

# EMCCTOGETHER

The Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada Family Stories

2025

# Engaging in Community

OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT

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I opened my inbox one morning to see a list of emails with stories of what God is doing across the EMCC: Stories about newcomers to Canada getting baptised and kids giving their life to Jesus at summer camp, home churches multiplying, and congregations coming together to pray. We had asked churches and leaders in the EMCC to share their stories of what God was doing through His people engaging together. I was amazed by the response and found myself thanking and praising the Lord for all the ways He is working in our denomination.

As you read these stories of people and churches engaging together for the gospel, I pray you will also be encouraged. I pray that you would read these testimonies of God's faithfulness and be moved to thankfulness and also to action. That your eyes would be open to the opportunities around you to engage with others and see what God might do.

If you have a story to share that relates to the theme of the year and can be an encouragement to others, please see our submission guidelines at [emcc.ca/emccotogether](http://emcc.ca/emccotogether).

**Katie Gutierrez**  
Interim Communications Manager



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# EMCC TOGETHER

BY REV. JOHN CRESSMAN

**N**ehemiah heard the news about the broken-down walls that once surrounded and protected Jerusalem. He was moved (Nehemiah 1). After assessment and with conviction, he invited the returning remnant to move— to pick up a stone (Nehemiah 2). Next to each other, driven by a common cause, the people of God accomplished more than any one of them could do on their own (Nehemiah 3). They supported one another. They protected one another—a powerful testimony of collective impact.

This magazine is a fresh call to co-labour together. The popular word is “collaborate”— to engage together in the mission of Jesus. This spirit has always been a part of our history: multiple churches working together to start a new work, youth workers collaborating to form a large gathering known as Pitch N Praise, and recently 48 churches contributing to the 2024 Pentecost Offering to raise over \$60,000.

What is the purpose of a denomination? I get this question a lot. It is a sign of our times, where institutions are under considerable scrutiny. While it may seem easy to focus on how institutions constrict growth; denominations like ours seek to mobilize and multiply ministry. I still contend denominations do invaluable things. You might think that I have to say that as the President, but I have witnessed and experienced the joy and impact of serving alongside our larger family of churches. Watching brothers and sisters in Christ and congregations hold hands together not just for fellowship but in service. Together, we have sent missionaries around the world and have the opportunity to continue to do so. Together, we have launched new works in many different communities and need to recapture that mandate. Together, we have raised generations of leaders, of which I humbly stand as one. We must continue to do so, with intention. While culture trumps autonomy, Jesus calls us to unity and shared ministry.

Here is my hand. We will join with others in rebuilding our connections and our collective potential. Back to the question, what is the purpose of this denomination? We prefer the word “family.” The EMCC provides a spiritual “covering;” a type of spiritual protection. We are under the authority of Christ and our shared beliefs. The covering provides accountability for our pastors, global workers, and churches. The EMCC conserves, supports, and celebrates our treasures: our people—past, present, and future. The EMCC provides connection. We are a network of people and churches with resources. While some may doubt the value of a denomination, we invite you to experience the joys of our collective identity.

Through 2024 and into 2025, we have been deliberately engaging with our churches. Meeting with church boards and pastors, we seek to rekindle our relationship as a collective group—as a family covenanted together. The invitation has been to renew our vows to each other. “For we are co-workers in God’s service” (1 Corinthians 3:9). ●

John Cressman is completing his first term as EMCC President. John & his wife Melanie were married 38 years ago and are members of Plattsville EMC in Ontario. Plattsville is a small town west of Kitchener. Melanie was discipled through the Plattsville congregation. The church family provides much strength and support on their faith journey.



**JOHN RECENTLY PUBLISHED HIS FIRST BOOK**  
**PULL UP A CHAIR, A HANDBOOK TO EQUIP CHURCH BOARD CHAIRS.**  
 YOU CAN FIND IT ON





# A Warm CHURCH

*It Really Does Make a Difference*

BY REV. MARTIN NIEUWETS

I've seen firsthand how creating a warm and welcoming church community can truly change lives. I remember one young person in particular who, at first, couldn't see himself ever feeling comfortable in church. He thought it wasn't a place for him—until everything changed. After just a few weeks of spending time with us and going on a weekend retreat, he realized how wrong he had been. His life was never the same again.

At our church in St. Catharines, we've been on a journey to figure out what it means to be a place where young people and their families actually want to be. What we're discovering is that building an authentic, warm community really does make the difference.

One of the resources that's been a huge help to us is the *Growing Young* study by Fuller Youth Institute.<sup>1</sup> This study looked at churches that were thriving with young people and found that those churches were committed to six key practices. One of those is creating a "warm community."

Not surprisingly then, comes research which suggests that young people, aged 15-29, aren't just looking for a "cool" church with flashy lights and the latest music. What they really want is a place that feels like family. A place where they can belong. A place where they're accepted as they are, and where they're invited to grow into who they're meant to be. It's not about being the trendiest church—it's about being a

warm, welcoming one.

This truth really hit home for me last fall during our Youth Alpha course. We held a Holy Spirit Weekend as part of the program, inviting the students to spend a weekend together, learning and experiencing God. After the last session of the weekend, we asked the students to share what had impacted them the most. One young person, who was new to church and to Jesus, opened up about how he had always felt like church wasn't for him. He thought he wouldn't fit in and that he wouldn't be comfortable. But after just a few weeks of being in one of our youth small groups and being part of that weekend retreat, he felt something shift.

He talked about how the warmth of the community—the adult volunteers, the small group leaders, and the other students—made him feel loved and accepted. It wasn't just that he encountered Jesus that weekend, but he also experienced the love of the church, and that was a game-changer for him. Now, he's attending worship services regularly, and this past June, he even got baptized!

This kind of life change happens when we take seriously Jesus' call to love one another and to welcome the outsider. It happens when we're intentional about creating a warm community where people know they belong. That's why I believe so deeply in the power of a welcoming church—it really does make a huge difference. ●



CANVA //

Martin Nieuwets serves as Family Life Pastor at Bethany Community Church in St. Catharines, ON which is a caring community in the heart of the Niagara Region. He also serves on the EMCC Next Gen Team. [bethanycc.ca](http://bethanycc.ca)

