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MORE FLOURISHING EFFECTIVE CHURCHES

THINKING AHEAD The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

Outivating new churches and Kingdom ventures

SANDRA REIMER

MC staff members Gord Martin and Jay Gurnett try to keep one ear to the ground and one to God's heart as they discern new ministry initiatives that VMC can nurture. Gord says: "We are always on the lookout for people with a heart to start new churches, ministries or extensions of their present ministry . Jay is our master networker and often crosses paths with dreamers, visionaries, and restless people who need a little encouragement to get started."

"Sometimes people have a good idea but they don't have partners, encouragement or resources to get it going," says Gord.

Once a potential church planter or ministry leader comes to the attention of the VMC staff, he or she meets with Gord or Jay to talk about next steps. If the idea becomes clearer, the person's preparedness and capacity seem real, and the commitment deeper; then the leader may be asked to complete an application found on the VMC website or work through VMC's "Vision to Reality" workbooks. The assessment process includes getting to know the prospective planter, helping them think through what they want to do, identifying needed partners, and working through the application. If there isn't a primary individual leading the potential new initiative, an interested small group goes through a similar process.

From there, VMC helps the planter decide when they should get started. Resources are gathered, supports are

put in place and Vision tells its community of churches that something new is in the works. A key element of championing a new work is getting others to pray. "Presently just over 90 people receive VMC's praise and prayer emails from potential planters, pastors, and other church leaders," says Gord.

Sometimes planters need financial support to get going. According to VMC staff, "If the work is not being planted out of an existing church, if the planter is new to Canada and has few connections, or if the work is among

people in poverty, the church may need financial backing." In cases like this, VMC connects with supportive foundations and/or receives donations from individuals on behalf of the new work. If the project is too costly for VMC and is in the greater Toronto area, they may reach out to their 12:12 Network partners (the Associated Gospel Church of Canada and the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches) to help provide resources and spiritual oversight. Financial assistance may be provided

Continued on page 2



Since 1992, VMC has helped nurture 56 church plants and seven church extension initiatives (like

Moveln, the Chin network of churches, Le Réseau, etc). Planted in 2005, The Spirit of Truth Church, lead by Pastor Siamak Shafti-Keramat, recently baptized seven new members. Vision Ministries Canada has facilitated financial assistance that allows Pastor Siamak to minister fulltime to Farsi-speaking people in Toronto. VMC has also provided teaching and administrative support that has helped to multiply God's transforming work among former Muslims through The Spirit of Truth Church. See page 8 for a testimony from Maryam, who was baptized at the church.

Dusty Old Book Still Transforms Lives page 3

Outliving Your Life page 5

Sanctuary London: Building a Community to Call Home page 4

Former Muslim Woman Baptized page 8

Continued from page 1

or facilitated for up to three years. Churches needing finances go through a more rigorous application process than those who don't need that level of support

In addition to financial, administrative, and prayer support, church planters and ministry leaders need encouragement. "Research has shown that one of the key factors in producing healthy church plants is ongoing coaching as the new work unfolds," says Mark Anderson, part time coach with VMC. Gord and Jay coach the planters in terms of ministry, while Mark provides more personal coaching and guidance for leaders. "Church planting is not only challenging frontline work, but also an intense season of spiritual stress in the lives of the planter and their core team," says Mark. He adds, "God is very much present in new things-coaches keep leaders healthy and effective by remaining open and receptive to His provision."

Though not all of the 56 church plants VMC helped start since 1992 have been successful, most are thriving today. We believe that by selecting capable leaders with a calling from God, providing administrative, financial and prayer resources, as well as supporting leaders through coaching, new kingdom ventures will grow and bring many people to faith. ■

VMC 'Gardeners'

Vision Ministries' staff are passionate about cultivating kingdom work—even if it looks different than anything else that currently exists. They are comfortable with things that don't fit the mold. According to the staff, "We guide leaders to hold to core orthodoxy, wise biblically-based values and to pursue essential practices, but we don't discourage them from trying new things."

VMC helps cross-pollinate leaders with fresh ideas. Some of this happens formally through its involvement in Church Planting Canada events, but it also happens by connecting planters with others that are involved in similar ministry. Gord and Jay make a point of reading and listening to current and past thinkers and practitioners in the area of church planting and leadership. As well, VMC has an extensive lending library that is available to anyone.

Administrative details can overwhelm the leaders of a new work. VMC staff member Dave McClurkin helps church plants work through incorporation and applying for charitable status and consults with them on financial matters at their request. He also assists churches who use VMC's online accounting service.



