 1 year); about half were among newcomers to Canada
- Nearly 60 church planters, potential planters and pastors of planting churches were inspired and equipped at the National Church Planting Congress in Montreal
- Through our Young Catalyst program, 11 young adults from across Canada, participated in spiritual formation that prepared them to launch future kingdom initiatives
- We assisted 4 young churches to obtain charitable status and provided 20 church plants with banking, accounting and receiving services
- Pastors in 14 VMC regional networks gathered a few times/year to share, pray, learn and partner in mission
- In our 25th year, we invited people to partner in God’s work through VMC during preaching visits at nearly a 100 churches and gatherings in 8 cities on a national promotional tour
- We consulted with leaders in 39 churches as they navigated difficult issues
- VMC helped expand Farsi Christian Ministries to strengthen mission among Persians in Canada
- We coached directors of 5 affinity/ethnic church networks as they continue to strategize on how to reach ethnic minorities in Canada
- A team of VMC leaders equipped and strengthened pastors in our sister network Vision Ministries Kenya during a conference in Kenya

### 2017 Revenue



### 2017 Expenses



## VMC Fund

### Revenue

- General contributions
- Conference, event fees and other
- Investment income (loss)

### Total VMC fund revenue

### Expenses

- Salaries and benefits
- Travel
- Leadership development and conferences
- Newsletter "Thinking Ahead"
- Administrative and office expenses

### Total VMC fund expenses

### Excess of revenue over expenses

	2017	2016
General contributions	384,039	461,787
Conference, event fees and other	146,946	108,305
Investment income (loss)	27,695	14,335
<b>Total VMC fund revenue</b>	<b>558,680</b>	<b>584,427</b>

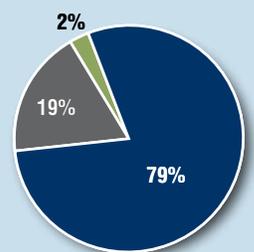
Salaries and benefits	484,746	401,953
Travel	48,966	50,059
Leadership development and conferences	31,214	28,049
Newsletter "Thinking Ahead"	12,575	12,223
Administrative and office expenses	92,162	55,277
<b>Total VMC fund expenses</b>	<b>669,663</b>	<b>547,561</b>

**-110,983\***      **36,866**

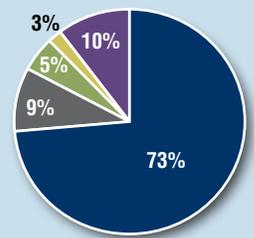
### Project Funds

VMC Church Plants	1,789,140	1,208,414
Vision Ministries Kenya	41,915	65,080
<b>Total VMC project funds disbursed</b>	<b>1,831,055</b>	<b>1,273,494</b>

### 2016 Revenue



### 2016 Expenses

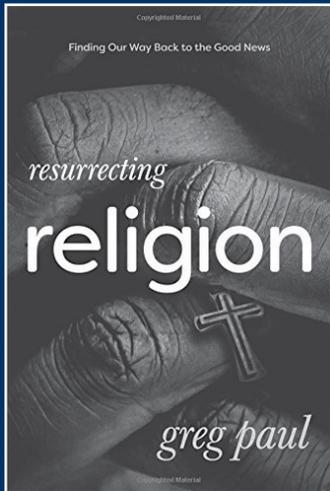


\*In 2017, expenses that exceeded revenue were covered by the gift of a church building which allowed us to finish our fiscal year in the black.

# NEWS & EVENTS

Greg Paul Pastor at Sanctuary Community in Toronto has just released a new book.

## Resurrecting Religion: Finding Our Way Back to the Good News



*"There's lots of bad religion out there. But the answer isn't no religion, it's true religion: living out publicly and communally what we say we believe privately and individually. True religion puts flesh on the bones of faith. Resurrecting Religion offers an inspiring, stretching vision for finding our way back to the good news of our faith."*

Award-winning author and long-time friend of VMC Greg Paul offers a vision for religion that is good for us and good for the world.