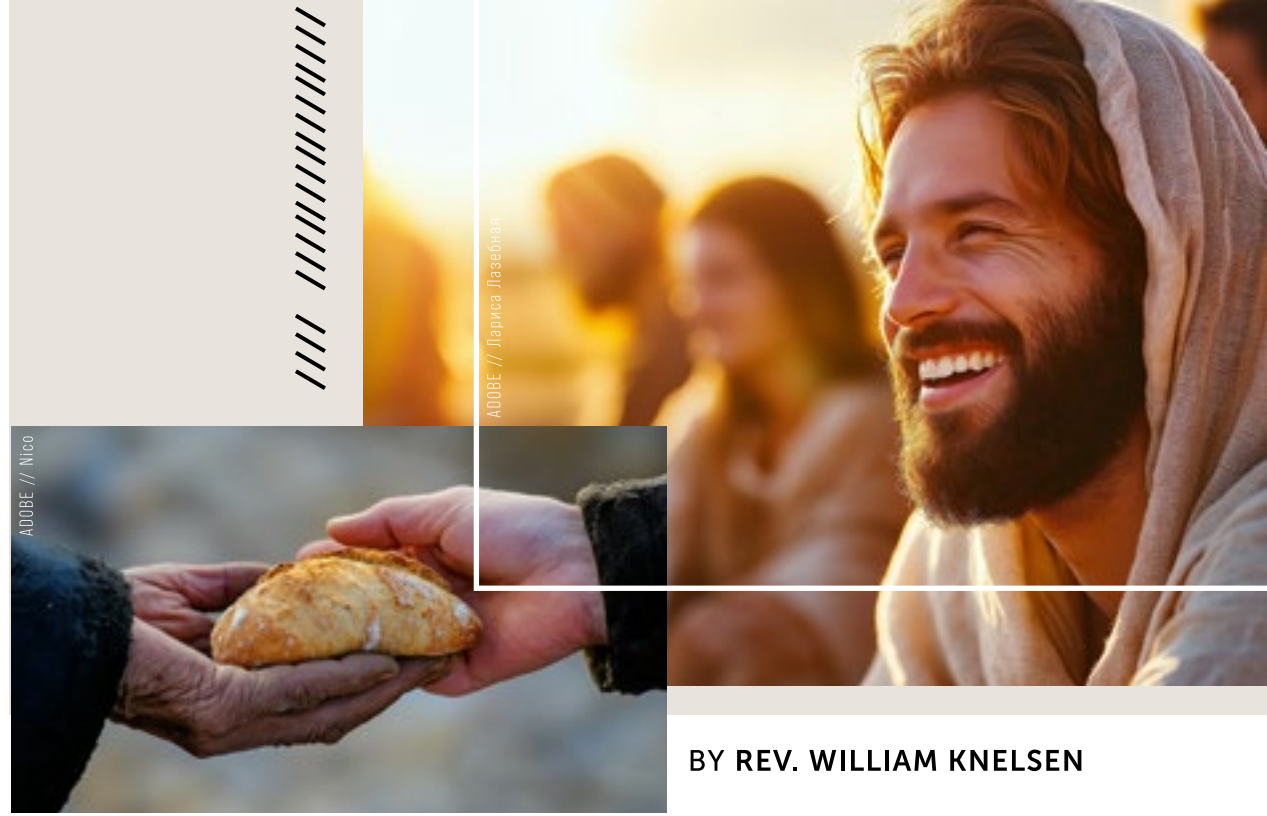


<sup>1</sup> Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad M. Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, First Edition (Baker Books, 2016).



# Humble Church

## Holding Power in Service of Others



BY REV. WILLIAM KNELSEN

What is the greatest benefit your church can bring to your community? I want to suggest that it is “humility.”

Typically, we identify someone as humble because of how they behave and how they treat people. It is an admirable character trait. Some common definitions include having a low opinion of yourself, absence of self-assertion, displaying an awareness of your own defects, and not being proud, haughty, or arrogant.<sup>1</sup>

As Christians, many of us feel a tension between humility and power. To be like Christ, we think we must take a low position in life, which might require us to reject positions of power or authority over others. In early adulthood, I imagined this as the difference between the school principal and the janitor. If I wanted to follow in the way of Jesus, I must seek the “humble” position of the janitor. In my mind, lowering myself and serving others meant cleaning toilets and scrubbing gum from under the desks.

For the last twenty years, reading headlines and reports about leaders’ misuse and abuse of power and seeing this happen among people I

knew reinforced my resolve to reject any position of power in which I would have authority over someone. This produced a conflict within me as someone drawn to leadership and with a pastoral calling. It was in the midst of completing a Master of Arts in Leadership, Theology, and Society at Regent College over the last two and a half years that I discovered a biblical response to the tension between power and humility.

In Philippians 2:7-8, Paul describes the nature of Jesus Christ as humble. In the context surrounding these verses, the humility of Jesus is not about relinquishing power but about exercising it through serving others. Jesus, in His very nature, is humble. He demonstrated this by willingly subjecting Himself to a shameful human death. Paul’s exhortation is clear—we are to imitate this transformative humility as followers of Jesus.

### NOT JUST FOR LEADERS - FOR THE CHURCH

While numerous leadership books and articles emphasize the benefit of humility for effective leadership, Paul’s exhortation in Philippians 2 is not just for indi-

viduals but for the entire church community. This communal aspect of humility is at the heart of how I have approached pastoral ministry in the last year at Hoadley EMC. Of primary interest to me has been what resources this church has and how we are using them to benefit others.

For the last year, I observed how busy we can be as a church running programs and ministries. Being a humble church requires relatively narrow criteria for what we keep and what we let go of, and careful evaluation of our priorities, constantly questioning what we are doing to be the presence of God in our community.

At a recent all-ministry teams meeting, I asked each team leader to identify a limit of two “big rocks” for their ministry. One example is our meal-prep days, during which we make a whole pile of freezer meals and stock a large freezer in the church basement. Everyone in the church is free to take meals as needed and bring them to people in need, especially those without a supportive community. Another priority has been making our building and property safe and inviting, which meant a substantial renovation to our front entrance, making it more accessible for those with mobility limitations. We also evaluated our hospitality practices through greeting and ushering, asking how to ensure people feel safe and welcome when they enter our building on Sundays.

### BEING PRESENT WITH PEOPLE

Humility is all about being present with, identifying, and thoughtfully meeting the needs of the people around us. In many cases, it will require reducing how busy we are so that we have time to pay attention to what is happening in the lives of our neighbours.

Being present with people in a highly individualistic society is a great challenge. The way churches often react to this challenge is to make the church building a hub for church ministry. This is not bad, but it limits our capacity to know the people in our communities. Our church holds movie nights as a

way to draw people together who would not normally come to the building. The purpose of these evenings is not to share the gospel with words but with presence. These are effective and important, but they reach a limited demographic.

As a way of being present with people in our community, I invite others to join me at the Seniors’ Manor and the hospital’s Long Term Care chapel services. We try to keep the “service” portions short to have more time to visit with the residents. The ministry of unhurried presence is at the heart of the humble church. What better way to practice this than with the elderly and the terminally ill?

### KNOWING OURSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER

Becoming a humble church also requires knowing ourselves and one another. Our resources are not limited to tangible, measurable items. It includes church culture—how well we know and love one another. We have done that by going through the process of identifying our strengths and weaknesses through a church-wide DiSC assessment and training in emotional intelligence. Starting in January 2025, we are going through Alpha together as a way to open dialogue around our foundational beliefs and provide an environment in which people can ask questions without fear of judgment.

When the local church is shaped by humility, it will become plain to members of our community that they are loved and cared for among us. They will be lifted up instead of condemned. They will see the character of God lived. This is the essence of the humble church. ●

William Knelsen is Pastor at Hoadley EMC Church in rural, Central Alberta. They are on mission to live out the love of God in all areas of life, creating a space for all to thrive as they care for the needs of the community and each other. To follow William’s writing on Humble Church, visit

[williamknelsen.com/humblechurch](http://williamknelsen.com/humblechurch)



<sup>1</sup> Matthew A. Wilcoxon, *Divine Humility* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019), 46



# INNOVATING FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY

BY REV. ANDREW MILLS

I believe deeply that the ministry of our local churches is good and needed. As we look into this world of ours, we need more churches, not less; we need more pastors, not less. Five minutes on the internet is enough to remind us how divided, anxious, angry, and lonely our world has become. The world needs change, and pastors and churches are vital to its ongoing transformation.

