



THINKING AHEAD

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The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

Redeeming the Death of a Church

BY MIKE STONE

With its cooling temperatures and colourful falling leaves, autumn is a season of dying but also a time of vibrant beauty. In his book, *Adam's Return*, Richard Rohr notes that fulfillment in the second half of life is dependent on our ability to come to terms with several realities, including the following: *you are not important; life is not about you; and you are going to die.* Though not easy to swallow, spiritually mature adults manage to reconcile themselves to these "life truths".

What's true of people is also true of congregations. They may start well, flourish in the middle years but—unable to gain perspective on their true role in redemptive history—vanish without an enduring legacy. Are your church's most vibrant years in the past? If so, is anyone bold enough to acknowledge this publicly? Have you discussed how to ensure a lasting kingdom impact once the lights are turned out?

Having fulfilled his responsibilities as the Messiah's forerunner, John the Baptizer knew it was time to get out of the way and let the spotlight shine on Jesus. Faithfulness required his diminishment. "He must increase but I must decrease." (John 3:30). He lived these truths: *I am not important. Life is not about me. I am going to die.*

In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council struggled over whether to allow believing Jews and Gentiles to eat at the same table—without requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised. In the end, they agreed to allow it. From Acts 16 onward, the once powerful Jerusalem church declined in influence, while the church in Antioch eclipsed its prominence. Richard Longnecker suggests that the demise of the Jerusalem church was due to its favourable disposition toward Gentiles, which incited persecution. This church showed disregard for its own institutional survival for the greater kingdom good. Ultimately, every congregation is faced with the same opportunity.

Early in the church lifecycle, growth and vitality seem a given. Like human beings, churches reach adulthood, experience their prime and gradually move into the second half of life. Through maturity, empty-nest and retirement stages, it's wise to pursue revitalization. But eventually, a time comes when church energy and resources are better spent extending impact through the lives of others.

If a congregation is within weeks of closing, liquidating assets and blessing other ministries with a financial gift is one way to secure a legacy. When a congregation's final Sunday is inevitable, but still months or even years away, there are other options. A merger can

sometimes create synergies and extend life for two struggling congregations. An aging congregation could welcome a young "homeless" church to share its facilities and even gift the building to their guests before wrapping up.

Declining churches might also pursue a reboot or replant. These options usually work best when established leaders, who have been at the helm for decades, relinquish control to a new team that can lead a congregation to flourish. If the existing leaders could facilitate this kind of radical change they would have done so already. **READ MORE.**

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NORTHSIDE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Sharing a Building, Being the Church

BY SANDRA REIMER

This past Easter, Bejoy Thomas recalls singing *How Great is Our God* in 7 languages in the sanctuary of Northside Bible Fellowship (NBF) in Calgary. “It was a taste of heaven,” says Bejoy, NBF’s board chair. NBF, a small group of 35 adults and 12 children, rent their 200-seat building to 3 other congregations. The joint Easter service included a bell choir and other contributions from NBF, Calgary Chin Evangelical Fellowship (Burmese), El Encuentro Alliance Church (Spanish), and True Love Arabic Church. They also collaborate on a gym night, potlucks, some ladies’ events, and an annual breakfast served to the local community when the Calgary Stampede takes over the city in July.

Drawing from his own experience, Bejoy encouraged NBF leaders to see

the bigger picture of renting to other congregations. “The church building is a tool,” says Bejoy. “It’s meant to be used more than 3 hours per week.” Growing up in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bejoy witnessed the blessing of sharing a facility. In the UAE, a mostly Muslim country, few Christian groups had buildings and they usually met in homes. However, Holy Trinity Church has a good-sized property in the city, given to them by the UAE government. To this day, their property is used by more than 100 congregations representing approximately 30,000 worshippers! (Read about Holy Trinity’s philosophy and a list of their “guest congregations” holymtrinitychurchdubai.org/guest-congregation/).

Andrew Hills, an elder at NBF says, “The motivation behind allowing different churches to use our building was not financial.” He adds, “God has

given us a space to use for his kingdom. As a small congregation [that doesn’t use the facility a lot] we wanted to open up the building to serve a greater purpose.” Though renting to other groups comes with some frustrations—like increased maintenance and repair costs—Andrew believes it’s worth sharing their centrally-located building. “It’s been a blessing despite the extra challenges. The blessing is having fellowship through our Ecclesia program, combined gym nights, through serving together at our Stampede breakfast, and through our bell choir,” says Andrew. “In the future we’re planning to do a weekend retreat with all four churches.”

