



ACTS Executive Director Jeff Golby at one of the thousands of tap stands ACTS has built across the southwest corner of Uganda. Each Tap Stand delivers a lifetime of clean safe water to about 175 children, women and men. Jeff is a young leader who is a friend of VMC. Read more about Jeff on page 7.

THINKING AHEAD

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The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

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Listening to Young Voices

BY MIKE STONE

This fall, Protestant Christians around the world will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—a religious revolution that shaped the contours of modern culture in the West. Though exhibitions, festivals and concerts have been celebrating this epic event for the last decade, October 31st 2017 marks

500 years since Martin Luther published his ninety-five theses. Luther issued his protest against the Church’s practice of selling indulgences when he was only thirty-three years old.

John Calvin was even younger when he made his indelible contribution to the Reformation. At twenty-six years of age, Calvin published his first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This work was not only an apologia or defense of his faith but also an exposition of the doctrine of the Reformers.

The Plymouth Brethren—a heritage many of us share—was a movement catalyzed by young adults. By his late twenties, John Nelson Darby was influencing this embryonic movement with his notion that the Spirit could speak through any member of the church, not just clergy. Anthony Norris Groves was in

his early thirties when he withdrew from the Anglican Communion to fellowship with the Brethren, convinced that the practices of the New Testament church should be used as a model for every age and culture.

At age twenty-six, George Müller was preaching and pastoring at Bethesda Chapel. In his late twenties, he founded five day schools—two for boys and three for girls—without any government assistance. At age thirty-one, with the help of his wife, he provided accommodation for thirty orphaned girls in the couple’s rented home in Bristol. Over his life time he provided the basic necessities of life for more than ten thousand orphaned children.

When Paul said to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you

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MORE FLOURISHING EFFECTIVE CHURCHES

Church Planting in Canada: The Slow Game



BY DAVID ANNUNZIELLO

When we planted our first church, we had a mantra that proved to be crazy-making: “200 in 2 years.” We prayed that mantra and put it on our

T-shirts. In two years we didn’t have 200 people.

My wife Barb said, “Dave, can’t you just enjoy what we have?” We had people coming to faith, close relationships, good people, vital spiritual growth and a vibrant culture. But I couldn’t enjoy it.

After that experience, I declared that

Church planting in Canada is less like planting grass and more like planting fruit trees.

I would never plant a church again. But here I am, over three years into my next church plant.

This time we started our church with a better mantra, “Self-sustaining in five years”. We are riding a denominational grant, started with a core group to die for, have created a beautiful church culture, some are coming to faith and everything is pretty great. But I still think a five-year window, is crazy-making.

I read this the other day in *Church as a Missional Movement*, “Most church planters over-estimate what they can accomplish in one year, and underestimate what they can accomplish in ten.” In Canada, it would be wiser and

more productive if we planted churches with a ten-year window in mind.

I have a bad habit of reading American church plant books—they are often the dark sources of said mantras. Fortunately, I have also read all of the Canadian Church Plant books. There are only two that I know of, plus one documentary, and a study by Ed Stetzer (*The State of Church Planting in Canada Research Report*).

These sources point to a different reality in this country. In 2015 at the Church Planting Congress in Montreal, Ed Stetzer reported that Canadian church plants grow 30% slower than American ones and that by year three average attendance is 61. It’s a far slower, smaller but interesting kind of work. No longer benefitting from a population that goes to church by default, ground level Canadian plants must work the soil or wither.

Church planting in Canada is less like planting grass and more like planting fruit trees.

When you plant a fruit tree in your backyard, you water it, fertilize it, speak nicely to it, and then what? Slowly it shows signs of life. No fruit, but signs of life—until one day a baby apple appears. It only took five years! But if the tree is healthy, and tended well, in ten years that tree will be bursting with fruit.

We desperately need a fresh new church culture to rise up as the old one fades into



a warm memory. The old church culture had money, buildings, programs and lots of order. Clergy had respected positions and a salary. Cathedrals towered over cities and towns and marked important junctions in the country.

The good news is that God seems to be birthing a new kind of Christian, a new kind of Christianity, and a new kind of church. A new movement of the Spirit is springing up. God seems to be saying to us, “Don’t you see it? Can’t you perceive it? Springs in the desert, rivers in the wasteland. Forget the past, I am doing a new thing.” (Isaiah 43)

But we have to be patient.

