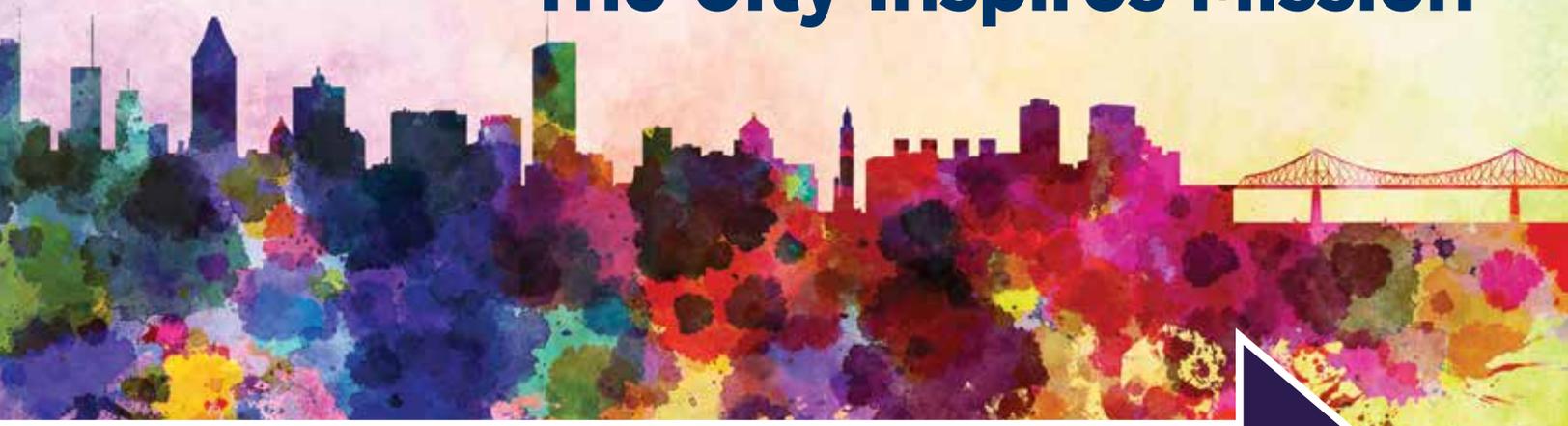


God's Passion For The City Inspires Mission



THINKING AHEAD

VOL. 22 NO.1 >> FALL 2018

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

BY MIKE STONE

God loves the city! The narrative of Scripture begins in a garden but human destiny crescendos in the city of Revelation 21-22. While most of us might be tempted to villainize the city—it's congestion, pollution and crime—God embraces urban imagery to envision our future with him in the New Jerusalem. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into the city (21:26). It will include the tree of life (22:14) and the throne of God and the Lamb will reside within (22:3).

If God dignifies the city as a mode of holy togetherness, we can never merely use the city's potential for gospel influence without first loving the city. Though scripture often portrays Babylon as the wicked aberration of archetypal Jerusalem, in the book of Jeremiah God invites Jewish exiles to bless Babylon. "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (Jer. 29:7)." Missional practices of shalom not only offer hope and healing for the community but the act of blessing is also a source of well-being for kingdom people.

So, as God's representatives, how can we truly love the cities in which we live and work? Over two decades of pastoring ForestView Church in Oakville, I witnessed members seek the peace and prosperity of the city in diverse ways. I think of Les

Horne, a retiree who demonstrated that love leads us beyond social service to be fully present with people who are poor and marginalized. Paul Millar, our first Director of Outreach at ForestView, mobilized us to start community gardens, community kitchens and a bike shop as a social enterprise. These activities provide employment, steward creation, improve personal health, foster real togetherness in neighbourhoods and enhance the quality of life in the city.

More examples of God's people creatively loving the city include: Janessa, working as the Director of Inclusion for a city choir in Toronto, a music company committed to involving those with various physical and mental exceptionalities. Scott, directing Kids4Kids, a program that nurtures the self-esteem of young people across the GTA, particularly those who have been bullied. A friend who runs a company focused on developing a clean source of alternative energy, capable of powering mass transit.