Rick Hiemstra, director of research at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, would agree with this statement. Writing in *Faith Today*, he says “evangelical churches are at the leading edge of a generational pastoral shortage.”<sup>1</sup> He highlights the crisis we find ourselves in when “we do some quick back-of-the-napkin calculations... evangelicalism in Canada, as a movement, needs 625 new pastors per year over the next 12 years just to deal with retirement attrition.”<sup>2</sup>

Let that sink in. In Canada we need 625 new pastors this year in 2025, 625 new pastors in 2026, and so on for the next 12 years just to deal with the retirement of current pastors.



This doesn't address the need for pastors to plant new churches in new communities or our expected population increase!

This is a problem we have spent a long time thinking about and praying about at Bethany.

We recognize that for many, the traditional schooling path to become a pastor isn't as feasible as it once was. With the cost and length of a traditional Bible college education being a barrier for many, one of the thoughts that kept resonating in my mind was, what if we could train people for vocational church ministry here at our church? What if we could somehow create a program that would reduce the cost and length of a Bible college program, making it more accessible for people to be trained and released to serve this urgent need in our churches?

All of this dreaming and thinking led us to start a pastoral training program called Accelerate. This program is in partnership with Rocky Mountain College, which allows us to offer a fully accredited program to our apprentices.

Accelerate is all about training pastors as apprentices. Just like in the trades, apprentices spend some time in class and lots of time on the job training and being coached by veteran trades people. Students in this program won't just study how to be a pastor, they will actually be pastoring while coached by an experienced pastor. We want to be part of the solution to the necessity of training pastors.

We also knew that if we limited it to those who could apprentice with just our staff, we would soon cap the number of who could join the program, so we thought, why don't we open it up for inspiring pastors from other EMCC churches to train at Bethany and apprentice with their local church! We call this a win-win. Apprentices are helping with the ministry in their local church and are being trained for leading their own congregations in the future at the same time.

This is something we are really excited about and we would love to challenge you to join in prayer for this program and prayer for more pastors to be called. We truly believe in the church as a source of hope and change in our world, and for pastors to lead in prayer, care, and sacrifice to see our world changed. May this also inspire you to be creative in meeting the needs you see around you—whether they be in your church or your community! ●

Andrew Mills is the Lead Pastor at Bethany Community Church in St. Catharines, ON which is a caring community in the heart of the Niagara Region.



<sup>1</sup> Rick Hiemstra, “Waking up to the Pastor Shortage,” October 15, 2024, <https://digital.faithtoday.ca/faithtoday/05062024/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1972547>.

<sup>2</sup> Hiemstra, “Waking up to the Pastor Shortage.”



# If My People

BY JEAN WINKER

## God's response to sustained, collaborative prayer in Medicine Hat

What happens when God's people come together in their community and get serious about prayer, worship, and fasting? Churches all over the city of Medicine Hat, Alberta are finding out. The Holy Spirit is moving among them.

With a population of approximately 63,000, the City of Medicine Hat is home to several evangelical denominations. The pastors often work together with joint services and collaborate in initiatives that bless their community. With a sense of unity, the pastors felt an urgency for the kingdom. As egos and independence dropped, in their place flowed love for one another and united prayer.

"We were already longing for Jesus to do a great work in our city, so when the opportunity came for a city-wide prayer movement, introduced by the Medicine Hat Evangelical Association and initiated by YWAM Selah, we all jumped in," said Mike Landry, Lead Pastor of The Link. "Seeing pastors come together, putting aside competition and comparison, and walking out that unity in love has been the cool part. Everybody had a part to play."

### A CALL TO PRAYER & WORSHIP

About two years ago, the first Prayer Movement began in Medicine Hat. YWAM's facility was the place they used for 40 days straight, 24/7. Most evangelical churches in the area took part. The focus was prayer and worship. Volunteers from the churches signed up for specific hours to come and pray and worship teams rotated through the timeslots. This began several days after Easter and concluded by Pentecost in 2023.

### A CALL TO PRAYER & FASTING

In April 2024, the Prayer Movement resumed with another event, this time for 21 days of Prayer & Fasting, 24/7. Well-organized with various prayer focuses, people could choose the length and type of fast. Some fasted

from food, others from media.

"Our young adults and several senior youths became especially involved during the days of prayer and fasting and returned with a spiritual hunger and a passion for Jesus. Eight of our Grade 12 boys signed up for 10 hours to go and pray."

### GOD RESPONDS AT THE LINK

"The fruit of the Spirit is abundant, and there is a sense of the presence of God with His people. Our gatherings have excitement and joy; there is freedom in worship, and there have been some physical healings."

### THE LINK'S MISSION IS:

*to connect people with Jesus, each other, and the community.* Mike is finding that people are more open to talking about Jesus. "People are searching, and they are coming." The senior youth have continued to meet on their own to pray and study the Bible each week. They've invited friends and fellow students to join them, and several who came asked for Bibles because they wanted to know more. "Seeing our youth and young adults full of passion and willing to pray is inspiring and is catalyzing the rest of us to continue prayerfully seeking God."

### GOD RESPONDS AT CHURCHES THROUGHOUT MEDICINE HAT

With the concentrated days of the prayer movement over, the churches of Medicine Hat are continuing to experience God's response to their

prayers, worship, and fasting. "Every church is seeing more baptisms, even in churches where there had been no baptisms for years. One pastor reported they had recently baptized more people in the last 12 months than in the past 12 years."

Pastors indicate their churches are growing, and it is not just a relocating of the saints. "People are just showing up; some have never been at church before. These things are happening all over the city."

### NOW WHAT?

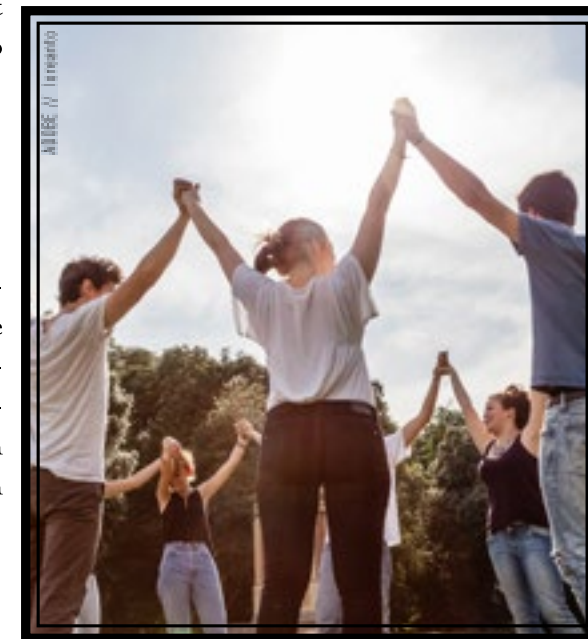
The prayer movement as an event is over. Mike

points out that to see these blessings of God continue, churches must embrace being led by the Holy Spirit. "This is the basis of God's working. As we abide, the Holy Spirit produces the fruit. It is for us to listen to God and obey—daily, ongoingly."

### POINTS TO PONDER

Considering a collaborative prayer movement in your community?

