



A New Catalyst to Help Local Churches Plant Churches

THINKING AHEAD

Spring 2025 The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

BY JAY GURNETT

The God of the Universe created the local church with all it needs to expand and reproduce. It's full of followers of Jesus with the same Great Commission "to go and make disciples." It has all the necessary spiritual gifts replicated over and over so new communities can have what they need. It has funds, systems, people, and sparks of holy discontent and vision. The local church is fertile, and I'd suggest, probably pregnant without knowing it.

So why don't churches plant more often? I'll get to that in a minute, but first, I want to tell you what we've seen that works to catalyze new church plants.

"The local church is fertile and probably pregnant without knowing it."

- Jay Gurnett

What Works

Vision Ministries Canada has been alongside about 160 church plants, with more than 75% fully "landed" and doing well. Vision has always been willing to help plant churches in any way possible. However, the tried and true method we've used from day one (influenced by the gurus of the 80s and 90s) is churches planting churches. We started 30% of the last 30 plants by helping develop teams in established churches that were out to do something new.

We celebrate these recent VMC Network examples:

- The East Branch of Toronto China Bible Church sent Whitby Christ Life Church in January 2025
- University Chapel in Vancouver, added a Korean congregation in 2022 and a Chinese congregation in 2021
- Woodside Bible Fellowship in Elmira, ON, sent Citizen's Church in 2020
- Gorrie Bible Fellowship "spun off" Brockton Community Church in Walkerton, ON, in 2019

These are just a few of dozens of churches we know that planted churches.

Why It Works

Here's why we believe in churches planting churches:

1. Individual congregations don't live forever. They all inevitably die (after birth, growth, thriving, and decline). Churches must plant to replace themselves.

...continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

A New Catalyst to Help Local Churches Plant Churches	1,3
Collaborating to Reach Every Community and Every Heart	2
Vision Church Catalysts	4
Micro Church: A Response to What the Spirit is Doing in Canada	5
Regional Gathering Update	6
Our Renewed Priority Gospel-Focused Disciple-Making Communities	7-8



Collaborating to Reach Every Community and Every Heart

by Sandra Reimer

Between 2009 and 2019, Buffalo, NY was the only North American city with a net increase in church attendance. What was their secret?

“A lot of church planting has just been moving people from other churches. We’re not really making ground for the kingdom,” says Mike Stone, VMC’s ED. The sad truth is that 94% of Canadians don’t follow Jesus. “Most churches have focused on helping the 6% grow closer to Christ, not reaching the 94%.”

When missiologist Jeff Christopherson investigated Buffalo’s city-wide growth in church attendance, he discovered collaboration among churches was at the heart of the increase. It all started when the largest church in the city repented for drawing Christians away from other congregations. In humility, this congregation took a kingdom perspective and used its resources to gather the Buffalo churches for prayer and collaboration.

“As tribes, denominations, and networks we’re still competing,” says Mike. Willy Reimer, Executive Director of 787 Collective, says Canadian churches need to shift away from trying to scale their own ministries. “No matter how well we scale it will never address the whole need.” But there is reason for hope.

A few years ago, Willy began to notice humility manifesting as spontaneous repentance during CPC events. “When I saw [opportunity, tools, and humility]

converge, I thought, “Man [reaching Canada for Christ] is possible!” At a CPC board retreat the “right heart” was in the room among Christian leaders from across Canada. “We genuinely appreciate each other and the gifts each faith community brings,” says Mike.

Leaning into the moment, CPC wants to stimulate “saturation church planting” where churches take collective responsibility for reaching their region. Churches around the world have used this model successfully for decades. But it has not been a Canadian thing. More recently, the Church Planting Team of the REQ is focusing on saturation church planting in Quebec among francophones.

Canada’s least-reached province (Quebec) has only one church for every 106,000 Francophones. The REQ discerned 4 “spiritual deserts” in Quebec using software developed by the Wycliffe Canadian Institute for Empirical Church Research that combines demographic, socio-economic, immigration and other data.

With this precise data, churches can ask, “What opportunities do we notice and how can we step into them?” For example, a Victoria, BC church planned to hire a Children & Family Pastor to attract young families. When they received the Wycliffe neighbourhood report they discovered no young families within a 20-minute radius. But there were a significant number of empty-nesters. They shifted their whole strategy. “It would have been a disaster to hire a Children’s Pastor,” says Willy.