Issues related to human migration burden most Canadian cities—especially larger urban centres. My nephew Jordan was instrumental in helping our church welcome and settle a refugee family at the height of the Syrian refugee

crisis. My son Aaron worked as the nighttime supervisor at Micah House, a short-term transitional residence for refugees in Hamilton. Ian Innis, a former member of our leadership team, used his "Bay Street" leadership experience as the board chair at Micah House.

Just last week, Myra Princivil told me about the growing diversity in her neighbourhood and church in Sherbrooke, QC. She is a public school teacher and also serves in a welcome program for newcomers to Canada. The intersection of these roles amplifies her capacity to connect with students as she talks with them about family matters and visits their homes. Myra is working on her Masters of Education with a focus on Community Diversity that will enhance her ability to integrate immigrant students and equip her to help

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Granville Chapel: Putting Compassion into Action in Vancouver



Granville Chapel sending out a young person for mission training. The church has a long history of global impact.

BY SANDRA REIMER

“There are two big issues in Vancouver—people living in the Downtown Eastside struggling with addictions including fentanyl deaths, and the cost of housing,” says Granville Chapel pastor Andy Perrett. Andy adds, “In Granville Chapel’s neighbourhood you can’t buy a house for under 2 million dollars.” The congregation of about 300 is located in the Kerrisdale neighbourhood of Vancouver, a city with a population of 650,000 with 2.4 million in the Greater Vancouver area.

The majority of Granville attendees are well-educated professionals. People travel to this ethnically diverse church from all across the city and from outlying cities like Richmond and Burnaby.

Planted in 1950, the church has a history

“There is a hunger to be relevant to neighbours among God’s people.”

of innovative missional initiatives. “For a small church, we have a global reach,” says Andy, recalling churches planted by Granville missionaries many years ago in the Dominican Republic and their recent partnerships with like-minded organizations on four church plants (3 in BC and 1 in California). “More people win when we collaborate for kingdom purposes. We share the load and the joy,” says Andy, who counts VMC as a key partner. He adds, “We have this dream of becoming a multiplying missional movement.”

While they continue to see people saved through running Alpha courses each year, the Granville leadership team is always

looking for new ways to reach the “very secular” city of Vancouver. Executive Pastor Paul William’s job is to “turn over rocks to see what we can do next.” Andy is pleased to be cooperating with the Holy Spirit in his context. “Evangelical churches are all planting, in Vancouver. There is a fresh wind of the Spirit as new expressions are bubbling up!”

Church planting has benefitted Granville as congregation members have been “cross pollinated” with ideas. Andy mentions Barry and Joan Jung who are good friends with Joe and Heidi White—church planters at Neighbourhood Church in Fresno, California. Just a few years ago the Jungs didn’t know many people in their wealthy Vancouver neighbourhood where most of their original neighbours had sold their properties to developers. Inspired by the Whites, the Jungs put their raised garden beds on the street-side of the property to increase interaction and they host innovative events like open air concerts. Now Barry and Joan know more

than 80 neighbours by name! Their efforts are so successful that they have begun teaching workshops at other churches about reaching neighbours. “The heart

of the gospel is to love God and to love neighbours.” Andy adds, “There is a hunger to be relevant to neighbours among God’s people.”

In addition to loving local neighbours, Granville embraces global neighbours by sponsoring refugees. Thirty years ago they sponsored a Vietnamese family, more recently they have brought in 10 Syrian Armenians and are now working on helping an Afghan family of six from Iran. “The church is called to put its money where its mouth is and to put compassion into action. It is a huge testimony to the world,” says Andy. ■

God’s Passion For The City Inspires Mission

...CONTINUED FROM COVER

her congregation at Église du Mont-Bellevue to welcome new Canadian neighbours.