- Collaboration among churches is a beautiful unity. Look beyond your own walls.
- For effective collaboration, pastors must come together, not compete. Link arms.
- Be intentional or it won't happen.
- Churches can do things together that they could never do alone. ●



Mike Landry is Lead Pastor of The Link, an urban EMCC church serving their community of Medicine Hat since 2006.





# REACHING FAMILIES THROUGH SUMMER CAMPS

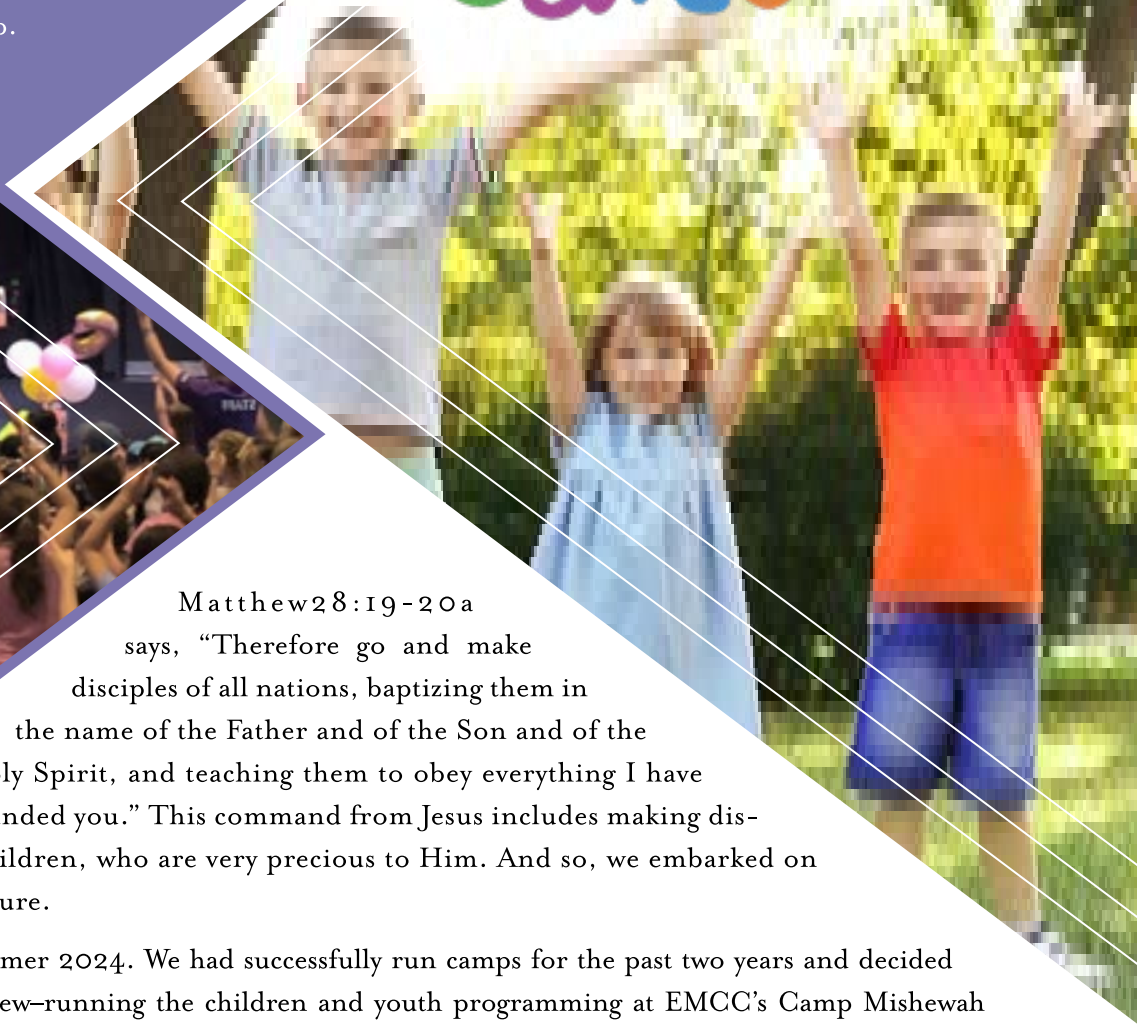
BY JENNIFER RAE

With so many families in our community looking for ways to keep their children occupied during the summer, we felt God calling us to use this opportunity to offer multiple weeks of summer camp. God was leading us to build His kingdom by reaching those most precious to Him: children.

The summer of 2022, our church leadership felt God leading us to run not just one or two weeks of vacation Bible camp, but six. Our goal was to be able to reach as many kids and their families in our community with the gospel as possible, and provide a safe environment where kids could have fun and experience Jesus. So, we created a variety of camps: Bible camp, sports camp, science camp, and Jr. High camp.




eastridge  
Camps



Matthew 28:19-20a says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” This command from Jesus includes making disciples of children, who are very precious to Him. And so, we embarked on this new adventure.

Fast forward to summer 2024. We had successfully run camps for the past two years and decided to add something new—running the children and youth programming at EMCC’s Camp Mishewah




for one week of family camp. This not only provided a great opportunity for our church to partner with Camp Mishewah, but we used this week as an opportunity to train and coach our summer staff, lovingly referred to by all as the “Purple Shirts.” Our Purple Shirts team consisted of 14 high school and college students who love kids and were willing to spend their summer running each of our camps. Our Purple Shirts have been an integral part of our summer, as we would not be able to have multiple weeks of camp without them. As our church congregation is on the smaller side, we have a limited number of volunteers who can assist with camps. Having said that, we had a total of 37 adult volunteers and 19 youth volunteers. Of the youth volunteers, 11 were from outside of our church, many of whom had attended one of our camps themselves in the past. Our church has been so supportive of our initiatives and have been a real blessing to our camp ministry.

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH KIDS

Our church has an average of 35 school-age children who attend with their families on a Sunday. However, through summer camps, we have been able to reach into our community in a unique way. When parents in our community looked for activities to keep their children occupied, wanted a Christian camp for their kids to attend, or simply wanted a cheaper form of childcare, they turned to EastRidge Summer Camps. Each week of camp we had anywhere from 80-116 children attend. Some children attend EastRidge or other churches, but many are unchurched.

Another goal of ours was to make summer camp as accessible to families as possible. Luke 18:16 says, “But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” With the cost of living rising, we wanted to make sure that the cost of camp wasn’t a hindrance and strived to offer affordable camp options. Several families over the summer mentioned that they felt so grateful that we offered a higher quality camp that they were able to send their kids to for free or for minimal cost. One of the weeks of camp we ran was called “Camp in the Park,” which we set up at two different local parks—one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. The intention was to offer a mini drop-



in Vacation Bible Camp that kids of all ages could come to for free. As some families would never step foot in a church setting, it was another way to reach our community where they are at and bring camp to them. The Purple Shirts ran games, did skits, told Bible stories, organized crafts, and most importantly, built relationships with the kids and their families.

