

THINKING AHEAD

VOL. 22 NO.3 > SPRING 2019

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

Mid-Life Revitalization: Jesus Builds His Church

BY MIKE STONE & SANDRA REIMER

When I (Mike) interviewed four leaders from across the country about what it takes to help revitalize a church, I noticed some themes. None of them mentioned a superstar pastor or a foolproof method that made the difference. Instead they talked about discerning God's vision for their church by noticing how congregation members are gifted and what God is already doing in and through the church. They also emphasized the need for prayer.

Congregations flourish in the adult stage of the church life-cycle when four critical elements are present: visionary leadership, healthy relationships, effective programs and accountable management. Somewhere in the prime of adulthood, vision begins to wane. Ironically, church members express the greatest satisfaction with congregational life at maturity, even though vision has faded.

Few recognize the loss of vision until the church enters the empty-nest stage when younger people are leaving and core members talk nostalgically about the good old days. Gavin Hall, pastor at Charleswood Community Church in Winnipeg noticed this focus on the past in

his congregation. One business-minded leader, who had watched a business fail, told the rest of the leadership team that it was the beginning of the end because they were spending too much time on management. "He kicked our butts," says Gavin. These days Gavin says that Charleswood aims to "Have one thing completed, something we are in the middle of and something coming down the pipeline."

The Charleswood team realized they didn't need to "bring the big idea down from the mountain." Instead they needed to

Continued on page 3...



IN THIS ISSUE

Midlife Revitalization	p 1, 3
The Beauty of Small, Informal Churches	p 2
Church Profile: We Are Lambrick	p 4
Fresh Bread: Hope Community Church	p 6
News & Events	p 7
The Benefits of Fellowship	p 8



The Beauty of Small, Informal Churches

BY GORD MARTIN

When I hear about the spread of the Gospel and church multiplication in Africa, Latin America and Asia, I am wistfully jealous. In contrast to highly organized churches (with their western life cycles), in these countries people are often reached through smaller, informal churches.

Recently I read two books which highlight the value of such churches. In the first chapter of *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu*, Brian Stiller states that faith is on the rise and he describes the “drivers” of global faith. In his last chapter, Brian says Jesus is going global! He highlights: prayer movements, women in ministry, praise and worship plus, the human tidal wave of refugees and immigration.

The second book is called *The Kingdom Unleashed* by Jerry Trousdale and Glenn Sunshine. It describes the flourishing church in the southern and eastern hemispheres. They say that “Christianity is spreading faster now than it has at any time in human history. If that statement surprises you, it probably means that you live in the global North where Christianity is – at best – holding its own.” Some of the chapter headings: Your Life With Jesus’ Vision, Abundant Prayer, Equipping Ordinary People For The Impossible. Both of these books describe smaller, nimble, reproducing, purposeful churches as a big part of what God is doing in the world today.

I can’t help but ask myself, could this

happen in Canada? I have been alongside 10 or more people who attempted to plant cell churches or house churches in Canada. None of them were successful in the way they had hoped. Groups that wanted to start five or six cells before they hosted a joint celebration service felt pressured to start the celebration service before they were ready. People missed the Sunday morning service. They missed the benefits of a bigger church. In too many cases the groups were too inwardly focused.

Much of this has to do with our culture, both socially and spiritually. Many people, even non-churched people, feel that a real church is one that gathers on Sunday morning. Even many immigrants feel this way. We are connecting with Persians,

people from Iran, and even though they come from an Islamic background, they believe that a real church meets in a church building—its what they’ve seen on TV!

Francis Chan, author of *Letters to the Church*, is one of the exceptions to this large church focus. He abandoned leadership in a large church of 5000 in California and successfully formed networks of house churches. Francis says that ordinary people can do it too! And after all, didn’t the early Christians meet in house churches?

Some Canadian examples of the power of small, informal churches include The Jesus Network and MoveIn. The Jesus Network began in a densely populated Toronto neighbourhood with many Muslims. Staff and volunteers of The Jesus Network build long-term relationships through handing out food and gift baskets at Christmas, visiting with people in their homes, and getting to know friends of their Muslim friends. They host Bible studies in homes and pray with people. It was several years before they began larger worship gatherings.

MoveIn, which also started in Toronto has spread to cities across the globe and reaches people in micro-neighbourhoods called patches. People who join MoveIn relocate to poor, unreached neighbourhoods in small teams. They continue working at their regular jobs, while praying that God will open up ministry opportunities. Teams get to know their neighbours and do things like organize activities for kids, invite people over for dinner, take their neighbours to appointments etc. MoveIn participants belong to local churches where possible, and occasionally plant churches.