Instead of stress-inducing mantras, let me suggest a more realistic statement. The Spirit is able to birth a beautiful, fresh expression of the kingdom of God in your locality. It may never pay all the bills or have its own bricks and mortar. Attendance may never reach three digits. BUT it will be life, health, peace, community, and spirit to a whole new generation. ■

David Annunziello is the church planting pastor at Maitland Street Church in London, Ontario.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

are young” (1 Tim 4:12), he was likely exhorting his protégé to live the kind of life that would generate respect among older believers. Paul issued his challenge because he saw potential in Timothy. It’s difficult to be certain about Timothy’s age but Paul’s terminology suggests that he may have been in his thirties. Timothy provided leadership for a large congregation, in a city hostile to the faith, in a culture that respected age over youth—a tough assignment for any thirty year-old.

Reformers and revolutionaries are, for the most part, young. That’s not to say that those of us in the second half of life can’t make a significant contribution, but just an acknowledgment that the passion, imagination and discontent of youth often provide the spark for great social change. Church history suggests that God delights in working with the angst and energy of emerging generations to bring about transcendent transformation in this world—both sacred and secular. Jesus and the disciples were also young men.

Over the last several issues of *Thinking Ahead*, we have made



Photo credit: Michael Swan

Seeing Jesus on The Whalley Strip

BY BENTON ROBERTSON

“Continue in school, I know you will make it,” James, a refugee from South Sudan, said to me. Having left his country behind nearly twenty years ago, James worked hard in labour jobs all over Canada, keeping his faith in God the whole time. But now James faces difficulties that leave him homeless, living in a tent on the Whalley strip in Surrey, BC with others who struggle with mental health and addiction.

Having grown up in the church with two strong Christian parents I have seen God work as those around me served and loved one another. I continue to try to seek and follow God on a daily basis, but this has become more difficult as I have gotten older and have seen many of my friends and family members turn away from the church. Despite this, interactions with people like James and others on the Whalley strip continually remind me of the grace God has for me and allows me to see tangibly how he works in people’s lives.

In this southern BC city, a new church plant headed up by David Morgan, is slowly growing as God continues to work in and through those who are a part of the church plant

(myself included) and those living on the strip. It has been amazing to see how God continues to use those living on the Whalley strip in my life, and the lives of the church plant team. The joy, strength and love those living on the strip exude, despite being homeless and having many deep personal struggles, is humbling and inspiring.

Having the opportunity to work with a church plant in Fresno, California called Neighborhood Church, as well as the church plant in Whalley has truly shown me that my faith and relationship with Jesus is meant to be more than just personal feelings and ideologies that I sometimes share with friends. Following Jesus is a way of life in which, despite my own failures, God is able to use me to bring his kingdom to my interactions with others, the institutions I am a part of and all other facets of life around me.

Benton Robertson is a student at the University of British Columbia. He is also a volunteer leader at Eden Whalley—a church plant in densely populated Whalley neighbourhood of Surrey, BC.

Watch a short video about Eden Whalley bit.ly/2kHuaM6 ■

a concerted effort to include articles written by or about young influencers within the VMC network. What might be understood as just another sign of the prevailing infatuation with youth culture is rather an invitation to hear those who will soon be the main shapers of our world—if they are not such already.

The task of listening to our teens, twenties and thirty-somethings is not an onerous obligation but rather a life-giving opportunity to discern the future God has for his people. If we turn a deaf ear, it is at our own peril. If, however, we seek understanding, we will discover more than a generation’s bias; we will find signs of what the Spirit is about to do next. ■



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Perspectives on Renewing the Church in Canada

Why I'm Hopeful for the Canadian Church

BY BEN PELTZ

When I was eight, my father left my mother for another woman. He lost many friends, gave up on pastoring, and became hostile to Christianity for an extended season. My mom retained her faith however, and surrounded me and my four younger siblings with Christian mentors who were pivotal in our recovery from my dad's decision.

I'm still engaged with the Church, because of the way that Christians have loved me. Although I've encountered legalism and dry religiosity in the Church, that hasn't been the norm for me. Christians, including my mom and mentors, have modeled Christ's love and provided a great deal of support throughout the various seasons of my life and faith.