## CELEBRATING THE FRUIT

Building relationships is such an important part of reaching our community. If people know that we care about them and feel valued, they will be more likely to receive our message. Summer camps are just one of the ways in which we try to help build these relationships. It takes a lot of planning, time, and effort but is completely worth it. The fruit of our labour by the end of the summer was 124 children who chose to become followers of Jesus! It was so encouraging to see multiple children week after week make that decision and start their journey of faith. Our congregation celebrated on September 8th by placing 124 helium balloons on stage for all to see. It was exciting to see so many balloons with the understanding that each one represented a precious child. It was also a reminder to continue to pray for all of the kids who attended camp as well as their families. Seeds were planted, and this is only the beginning of their faith journey. As we start to plan camps for the summer of 2025, we will see where God leads us next in His desire to build His kingdom. ●

Jennifer Rae is the Children's Ministry Director at EastRidge Church in Stouffville, ON. [Eastridge.ca](http://Eastridge.ca)





# Spiritual Retreating

## *Creating Sacred Space*

### to Hear from Jesus

BY JEAN WINKER

Are you really telling me I should set everything aside, all my relationships, my responsibilities, and go off on a spiritual retreat? Laura Huh, Creative Arts Pastor and member of the Executive Team at Bethany Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, utters a resounding, “Yes.”

Laura and I spoke about her recent experience with spiritual retreating—why she did it, what she did, and the impact it had on her life and ministry.

#### **What caused you to push pause and leave family and ministry for a three-day, two-night, spiritual retreat?**

I was meeting with Krista Bennett as a spiritual director. During one of our conversations, she suggested the idea of a retreat and gave me some insight into how retreats had impacted her. I agreed that this would likely be beneficial for me to try. She held me accountable to booking it and following through.

#### **What warning signs have you noticed that signal a need for soul care?**

Burnout, going through the motions, losing passion, feeling disconnected from God, planning services or events without actually praying about them.

#### **How did you decide what to do on your retreat?**

Krista guided me through what I might do and suggested I pray and seek God’s direction for what He wanted of my time. I spent some time praying through an exercise Krista gave me and got three clear answers from God.

#### **Did you do anything in advance to prepare for your time away?**

I did a little bit of research about prolonged spiritual retreating and sought advice from a couple of others with retreat experience. There are several good Christian books and resources about creating sacred space to be with God. Before leaving for the retreat, I made a list of everything I needed to do the day I came back. This helped with my anxiety over leaving and helped me focus on what I wanted to accomplish. Because I know I can get easily sidetracked, I also kept a notebook with me during my retreat to write down all the thoughts that popped into my head. Since these items were on paper, they couldn’t take up the space in my head or get in the way of God speaking.

#### **You stayed in a home where the owners were away. How important is it to leave your usual surroundings and have solitude for your retreat?**

Without separation from the family and all the regular distractions, it would have been impossible for me to spend uninterrupted and unhurried time in God’s presence and to hear what He wanted to say to me.

#### **Your retreat was quite long. Wouldn’t one day be enough?**

It was a good length of time. It was long enough to break my routine patterns and not feel rushed in God’s presence.

#### **What were the components of your retreat?**

Self-care and soul care go hand in hand for me. My retreat contained elements for both and included

what I’d heard from God when I asked Him.

I took long walks in nature. God brought to mind an outdoor place I should go, and I took my Bible along and spent time meditating and praying. I took an afternoon nap and went for a swim. I ordered a meal and brought prepared food with me. I spent time reading. I had asked God what Christian book I should bring, and a book cover appeared in my head. As I read it, I realized it was exactly what I needed.

#### **Did you hear from Jesus on your retreat?**

I heard from Him quite clearly. When retreating, there is time to contemplate what you think you are hearing. You can pray about it—walk and think. I noticed that Jesus revealed things to me in layers. With an extended retreat, there was more time to ask, “Is there more besides what we talked about earlier, Jesus?” And then more came.

#### **What did you come away with when you returned to your usual routine?**

I came home rejuvenated, with a fresh passion and calling. God knew I needed encouragement and to see He was pleased with me and my work. I came away feeling the individuality of His care for me.

#### **Will you be retreating again?**

My plan is to schedule a three day retreat annually and a smaller retreat quarterly. Because I try to pay attention to the rhythms of creation, I will put it on my calendar to match seasonal changes. Based on my experiences, I believe that whether I

just need to hear His voice, or if I need a specific answer or breakthrough, taking time away to listen to God’s direction will help with the solutions.

#### **What takeaways would you offer regarding the importance of regular spiritual retreats?**

Speaking from my own experience of resisting scheduling a retreat, if you don’t see the importance of retreating, you may not be aware of how well you are doing. If you think you’re too busy you might actually be afraid of what you will experience—scared of hearing from Jesus. Fear of what might come of it. But the truth I’ve rediscovered is that we are partners with Jesus in ministry. He wants to pour into us and speak His truth over us. He wants space to shape us and mold us to be more like Him. And, He also wants to say, ‘Well done, keep going. I love you for who you are, not what you do.’

#### **A few words from Krista**

“Hearing from Jesus and doing what He says is the number one job of spiritual leaders and everyone who follows Him. Intentionally scheduled regular spiritual retreating makes space for that,” says Krista.

If you are an EMCC credential holder, Krista Bennett, EMCC’s National Coach of Leader Development, is available if you need help planning a retreat. You can reach Krista to arrange a coaching call at [kbennett@emcc.ca](mailto:kbennett@emcc.ca). ●

Laura Huh is the Creative Arts Pastor and member of the Executive Team at Bethany Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario.





BY REV. SIMON BEADLE

# Facing Ministry Together Not Alone



I first arrived at South Shore in August, 1997 with the invitation to start serving the church as pastor on September 1st. Two days in, a car pulled into the parking lot and out got Richard, the kind-hearted pastor of the United Church in Callander, ten minutes away. Small-town Northern Ontario is tight-knit, and he had heard there was a new pastor in the area, so he came to welcome and pray over me. While those early days were filled with many unknowns, if that visit was any indication of what might come, I knew with fellow believers like Richard in the area, I would never have to face ministry alone.

When a casino was proposed for our small town of Callander, we began to meet as pastors and leaders of various churches to pray and worship—the casino was never built. Whatever it was we met for, we always had a sense that we were better together. Today, the group looks different; the United Church is a daycare, the Anglican congregation hanging on by a thread. But what we do have are EMC congregations, close by and alive, and now we meet as pastors to share a meal, listen to each other, and pray.

It's no surprise that being alone in ministry, and feeling lonely in ministry, are a reality. And when

you're alone your thoughts can play havoc. Perhaps you've heard yourself say, *I don't know if I can do this another Sunday. Is any real change happening? I'm not worthy. This sermon just doesn't cut it.* And on and on it goes. God had meaningful work for Adam to do in the garden and He didn't want him to do it alone. We're no different.

## SHARED MINISTRY

About a ten-minute drive east of South Shore EMC is Callander Bay EMC, in another five, Lakeshore EMC. A half hour further east is Eau Claire EMC. Because we are in relatively close proximity, opportunities exist that are good for everyone. On the visible side there have been the expected things: shared youth ministry, praying together at significant times, joint services, helping each other financially, sharing the preaching load. When we were looking ahead to fall, one church planned to spearhead a ten-day prayer initiative, another would offer training in dealing with assisted suicide, and another equipping in discipleship. Everything was open to everyone. There's an ebb and flow to this as sometimes one church can offer something needed by the others or one church has a particular interest that can benefit everyone.