Others I know seek the well-being of the city by advocating for the arts and artists. My former Bible College Professor, John Franklin, who taught on Western Thought and Culture, is now the Director of Imago. This organization “affirms the artistic gift and encourages and facilitates creative initiatives in the arts that will

make a positive contribution to the Canadian cultural landscape.” Their intent is to promote high calibre artistic work across the spectrum of visual, written and performing arts. I’m also inspired by Bob Cameron’s latest ambition to minister to the arts community in Windsor’s urban core. Recognizing that many artists feel alienated by the Church, Bob and co-pastor Steve Coupland are planting a church that will focus on loving the arts community. They are working on securing a facility that will provide space for artistic expression. A

flourishing arts community is important for fueling vibrant urban life.

Far from being merely the latest hip destination for aspiring church planters, the city is a way of life and community of people that God loves deeply. He delights in the way it contributes to human flourishing and his heart breaks over its dark failings—greed, consumerism, competitiveness, oppression, etc. Inspired by God’s passion for the city, we can reach cities in a way that honours him and accomplishes his kingdom purposes. ■

CHURCH PROFILE: Grace Chapel, Halifax

Generously Loving their Community

BY SANDRA REIMER

Walking or driving through the densely populated Halifax neighbourhood of Clayton Park West where Grace Chapel is located, Pastor Ross Macdonald sees the world and an incredible opportunity. “This is the most culturally diverse neighbourhood east of Montreal,” says Ross, who spent his formative years at Rosemount Bible Church in Montreal. Two years ago, after pastoring at a church outside Geneva, Switzerland, Ross came to Halifax—a city of 400,000 with six universities.

Though Grace Chapel was quite culturally homogenous when it began in 1986, these days the congregation reflects the neighbourhood. “We have growing numbers of Africans, South Asians, Asians and Quebecois; there is a richness in our diversity.”

Grace Chapel reaches its diverse neighbourhood through community-focused activities including ESL classes, lunch and learn events on topics like end-of-life planning, pick-up volleyball, monthly meals for seniors, basketball camps, and even a children’s rocket-building camp.

On Easter Sunday morning in 2018, the congregation hosted an Easter egg hunt inside the church. About 100 people showed up—many not regular church attenders. After the egg hunt, guests were invited to tour several ‘experience stations’: At one station, people could taste a Passover meal like Jesus would have eaten. At another, the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection was told. Some Hindu and

Muslim neighbours commented that they had never heard about the resurrection. Several community members stayed for the Easter worship service. “They were genuinely curious,” says Ross.

The church also extends a warm welcome to neighbours in other ways, including allowing an Ethiopian and Eritrean church to use their building on Sunday afternoons. But it goes deeper than sharing their building. “A few weeks ago one of the Ethiopian pastors preached at our morning service. It was great,” says Ross. Teens from the African congregation attend Grace’s youth group and some families attend services at Grace in the morning and Ethiopian services in the afternoon.

Skilled at ministering cross-culturally, Ross says he is quick to integrate new people. “I invited a Kenyan man who had only been attending the church for a month to read scripture in a service.” The congregation is also increasing their emphasis on home groups to embrace new people.

Ross says that there is a generosity about the way the congregation cares for neighbours. He thinks of a middle-aged couple and their kids who got involved with one of two Sudanese families that the church sponsored. “The Halifax man told me it is the best thing they have ever done.” The Canadian father goes to watch the African children play basketball and the two families have formed a reciprocal relationship. Ross adds, “We are known as a church that cares about the community.” ■



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Thinking Ahead is published 3 times/year in an effort to connect like-minded Christians and their local churches and encourage them to work cooperatively, especially in evangelism through church planting and church extension. Subscriptions are free.

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

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Editor: Sandra Reimer
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Sharing the Gospel in One of

About The Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

Population: 2.8 million, 51% are immigrants (compared to 26% in the rest of Canada)

Population Density: 4,457/km²
(Compared to Vancouver 5,493/km²)

Average monthly rental cost of a 1-bedroom apartment: \$1,970

Religions: 8% Muslim, 6% Hindu, 3% Sikh, 2% Buddhist, 21% Non-religious, 57% Christian

Due to immigration, the GTA is one of the fastest growing urban areas in North America. To avoid urban sprawl, the city is getting denser in some areas. Services like transit, parks, schools, and medical professionals have not kept pace with this growth.

