

THINKING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries



Remember, Ruminare and Revitalize

BY MIKE STONE

Three great anniversaries occur in 2017 and NO—the Maples Leafs turning 100 isn't one of them. It's been 500 years since Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation and 150 since MacDonal, Brown and Cartier orchestrated Canada's Confederation. It's also been 25 years since Vision Ministries Canada began its mission to incite greater evangelism and church planting.

Each edition of Thinking Ahead in 2017 will highlight and explore the implications of one of these three great anniversaries. We will be asking: How have these movements shaped us in the past? How might the kingdom refine their ongoing influence in the present? And how do they inform faithfulness to the gospel for the future? The events of 25, 150 and 500 years ago have forged present identity but also hint at future possibility.

500 Years Since the Reformation: Gratitude and Regret

Whether the Protestant Reformation began when Martin Luther sent his letter to the Bishop of Mainz in October 1517 or when he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, Germany, the circulation of his ideas ignited a renewal in the church. Five hundred years later, our faith continues to be nurtured by a legacy that emphasizes faith alone for salvation apart from works and scripture alone as the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

Unfortunately, not all by-products of the Reformation were positive, including



the division and sectarianism that emerged. Within the Protestant tradition, denominations now number in the tens of thousands. VMC's own heritage, the Plymouth Brethren, is familiar with this tendency to splinter.

Over its twenty-five year history, VMC has worked hard to facilitate missional collaboration among its own network of churches but has also reached across tribal lines to work with other denominations. VMC has cooperated with the AGC, the Mennonite Brethren, Salvation Army, Baptist groups and others on church planting initiatives. Perhaps this is a sign that the Spirit is empowering God's people to overcome a dark side of the Reformation. As we celebrate the winds of renewal that God blew across his Church five hundred years ago, let's pursue a fresh reform—a Church envisioned in Jesus' prayer, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ... that they may be brought to complete unity" (John 17:21, 23).

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25 Years of Church Networking

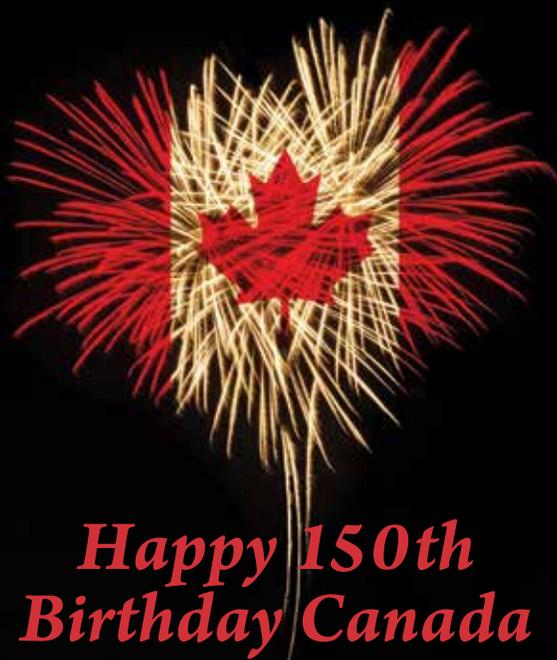
We've inherited an inspiring legacy of interdependence from New Testament churches. There is evidence of warm relationships between early congregations and their key influencers (I Cor. 16:19).

Paul's commendation of Phoebe hints at the practice of sharing personnel (Rom. 16:1-2). Circulating his theologically rich letters allowed churches to learn from a common body of teaching (Col. 4:16). Financial resources were shared to provide for churches in need (I Cor. 16:2-3). Even some decisions pertaining to belief and practice emerged from deliberation among leaders from different congregations (Acts 15:1-35). Without Facebook or cheap airfares, first century churches enjoyed reciprocity despite

significant geographical and cultural barriers.

For twenty-five years, VMC has encouraged faithfulness to this legacy among the churches within its sphere of influence. Our journey of experimentation has birthed a network of congregations that honours local autonomy but calls for collaboration with skin in the game. VMC churches and their leaders have benefitted from sharing venues, new insights, skilled personnel, innovative practices, financial resources, and the common pursuit of kingdom impact.

While founding luminaries should find satisfaction in their Spirit-empowered achievements, faithfulness for the next twenty-five years will require a sacrificial resolve to see fellow churches flourish in their gospel endeavours.



Happy 150th Birthday Canada

We don't host birthday parties primarily to celebrate the duration of someone's existence, but rather to give thanks for the ways in which they enrich our lives. Similarly, Canada's sesquicentennial is an opportunity to give thanks to the One who blessed us with our particular way of life. The world may know us for hockey, poutine or Ryan Gosling but Canadian identity is rooted deeply in values that many nations envy.