## GOD'S BLESSING

Beyond the obvious benefits of shared ministry, though, there is something deeper: God's blessing. Looking back over the challenge that Covid brought, I remember the tangible sense of God's blessing when we met as Northern Ontario churches to participate in the National Assembly via Zoom. We ate, got to know one another, shared ideas, and prayed. As people were leaving, the common phrase on everyone's lips was, "It was good to be together." I didn't see oil running down any beards, but the blessing was definitely there (see Psalm 133).

The simple habit of having a meal together once a month as EMC pastors to get caught up and pray over the years has been an experience that has taken on increasing importance. Truthfully, in the past it sometimes felt like just one more appointment on the calendar. But times are different now and it's become a spiritually nourishing priority. It hasn't always been easy melding as a group, but we've grown and now have a healthy understanding of each one. We've been challenged and have developed a genuine concern for each other and our families. It's not surprising that over the years we've prayed about a wide range of realities: pastoral changes, desperation over children, life-threatening illnesses, frustration and anguish in ministry, and surprising, wonderful glimpses of God's mercy. In all of it, God is at work, uniting us.

## DORMANT BUT STILL ALIVE

A few weeks ago, I looked at the bare spots in my lawn and finally got around to doing something about them. The seed was in the shed, but it had been sitting there for a couple of years. Can grass seed die? Can it sit in an old container for a long time and still spring to life when the conditions are right? The answer, of course, is yes. It's still alive, just dormant, "sleeping" until conditions are right for it to wake up. Well, the seed was sown and the sun and soil did their work and the shoots ap-

peared. And maybe that's a good picture for all of us now, as it was when Jesus was explaining His work to His first hearers: This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how (Mark 4:26-27).

Have you ever sensed that we're meant to be together more? That somehow the solo mindset of any believer actually repels the blessing that God willingly has for us? I think God is sowing seeds all the time: Richard's prayer, that intangible but very real joy that comes from being together, the desire to partner with others in joint mission as we reach out to the lost. Maybe you have some others in your heart. The conditions are right for those seeds to grow. They may have been dormant in your heart for a long time, but if God sowed them they're still alive.

## LET'S DO MORE THINGS...TOGETHER

I saw a shoot emerge the other day, not on my lawn, but at our monthly prayer time. The new guy on the block had just shared about a discipleship training workshop he had planned with an invitation for everyone to join in. And then the shoot appeared; it didn't seem like much really, but for those who have eyes to see, it was definitely a seed that had sprouted. He simply said, "We should do more things...together." ●

Simon Beadle volunteers as the first response Regional Minister in Northern Ontario and has been serving as Lead Pastor at South Shore Church since 1997. South Shore EMC is located just outside the small town of Callander, Ontario in the beautiful country around Lake Nipissing. The church was originally started as an outreach to the children of the neighborhood and continues to have a passion to reach all people with the gospel.





# Lessons for the Church from Vimy Ridge

BY REV. JED GORHAM

As a Canadian and a student of history, I have spent a lot of time studying the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Let's be clear, I am not wanting to glorify war. However, everything from character to communication are all magnified in the crucible of battle. There were few engagements as successful as Vimy Ridge in World War I.

What did the Canadians do differently and what can we as a church learn and apply today to advance God's kingdom?

## A DIFFERENT TYPE OF COMMANDER

In an era of commanders with bravado and big bristling mustaches, a rather non-stereotypical, plain, clean-shaven officer named Arthur Currie was asked to get the plan ready. He investigated every rank and file and discovered that

the every-day soldier on the ground didn't know their objectives, or in most cases, even how to read a map. Battles in those days were often directed by a few, with the number of combatants in the tens of thousands. Like a great mass, the men moved forward, usually to disastrous results. Currie wondered, what would happen if each soldier was trained and equipped to engage together towards the ultimate task of taking the heights? By Easter Sunday 1917, the Canadian divisions did the impossible. This victory began with a new type of commander who empowered the every-day soldier.

This is also true of Jesus' plan for the church. It is no longer centered on the building, nor the priesthood, but instead, God will dwell within all His people as they become His church together. As a leader I have had to discover where I made mistakes and where I might better be able to equip our team to know the bible and share it with others.

## EVERY SOLDIER COUNTS

Currie realized that each soldier counted, and his goal became to prepare and execute this daunting task differently. It would not just be the officers who would know what was supposed to happen. The Canadians went so far as to cross-train their soldiers so that if a machine gunner went down in a platoon section, one of his fellow soldiers, whose main skill set was very different, would be able to take over because he had some training.

This is one of the keys to engaging together to advance the cause of Christ in the EMCC and beyond. Every believer should be equipped and trained in The Great Commission. Ephesians 4:11-16 tells us that we have leaders like pastors and teachers to

equip the saints so that they all can work together as the body of Christ. Everyone in the church is to be learning how to read the Bible and apply it. We are all called to be disciples of Jesus who are actively engaged in making disciples.

Have you been part of the work God is doing in your church family? Did you know that every part of the body is needed to do what is necessary?

## SMALL GROUPS MAKE UP A BIG ARMY

Battles at that time were often counted in thousands and tens of thousands. Yet, the Canadians trained their soldiers differently. There were four divisions, but then they broke things down further so that each group could work together. Many objectives were broken down to company level, which is around 150 rank and file. These groups were broken up further into platoons and even platoon sections of five to ten men.

At Eau Claire, we value the larger gathering on Sunday morning, but the real training and discipleship happens in groups of five to ten. How about you?

Are you meeting with both the larger gathering, and some smaller groups focused on affection-based obedience to Jesus and His teachings?

Jesus met with many people, even thousands at times, but his deepest moments of discipleship came in his small groups. Jesus' smallest group consisted of four, with the sons of Zebedee, James and John, along with Simon Peter. Even the group of twelve was a family sized group that allowed for discussion, questions, and answers, which was and is crucial for spiritual development. How many young people have walked away from the church because their questions were not welcome?

## ALLOWING PEOPLE TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE

One other thing that Currie supported was taking initiative and trying new things. The Canadians heard about other techniques being tried out across the front and honed their skills to make it work. They used something called a creeping barrage, and even went so far as to target enemy gun emplacements, which was not thought possible. Each soldier would follow orders, but there was room for imagination to get past the tough enemy strongholds.

When you hear the stories from some of our connections through World Partners in Kenya, India, and Nepal, it becomes obvious that it is more than just pastors making converts and adding them to their churches. Every follower of Jesus is being trained and encouraged to be disciple makers. This is also some of the primary focuses of groups like E3, I am Second, 3DM, and Church Renewal. The goal is flourishing disciples making disciples, but the methods are not always the same.

We need those who are leading to be different types of leaders. Every believer is needed to complete the daunting task of making disciples in an ever more complicated world. It takes small teams working together to make a winning army. Let's learn from each other and take the initiative to change our world. ●

Jed Gorham is Pastor at Eau Claire EMC. Eau Claire is surrounded by bush in Northern Ontario. They value small group Bible discovery, equipping disciple-makers, and learning to practically love one another, often with a smile, a song, or a laugh.





# Backhanded Truth

BY REV. GUY SCHOLZ

Sometimes backhanded compliments are the best. How about Carlene Carter's classic **Every Little Thing**, with the lyric, "I love you so much I hate you!" I've heard that in my marriage and I use it about every second CFL game when my Roughriders lose.