The crucible of planting (or any high-intention, highcommitment ministry) seems to highlight places where the Spirit is longing to bring healing and growth to planters and other high-potential leaders. By paying attention to what God is doing in and around us, coaches help create awareness which leads to openness to joining in on what God is doing. —Mark Anderson, part-time VMC Coach to Church Planters and Leaders



Here are a good number of the 100 plus people who were at the first official service of Morning Star on Easter Sunday, 2011. Morning Star, led by James Yu who is in the centre left side of the picture, is a Mandarin congregation growing out of Granville Chapel in Vancouver, BC. If you can pray regularly or support this work in other ways, let VMC know.

2 // THINKING AHEAD

Dusty Old Book Still Transforms Lives

SANDRA REIMER

hrough his ministry in poorer Toronto neighbourhoods (started in 2010), Quincy Bergman oversees two house fellowships that meet weekly. In January 2011, Quincy started a third church in his Brampton home to better care for the spiritual needs of his wife and two young kids.

wife and two young kids

Unlike the other two churches where most people live in government housing, those attending the Brampton fellowship come from different ethnic backgrounds, family stages, and income brackets.

While the Brampton church meets the needs of Quincy and his family, it is also becoming a blessing to the other two fellowships. "The young guys that come from Jane and Finch [a poor neighbourhood] are able to get a feel for family when we get together once per month."

Each of the three fellowships meets weekly on its own, but monthly they all get together for a celebration. "Our services are more like a wedding reception than a regular service. We have a huge meal and then we do some teaching and we do some singing," says Quincy.

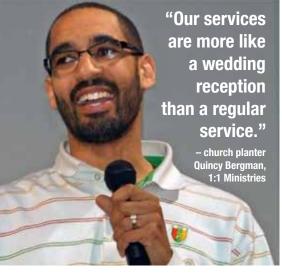
During the winter, the 50 or so people who collectively make up the three groups meet in a few of the members' homes or at Calvary Church in Toronto. Last summer, they did all of their monthly celebrations in local parks. "We would have 50 people together for a barbeque. We bring the lawn

How You Can Pray for 1:1 Ministries

- for sufficient resources to run the ministry
- God would give Quincy and the other leaders grace to walk with people experiencing many heartbreaking issues
- funds to purchase a dozen *The Jesus* Story Book (an adaptation of the Bible) for the group's 8-12 year olds

chairs around for discussion."

What do the groups discuss when they get together? Quincy says, "One of the things that I am passionate about is Biblical literacy. I want people to understand the meta-narrative [overall story] of scripture." For this reason, the fellowships are studying the Old Testament.



"Last week we were covering Joshua and Judges. We invited all of the young boys between 10 and 13 into the discussion... Our young boys were sitting beside their dads, both having their Bibles open and sharing insights, being asked questions and being allowed to ask questions back." Quincy adds, "There has been a disconnect with the fathers. It has been amazing to see the transformation of young men wanting to be fathers to their kids and also forgiving their own estranged fathers from the past. We are seeing reconciliation happen." God is fulfilling one of Quincy's favourite promises found in Malachi 4:6: "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers ..."

Quincy admits he was a bit apprehensive diving into scripture with the fellowships rather than doing more life-issue based teaching. "So we are trying to meet a practical need, which does get met, but our conversations are rooted in Scripture. Everything comes from there and you see that this old dusty book is still speaking to people in their lives today."



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Spending of funds received by VMC is confined to board-approved programs and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved program will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where needed most. Gifts of \$20 or more are acknowledged with an official tax receipt.

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



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SANCTUARY LONDON: Building a Community to Call Home

ike came to the streets of London, Ontario to find, in his words, "better drugs" to dull the pain of his abusive childhood. But in the end, he found friends, and the healing of Jesus.

Sanctuary London, lead by Gil Clelland and Darryl Reckman, serves the impoverished people living in London's downtown. "Our church is about being in and among the most impoverished in the city," says Clelland. "It's about creating a place they can call home."

For the past four years, Clelland and Reckman worked with London Youth For Christ's Streetlight program, aimed at street youth aged 16-24 years. The hardest part of this ministry is building trust. "Most have been hurt or rejected by authority and have been abused," explains Gil. "Trust is something that happens over a long period of time." And over the years, as they persisted, a community grew.

Then, a turning point came. To stay true to their mandate, Youth For Christ requested that they limit their ministry to 16-24 year olds. However, neither Clelland nor Reckman felt comfortable abandoning their older friends. And, they realized, their community had become a church. "We were worshiping together, we were studying the scriptures, we'd had baptisms," says Clelland. "We said, 'We're already a church; we might as well express what we already are.'"