As a global or world city, The GTA has national and international influence. Toronto alone is home to six universities and several colleges.



Revealing the Gospel to Afghans in the GTA

BY OBAID OBAIDULLAH

The first contact that I made in the Afghan community in Canada was introduced to me through a Christian friend, so from there I started talking and working with that person, and he introduced me to dozens of Afghans. As my wife and I started to attend their birthday parties, picnics etc, we made many more contacts. Then, we started visiting them and also inviting them to our home. And today each person gives us more contacts in the community. By building relationship, we get chances to share the Gospel with them. Many of our contacts come to our prayer meetings and other programs in the church.

GTA is a very difficult place to share the Gospel with Afghans, because they are Muslim. They are afraid of their

community here and their connections back in Afghanistan because their lives could be in danger if people discover they are learning about Jesus. For this reason, everything is done in secret. We meet each person separately to talk to them about Jesus because they don't want other people to know about this. We have worked with some of our contacts for many years, so they are now more open about their faith in Christ and don't care what others think.

God is sending me new people everyday. Many are hungry to hear about Jesus. God gave me a new group of people in Scarborough. I am meeting them as a group every Friday; they are growing in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus. We started with one person and now after 5 months we have ten people in the group.

What I can say about planting a church



Obaid and Tarana Obaidullah

for Muslim background people in Canada is that our main focus should be on making contacts, building relationships and serving them. People are not interested in listening to our message about the Gospel, they want to see the Gospel in your life—so we need to be practical.

Canada's Global Cities: GTA

Ethnic Church Plants associated with VMC in the GTA

1. Addis Kidan (New Covenant) Church

Ethiopian, planted Feb. 2018, Toronto
Planter/Pastor: Girma Bekele

2. Toronto Myanmar Christian Church

Burman language, affiliated with VMC Nov. 2017, Toronto
Pastor: Saw Kyaw Lay Aung

3. El Bethel Evangelical Church

Ethiopian, planted Nov. 2017, Toronto/East York
Planter/Pastor: Tilahun Chali Sardo

4. The Afghan Church of the GTA (Jesus Network Afghan Work)

Planted Sept. 2017, Toronto
Planter: Obaid Obaidullah

5. His Prayer House International Church

Punjabi, planted summer 2017, Brampton
Leaders: Bhupinder & Mona Singh Behl

6. Farsi Christian Ministries

Facilitating planting Persian congregations across Canada with headquarters in the GTA, started July 2017
Leader: Siamak Shafti-Keramat

7. Rehoboth Inner Healing Church

Eritrean, planted in 2016, Toronto
Planter/Pastor: Paulos Shifare

8. Toronto China Bible Church

Has seven branches in the GTA, 3 planted in 2016 and 2017
TCBC / U of T - Daniel To, Joe Hu
TCBC / North York - Binghai Zeng, Samuel Xiao, Johnson Hsu
TCBC / Scarborough - Silas Luo, Hongyuan Wang, Zhengjie Liu
TCBC / Grace - Xinming Li
TCBC / York U - Mingpeng Gong, Amy Liu
TCBC / Markham - David Wang, Zhenyuan Xu
TCBC / Agape (Markham) - Kathy Ma