My favourite theological backhanded compliment is in **Luke 15:1-2** when the theological experts of the day challenged Jesus' primary way of engaging in community:

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, **'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'**"

I get chills whenever I hear one of my Christian friends get accused of this. I quietly smile whenever I get accused of this and am quite concerned when I haven't heard it muttered in the background for awhile.

## STUFF THAT WORKS

I strive to practice Luke 15:1-2 and not just spout off a theological theory that sounds good. Back in the day, I was mentored by a mission-minded pastor in Regina, Dan Sattelmeier, while I did my social work practicum at his church. I was challenged to the core by their two prerequisites for board members and church leaders: 1) a consistent quiet time and 2) at least two visits a week with a non-Christian. This could involve a coffee at Timmy's, playing a sport with 'sinners,' the arts, backyard barbeques, etc. At the bare minimum, a weekly phone call.

I later learned from an Evangelical Fellowship of Canada employee that this church in Regina was the only one in Canada that grew from 80 to just under 1000 in attendance, with 700 converts and an 80% stay rate in 20 years. Maybe re-read that last sentence. The national average is between 10-15% stay rate by most research.

The Regina church wouldn't claim a convert in their stats for at least a minimum of three months to see if there were any 'fruits of repentance.' The EFC employee said, "I don't think there is a church in North America with the purity of their numbers."

## IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT

I eventually got a theology degree to go with my social work degree and entered ministry. When it came to engaging in community at the two church plants I pastored in Chauvin and Calgary, we encouraged all our church leaders to have consistent quiet times and a couple visits a week connecting with the lost.

I sure wanted to legislate this guideline, but I'm much too polite to come across this way. I am a stereo-type polite Canadian until I put on a pair of skates. But most of our leaders over the years bought in and were energized by the challenge. The church growth came through a team effort.

I don't like to get caught up in the numbers game but to show the wisdom of Luke 15, we saw close to 120 converts in these churches with an 80% stick rate as the years have gone on. In the two plants, we have served close to 400 people overall, most of whom would not call themselves committed Christians when they started attending. One day at a board meeting in Calgary, it dawned on us that every convert was won through the Luke 15:1-2 backhanded compliment. Almost all of these people had eaten in our homes, or we had eaten in their homes, or with them in a restaurant before their commitment to Christ was made.

One of my favourite stories was about a man named Lorne in Chauvin. We curled together for five years before our family moved to Calgary. The first game together he said, "I like your game, but don't ever preach at me, ever." Fast forward, we became close friends. Bonspieling will do that. His wife was a seeker and made a commitment to Jesus about six months later. Then their two daughters. He started coming to church about a year later.

We were hoping to add a drummer to our music team and Lorne used to play drums in a dance band. Another

good quote from Lorne, "I'll play drums, but don't ever ask me to speak out loud like the rest of the team." No problem. Almost five years later he made a commitment to Christ.



I asked him what finally convinced him. "I sat down for a coffee or meal with most of the church, multiple times. I started to envy their lives. No one was perfect but you all tried so hard to follow your faith. That and the sense of peace you all had."

## MAKING DISCIPLES

Our prairie paraphrase we like to use is, "Jesus ate good food with lost souls." We all understand that engaging in community is our mission. It's all about planting seeds. I know I'm typing to the choir and reminding my own heart, it's all about the two Great Cs. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the Great Commandment in Matthew 22. I love the emphasis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the two great Cs. He wrote that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is the discipleship template for all people.<sup>1</sup> When Jesus preached this sermon, it was mostly to lost souls.

Sometimes, we tend to think of discipleship for converted souls only. Bonhoeffer said all his messages and writings were filtered through the Sermon on the Mount. And as my friend Lorne often said, "Just being around real Christians visiting and eating, and curling together was seeing those truths in action without forced religious talk. I observed a lot of walking sermons from you all, and you probably didn't even know I was paying attention." So, as we all engage in our communities, I hope you hear some muttering backhanded compliments, "These people welcome sinners and eat with them." ●

Guy Scholz lives with his wife Maxine in Regina. He ministered the last four years in Lipton, SK, as their interim pastor in the EMCC.



<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*



# An Unexpected Ministry

## Growing in Colborne

BY JEAN WINKER

After losing his job in Mexico during COVID-19, Omar Corona could not find work to support his family. He and his wife Carla prayed for guidance and decided to search elsewhere. He applied through an agency that connects job seekers with work in other countries. An employer in Colborne, Ontario was looking to hire new immigrants. Would he be interested?

In early 2022, Omar arrived in the rural town of 3,500 in southern Ontario. The worker's permit only applied for him, so he had left Carla, who was expecting their second child, in Mexico.

Although his English was not fluent, Omar longed to find fellowship in a local church. As he walked the streets, he saw Prospect Church. The sign on the door mentioned meetings on Wednesdays—Omar's day off.

"I was pleasantly surprised when I opened an email from Omar asking about our Wednesday night Bible study" said Pastor Leonard Sonneveld. "It was Wednesday, so I got right back to him and said, 'Sure, come, join us!'"

"I did, and I felt pretty comfortable. They made me feel welcome," said Omar.

Omar and a few other Spanish-speaking workers continued to come for several months. But when Carla experienced a health complication, Omar had to return to Mexico.



"We stayed in touch during the eight months Omar was in Mexico," says Pastor Leonard. "When he returned, he came back to Prospect."

Omar was working on the paperwork required for Carla and their children to join him. The Corona family was reunited when mother and children arrived at the airport on Christmas Eve 2023.

After the family was settled and a few months had gone by, Pastor Leonard approached Omar with an idea. "What do you think about doing something together?" A few months of conversations ensued and Omar checked to see if the other Spanish-speaking workers were interested and available. With space to meet in the basement of Prospect Church, they

agreed on Tuesdays and began to meet in June 2024 every other week. They call their time together Fè & Fellowship Gathering. Fè means Faith in English. The group of five or six Spanish-speaking adults and three or four kids get together for prayer and worship, and Omar brings a devotional and leads a time of sharing. Pastor Leonard and others from Prospect also come. The gatherings are in Spanish and Carla interprets.

"It's a safe space for them to meet and have fellowship," says Pastor Leonard. "It's also an outreach. Some Spanish speaking people in the area attend, although they are not believers. And Carla has ministry with some Spanish speaking women who don't attend the gathering." Although two groups, they are one church in two timeslots, learning and

benefitting from one another, and with a reach into the community one wouldn't have without the other. Eventually Omar received permission to work to begin an hour later on Sundays, making it possible to attend Sunday services. Omar is a musician and uses his guitar in worship. Recently, Omar spoke in a Sunday service and Carla interpreted.

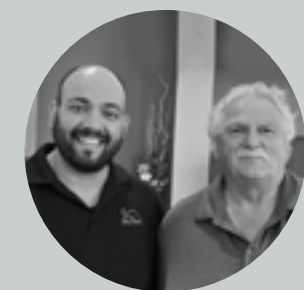
"We are trying to link the gathering to the church, but we're not pressuring people. If they come to church on Sunday, that is a bonus. Several from the gathering come and bring their kids to Sunday School," said Pastor Leonard.

Although Omar and Carla want to stay in Canada, the way ahead is uncertain. "We are learning to trust God. Every day, we remember that we should be able

to serve the Lord wherever He puts us. That's our challenge."

When asked how a church can reach out to newcomers in their communities, Omar said, "There are so many foreign workers. We all know someone. Be open and friendly. Pray for them. Don't be afraid to speak to others; take a chance. God will do the rest."