Personal relationships have also developed among the leaders of the four congregations. Former NBF elder, James Edle, appreciated his connection with the pastors of True Love Arabic Church. “Pastor Fayez and his wife Vivian mentored me as I went over to their house and asked for advice and just visited.”

All three men agree that it’s positive when people from different cultures interact and learn from each other. North Americans who worship with restraint, can be inspired by Christians from other countries who celebrate with passion, says Bejoy. He believes that multi-cultural co-operation “breaks down barriers” and “widens our purpose.” James is pleased that established Canadians can invite new Canadian congregations to access facilities like Christian camps. “Sometimes ethnic churches don’t know what great things the evangelical church in Canada has set up.” NBF has sponsored children from their partner congregations to attend Salem Acres Bible Camp.

James mentions that NBF is a culturally diverse congregation. “Getting along well amongst ourselves and with our partner churches, is all part of the same thing.” He adds that the Apostle Paul’s instructions to share his letters between congregations is a model for us “to share things with each other, not just stick to ourselves.” James adds, “We bump up against each other sometimes, but if we become friends and stay committed, we are being the church.” Andrew says “It’s cool to praise God together in different languages and to work through language barriers to serve God together. The Lord Jesus Christ is our common bond.” ■



Phyllis Hills, Bejoy Thomas and Gene Gan serving together at the joint Calgary Stampede breakfast offered by four churches who share a building.

NORTH PARK CHURCH STRATFORD

Humble Yourself for the Kingdom

BY SANDRA REIMER

“We were down to the bare bones. We had to do something,” says Graham Martin, former elder at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in Stratford. Planted in 2001, the church had grown from meeting in a rented space to purchasing a former Lutheran church building, but then they hit a season of conflict, which resulted in a church splits that decimated the congregation.

Meanwhile, the leadership team at North Park Church in London was telling God that they were open to support struggling churches. North Park had already purchased another church building in London and relaunched a congregation. “After launching The Church at 1750, we decided to be open to whatever other opportunities might come our way—within a one-hour drive of the main campus,” says Matt Eckert, Lead Pastor at North Park. “Only three months later, the Cornerstone opportunity came our way.”

Vision Ministries Canada staff member Gord Martin introduced the two congregations. “Gord made a presentation to all the [Cornerstone] leaders and there was good enthusiasm from most of them,” says Graham. Over several months, North Park and Cornerstone continued to dialogue with each other and within their own congregations. North Park representatives made a site visit so that they clearly understood what taking over the building would cost.

Graham and two other elders kept the ship afloat during Cornerstone’s turbulent time. They worked hard consulting the remaining congregation members—calling or visiting each family. When the time came to vote, though difficult for some, everyone was onboard with transferring the building to North Park. Graham believes 35 or so people from Cornerstone will join the North Park Stratford location.

When North Park leaders announced



the new Stratford site at their annual meeting, Matt says that “everyone broke out in spontaneous applause.” By the end of 2019, North Park will have invested upwards of \$800,000 to renovate the Cornerstone building and their second location in London. They also hired a site pastor, Kirk Ehrhart for Stratford. Matt says that people have donated to the relaunch over and above their regular giving. “It has been some large gifts and many small gifts,” says Matt. “One lady came to me with her cheque book after we announced the Stratford site and said, ‘I have always wanted to give money to a new church. I am so excited.’” Another couple told Matt, “Our son lives in Stratford and we are trusting this church may bring him back to God. We want to donate to make it happen.” Others volunteered to be part of the core group at the new location. The first public service of the North Park Stratford site was held September 8.

Graham’s advice to struggling churches: “Humble yourself. Let another congregation help you.” He adds that it is important to recognize when a congregation has done as much as it is able. “It would have been more of a failure if we had sold the building to a developer and they flattened it to build condos.” Graham is pleased the Cornerstone building will continue to be used for kingdom purposes. ■



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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 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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VMC ANNUAL REPORT

July 1st 2018 – June 30, 2019

Recently, one of the churches in our network baptized 75 people (most previously Muslim) while on retreat in Muskoka. That's right—75 people publicly declared their love for Jesus and liberation from darkness! This kind of transformation is why VMC was founded and continues to serve. Behind all the conferences, coaching and consultations lies a deep desire to see more and more people become committed followers of Jesus.