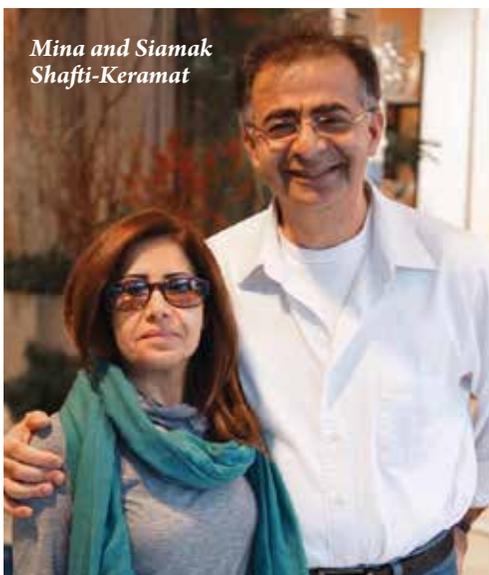
9. Hebron Reformed Church

Mandarin Service. Launched October 2015, Whitby
Started with the help of Toronto China Bible Church & VMC but affiliated with Hebron Reformed
Pastor: George Zhao

10. Jesus Network Urdu Ministry

Started in 2014 GTA
Leader: Samson Javed

Reaching Persians in the GTA



Mina and Siamak
Shafti-Keramat

BY SANDRA REIMER

“The cost of living in the GTA has increased dramatically in the last few months,” says Siamak Keramat, who pastors Spirit of Truth church in Toronto. “Almost every week more desperate newcomers visit our church looking for a job, for housing, and even food.” Despite the financial challenges many newcomers prefer to stay in larger urban centres to be near others from their culture. “This means there is a huge field for outreach,” says Siamak.

Spirit of Truth reaches out to Persian speakers in the GTA through Sunday services, weekly Bible study and discipleship, a weekly ad in their community magazine, events, and daily sharing of God’s word through different

social media platforms. Siamak and leaders in his congregation also meet with people one on one. “We are amazed to see more and more people who are thirsty for God’s word.”

In addition to pastoring a congregation, Siamak leads Farsi Christian Ministries, an emerging network of Farsi-speaking churches in Canada. He echoes other leaders of ethnic church plants who find it challenging to minister to newcomers and their children who grow up in Canada. He says, “it takes all kinds of wisdom” to meet the needs of the first generation of immigrants, many of them new Christians, and their “second generation” children. It is challenging to disciple both generations into biblical culture and to help them resist being drawn away by the secular Canadian culture.

NEWS & EVENTS

Get Equipped!

VMC Church Planting Internships

Three VMC connected churches, currently engaged in planting a new church, are offering internships to anyone interested in learning to launch a church.

DETAILS:

- Part-time hours (16-24 hrs / week)
- Combination of practical experience, reading, reflection, discussion and spiritual formation
- Coached by an experienced leader/church planter
- Learning supplemented by a multi-day intensive retreat with interns from other locations
- Expected to be financially self-sufficient and to provide your own accommodation
- Host churches will support the search for part-time employment and housing

Internships are available in London, ON, Hamilton, ON and Victoria, BC. If you have an entrepreneurial 'bent' and sense that God is calling you to start churches and other missional communities, contact VMC at 519-725-1212 or info@vision-ministries.org.

VMC Regional Conferences – Spring 2019

To make the best of our Thinking Shrewdly conferences accessible for ministry leaders, we will be offering one-day ministry conferences in five regions in 2019. These events will share common elements but will also include regional flavour and content. This is a wonderful opportunity for elders, staff teams, ministry leaders and others from churches in our networks to experience inspiring worship, mutual learning and connecting with ministry colleagues.

March 30	AB & Prairies	Mount Carmel Bible School, Edmonton
April 6	BC	Granville Bible Chapel, Vancouver
April 27	ON (west)	Lincoln Road Chapel, Waterloo
May 4	ON (east)	Don Valley Bible Chapel, Toronto
May 11	QC	WestView Bible Church, Montreal
May 25	Atlantic	Grace Chapel, Halifax

Stay tuned for conference details in your region; save the date and plan to attend with your team.

CHURCH PROFILE: Rosemount Bible Church, Montreal

BY COURTNEY VAN ROOTSELAAR

In the summer of 1929 a group of families started a tent ministry in Rosemount, Quebec—which is now part of metropolitan Montreal (population 4 million). That ministry became Rosemount Bible Church. Almost 90 years have passed, but RBC's mission remains the same, to make disciples and to serve its community.