So, under the umbrella of Sanctuary Toronto, Sanctuary London became an official church on January 1, 2011. Sanctuary London offers several weekday drop-ins , meals, art classes, a Bible study, a worship service, and continues to partner with Streetlight. About 30-50 people come regularly, with another 400 to 500 coming occasionally.

Mike, his arms covered with tattoos, often paints canvases with Clelland. But

when they first met, Mike had threatened a volunteer. Yet Mike was drawn to the group, and when they went to the beach, he asked to come along. "When we got there, Mike was just sitting there alone, brooding, so I invited him to throw a Frisbee with me," says Clelland. And that began a process of building trust. Two years ago, Mike was baptized, and now he often goes with Clelland when he speaks to groups.

When Mike shares his story, people respond. "The poor give us the gift of allowing us to see our own poverty," says Clelland. "You don't have to put on a mask and pretend that because of Jesus you have it all together."

The biggest surprise to Clelland in planting this church has been the support of churches. "When I first started, I felt alone. But now there's an openness to see that the call of Jesus is not just a personal relationship—as wonderful as that is—but a calling to a different lifestyle, a kingdom in which the most impoverished are



In addition to running art classes for people in need, Sanctuary London offers several weekday drop-ins, meals, a Bible study, and a worship service.

taken care of and where justice is done."

JEANETTE DUNCAN

What would Gil say to a church that wants to get involved with impoverished people in their own community? "Find someone who's working with them, and join them. Lead with your ears, not your mouth."





"The poor give us the gift of allowing us to see our own poverty," says Gil Clelland, pastor of Sanctuary London. "You don't have to put on a mask and pretend that because of Jesus you have it all together." Bottom right: Darryl Reckman

DAVE MCCLURKIN

The last words of a father to a son

((T am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the Lord your God, and ■ follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go." – 1 Kings 2:2-3 (NLT)

Outliving Your Life

A last word before death is worth remembering, especially when it comes from King David, "a man after God's own heart." I reflected on these words, as I recently read them in my time with God. I wondered, "What have I learned over a lifetime that is so important I would like people to hold it tightly? What would I like on my headstone? What lessons have I learned that need to be passed on to the next generation?" I can learn from David. After years of walking with God, he knew what had eternal value. His instructions were on four levels:

Sharpen your eternal perspective.

We all must die. David knew that. I know it. You know it. And when we live with the perspective of eternity, coupled with our finiteness, chances are what is really valuable will come into sharp focus. We will make wise decisions. We will choose to make what is invaluable shape us rather than what is simply valuable. David didn't say, "Amass possessions; that will immortalize you." Or "Build massive structures with your image on them so people will remember you." No, to David the only thing that mattered was what mattered to God. Great leaders will do for people what David did for Solomon. As Max Lucado puts it, David taught Solomon how to "outlive his life." You can only do that when you have a humble sense of your mortality.

Draw courage from God.

"Take courage and be a man." King David is saying, "Stand tall as a man as you are encouraged by Jehovah." If I could communicate anything to people today it would be this: "Figure out how to rest in the strong arms of Jehovah and draw on His strength." I can think of nothing sadder than to face a crisis in life not knowing God well enough to rest in His strength and

encouragement. In effect, David said to Solomon, "If you want your life on earth to really count, become a model of drawing strength from God so that those you lead will follow in His strength, drawing on His encouragement."

Follow in all the ways of God.

"Follow all His ways." Walk as He would walk. Think as He would think. Live as He would live. That's why we need to camp regularly in the pathways of Jesus in our studies and preaching. How did He do it? How can we match our stride to the steps (or footprints) that He left for us in His life? There is nothing more secure in this broken world than embracing the privilege of walking with the Almighty God. Leaders need to pass this torch on to those who follow them.

Give high priority to His wisdom. "Keep [His] decrees ... so that you will be successful." His wisdom will never lead you into bondage - only to freedom and joy. Make His wisdom the centre of your life.

My anchor verses for 2011 are from Matthew 11:28-30:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. (The Message, emphasis added.)

That's such good advice. No wonder 1 Kings 2:46 says, "So the kingdom was now firmly in Solomon's grip." A kingdom or a life built on such advice will never go awry. And it is only when Solomon departed from this wise counsel from his dad that his kingdom began to unravel.

Father, help me to model these concepts out every day. Help me to govern my life so that it is calibrated to Your Word, Your commands, Your ways. When You call me to lead, help me to pass the torch into the hands of those who follow so that I too can outlive my life. Amen. ■



VMC Network News

Report on: Moving Your Church's Mission Forward

We held nine half-day events in churches across the country (Wallenstein, Montreal, Ilderton, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton, Calgary, Peterborough and Toronto), with one more scheduled for Halifax in late May.