Ministry Highlights for the Year

- VMC's 6 conferences across the country were planned with local expertise and showcased regional stories of mission. 3x more leaders attended these events than typically come to our national conference.
- We expanded our Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) National Partnership group's mandate to act as an advisory council to VMC, in addition to catalyzing new church plants.
- During two trips to Kenya, VMC teams taught 480 leaders, who represented 80+ churches, at regional training events.
- The First Annual VMC Sunday was held on Pentecost Sunday. Nearly 40 congregations prayed for VMC's ministry, plus churches and leaders in our network.
- A new partnership with Tearfund Canada, enables VMC network churches to donate funds in response to international disasters. Tearfund will also assist with humanitarian needs in countries where VMC seeks to strengthen and multiply the church beyond Canada.
- We gathered 16 leaders, from 14 countries, in Rome to share best practices and ideas about church multiplication and revitalization within their national church networks.

We thank God for sparking imaginations, empowering initiatives and transforming people, churches and neighbourhoods. Thank you to the many who pray, financially support and volunteer their skills to participate in our mission!

Mike Stone
Executive Director

VMC by the Numbers

The VMC Network

- 200+ churches
- 99 partnership agreements
- 15 regional networks
- 5 cultural affinity groups



Churches & Leaders Strengthened



- 600 leaders inspired at 6 regional conferences
- 144 leaders coached
- 132 sermons preached in 68 churches
- 69 leadership teams counselled
- 25 church consultations
- 13 churches in crisis helped
- 12 prayer meetings for VMC churches & leaders

Church Planting & Support

- 12 new churches planted
- 12 more potential plants
- 11 new churches per year (5-year running average)
- 20 in-trust churches assisted with banking, accounting and receipting



Financial Summary

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019

- Revenue exceeded expenses by \$51,486, in contrast to the previous year's deficit of \$121,696.
- Revenue for December 2018 was \$178,842, which exceeded previous year by \$44,106 (33%).
- Revenue for June 2019 was \$135,848, exceeding the previous year by \$60,102 (79%).
- Donations related to our Matching Fund Campaign generated \$205,832 in additional (new) revenue.
- Donations from churches accounted for 23% of general revenue, up from 16% the previous year.
- Travel costs were reduced by 14% during a year in which we held six conferences across the country.
- Salaries and benefit expenses were 26% higher than last year. Increase is due to a) the new practice of including salary for Farsi Ministries staff and subsidies for church planters, and b) overlapping salaries for the training of replacement staff in our office.
- We did not provide year-over-year comparison due to the restructuring of our account layout; the comparison practice will resume next year.
- This annual report is issued earlier to begin a practice of reporting closer to the end of the relevant fiscal year.

2019 Financial Report*

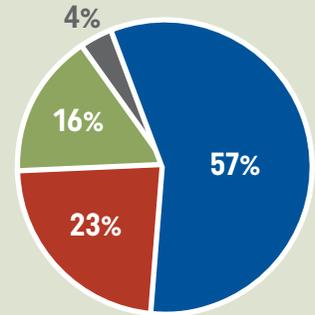
VMC General Fund

Revenue

540,313	● Individuals & corporations
214,495	● Churches
150,237	● Program fees
34,296	● Investment income

939,341 Total VMC general revenue

2019 General Fund Revenue



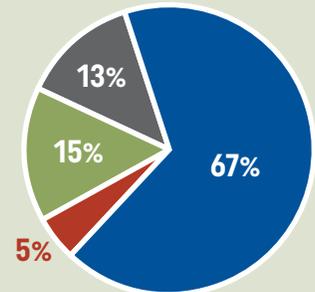
Expenses

598,120	● Salaries and benefits
45,459	● Travel
133,295	● Promotion & program
110,981	● Administration

887,855 Total VMC general expenses

51,486 Excess of revenue over expenses

2019 General Fund Expenses



VMC Project Fund

1,372,970 Project revenue supporting church planting

2,312,311 Total overall revenue

*Based on unaudited data; subject to change upon completion of external audit. Adjustments required by the audit will be reported in the next newsletter.

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US SAVE
MONEY**



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Thinking Shrewdly 2020: Spirited

INSPIRED, GUIDED AND EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

April 29-30, 2020 at Creekside Church in Waterloo, ON

Since the day of Pentecost the Church has been inspired, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Church has renounced self-reliance and cast ardent dependence on the Spirit, there has been a flourishing of vitality within and transformative impact beyond. Is the mission and very life of your congregation animated by the Spirit?

Join us to consider the essence of Spirit-shaped mission and to explore practices for appropriating the Spirit's life-giving presence within your

church. Our featured presenters lead gospel focused organizations and bring an international perspective. They are well acquainted with the VMC network. Be inspired and challenged as they share what the Spirit is doing globally and how the Church in Canada might be animated by the Breath of God.