Small, informal churches can work in North America—but they are countercultural and take a good deal of prayer and intentionality. ■

Gord’s Tips for Starting Informal, Kingdom-Advancing Home Groups

- Pray, lots!
- Identify a neighbourhood/area in which to start
- Find two truly like-minded partners and pray with them to find ways to obey Jesus in that neighbourhood/area
- When God opens doors to ministry for any one of the three of you, walk through, using both hands—Word and deed
- As people are transformed by Christ, ask them to introduce you to others they know
- Teach them to walk with Jesus and to do what you are doing
- Form learning and prayer groups
- Get together occasionally for higher octane learning and prayer times.



People from NorthPark Church in London, Ontario gathered to discern together in prayer.

Mid-Life Revitalization
...from cover

recognize what God was doing through congregation members, celebrate it and resource it. Gavin advises other pastors to “Talk to your people, find out where the life is. Then tell those stories well.”

After infighting that resulted in the loss of a pastor and some elders, a

“There was a huge shift away from entertainment—our ministry became centred on the love of Christ.”

new leadership team at Grace Chapel in Halifax also decided they weren’t going to use a “top-down approach.” Instead they challenged their people to pray. “The Spirit generated passion and out of that a couple of significant ministries were birthed,” says Graeme Higgs, previously an elder at Grace. They hosted the Alpha Course and 35 seekers showed up. In addition, they began a seven-year adventure to help 21 boys in poverty in India. The congregation also got involved in a downtown Halifax drop-in centre opened by a street ministry. “We started to tell stories of what God was doing through ordinary people with ordinary lives working at ordinary jobs—it was beautiful,” says Graeme.

Northpark Church in London, ON also faltered after a beloved senior pastor left. “It took six years to figure out the next leadership structure,”

says Pastor Matthew Eckert. During that time staff worked on their own visions and the congregation wondered where they were headed. Things started to turn around when Matthew strengthened his relationship with the elders and assured them that he was in it for the long haul. They also brought in an outside consultant who helped them refocus their vision.

Leaders introduced a goal to bring in 300 new young families in 5 years. To reach this goal, leaders realized they needed to revamp their ministry to families, get a better understanding of the demographics in their community, and pray more. Matthew advises, “Rebuild your foundations before moving forward.” He also emphasizes the need for strong trust among leaders.

Matt Craig says Don Valley Chapel in Toronto was revitalized as the result of some crises—including a fire. Extensive renovations were necessary and for a time, they couldn’t use the church building. Their ministry became focused around “gospel communities with families.” Matt says, “There was a huge shift away from entertainment—our ministry became centred on the love of Christ.” This shift had begun years earlier after other renewal methods—including a superstar pastor and amazing programs—failed.

Matt says, “Jesus builds his church—it’s a miracle from beginning to end. Stop trying to fix your church with a technique. Get on your knees and pray!” ■



More Flourishing Effective Churches

Board of Directors:

Kevin Armstrong, Ajax, ON
A. Buchan, ON
Matthew Eckert, London, ON
Rosemary Gaunt, Victoria, BC
Trevor James, Edmonton, AB
Graeme Higgs, Halifax, NS
Bill Hillis, Waterloo, ON

Staff:

Mark Anderson, Rebecca Cummings,
Indiana Salai Cungcin, Jay Gurnett,
Henrietta Koenig, Doug Loveday,
Steve MacDouell, Gord Martin, John Riley,
Gwen Sharp, Mike Stone, Cathy Zhang

Thinking Ahead/Vision Ministries Canada

145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8
Phone: 519-725-1212
Toll-Free: 1-877-509-5060
Fax: 519-725-9421

e-mail: info@vision-ministries.org
www.vision-ministries.org

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 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.

We appreciate notification of double mailings, names for our mailing list, or if a name should be deleted. Articles may be copied for limited circulation without permission.

Please include the credit line: Reprinted from *Thinking Ahead*, 1-877-509-5060
www.vision-ministries.org

Editor: Sandra Reimer
Design: Audra Noble
Reimer Reason Communications





CHURCH PROFILE: Lambrick Park Church

BY SANDRA REIMER

At a low point in the mid-2010s, Lambrick Park Church would remove another row of chairs from their 450-seat multipurpose sanctuary so it wouldn't look so empty. "Each Sunday, the congregation wondered who else would be missing," says Scott Anderson, who has served as Lead Pastor of the 225-member church since July 2016.