To facilitate reaching unbelieving Canadians, CPC is focusing on connecting

with kingdom “catalyzers”. Mike says, “Certain people play an apostolic role for denominations and networks and mission agencies.” CPC wants to “equip, encourage, and inspire” these spiritual entrepreneurs and bring them into dialogue with their counterparts from other “tribes.” Mike believes healthy collaboration will emerge as leaders build trust.

Primed for collaboration, these catalyzers can pull groups together in a city to ask, “What are you good at? What resources do you have? Who’s doing what and where?” This will enable planters to share resources and ideas and pray together.

Willy says the ultimate metric for a church’s success is obedience.

Imagine each church in a region fulfilling its calling instead of competing for the most attendees—maybe more Canadians would come to know Jesus. ■

TAKE ACTION

Ask your leadership team,
“How can we reach the 94%
and who can we partner with?”

.....

Attend Church Planting
Canada’s Intersession 2025
event, October 27-29

...continued from page 1

2. A team approach is what we see in the Book of Acts, for example how things got started in Corinth and Ephesus in Acts 18-20. (Imagine planting with Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, Silas, and Timothy!). Local churches organize around teams of leaders/elders, ministry-focused groups, staff, etc. When a pioneer, solo church planter wants to do something new, he or she often scans and scrapes around to find the right partners. But when the Spirit of God sparks an established community to do something new, odds are people with the right gifts are already within arms reach.
3. Mother churches can handle administration. Part of the heavy lifting of church planting is administrative. A church planter often has to count money, issue charitable receipts, and pay bills just to survive. Mother churches can take care of administration to free planters up to connect with the surrounding community and gossip the gospel!

Why Churches Don't Plant

The wrench in the works is that churches are often too busy to nurture a tiny green shoot of vision. Sometimes, they're reaching new

people, and certainly, they're growing disciples. Leaders are often doing so many things it's hard to keep their heads above water. It's easy to forget that you planned to "go and make disciples." Many congregations also assume that planting can only be done with a paid planter—a big commitment. We don't think this is the only approach, and sometimes not even the best one.

Hope to Catalyze More New Churches

Lately, we've been wondering if local churches need help sooner to recognize when something new is brewing in their midst. Usually, a baby church is obviously on the way before a congregation invites Vision to come alongside with our services (discernment, coaching, leadership development, team development, funding, admin management services, etc).

But what if we could partner with churches to scan the horizon and help them nurture the tiniest green shoot of a vision? How many more people could we reach for Christ, and churches could we plant?

So, if you're a leader who has an inkling it's time you saw some reproduction, contact me or one of the Vision catalyzers pictured on page 5. We're eager to try this "early intervention" a few times in the next year or so. Let's collaborate for the kingdom. ■

READY TO CATALYZE SOMETHING NEW?



Contact jay.gurnett@vision-ministries.org

See P 4 to find out what this collaboration with Vision looks like.



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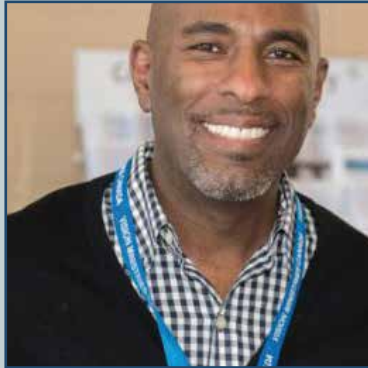
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Vision Church Catalysts



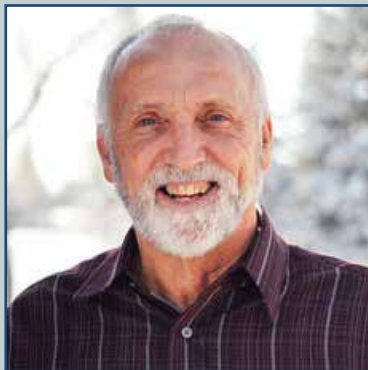
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Here's How We Can Help You Catalyze a Church Plant

Vision's Early Intervention Catalyzing

A Vision Ministries Catalyst helps churches discern mission impulses that could be nurtured into church plants. But we want to start sooner rather than later.