Featured Presenters:

Dr. Girma Bekele – Adjunct Professor of Missions and Development Studies at Wycliffe College, University of

Toronto and Pastor of Addis Kidan (Ethiopian) Church in Toronto

Dave Brereton – International Director of Youth for Christ and Elder at Rosemount Bible Chapel in Montreal

Nigel Paul – Founder and International Director at MoveIn

Shaile Visser – National Director of Alpha Canada and Senior Vice-President of Alpha International

Save the date and spread the word! More details to follow.



East Coast leaders and influencers sharing communion in Halifax.

In Spring 2019 VMC convened six regional conferences across Canada—attended by more than 600 leaders. At the Montreal and Halifax events in May, Matt Pamplin and Dave Arnold inspired leaders to prioritize disciple-making and laid out the framework to help them accomplish the task.

A steering committee of French and English leaders, from across Quebec, designed and hosted an informative and challenging regional conference in Montreal attended by close to 120 people. Team leader, Nick Azzoulo,

believes this was the largest gathering of VMC leaders in Quebec ever (or at least in a very long time).

Halifax leaders collaborated extensively on an event that drew 50 people. The success of their conference was due in large part to the strong relational connection forged among these leaders in their VMC Moving the Mission Forward regional group in recent years.

Attend the National Thinking Shrewdly in Waterloo, ON (April 29-30). Expect more regional events Spring 2021. ■

Redeeming the Death of a Church

...CONTINUED FROM COVER

Reboots are possible when young, energetic and sacrificial leaders can imagine a new way to be the people of God in their context, and when established leaders are willing to graciously step aside and humbly support their successors. With a replant, the waning congregation invites a young planter and his/her supporting core from outside to plant a new church within the existing one. Sometimes a larger regional church is invited to lead the replant (see North Park Stratford story p 3). The existing congregation serves as the scaffolding, while the new leader and core are grafted in. With greater vitality, the newly planted church eventually supersedes the existing one.

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24). Jesus reminds us that death is often the necessary precursor to new life. He surrendered his life, to make new life possible for others. In the same way, he invites us to give away our lives—and our churches—for others. ■

PASS IT ON: Transferring Church Buildings within the Kingdom

BY JAY GURNETT

In a March 2019 CBC report, National Trust Canada said that 9,000 “religious spaces” will close over the next decade. The United Church of Canada told the 2017 Church Planting Canada Congress that it alone would be closing 1000 buildings in the following five years. And last year they updated that number to 1500 in conversations with me. At the end of March, The Christian Post quoted Lifeway Research’s estimate that 6,000 to 10,000 churches die in the U.S. annually because they can no longer afford to maintain their buildings. Not very positive news.

Vision Ministries has been alongside about 125 church plants since 1992 (more than half of those were planted in the last six years). 24 are no longer living local churches. Only 24 of the 101 “alive” churches have a building of their own; and 1/3 of those buildings were provided by the “mother church” to its dependent sub-congregation.

Some new Christian communities don’t want their own building, or any sort of building. But if even half of our “homeless” church plants wanted their own space, we wonder why 35 of those 9,000 buildings couldn’t be re-activated by some of our groups.

Of course, church planting networks like ours (plus some “real” denominations) are talking about this. We’ve discussed a formal Canadian Church Buildings Conversation that would encourage a commitment to sell buildings for 50-75% of their value and to always transfer buildings to other churches – not condo development or



In 2003, Bethany Gospel Chapel (represented by Maurice McElrea, left) gave their building (far right) to Emmanuel Christian Community (represented by Frank Sawasky) for \$1.

other commercial uses. Former Vision-associated church planter Graham Singh has even assembled a group called The Trinity Foundation that wants to re-boot historic flagship church buildings in major cities as community centres with 2-3 new churches using each facility.

Over the years, we have noticed candles being lit in this darkness. In addition to the good examples of a thriving church coming alongside a declining one (North Park story on p 3), and sharing a church building among smaller congregations (like Northside Bible Fellowship in Calgary, p 2); a good number of dying congregations have transferred buildings to other congregations for **free!**

The stories of congregations passing along foundational assets to young churches are downright inspiring.

Way back when, the sale of a church in Grimsby, Ontario provided the funds that launched Vision Ministries. A few years back, Bow Waters Community Church in Calgary gifted Vision Ministries a church building. Last year, we sold the building to a congregation that agreed to continue renting space to the fledgling Worldwide Acceptance Ministries church that we welcomed. A new church was established, and we have funds in the bank to plant many more.