Gord Martin presented "Missional God, Missional Church and the Mission of 'our Church." Leaders were invited to assess their personal commitment to the mission of God as well as the commitment of individuals in the congregation and the church as a whole. Mike Stone facilitated a discussion that helped leadership teams consider their next steps.

Participant Comments:

Thanks for organizing the regional gathering in Ilderton on Sunday. It was very encouraging, challenging and practical. I think we all went home stimulated with good ideas.

—Larry Teeple

Thriving Quebec Church Moves To Where the People Are

Huntingville Community Church, in a small town now part of metropolitan Sherbrooke, has purchased a former Catholic church in nearby Lennoxville (St. Antoine's).

"This is not a new church plant, but it is definitely an obedient move to be closer to those in need and to minister to a community much more intensely than we have ever done before," said John Haffenden, an elder with the church.

About 175 people attend on Sunday, a huge number for a church in Quebec. The congregation is trying to sell their old building (top) in a more rural location while doing renovations at their new location (bottom).

Listen to a CBC radio interview with Pastor Randy Crozier at http://bitly.com/ huntingvillecbcstory





Wallenstein Bible Chapel Takes Action

After one of the events, we received the following

note from Ron Seabrooke, Outreach/Teaching Pastor at Wallenstein Bible Chapel:

Saturday evening, emails were already flying around about what to do with some of our ideas generated in the small groups.

No longer want a printed copy of Thinking Ahead?

Send us an email at info@vision-ministries.org with "TA Enews" in the subject line. Include your full name and current mailing address in the body of the email. We will remove you from the mailing list and send you an electronic version instead.

Or if you no longer want to receive our communication, please send us an email at **info@vision-ministries.org** or call toll-free **1-877-509-5060** (519-725-1212).

We recently received this witty letter requesting that a person be removed from our mailing list:

At least two years ago, ______ moved from Bethany Manor to a more favourable Home. Where she is now, English is not the official language. I have never been there, never have spoken face-to-face with anyone who has been there, but from all I read in a black Book I carry with me betimes, I have the impression that it is not such a bad place to be. I hope to see her in the Land of Fadeless Day but I am not too sure how soon that will be. In the meantime, I'd suggest that her name be deleted from your mailing list. —John H. Adams, Bethany Manor Sunday afternoon was our members meeting—we spent close to an extra hour discussing some ideas and the need to change our budget to make them happen and send a strong message of support to those who are already involved in missional life in the WBC community.

We voted and made a change to our missions fund. The first two Sundays each month are missions offerings and the money is divided into shares for missionaries. This is a substantial ministry—some families receive close to \$2,000 per month and we have quite a few.

We have now expanded and added another share for local missional activity. We as a church made it clear we want people to see missions as here at home in our lives as well as overseas. We all 'know' this but are now giving this more attention.

Money is to be set aside monthly for the huge needs around us. A team will now begin to work on how we can meaningfully support the present missional activity and expand it.

There is already a lot happening in reaching the Old Colony community with huge needs in ESL, shortage of food, basic necessities, home violence, etc. This is a good step forward in making this happen.

That was just one day. We have yet to coordinate each of the several groups that we broke into in order to examine the other great ideas that were discussed.

Thanks for being the catalyst!

We Welcome Ken Taylor to the VMC Board

Ken Taylor recently joined the Vision Ministries Canada Board of Directors. Ken is the Lead Pastor at Creekside Community Church in Waterloo, Ontario.



He is passionate about leading and teaching and is fired up when people begin a relationship with God through Jesus and experience God's power and joy in their lives. He and Carol have five adult children and two grandchildren.



Leader Support Update from Doug Loveday

When I think of my ministry with VMC, I consider the very important service Barnabas provided when he went to

Antioch in Acts 11:23:

"When he arrived, he saw the evidence of the grace of God; he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts."

I am seeing the grace of God at work in pastors and leaders among the VMC network, and I am glad! So my role is to encourage these brothers and sisters to remain true and faithful to the God who is true and faithful. I love Psalm 143:8 in this respect: "Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul."

As I talk with these good fellow labourers, I am encouraged as I see them walking with the Lord and leading others to be devoted followers of Christ. These relationships are growing and I look forward to deeper and more times together, by phone, email or in person, all to the glory of our great God and Saviour and Lord and coming King!

So far I have been in contact with the primary leaders of these churches, but I am also looking for other leaders, coworkers or elders who might find it helpful to have my support and encouragement.