A Vision Catalyzer:

1. **Meets with primary leaders** to discuss possibilities and discern what the Spirit is urging them toward.
2. **Joins prayerful discernment** amongst the leaders to come to an initial agreement about where God is leading.
3. **Continues to be alongside the elders** for the rest of the process.
4. **Develops a plan with the elders** to introduce the idea to a select group and the congregation in general.
5. **Helps draw folks together** in larger info meetings, one-on-one, and in small groups.
6. **Assists leaders to discern primary leaders** and members of the church planting team
7. **Coaches and provides training to the church planting team.** (Ask lots of questions/bring up matters to consider, especially with the vision-carrying leader).
8. **Develop the plan** for the plant.
9. **Continue coaching, help determine the plant structure,** relationship with the mother church, systems, funding, etc.

The ultimate result...a new church! ■

Interested? Contact
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Micro Church: A Response to What the Spirit is Doing in Canada

BY SANDRA REIMER

How do we live out the way of Jesus at this time? God is doing beautiful things across various forms of the church. There's nothing wrong with larger Sunday gatherings. But for some Christian leaders in the VMC network the answer is home-based microchurches or missional communities. According to Brian Sanders, author of *Underground Church*, microchurches have minimal ecclesiology. If you have worship, community and mission, you have a church. "We noticed some new wineskins—churches are emerging out of people's homes," says Matt Pamplin. He comes alongside microchurches in the Vision network. "I don't think this is a fad... it seems to be a response to what God is doing in our time."

Matt observes that our technology-rich society is making people disconnected, so they long for deeper relationships. "Homes often feel like an easier place to invite someone." He also believes it's easier for people new to the faith to live out the way of Jesus in community. "Discipleship happens best in relationship. We need to be in each other's lives enough to know one another." He points out that in homes over a meal you see how a person "treats their spouse, parents or their kids."

Matt and his wife Jenn helped start a missional community in their Hamilton, ON neighbourhood. They have hosted or been involved in microchurches for the past decade. Matt says missional communities practice hospitality and "reclaim the meal as central to church gatherings." Microchurches equip every member to be an active follower of Jesus and to live into belonging to the priesthood of all believers.

For most groups that begin in homes, their end goal is not to start a Sunday gathering. "They might multiply into starting other microchurches."

Some groups do meet once a month on a Sunday for a larger gathering. In addition, established churches



with Sunday gatherings have launched missional communities. These congregations want active church expressions on other days besides Sundays.

Matt says home-centric churches are actually a very ancient expression of the Christian church. For example, in Acts 2:46 it says, "Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes." As well, when Saul persecuted the church in Acts 8:3, it states he went "from house to house" to drag off both men and women and put them in prison.

Vision recently decided to provide more formal support because they noticed microchurches emerging nationwide. "This is something popping up in multiple places, from Vancouver to the East Coast." Vision is walking alongside 12 microchurches. Vision gathers like-minded Christians leading microchurch communities online to share best practices, commiserate, celebrate and pray. Vision is also considering handling administration for these groups like they do with more traditional church plants.

Matt admits that being involved in a

"Discipleship happens best in relationship. We need to be in each other's lives enough to know one another."

microchurch "can get really messy." Over the years, he and his wife have wondered, "should we just quit?" But then, they think about the impact on their kids. "Our kids have been mentored by a bunch of people who aren't their parents." He thinks of a few single girls who have been "amazing" with their daughter. Recently, Matt was injured and couldn't ferry his daughter to soccer, so one of her mentors took her to the game. An engineer in the church invited their son (who wants to be a mechanic) over to change the oil in his car. Matt's son and daughter are usually enthusiastic about gathering with their church. "For my kids, this has been truly family growing together." ■

Interested? CONTACT
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Thinking Shrewdly Regional Gatherings

60+ friends of Vision Ministries Canada (representing more than a dozen churches), gathered together in Edmonton on April 5, 2025. Dialogue was sparked by four presentations from 10 local church leaders as well as a couple of short talks from Mike Stone. The group worshipped together, broke bread together, and talked and talked and talked. And ate a lot of food. All in all, the right things to do when you are remembering that We are Family (the theme of the event). 2025 regional gatherings were also planned in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver.