In Canada, citizens enjoy freedom of thought, speech, religion and peaceful assembly. We believe in equality—protecting the rights of individuals and respecting all, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. Our country is a cultural mosaic, not a melting pot—a society that celebrates diversity, embraces difference and welcomes strangers. As a land of peace, we frown on violent measures for resolving conflict and have often been an agent of reconciliation on the international stage.

In his address to the Athenians, Paul said, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us." If I read Paul correctly, God might be instrumental in the formation of nations to cultivate human desire for Him.

All that's noble and beautiful about our way of life provides an occasion for conversation about the Ultimate Source. As we celebrate Canada's sesquicentennial, let's find meaningful ways to discuss and embody those national values that best point to the wonder and reality of God.



FaithTech: Combining Faith & Technology

BY JAMES KELLY

In Canada, more than 4,000 people a month search this phrase in Google, “How to Kill Yourself?” Sadly, the top search result is “7 Easiest Painless Ways of Killing Yourself Quickest.” The fifth result is a Youtube video that shows you how. It’s devastating.

A team of four people (two Software Developers, a Communications Manager and a Physiotherapist) purchased the domain www.howtokillyourself.org and are building a site to replace the current top result with, “You’re Not Alone.” It has resources, videos, articles and eventually will direct people to speak with someone.

Herein lies a wonderful example of what God is doing in a movement called FaithTech.

FaithTech brings together Christians with a heart for Jesus, and a mind for technology to facilitate Kingdom-minded collaboration with tangible results. We want to bridge the gap between faith and technology in our churches and cities.

The idea for FaithTech was sparked in October 2015 when I heard someone say, “In the midst of devastation, there is an opportunity for innovation.” At that moment, two of my worlds collided.

My wife and I intentionally moved into a neighbourhood most people were trying to leave. It has a reputation for drugs, violence, abuse, prostitution, shootings, and suicides. And then I realized: we live in Waterloo region, one of the fastest growing tech ecosystems in the world! I knew there had to be a way to leverage this creative community to find innovative ways help my neighbours.

We discovered there were two distinct groups: people in ministry working on issues that tech could help to solve and Christians in tech struggling to find their place in the church. We brought those groups together.



James Kelly, Founder of FaithTech, speaking to 97 people working in tech or ministry gathered in Waterloo, ON January 31st, 2017.

At our first event in April 2016, 35 people gathered at a coffee shop. At each table sat someone in church or non-profit ministry, a tech creator and a tech visionary. It was electrifying as we considered the possibilities of combining faith and technology.

Following that, we had three more conversation nights, an event with TED-style Innovation Talks, a weekend-long hackathon, and launched Faith@Work, a program gathering Christians at their workplace. Non-Christians and skeptics are starting to show up to see what it’s all about.

Sensing a strong calling, I quit my steady business job in October 2016 to launch FaithTech full-time. When considering the change, I drew up a plan and talked it over with Mike Stone, who graciously invited us to join the VMC network.

I truly feel God is just getting started with FaithTech.

To learn more about FaithTech, visit FaithTech.ca or email james@faithtech.ca

DONATE in 5 seconds with 2 texts, and 3 characters

The Text to Tithe giving platform, developed by James Kelly, helps churches receive gifts by cell phone. “After an initial set-up that takes less than two minutes, all you have to do is text the amount you’d like to donate to a specified phone number and press send,” says James. After accepting donations by text, a church in Guelph saw gift increase by almost 20%.

www.texttotithe.com



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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 tax receipt.

VMC is committed to financial accountability; all accounts are audited by an independent auditing firm; financial statements available on request.

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More than any other reason, Vision Ministries Canada came together 25 years ago for the purpose of evangelism through church planting.

Nowadays, we understand the importance of more flourishing effective churches. But originally, we helped churches be healthier and grow, built a partnering network, and did leadership development because it provided the raw materials for church planting—"pregnant mother" churches, prayer support, planters, core groups, and funds.

Church planting was and continues to be a primary focus for VMC. The founders (Gord Martin and friends), and the people who followed them, were captured by the vision of Vision – to see more churches in Canada. We're still convinced, that evangelism, outreach, and expansion of God's kingdom results in thriving local churches, and vice versa.

We approach planting with a few strong principles:

Scan and support – We keep our eyes open, and ask our friends to keep their eyes open. Whenever we hear of a little green shoot of a possible plant that could fit our ministry values, our beliefs, and understanding of the mission of the Church, we start a conversation and hope it leads to watering and fertilizing.