I also find Christianity compelling as a worldview, and have benefitted greatly from my theological studies at Tyndale University College and Seminary and on my own.

The third reason I'm still connected to the Church, is that I've had a number of personal encounters with God that reinforce the understanding I've gained from my Christian community and studies. I find listening prayer and Scripture memorization particularly life-giving. God's also provided for me and my family my whole life, first as I grew up with a single mother of five children and now, as I depend on faith support for a decent portion of my income. In

ministry, I have the privilege of spending a lot of one-on-one time with people and I regularly get to see how God is working to transform their lives as well.

In short, I'm still engaged because I can't not be—God and Christians have been too faithful in pursuing me for me to slide away!

As I work with other young adults and youth, I'm encouraged by how seriously many of them take their faith. They're not satisfied with stock answers and nominal religion. They want to understand why Christianity is worth believing and how it affects their whole lives, including their secular careers and political engagement. Due to their constant exposure to secular thought and alternate religions, many young people are hesitant to say that they're 100% certain about their beliefs. Despite this, their commitment to Christ and his teachings remains strong—often stronger than older Christians who don't seem to have any intellectual doubts.

I'm also encouraged by the thirst I see for transformation among the First Nations youth I work with. I believe that we'll see a wave of First Nations Christians emerging as leaders in the next few decades. The unique perspective they offer will be a healthy challenge to Canadian churches.

More broadly, I'm encouraged by an increased focus on missional theology, robust spirituality, cross-cultural engagement, social justice, and cooperation across traditional divides.



29-year-old Ben Peltz is a part-time Care and Discipleship Pastor with Auburn Bible Chapel. He also leads a faith-supported campus ministry at Trent University and is the VMC Regional Representative for the Central-East Ontario region, which includes churches in Bancroft, Peterborough, Newcastle, Belleville region, and Ottawa.

Even in my relatively short lifetime, I'm aware that these topics are getting more attention among Canadian evangelicals. I think that it's necessary to emphasize these things if we want to influence our culture, especially millennials and Generation Z.

I want to thank the many older Christians who have invested in me and my generation. It's because of the battles you've fought in your personal and public lives that we are able to trust and serve God today.

Getting Our Mission and Purpose Right



32-year-old Jake Chitouras is the pastor at Colby Drive Bible Chapel in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. He is also VMC's Moving the Mission Forward Atlantic Rep.

BY JAKE CHITOURAS

For the first twenty years of my life if it had been my choice, I would have chosen anything other than going to church. But when I pursued music at Briercrest College, everything changed. Thanks to some wonderful professors, the Bible and God's redemption of the world were opened up to me in ways I had completely missed in my younger years. I was also challenged to love the Church and look for ways to serve.

I am still part of the Church because I see her potential to be who God has called her to be—the community through whom his power and blessing are abundantly poured into the world. However, I still feel like a kid on a sports team bench who is

working hard and growing lots but isn't quite ready for the game. I am enormously passionate about ministry, but feel under-equipped to bring to fruition what is being formed in my heart. I think the Lord is preparing me to eventually bring those passions to fruition.

It's no coincidence that almost everyone in the evangelical church is talking about mission and discipleship. In earlier decades, the focus was on getting your doctrine right, and while that is still important, the greater focus now seems to be getting the mission and purpose of why we exist right. This excites me, as God seems to be stirring his church to a mission and call that was unintentionally replaced with an emphasis on simply getting people saved.

God is Bringing Disparate Groups Together

BY JOHNSON HSU

I grew up in a very agnostic/atheist/syncretistic family. My family would try anything if they thought there was an advantage in it! We immigrated to Canada when I was 3. We started attending church after being invited by Christian evangelists who visited us in our home, but we didn't attend for very long. Those first impressions of the church were not very good.

It took until my mid-30s before I accepted Christ, and it took revelations of God's reality to finally speak to me.

I am still engaged in church because of those lived experiences of God's reality and truth. I see God today in the words of Scripture, in the daily deeds of His body the Church, in the way He provides for my family, and in small glimmers of light in the darkness of the world.

I think God is renewing and reforming the Church in Canada by bringing previously disparate groups together in unity. Some of this rests in the linking of ethnic churches with older established

churches, not just in rental agreements, but in blessing one another with their different giftings. The increased dialogue and cooperation between denominations is another sign, evidenced strongly in missionary work.