Scott is grateful for the committed, prayerful core members who stuck it out during a 15-year period of refining—including Don Crawford, whom he calls "stubbornly optimistic." Don was on staff from 1999-2008 and later led the elder board. "My wife and I never entertained leaving. This is our home church," says Don.

Lambrick Park Church was founded in 1965 to reach the Gordon Head neighbourhood in Victoria, BC. "From the beginning, there has been a heartbeat to help people know, encounter, and follow Jesus," says Scott. He adds, "We are a church with a reputation for thoughtful Biblical reflection that's engaged with the world, honest about ourselves and honest about God." Scott says "Deep and wide" evangelical teaching from the pulpit has

been complemented by people learning truth from each other in smaller groups. "A lot of people in our church have been disciplined through a competently led Bible study in someone's living room in community with others."

Tom Cowan, who pastored the church for 23 years, helped to firmly establish this DNA of deep teaching and discipleship in community. During his ministry, the church grew from 80 people in 1981 to close to 1500 by the late 1990s. They had two morning services plus a Sunday evening meeting for a congregation of Victoria's "unchurched and overchurched" young adults called The Place. Growth came with much fruit but many organizational challenges. When Tom moved on to another church in Vancouver, Lambrick adopted a shared leadership model for a few years with Don as Executive Pastor.

Later, in search of a better organizational structure and a stronger missional focus, Lambrick's elders chose a more traditional senior pastor model. Though the church invested heavily in clarity surrounding governance, leadership and structures, missional action remained elusive. VMC's Jay Gurnett walked alongside the Lambrick Park elder board during some

of the difficult years. "In 2015, we led the congregation through a process of asking the right questions to rediscover what God had called us to," says Don. "The board rebuilt trust with the congregation...they did good work," says Scott. With a renewed focus, the church was re-energized. During this self-examination, the 21-year-old evening congregation recognized that it had matured enough to step out independently. Lambrick Park Church blessed The Place Community at a special commissioning service in the Spring of 2016.

Lambrick Park was ready for a fresh start when Scott arrived with a "fierce pastoral hope and vision that we could revive the beautiful DNA of Lambrick to see this church grow." He acknowledges that the church would not have survived if it weren't for a healthy board and faithful core members.

Scott and a new generation of elders have been "renewing the centre" and simplifying the ministry as they come to grips with being a smaller church with fewer paid staff. "It has been a process to rediscover the priesthood of all believers and to help congregation members take ownership of doing the ministry again," says Scott. The often repeated phrase and hashtag #WeAreLambrick reminds everyone that they are in this together.

"We're in a new chapter...People have started inviting friends again," says Scott. "There is a buzz of conversation on Sundays and people from the community are visiting and staying," adds Don. ■





Apprenticing in the Ways of Jesus

2019 VMC Regional Conferences



115 leaders gathered in Edmonton Mar. 30.



Graeme Kirk talked to 114 leaders in Waterloo.



85 leaders engaged at the Vancouver event.



Keynote speaker Matt Pamplin.



Yonatan Hiruy shared with 97 leaders in Toronto.



Pastor Hudson Taylor Wells (left) with Youth Pastor Kevin Smith baptizing a teen.

Hope Community Church: Fresh Bread

BY SANDRA REIMER

“God has bread for us today and tomorrow. We don’t need to hoard yesterday’s bread,” says Hudson Taylor Wells pastor at Hope Community Church in Lennoxville—a suburb of Sherbrooke, Quebec. He adds, “God has a vision and a plan for us today.”

Hudson began attending the church in 2012 and was asked to become Hope’s interim pastor when their beloved lead pastor Randy Crozier felt called back to the East Coast in 2017. “I had just stepped in as interim pastor and we were seeing fruit as new families came,” says Hudson, “I was flabbergasted, and the Lord spoke to me, ‘You are reaping what so many others have sown.’” He adds, “Though it may seem slow day to day, there is an incredible movement forward thanks to faithful people investing in prayer, preaching, discipleship and community building to make the church what it is today.”

Over their 59-year history, Hope Community Church has wrestled with releasing some traditions while holding tightly to cherished values as they have transitioned from a small rural church to a

thriving faith family impacting their city.

Planted as an English-speaking Christian Brethren church in 1960, Hope Community Church was located in the small town of Huntingville. When the vision was still fresh in the 1970s, the congregation grew and built a good-sized church building that was later expanded. Membership declined after the 1980 referendum calling for Quebec to separate from Canada. Many anglophones—especially young adults—left the province.