Partner – We believe planting works when people work together. Nearly 20% of the start-ups we've been part of in the last quarter century, have

been with other denominations or networks. As good as that is, recently we've learned how to work more closely with churches in the VMC network. Since we began talking about "moving the mission forward" and assisting small groups of churches to plant cooperatively, we've helped to start 2.5 times more churches/year than previously.

Try anything – We think all kinds of things are "equivalent" to planting, and we try to help them come to be. This includes sub congregations of established churches (on and off-site), churches for new Canadians, small less-formal "missional communities", and even independent new churches. Or anything else you can think of. New buildings, and significant growth in existing churches are also equivalent to planting – but we keep track of those separately.

How Vision helps new churches

Discernment and assessment using our Vision to Reality process; which includes thinking, praying, and talking.

Coaching, including strategic, spiritual/whole life, spouse, peer learning team, etc.

Support Services, such as charitable receipting, a bank account in the name of the new work, online accounting, insurance, marriage licensing, access to inexpensive funds for buildings, etc.

Funding, mostly "bare bones".

BY THE NUMBERS

How has God blessed VMC's church planting focus over the past 25 years?

- VMC has come alongside/planted 98 churches in 8 provinces, plus one in the US.
- 84% are still functioning local churches of all sizes, generally healthy and growing; some are primarily associated with a partnering denomination.
- Church plants are distributed regionally approximately based on Canadian population, with one noticeable glitch: only 5% were planted in Quebec (23% of Canada's population lives in Quebec). More prayer and work needed in la belle province.
- With a six-year lead on the rest of the country, extra planting occurred in Ontario

Average new initiatives/annum:

1992 through 1998 (7 years):
1.5 churches/year

1999 through 2005 (7 years):
3 churches/year

2006 through 2013 (8 years):
4.5 churches/year

2014 through 2016 (3 years):
12 churches/year

Once in a while we sit back and are astonished at what the Lord has done.

But then another green shoot catches our eyes! ■





Paul is a well-balanced, good humoured man who loves God and loves people. He continues to be a good friend and mentor.

—VMC Founder Gord Martin

Paul Fletcher Retires from VMC

BY SANDRA REIMER

At the end of December 2016, Paul Fletcher decided it was finally time to slow down, and so has retired from formal involvement with Vision Ministries Canada.

Paul was one of only a handful of full-time Brethren pastors, when he accepted a call from Simcoe Gospel Chapel in 1972. From 1994 until his retirement in 2003 Paul pastored at Woodside Bible Fellowship in Elmira, Ontario.

Never one to eat the bread of idleness, each week Paul preached twice on Sundays and taught on Wednesday evenings. When he was not at his home church, Paul preached elsewhere. “I generally spoke 50 Sundays in the year,” says Paul. He also did a Sunday morning radio program for many years. A “storyteller” who preaches in an expository style through a book of the Bible, Paul says Mark and Ephesians are tied as his favourite biblical books.

While he pastored, Paul was also involved in other ministries. Paul taught a course at Kawartha Lakes Bible School for ten years, served on half a dozen Mission Boards, and led Bible Land tours for

years. He directed Youth for Christ for six years and ministered at Joy Bible Camp for 35 summers. “I had Mike Stone [VMC director] in camp when he was a very bad teenager. We weren’t sure whether to drown him or send him home,” says Paul with a twinkle in his eye. Later, Mike was Paul’s associate pastor at Simcoe Gospel Chapel.

Paul also helped to catalyze Vision Ministries Canada. Back in the late 1980s Paul was involved with Interest Ministries in the US. They suggested that he take a course in church consulting at Fuller Seminary. After taking the course, Paul consulted with a number of churches in both the U.S. and Canada. “Interest Ministries recognized that there was a good deal of networking happening [in Canada], and the heart of it was in our area [Waterloo Region of Ontario] with Gord Martin, Dave McClurkin, Dave Booker and myself,” says Paul. They suggested that the network be formalized. “After the Lord worked in our lives through different events and people, this dream came to fruition. All of us recommended Gord for the leadership of this new ministry.”

Paul was one of VMC’s first board members and later joined the staff after he retired from pastoral ministry. As a veteran pastor, he consulted in difficult situations. He also took on the role of interim pastor in a dozen churches. “It was gratifying to see places in trouble settle down and find a pastor.” Paul recalls a country church in Ontario where all the leaders had resigned. “They weren’t sure where to go next. We had the joy of seeing a new leader come.”