I also see unexpected movements of the Holy Spirit within traditionally conservative churches, like the Chinese church. God is bringing all the nations of the world to Canada so that we can witness to those who may have barriers to the gospel in their home nations, and this witness involves more than our words. It includes experiences of God and His reality.

God is also reforming the church as it becomes more difficult to be a Christian in Canada. Part of that renewal involves our separation from the world through persecution, as we become more distinctly a light in and to the world.

As to my family, both of my parents left behind their syncretism and chose to follow Christ. In a sense, we are the fruit of some of these movements. ■



51-year-old Johnson Hsu is an English Pastor, Youth Pastor, and Youth Ministry Coordinator within the Toronto China Bible Church network of churches. He is also a Chaplain at the University of Toronto. He connects with the VMC family as part of the Greater Toronto Regional Network that meets at Don Valley Bible Chapel.

NEWS & EVENTS

MINISTRY SNAPSHOTS FROM KENYA AND RWANDA

July 9, 2017, Nairobi, Kenya: Today, each of us preached in a different church. I spoke at Word of Grace church (pictured right) a new, lively and impressive congregation that started just 16 months ago. Already they have their own land, a modest building and a youthful congregation of about 60 people. While I was there, they had a fund raiser which included about a 2 hour “dance off”. They certainly were having fun while they gave to pay off the remaining debt on their land. Perhaps an idea for some of you church leaders in Canada? –Gord Martin



In July, four leaders from the Vision Ministries Canada network travelled to Kenya and Rwanda to do some teaching and to work with our partner network Vision Ministries Kenya.

VMC team members Gord Martin, Doug Loveday, Ron Seabrooke, Evans Makatia, David Cottrill alongside Vision Ministries Kenya director Ishmael Ochieng and his wife, Molline.

HOLD THE DATE!



**VMC's National Consultation
Thinking Shrewdly**
Creekside Church • Waterloo, ON
April 17-18, 2018

In addition to a great lineup of contributors from our network, Australian missiologist and author, Alan Hirsch, will be our featured speaker. Stay tuned for registration details.

July 11, 2017: The daily meetings with the Vision Ministries Kenya board have all gone very well. It was the most direct and earnest interaction we've had with them. Our partnership took a slightly different turn than I'd expected but in a good way. So much to process as a result of this trip! Thank you for your prayers! –Gord Martin



July 13, 2017, Nairobi, Kenya: Yesterday morning after I finished speaking to 150+ people in Nairobi, I asked if there were questions. They were quiet, then one man said, “This is touching me so deeply, I don't have questions but I have done so much wrong, I really need time.” I invited them all to kneel and pray. They all prayed out loud at one time, confessing and repenting—it was a very moving moment! –Gord Martin

See more photos and blog posts about this trip at vision-ministries.org/story

Following God's Lead in Work and Church Life

PROFILE: JEFF GOLBY

BY HANNAH AGLER

Since his life-changing decision to follow Jesus at camp as a child, Jeff Golby has striven to live in a way that honours the Lord. "The community that exists in summer camps had a dramatic impact on me," he says. As a camper and staff person at his childhood camp on Anvil Island in British Columbia, Jeff has seen how values of Christian community are paramount to living a full life.

Jeff now works for ACTS, an organization that provides clean drinking water for Ugandans. "As I prepared to transition out of my previous job, I had a very clear sense that this organization was the next stage for me," says Jeff. "I've been blessed in being given clear direction in my working life." Jeff has found his niche in start-up business environments and, more specifically, coming alongside companies during seasons of transition. "They're definitely my sweet spot," he confirms.

His role with ACTS is no exception. This 44-year old organization has been providing clean, safe water to Ugandans for over 20 years, with almost all their funding coming from the federal government. Recently, however, the government announced that they would be halting funding for Uganda.

Jeff, who stepped naturally into the CEO position at ACTS, is now leading the charge in reimagining the organization with 100% financial support from donors. "We haven't had to focus on



Jeff Golby with his wife Katelyn and son Evan (now joined by baby Brooklyn). Jeff chairs the elder board at Emmanuel Christian Community in Richmond, BC. He also directs an organization called ACTS, which provides clean drinking water in Uganda.

finding a reliable funding source for the last number of years; God has done this for ACTS," says Jeff. "Now, we wait with anticipation to see what God has planned for the next 25 years."