## THINKING SHREWDLY 2018 *Finding Our Voice, Proclaiming the Gospel*

A NATIONAL CONSULTATION FOR LEADERS AND CATALYSTS



FEATURED SPEAKER

## Alan Hirsch

Author, Consultant & Mission Strategist

This year, we ask the question: "What does it mean to share the Gospel in the Canadian context in 2018?" As we follow God into our neighbourhoods and networks, how might we pursue conversations about Jesus?

**April 17-18, 2018**

**9:00 am Tues. – 3:00 pm Wed.**  
(Registration from 8:00 – 9:00 am on Tues.)

**Creekside Church, Waterloo ON**

At our annual gathering, celebrate what God is doing across our network, country and world. Through stories, seminars, speakers and conversation we hope to equip pastors and ministry catalysts to help their church communities follow God into Mission.

Not only will we have a number of opportunities to hear from Alan Hirsch, we'll also engage the issue through a series of seminars and peer-learning forums.

### Seminar Presenters

**James Kelly**  
Faith conversations in the Tech Sector

**Ming Peng Gong**  
The Gospel for and from Canadian Newcomers

**Tim Fletcher**  
Speaking Good News to those suffering Trauma, Addiction & Mental Illness

**Murray Taylor**  
Helping Business Leaders be Salt and Light in the community

**Randy Hein**  
Finding Jesus at Art Galleries, Night Clubs and Slam Poetry Competitions

**David Cottrill**  
Christian Community Development and verbal witness

Special Early Bird Rates: Register by midnight on March 30: \$169 per person/ \$89 for any accompanying spouse \* Travel subsidies available.

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...cont'd from cover

not only because most people live in cities, but because Canada's major cities generate cultural changes that shape our nation and the world.

All cities are sources of culture, but some urban centres are even more influential than others.

A global or world city might be known for its economic activity, political power, research institutions, innovation, quality of life, arts and entertainment or other defining characteristics. It might have influence in one or several of these areas.

The Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC) recently ranked five Canadian cities among the world's influential—Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. If a

significant percentage of citizens in just one of these cities became followers of Jesus—film makers, professors, lobbyists, stock brokers, cabinet members and news reporters—imagine the influence that city could have on its region and the world.

Mai Hariu-Powell is the Executive Director of the New York Project, a ten-year joint initiative of Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church to see the body of Christ triple in New York City. Over the last three decades they have seen a rise in “gospel-centred” church attendance: from 1% (1989) to 3% (2009) to 5% (2014). Sensing that 15% could be a tipping point for the spiritual renewal of NYC, Mai and her team are praying audaciously for their city (she cites Chuck Colson who noticed that entire prisons were transformed when 15% of the inmate population accepted Christ). In collaboration with twelve denominations, they are working toward 250 new churches, 250 new leaders and 250 new church facilities.

As Christian leaders, pastors, and church planters in Canada we should be intrigued and inspired by the vision of the New York City project. Like the Apostle Paul, Mai and her team believe that the influence of the world's great cities can be harnessed for God's purposes—and they are working and praying to make it a reality.

Does this mean churches and Christian organizations should abandon suburbs, small towns and rural regions? Not at all.

While sharing the gospel in large urban centres is important, we can't neglect rural and suburban areas. From 2011-2016, “peripheral cities” (suburbs) that surround major urban cores in Canada grew at a faster rate (6.9%) than the central cities they orbit (5.8%). During that same period, rural regions in Canada grew by 1.1%, not huge growth but a net increase in rural population. Percentages aside, there are now more Canadians living in suburbs and rural regions who need the good news of Jesus.

The Church in Canada could benefit from a variety of structures and strategies that are tailored for urban, suburban and rural contexts and from a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship between each of these settings. With this in mind, we will profile and celebrate the missional pursuits of churches from each context in this year's issues of *Thinking Ahead*. The church profiles in this issue are focused on ministry in rural areas. In May, we will highlight churches working in suburbs, and the fall edition of *Thinking Ahead* will spotlight some thriving city churches.

We've been given a shared mandate to bear witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This should inspire each of us to pray for strategic gospel presence in our great cities, whether you live in Surrey, worship in Westlock or pastor a church on Rue Sherbrooke. ■

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Get a free e-book by Tim Keller called *Why God Made Cities* at [www.redeemercitytocity.com](http://www.redeemercitytocity.com)

Globalization and World Cities Network [www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc)

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