Undoubtedly, Paul has positively impacted hundreds of people including many leaders. “Paul is a well-balanced, good humoured man who loves God and loves people,” says VMC Founder Gord Martin. He adds, “Paul has been an example to me and continues to be a good friend and mentor. Whenever I need to talk with someone about something prickly, I will call Paul.”

Paul and his wife Dorothy have four children, 15 grandchildren, and even some great grandchildren. ■

VMC ANNUAL REPORT 2016 Highlights

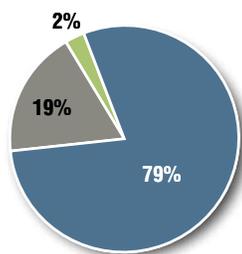
This year we witnessed greater collaboration among churches, an increase in churches formally partnering with us and a deeper affirmation of VMC's "apostolic-like" role among network churches.

- People continue to come to faith as churches find fresh ways to declare and embody the gospel.
- Nearly 160 registered for Thinking Shrewdly (national consultation), more than doubling from the year before and representing the second largest national gathering to date.
- 11 new churches were planted—several with other networks and denominations.
- The MMF National partnership held a retreat to review progress since inception and made modifications for future impact. This partnership supported five planting initiatives in 2016.
- 2 MMF regional networks were added, increasing the number from 12 to 14 regions.
- 5 affinity/ethnic networks were strengthened as network leaders were coached in vision formation and strategic planning.
- A team of VMC leaders traveled to Kenya to strengthen our sister network—VMK (Kenya). Leaders from neighbouring countries Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Southern Sudan were inspired through attending a conference we sponsored and participated in.
- A new young leader's development program was designed with the aim to mobilize missional catalysts and kingdom entrepreneurs.
- VMC initiated a gathering of leaders from VMC-like networks in other countries to share best practices, strengthen networks and incite greater inter-church collaboration.
- For the fifth year in a row, VMC ended our fiscal year and calendar year in the black.
- After a review, the Canadian Council of Christian Charities renewed VMC's Seal of Accountability.

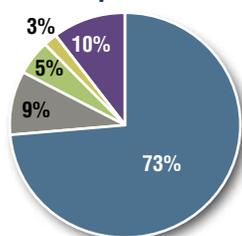
Thank you for your time, prayer and financial support that enables VMC to inspire leaders, stimulate congregational vitality, plant new churches and strengthen our partnering network. Together, we have seen lives transformed, relationships healed and communities restored by the power of the Good News! ■

2016

Revenue



Expenses



VMC Fund

Revenue

- General contributions
- Conference, event fees and other
- Investment income

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

Project Funds

VMC Church Plants	1,208,414	1,107,600
Vision Ministries Kenya	65,080	50,694
Total VMC project funds disbursed	1,273,494	1,158,294

Audited, Year Ended June 30, 2016

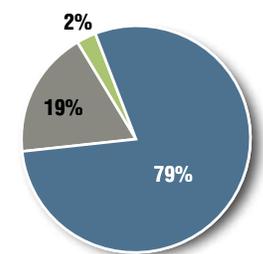
	2016	2015
General contributions	461,787	362,197
Conference, event fees and other	108,305	84,187
Investment income	14,335	9,322
Total VMC fund revenue	584,427	455,706

Salaries and benefits	401,953	318,146
Travel	50,059	20,905
Leadership development and conferences	28,049	21,885
Newsletter "Thinking Ahead"	12,223	12,061
Administrative and office expenses	55,277	57,599
Total VMC fund expenses	547,561	430,596

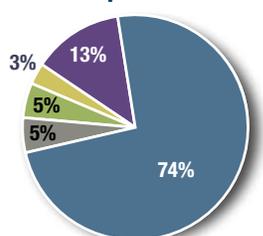
36,866 **25,110**

2015

Revenue



Expenses



VMC News & Events

THINKING SHREWDLY 2017

A NATIONAL CONSULTATION FOR LEADERS AND CATALYSTS
APRIL 27 - 29 | CREEKSIDE CHURCH | WATERLOO ON

THE
NEXT 25
YEARS

The Reformation turns 500
Canada turns 150
VMC turns 25
in 2017

Together we'll ponder
the identity-shaping impact of these epic events
and imagine their implications for future faith and mission.