Doug Loveday started ministering part-time with VMC in January, 2011. He is available to support leaders in churches connected to the VMC Network. He can be reached at 519-666-3049 extension 4.

Pastoral Support: Resources for Wounded Healers

In February of 2011, Doug Loveday and Mark Anderson attended a conference on Member Care in Toronto, on behalf of VMC.

Presentations emphasized how the growing pressures of ministry, along with the increased emotional and relational fracturing in our western society, are leading to more exhaustion, burn out, or entrapment in addictive behaviours for pastors, planters, and missionaries.

As Doug and Mark offer informal care and support to VMC workers and congregations in Eastern and Western Canada respectively, their emphasis is on prevention and recognition of unhealthy ministry situations. They offer invested companionship and confidential support to spiritual leaders who are pouring themselves out in ministry.

Staying healthy for ministry in the longterm involves a) appropriate self-care, b) learning the best practices for early interception of unhealthy addictions, and c) accessing healing resources when major wounds surface.

Following Jesus' example of Kingdom ministry does not mean cleverly avoiding pain and woundedness, nor stoically enduring it in human strength. Instead, we are to face pain and embrace suffering in the Spirit's strength allowing Him to heal our brokenness as, together with caring companions, we are held in His strong, loving hope.

Other wisdom from the conference:

- Conflict has the potential to be destructive, but welcoming disagreement, even seeking it, is honouring to the people involved. Leaders can say things like, "I'm feeling confused about our discussion last night. I'd really like to sit down and hear more from you" or "Let's have as many different perspectives on this as we can."
- "When you see a man drowning, you don't ask him if he wants a life vest. You throw it to him." Often people will not ask for help. As leaders, if the Lord shows us the need, then we must respond even if there is no request for support.
- Risk is normal. Losing sleep is not. As pastors and church leaders, we face stress and risk. When the Lord uses our bodies to get our attention through lack of sleep or other abnormal and unhealthy symptoms, we must listen to Him and get support.

Update on Thinking Shrewdly V Conference

The Good News and Your Church in Word and Action *Five conference streams:*

- Communicating the Good News in Canada
- ► Church, Leadership and the Good News
- Compassion, Justice and the Good News
- New Canadians and the Good News
- New Initiatives and the Good News

Location and date: Waterloo or Guelph, Ontario; May 10-12, 2012 *Committed presenters to date:*

- ► Gary Nelson, President of Tyndale University College & Seminary
- ► Greg Paul, Founder & Director of Sanctuary Ministries
- ► Bruxy Cavey, Teaching Pastor, The Meeting House

Former Muslim Woman Baptized At Spirit of Truth Church

My name is Maryam, born in a Muslim family and raised by Muslim parents. I was practicing Islam until I was 13 years old.

At that time my sister—who was 16 years old and a member of a Communist party in Iran was trying to convince me that there is no God and asked me to take part in their meetings with her. Very soon I followed my sister's beliefs until my sister was arrested and jailed for four years under persecution and torture. Because of this relationship, my brother was also fired from his job.

My whole family situation was screwed up. Anyway through Azad University, I graduated as a nurse and started to work in the cancer department of a hospital in Ahvaz (capital city of the south-western province in Iran called Khuzestan).

Every single day I saw kids dying of cancer in spite of the work of the doctors and specialists. I had a feeling that there must be something much more powerful to heal these innocent kids. There must be somebody more powerful than humans with the ability to hear our cries and help us. These thoughts created new ideas about a God in my mind, until I and my family immigrated to Canada in 1999.

Very soon I came to know the Mormons and took part in their services. I studied their book

in Farsi, but I did not get anything out of it, and through some excuses stopped taking part in their services.

Later I came to know the Jehovah Witnesses. I took part in their services and they came into our house. They explained to me their beliefs. Although I had a very close friendship with them I was in doubt about their beliefs.

After a while, through one of my friends I became acquainted with a book by [Florence] Scovel Shinn. Through it I found a different feeling in regard to God. In the winter of 2009, I learned about the Spirit of Truth Church. Since participating in their Sunday worship services, the Spirit touched me and I met my living God.

A person full of fear and stress like me has been found by the real God at the Spirit of Truth Church. By taking part in Bible studies and observing the quality of their services, I got a very powerful confidence in my heart towards God. Very soon I had no fear to talk about God or about my feelings. My stress has gone away and the peace of God is filling me every single day.

Now with my baptism I would like to start a new life through Jesus Christ and be a faithful servant for Him to share His love and Kingdom with others. ■



Siamak Shafti-Keramat is the pastor at Spirit of Truth Church, where Maryam was one of seven new members recently baptized.







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