"I do what I see the Father doing," says Jeff. This desire extends far beyond his work. As the Chair of the elder team at his home church, Emmanuel Christian Community (ECC), in Richmond, BC, Jeff is leading the church through a season of intentional transitional ministry. "It's allowing us to refocus and start to think through some big ideas, like our structure,

our membership, and our finances." ECC is learning to lean in and come up with solutions as a vibrant and faithful community.

In a time where many Canadians are walking away from the church, Jeff remains very much engaged. For him, the Church is more than a place in which to obtain information. For someone whose foundation of faith began with a strong sense of Christian relationship, he sees the Church as an extension of his family. "We want to work together to see how the Holy Spirit is working among us, our neighbourhood, and our community." ■

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Faithful Witness: Recovering a Lost Past and Adapting for an Emerging Future

BY MIKE STONE

Martin Luther's life and ministry remind us that to be faithful to the Christian faith we often need to recover something from an earlier era. Calling for a return to the authority of Scripture, Luther detailed how selling indulgences (payment for exemption from punishment for certain sins) undermined God's free gift of grace.

With a similar desire for reform, in the early 1800s the founders of the Plymouth Brethren tried to recapture the simplicity of the first-century church. They boldly challenged the prevailing division between denominations (sectarianism) and an over-reliance on professional clergy (clericalism) of the day.

So what could it look like for churches to remain true to the gospel in our time and place?

"With one eye on the horizon ahead and the other on the rear-view mirror, the church is both forming and reforming—simultaneously missional and confessional."

Reform may be the default expression of gospel fidelity in many congregations but faithful witness also requires each congregation to contextualize its ministry for an ever-changing world. With one eye on the horizon ahead and the other on the rear-view mirror, the church is both forming and reforming—simultaneously missional and confessional.

The need for contextualized ministry is grounded in the incarnation of Jesus.

Speaking about this future-oriented faithfulness, Craig Van Gelder says, "In order to be good news, the gospel must make sense to those who are hearing it. It must reflect the promise that is embedded in the Incarnation: that the Word becomes flesh. In becoming flesh, Jesus Christ as the living Word became understandable, knowable and accessible."¹ Each local church is responsible for translating the gospel so that it speaks to its own situation without surrendering the authority that comes from God's universal truth.

In his book, *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, Van Gelder suggests that missional congregations seeking faithful witness:

1. Know how to read their context—

Congregations examine natural and built environments, unique rituals, patterns of life, and the shared stories of those who live in a place in order to discern what God is doing and what he intends to do in that setting.

2. **Anticipate new insights into the gospel**—Translating God's message for a culture often opens fresh understanding of its meaning. When the gospel was adapted for Greek culture in Antioch (Acts 15) new Christians were no longer required to embrace Judaism to follow Jesus.

3. **Anticipate reciprocity**—When the gospel is introduced in a new situation, those who receive it are transformed. But the Spirit also uses the encounter to further change those who shared the message. The story in Acts 10 is as much about the ongoing transformation of Peter as it is the beginning of a journey with Christ for Cornelius.

4. Know that ministry must be

customized—No program will work in all contexts. While Scripture should inform all program design, we need guidance from the Spirit to do more than copy what the New Testament church did in its time and place. Similarly, programs developed by other churches may not work in your context. Each congregation should innovate or adapt practices to meet needs for their own situation. Ministry in a subsidized housing complex should look vastly different than it does in a gated community.

5. Acknowledge that theology depends on perspective—

A congregation's theology is usually shaped by earlier confessions that were influenced by the culture in which they developed. While every theological belief should correspond to the larger reality of God's truth, a congregation must learn how to confess the faith for its own context. Biblical themes and historical insights must be interpreted for the people and place to which a church is called.

6. Understand that organizational structure needs to be flexible—

While the structure of congregational life is shaped by biblical principles, it should also be influenced by the best organizational practices from its context. In Acts 6, the church borrowed organizational wisdom from contemporary Jewish culture when they appointed men to take care of the needs of Greek widows.

In celebrating the Reformation's 500th anniversary, we might conclude that faithful witness is best pursued through recovering and restoring the past. But fidelity to historic faith also calls for a nimble responsiveness to emerging contexts so that the good news can be embodied and proclaimed for every people, place and era. ■

¹ Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 33.

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