Sola Fide & Sola Scriptura for the 21st Century

Jean-Marc Princivil—Eglise du Mont-Bellevue, Sherbrooke QC

Canada and the Kingdom: Our Dual Citizenship

Steve MacDouell—Hillside Church, London ON

Mission, Multiplication & Network

Joe White—Neighborhood Church, Fresno, CA

FRIDAY NIGHT CONCERT

with Mike Edgel

Artist in Residence, Hollydene Church, Victoria BC

"Imagining the Next 25 Years" — Greg Paul
Founder and Pastor of Sanctuary, Toronto ON

Register on the Vision Ministries Canada website
<http://vision-ministries.org/resources/events/>

\$159 - Early Registration (by March 31)
\$229 - Late Registration (after March 31)
\$79 - Accompanying Spouse
Travel subsidies are available

Dragging Darkness Into the Light: Protecting Kids from Exposure and Addiction to Pornography

BY HANNAH AGLER

“We’ve left this issue in the dark for so long and let it gain power. We are finding freedom by bringing it into the light.”

In response to the staggering number of youth being exposed to internet pornography, 30-year old Jay Brock produced the documentary *Over 18* in the hopes of raising awareness concerning this issue.

Jay – son of Karen and Gord Brock, church planters at Radiant City Church– and his wife Michelle Brock went on a cross-Canada tour to promote the film. For example, almost 100 people attended a screening at Elevation Church in Waterloo, Ontario.

Documentary coordinator, Dave Knox, confirms that the response to the documentary has been overwhelmingly positive. “It goes beyond what we ever could have hoped for,” Dave says.

Over 18 hopes to draw attention to Motion 47 – a motion that, if passed, will require the government to study the effects of online pornography on children and teens. No such study has taken place since before the age of the Internet.

“People are beginning to realize that, while it’s hard to hear some uncomfortable words, it’s worth it to protect their kids from seeing those same things,” Dave shares.

If you’re interested in bringing *Over 18* to your community, visit over18doc.com or e-mail dave@hopeforthesold.com ■



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Gifts to Vision Ministries Canada can be sent to the address below or given online at www.vision-ministries.org, or by calling 1-877-509-5060.

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Inspiring Dreams

BY MIKE STONE



La La Land was the big winner at this year's Golden Globe Awards. With fourteen Oscar nominations, it might also run away at the Academy Awards. The movie-musical is about two young artists, an actress and jazz musician, struggling to pursue their craft. The story reaches an emotional crescendo when Emma Stone's character, Mia, tells (sings) a story, during an audition, about an aunt who never gave up on her art. Though Mia's aunt made mistakes, her infectious passion inspired Mia to pursue her own dreams of performing.

As Mia's solo soars, it becomes clear that both song and movie are an invitation to dream and never give up on those dreams. With a touch of realism, the storyline warns that the passionate

pursuit of personal dreams offers no immunity from mistakes and anguish. Heartache might accompany the attainment of one's dreams.

Earlier this month I spoke at a memorial for a young woman who passed away in her late twenties after a struggle with cancer. Julia had dreams for her life—the kind you might expect for a young married woman. She dreamed of pursuing her career as a teacher, raising a family, traveling and growing old with her husband. Somewhere early in her journey with cancer, the Spirit led her to these words, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12). Though the words provided comfort and encouragement during dark moments, Julia received them as a divine directive. Through this verse, she believed God was inviting her into a specific way of living. In a sense, God was replacing her earlier dreams with a new transcendent one.

As an adolescent, Julia had a vibrant faith. In her twenties she married Andy, a young man just as passionate about following Jesus. Together they lived their lives as a sign of the kingdom. But as much as any experience, it was the context of terminal illness that amplified the light of Jesus in Julia. Invigorated by a fresh calling and empowered by the Spirit she focused her energy on the pursuit of joy, patience and prayer. Yes, there were

moments of anguish but Julia would not let despair eclipse her deep desire to draw attention to the beauty, wonder and goodness of God.

Julia's relentless quest to fully embrace Romans 12:12 generated a life that was rich in meaning and deeply gratifying—a bit of heaven come early for her. We too were given a glimpse of heaven. She directed our attention toward God. Through her blog posts, televised interviews and live-streamed funeral, tens of thousands have been inspired by her faith and know something more of God's love in Christ. Already stories of new-found faith are trickling in.

The right dream can inspire both dreamer and those who witness its pursuit. But not all dreams are created equal. Some focus on the best that this age has to offer—family, career, security, health—signs of God's benevolence in creation. Others are less noble, fixations on fame, dominance, accumulation and selfish consumption. Then there are otherworldly dreams, rare ones that look beyond mere human flourishing, longing to see the kingdom come in fullness and all glory given to God. In her living and dying, Julia challenged us to set our hearts on the right dream and to pursue it tenaciously.

What dream are you chasing? ■

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