The stories of congregations passing along foundational assets to young churches are downright inspiring. Charleswood Community Church (formerly Assiniboia CC) in Winnipeg

was blessed by Charleswood Baptist Church in 1991. The declining congregation chose to give their building and building fund to the thriving church plant in their district—with no strings attached. Charleswood’s current senior pastor Gavin Hall, who had been part of the church plant since childhood remembers: “This monumental gift started with a conversation between two old friends from two different congregations, both wanting to see God’s kingdom move forward in a neighbourhood. For that dwindling congregation, it took a lot of grace and humility to say yes to what God was bringing forward. That gift and sense of humble grace is part of our legacy now.”

Similarly, Gray Poehnell (former staff person and elder) recalls when Emmanuel Christian Community in Richmond, BC, received a building from Bethany Gospel Chapel in 2003. Gray says,

“Being given a building for one dollar was a miraculous gift from God in answer to prayer.” He adds, “It confirmed to us that God still had a ministry for us in Steveston [neighbourhood] and renewed us as a congregation to be a light in our community. This gift has instilled in us a deep sense of gratitude that underlies all that we do.”

For the churches that received a building it made a huge difference in growth and health. Both Emmanuel and Charleswood eventually renovated and added to their buildings.

At Vision, we want churches to thrive. Transferring buildings is one way we have seen God build his living church. ■

The Passing of a Friend: Ron Seabrooke

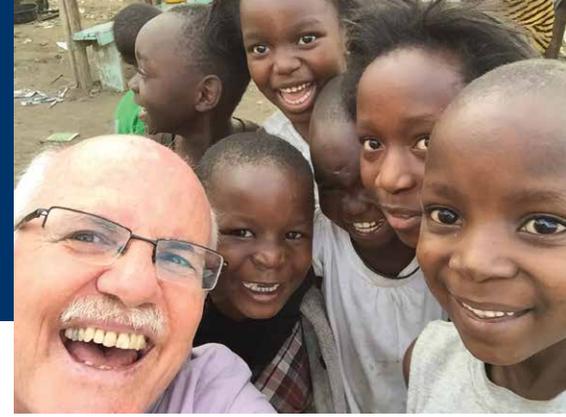
BY GORD MARTIN

Ron Seabrooke, pastor at Wallenstein Bible Chapel in Ontario passed away of a heart attack on October 5th. This came as a shock to all of us! Ron was a very good friend to VMC and to so many. He participated in three leadership training trips to Kenya, was very actively involved with the Spirit of Truth Church in Toronto, connected regularly with VMC-related churches in his community and consulted with a number of congregations. Ron was also a VMC church planter and board member. He had a heart for the gospel.

Most of all we miss Ron as a friend. His loud, outgoing and friendly manner

endeared him to many. He and I quite often drove together to Toronto or to other events. We were never at a loss for things to talk about! We talked about church leadership, about family, about relationships, about global issues, cultural issues – the conversations went on and on.

I was talking with Ishmael Ochieng of Kenya yesterday. He said “I wish this funeral were just around the corner from us, I would love to be there”. He went on to say that they had so much fun together in Kenya in August but that Ron was also serious and stood firmly on the word of God. With laughter, he remembered Ron’s



regular and public correspondence with his wife Win while he was participating in the conferences in Kenya.

Ron’s ministry at the Wallenstein Bible Chapel where he served for 13 years, was greatly appreciated. He loved doing outreach, conducting Alpha groups and all kinds of evangelistic Bible study groups.

We are deeply missing our brother Ron. We are thankful that he is with the Lord. From heaven’s perspective, his race was finished and run well. ■

Participate in VMC's Matching Fund Campaign on Giving Tuesday

The gift-giving that characterizes the Christmas season began first with God's own generosity, expressed through the gift of the infant Jesus—God with us.

Will you support Vision Ministries Canada to help people discover the One who embodies God's love?

Some of our friends have given toward a matching fund to inspire new sources of generosity.

With this fund we can match all new giving* until the end of 2019. **Double the value of your donation!**

So far this year...

- \$141,000 has been donated toward the Matching Fund
- Almost \$65,000 in new gifts* have been matched

FAITH GOAL: We are praying for another \$100,000 in new giving by the end of the year.**

After Black Friday and Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday (Dec. 3rd) provides Canadians with a great opportunity to donate to their favourite charity. Join with others on this day in donating to Vision Ministries Canada.

Donate here:
vision-ministries.org/donate

*New giving = Gifts from those who have not previously given, haven't given for many years, or increased giving from regular VMC supporters.

**New giving between now and December 31st, 2019 will be matched dollar for dollar—doubling your impact for God's kingdom through Vision Ministries.

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