Photos: Cal Hultgren, Bow Valley Community Church



Our Renewed Priority: Gospel-Focused, Disciple-Making Communities

BY MIKE STONE
Executive Director, VMC

Vision Ministries serves a sizeable network of churches as a hybrid between a denomination and an independent mission agency. We leverage the possibilities of both identities as we cultivate mutuality sans the control. Churches appreciate our “denominational” type services—consulting, crisis intervention, help with pastoral transitions and licensing, and connection to other churches. Our ‘mission’ priorities—discernment, team formation, equipping, resourcing, and coaching—help to catalyze new churches.

At our annual retreat, the VMC staff team gathers in person to discuss, reflect, imagine, pray, and discern where the Spirit might be leading us in the coming year and beyond. This year, we discerned several priorities, including a renewed

focus on cultivating evangelistic church planting across our network. We’re eager to partner and collaborate with churches who share our values and passion to multiply disciples, leaders, and churches. These churches and the churches we plant deserve our primary energy and attention.

Our team considered the question, “How can we ensure that our church planting efforts result in gospel-focused, reproducing, disciple-making communities? The prevailing imagination for church in North America still prioritizes the Sunday gathering. As a result, church planting often settles for merely launching a worship service that primarily appeals to Christians and unwittingly fuels religious consumerism.

In the planting process, we wonder if churches start worship services too soon. Would this ministry sequence be more impactful?

1. Serve the city or neighbourhood.
2. Proclaim the good news and make new disciples.
3. Gather disciples for formation.
4. Then launch a public worship gathering.

To foster more disciple-making communities, Matt Pamplin is coming alongside microchurches across the country (see article p 5). Microchurches often begin with and are birthed out of mission. Micro-churches are committed to simplicity in worship, formative community, and mission. That’s why they find it easier to keep the main thing the main thing.

Unencumbered by production-driven worship events or a wide selection

...continued on page 8



Micro-churches are committed to simplicity in worship, formative community, and mission.

...continued from page 7

of church programs, they can allocate more resources to mission. That's why microchurches often punch evangelistically above their weight.

Committed to the idea of churches planting churches, we're seeking leaders who will invite a VMC catalyst to help cultivate a planting team from within their congregation. (See Jay Gurnett's article on page 1) The catalyst will help to establish a disciple-making priority and ensure the inclusion of evangelistic gifting on the team in its formation process. When the team is formed with missional priorities, communal practices, and a discerned location, the elders will commission and send it out to plant.

To sharpen the evangelistic edge of church planting across our network, we want to develop a profile of a typical evangelist and design a system to identify and mobilize gifted evangelists in our midst. Disciple-making will be front and center at Thinking Shrewdly 2026, with a heavy emphasis on equipping.

While VMC will continue to help established churches with revitalization, we will be more selective about who and how we help. When churches are in trouble, often they call too late. By the time we get involved, the church is well into decline and beyond the likelihood of renewal. Revitalization requires change; only about 15% of the population

embraces change easily, another 15% resist stubbornly, and the rest need significant coaxing. The longer a church has been declining, the more disruptive the change will be and the longer revitalization will take.

To maximize our church revitalization efforts, we will:

- **Pre-screen churches with a preliminary assessment.**
- **Make sure all leaders are on board with the process.**
- **Ask them to commit to follow through on mutually agreed on action.**
- **Look for progress in the first 3 months**

We want to help churches stay ahead of the decline curve by developing resources that help leaders identify early signs of diminishing vitality. After all, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. While we can't consult directly with every struggling church, we can create group and online revitalization seminars for churches where decline is less advanced. This approach requires fewer resources but enables VMC to help more churches in need—good stewardship.

I am hopeful and optimistic about the year ahead, as our team lets go of less fruitful priorities, to experiment with new initiatives, and lean into what's working. ■



We would love to have you deepen your partnership with VMC:

- Sign a VMC partnership agreement, so we know you're on board.
- Invite a VMC catalyst to help you form a church planting team.
- Inquire about our church revitalization help.
- Give to support VMC's kingdom work.

THINKING AHEAD



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