By the time Paul Mclean and his wife Willette arrived in 1990, the middle-aged congregation of 70-90 people had very few young adults and youth. “The pastor at the time, Rob Daley, was trying to convince some of the old guard that it was time for change,” says Paul, who is a long-time elder at the church. The church lost some members as they made “style and form” changes to be more welcoming to the community. “We tried a seeker service, including some drama.” Paul remembers entering the sanctuary dressed as a pompous pharisee and being interviewed by the pastor. A man in the front row was so offended that he yelled “get behind me Satan” and walked out of the service.

Later, when David and Nancy Dytynyshyn were called as the pastoral couple, they helped the church take another step toward focusing on community outreach. The church hosted barbeques and 5 km runs. They also went out 2 by 2 knocking on doors to invite people to church.

In 2007, the church called Randy and Paula Crozier. In an interview with the pastoral search team, Randy said, “I believe the church has the potential to be the most significant institution in any community.” Within a few years, Hope Church was looking to expand their building and their reach. “On our doorstep at Bishop’s University there were 2000-3000 students who didn’t know Jesus,” says Paul. Without bus service students couldn’t get to the rural church, so Hope needed to go to them.

As they prayed for space, the large Catholic church in the heart of Lennoxville, went up for sale. The congregation of about 120 people couldn’t really afford the building but they sensed God’s leading. Though Hope’s bid was lower than others, the Catholic congregation accepted it because they were a church.

Today the congregation of about 300 (with 220 or so weekly attenders) has a vibrant and large youth group, a young adults ministry, bi-weekly food hamper distribution, men’s and women’s ministries and they collaborate with a ministry on the Bishop’s University campus to reach students.

“If you are not investing in your youth and young adults your church is on the way to decline,” says Paul. Hope Church has a culture of growing leaders from within. Their youth pastor, Kevin Smith, is from Lennoxville and became a Christian through the Hope youth group. Long-time member Mike Enns became the Pastor of Communication & Administration and is leading the church into the digital age as he manages the church’s app, podcasts, digital member directory, and soon live streaming on Sunday mornings.

Hudson says that they don’t have a recipe for success, they have a family. “When it’s a family, people are less likely to leave if they are irritated.” He has been respectful as he has gotten to know the traditions and values of the Hope family. “Some practices are really good but we want to continue to press forward and not get stuck just maintaining what we have.” ■



The Benefits of Fellowship

BY MIKE STONE

As a child I thought the term fellowship mostly pertained to potluck dinners—with several variations on lasagna and almost as many permutations of rice crispy squares for dessert. Oh, I’m sure the biblical concept of fellowship was taught often and well but you can understand the association in my mind, given the feast that usually accompanied the invitation, “join us for a time of family fellowship”.

We’re hard pressed to find references to church membership in the New Testament. Its not that our modern notion of membership is wrong, its just that the inspired authors preferred the idea of fellowship or koinonia. This Greek term embodies sharing, doing life together, participating with each other, and being partners.

Within the church, they

shared meals and material resources. They also encouraged, exhorted and forgave one another and suffered together. Between churches, they sent offerings, shared personnel, circulated Paul’s letters and discerned God’s leading on theological dilemmas. Koinonia transcended the local church, connecting believers across geography, culture and language.

The eternal dance of Father, Son and Spirit is a reminder that relationship is everything. God’s missionary essence is evident in the sending of the Son and the subsequent sending of the Spirit. Taking our cue from the Trinity, at VMC we embrace relationship and shared mission as the primary characteristics of our network-wide fellowship.

With nearly a hundred partnership agreements signed, we’re continually welcoming churches into official relationship with Vision Ministries Canada.



Why would a church want to partner with VMC?

Here’s a dozen benefits worth considering:

- 1 A compelling vision to reach Canada with the Good News
- 2 An effective structure for collaborating on mission
- 3 Coaching for pastors through the seasons of life and ministry
- 4 Consulting with elders and governing boards for greater impact and flourishing
- 5 Mediation and conflict resolution
- 6 Relational connection with ministry peers through national and regional gatherings
- 7 Practical resources for church leadership and administration (eg. sample policies, ministry guidelines, funding sources etc.)
- 8 Collective representation to other governing bodies and affiliating agencies (CRA, EFC, etc.)
- 9 Assistance in obtaining a license to officiate weddings
- 10 Assistance with pastoral placements and transitional leadership
- 11 Start-up support for new churches (banking, accounting, payroll, receipting, insurance, etc.)
- 12 Inspiration from impactful stories shared through our newsletter, website and social media

In the garden, God announced that isolation was not good. The curse of the fall separated us from God and from each other. Let’s not perpetuate the curse but live against it. We are better together! ■

THINKING AHEAD



www.vision-ministries.org

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to
145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8

Publications Agreement Number 40016262