In recent years, the congregation of about 350 has embraced many newcomers. Full-time staff elder, Nick Azzuolo, says; "We have become a multicultural and intergenerational community." Once predominantly Anglo-Saxon, now 50 % of attenders are visible minorities. "People tend to take ownership of welcoming,"

Nick observes, "It's not just the leadership that does it."

RBC's hospitality extends far beyond its church walls. Nick says, "We strongly believe that the presence of the Holy Spirit needs to be felt not only amongst our members, but also in our community." RBC often takes part in community-led projects, such as Bouffe Action Rosemont, a program that organizes community kitchens. Annually they participate in "Magasin Partage", (Shop-Share) providing Christmas baskets and gifts to over 350 local families.

RBC also organizes a number of its own outreaches. They host an annual Neighbours' Day, inviting the community to a barbecue with music and games in the churchyard while simultaneously

running a blood drive. For their summer camp focused on music, arts, and teaching Christian values, the church subsidizes a large portion of the camp fees so that many refugee children and children from lower income families can attend.

A lot has changed in the Rosemount area since RBC's humble beginning almost a century ago. "There has been a departure from religion in the francophone world," Nick says, adding that only about 10% of Quebecers currently attend church regularly (a number that was once closer to 85%). "[People are] looking for a more authentic spirituality," Nick continues, "[but] it's difficult to go deep and bring people to transformation when the culture is indifferent to faith."

In an effort "to influence the culture by going against the tide", RBC strives to be a church where people are active rather than passive participants. They want to be a place of authenticity and connection, where people can go deeper and be transformed by God. ■



Jehovah Jireh Demonstrates His Power in Kenya

BY DOUG LOVEDAY

Once again, the LORD provided sufficient finances for us to give a week of leadership training to 100+ Kenyan pastors and leaders, in with Vision Ministries Kenya*, August 6-10, 2018 (pictured above). During this refreshing retreat in Nairobi, pastors enjoyed meals, comfortable accommodation, amazing worship and fellowship, and practical teaching. Used to receiving more theoretical instruction, the pastors appreciated our clear teaching which made God's truth ready to apply to their lives, and teach in their home churches. In spite of very tough circumstances, these brothers and sisters in Christ are so full faith and enthusiasm for the LORD! Many work additional jobs as carpenters or auto mechanics while living in the slum and bringing the good news of Jesus to their neighbours.

This year's VMC Kenya Mission team included Ron Seabrooke (Wallenstein Chapel), David Cottrill (North Park Church) Doug Loveday (VMC staff) Taryn Ferrede and Ben Ahrens (Lincoln Road Chapel) (pictured above with Ishmael and Molline Ochieng) plus two Kenyan leaders, Evans Makatia and Charles Omenyo. After a day of fasting and prayer for God's blessing on the week, we preached in different churches the first Sunday. I preached in a Kibera slum where 1 million people live. We walked down a well-worn path, across a very polluted river, past mud-packed home-made shelters, to the church.

As we walked in, a 12 year-old boy was leading a large group of kids in harmonious singing about Jehovah Jireh providing all they need. Then they sang "God is my Father and he will never, ever leave me". Amazing! The afternoon-long service was filled with prayer and Bible reading,

exposition of the Word, and dancing before the LORD! Our team returned home with a fresh sense of God at work in our world.

**Vision Ministries Kenya facilitates a network for MORE and BETTER churches in Kenya. ■*

VMC Director visits New Zealand

Besides speaking at a Christian Community Churches in New Zealand (CCCNZ) conference this summer, I met with leaders of an Auckland network of pastors, to discuss possibilities for collaborative church planting in their urban region. Rich encounters included interaction with a board chair about how to care for a congregation in the wake of a difficult staff departure; conversation with key staff of a large church about how to form a new congregation around emerging mission in a nearby town; discussion with the network's national coaching coordinator concerning how to cultivate regional networks; and dialogue with the national church planting enabler about fostering collaborative planting between networks and denominations.

I was humbled and inspired as I spent time with Mark and Emma Grace—and boy, does the name fit! Relatively new in his role as Executive Director of CCCNZ, Mark has already launched new initiatives and added bright young leaders to their team as he imagines a vibrant future for their group of churches. Mark and Emma testified to witnessing the active presence of God during seasons of struggle and triumph as they lead a national church network, and serve on staff at a local church, while raising three children.

Back in Auckland, where I preached at Mt Wellington Church, Russell and Jillian Grainger hosted us on our final weekend in the country. We enjoyed hearing the Grainger's hearts for ministry in the local church and beyond. Throughout his decades in pastoral ministry, his deep concern for fellow pastors inspired him to begin the Taupo pastor's retreat to provide a safe space to rest, share heartaches, pray and receive nourishment from Scripture. This event plays a critical role in deepening friendships and nurturing a sense of togetherness among a fraternity of servants who often feel alone in the trenches of church ministry. ■

– Mike Stone



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Sharing Insights with Friends Around the World



Mike and Sharon Stone praying and sharing with Jeremy Suisted. Coaching Coordinator with Christian Community Churches of New Zealand.

BY MIKE STONE

This summer, I was invited to speak at a pastors' conference in New Zealand. Sharon and I spent time connecting with pastors and ministry leaders who serve the Christian Community Churches in New Zealand (CCCNZ). Like Vision Ministries, CCCNZ exists to plant churches, support leaders and strengthen existing congregations—independent churches and fellowships with Plymouth Brethren heritage. The visit provided an opportunity to connect with key influencers and gain insight into the New Zealand context.

The pastor's conference convened in beautiful Taupo, along the southeast shores of New Zealand's largest inland lake—a perfect place for congregational leaders to share their hearts, pray and be prayed for and listen for the fresh promptings of the Holy Spirit. People seemed encouraged by the main teaching sessions, in which we explored central leadership issues including renouncing the need for recognition, ministry to difficult people, fresh revelation for sustained ministry, and prioritizing mission in the life of the church.

While there are similarities between New Zealand and Canada, there are also some important differences that impact the way they share the gospel. Both countries are former British

colonies and both are seeing significant declines in church attendance and Christian influence on society. Though New Zealand only has a population of 4.6 million, a larger percentage of inhabitants live in cities than in Canada. More than a third of the country's population lives in Greater Auckland. Seeing this concentration of population and center of cultural influence as an opportunity, CCCNZ hired a missional catalyst to discern the best ways for Auckland area churches to collaborate on church planting and other missional initiatives in the region. Without ignoring unique ministry contexts in the rest of the country, this is a strategic approach to influence the entire nation with the gospel.

Though in Canada we have put behind us some of the tensions and traditions that our Kiwi friends are still wrestling through, we have much to learn from their identifying, empowering, and releasing younger leaders. Present challenges aside, in some ways they are better positioned to live out and share the gospel with the emerging generation.

Additionally, it would be wise for national leaders in both networks to pay attention to the polarization that seems to be rising among western evangelicals, particularly young aspiring pastors. Our world needs Christian witness that is both robust and united. Healthy networks establish clarity around the

things that bind us together AND create space for diversity.

I am grateful for my time in New Zealand and also for the VMC teaching team that went to Kenya this summer. Collaboration and mutual learning among leaders from national networks enhances our capacity to cultivate connection and cooperation among our respective churches. God is glorified and the Kingdom is advanced as we share insights. ■

About New Zealand

Population – 4.6 million

Urbanization – 86%
(vs. 82% in Canada)

Largest Cities – Auckland has 1.6 million people, next two largest cities Wellington (412,000) and Christchurch (396,000).

Approximately 48% of New Zealanders nominally identify themselves as Christians, while 41% say they have no religion. About 15% of the population attends church regularly. (In Canada, 21% are religiously committed and attend worship services from a variety of faiths).

THINKING AHEAD



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