Of the Spanish-speaking ministry in Colborne, Pastor Leonard says, "We're believing God's going to use this. It's a small ministry, but it's not necessarily only what's happening within the four walls; what's happening outside the four walls is also valuable ministry. That's what EMCC's all about—being out there, living the way of Jesus among others." ●



Prospect Church in Colborne, Ontario, has been serving the community since 1936.



BY JEAN WINKER

# DEVELOPING NEW LEADERS

## for Ministry Today and Tomorrow



“When we began Multicultural Christian Church 14 years ago in Edmonton, our vision was to be a future-looking church where we would offer help and discipleship to newcomers and our own children who would grow up in the church. It is about multiplication—learning for the purpose of being able to pass on what you’ve learned to someone else,” said Pastor VP Singh.

“Ours is a church of young people. About 80% of our congregation is under 40. When we talk about developing leaders, we talk about the young people. We want to keep our children in the church and make them leaders for tomorrow. Children’s Sunday school and youth group are the strength of our church. Children and young people bring their parents and family to church.”

Multicultural Christian Church is home to believers from the Fiji Islands, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India. Most speak English, and there is a smattering of other languages that give people a flavour of their culture, which Pastor VP sees as key. There are thousands of newcomers in Edmonton who don’t know Jesus yet. There is much ministry to be done, which makes the ongoing multiplication of new leaders from within the congregation vital. Maintaining current ministry and being prepared for future ministry depends on it.

### MEETING TODAY’S NEEDS WHILE KEEPING FUTURE MINISTRY IN MIND

“I knew I couldn’t do it all. I needed a team,” said Pastor Singh. “Jesus prepared the 12 disciples to carry on the ministry. We developed a church model based on 12 ministries.”

Each member is encouraged to join two of these ministries based on their gifting. They then prayerfully select a convenor. The 12 convenors, along with Pastor VP and Jesus (the unseen Member), comprise the church board. Ministry members are accountable to their convenor and report what they recently did to advance the ministry. Each member is expected to do what they can to develop their skills. All ministry members are involved in connecting and follow-up. When newcomers who are believers join the church, they join a ministry where they are discipled and nurtured.

“It is a condition of being a member of the church that you are involved in ministry in some way. Our goal is to prepare each one to be ready to disciple the generation coming up.” The intent is that those who will retire from church ministry in two or three years will mentor the new leaders.

### GOING WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

Most newcomers are brought to the church by the outreach ministry or the women’s or men’s ministry. The welcoming team goes to homes with a welcome package. Their website invites people to come to the church if they need help filing taxes. Other assistance is available from Pastor VP, who is a Commissioner of Oaths. All help is free of charge and with no obligation.

“If we hear about newcomers, we call them and ask if they need any help. If they say “yes,” we go to their homes. We help as much as possible, and we do informal discipleship and Bible studies in homes. We know potential leaders are in those homes, so we nurture people where they are. Our seniors are involved in this ministry, and I go too—usually five or six of us. As people grow accustomed to a small group of people, they may start coming to the church, where, after six months, believers can join any one of the ministries where they feel their strengths lie.” And the multiplication continues.

### TEAMWORK

Pastor VP is grateful for those around him who support his ministry and serve at his side: The Outreach Pastor and his ministry bring new people in. The Family Pastor and his team look after them. The Board Members; together, they lead the church, which presently has 172 members.

### PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

In further intentional preparation for the future, Pastor VP is preparing a 22-year-old from the congregation to take his place when he retires. He is in his 3rd year of a bachelor’s in theology. “Through him, we are preparing a group of young people, his disciples, who will be our future pillars for the church.”

When Pastor VP attends EMCC events, he takes young people from the church along with him as delegates or attendees. This provides them invaluable learning opportunities about how the larger Church functions. They learn from EMCC resources and are familiar with EMCC’s governing documents.

To train and equip future leaders, the church organized a three-day Leadership Training Camp in June. The theme was “Equip to Minister” (Ephesians 4:12).

“We are teaching our young people that the main thing is, we are here to make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples. We tell them they are in the stage of discipleship right now and here is where they learn not to keep faith to themselves but to carry it to someone else and mentor them so they will carry it to someone else.”

*(Note: If you are interested in hearing more about the ministry model at Multicultural Christian Centre, you are welcome to contact Pastor VP Singh at [vps@telus.net](mailto:vps@telus.net), or visit their website at [www.mc-church.com](http://www.mc-church.com))*

VP Singh is Pastor at Multicultural Christian Church in Edmonton, a home to believers from the Fiji Islands, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India. Their vision is to be a future-looking church that offers help and discipleship to newcomers and the children who grow up in their own church.





# God's Response to 24/7 Prayer

## Reaping a Harvest; Preserving the Fruit



Hillcrest pastors jumped on board when the Medicine Hat Evangelical Association and YWAM Selah initiated two prayer movements across their city. In 2023, a 40-day, 24/7 event focused on prayer and worship. In 2024, a 21-day, 24/7 event emphasized prayer and fasting. Hillcrest Church rallied behind both. People signed up to pray at the YWAM facility, and leaders and worship teams ministered using their spiritual gifts. Since then, God's response to the prayers of His people has given rise to profound effects throughout congregations across the city.

### WE'VE GOT THE BEST NEWS IN THE WORLD!

"More and more people from outside the church are coming to Hillcrest with their questions," says Community Life Pastor, Jamie McDonald. "Both pre-Christians and others who have walked away from Jesus are recognizing that we live in dark, dangerous times. But, as the world gets darker, the light of Jesus shines brighter. Now is the greatest time to see revival. The gospel message is attractive because it offers hope. More than ever, people want to know: 'Is God real? Does He care? Can He help me with my marriage, my job, my mental health?' The answer is, yes! We've got the best news in the world! God is responding, and we are seeing a growing in-

vitational culture in our church, as believers step out—in faith—to invite. The results we leave up to the Holy Spirit."

### BAPTISMS ON THE RISE

Another noticeable effect during and since the prayer movements has been the rise in baptisms. "In 2023, we had 34 baptisms, more than double from the year before. In 2024, we're at 41 so far. Among those we baptized are brand new Christians, former 'cultural' Christians, children from our kid's ministries, youth and young adults, seniors, Alpha Course attendees, and long-time Christians who recognize their need to take a stand for Jesus by this act of faith and obedience."

### A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS

"We have 42 nations and counting in our services," says Jamie. "We've seen an exponential rise in our international population—especially international students—as people move here to pursue careers or complete a program of study at Medicine Hat College. This growing cultural diversity in our city is particularly noticeable at Hillcrest. God has raised up believers within our congregation who welcome and connect internationals with Canadian culture and have been doing this well for almost two de-

cares. As internationals move to the city, they hear of us and come to Hillcrest and connect with people of their own culture, but also experience the warmth, hospitality, and Christ-centered community we offer.

"We now host an annual 'All Nations Sunday' as we lean into the reality that, one day, believers will gather around God's throne from every nation and tribe and people and language, as described in the book of Revelation. The last two prayer movements in our city have only increased this sense of celebration and anticipation. It's encouraging to see many whom the Lord has brought to Hillcrest from around the world engaging in what He has called us to pursue."

### HOW CAN THE CHURCH SUPPORT THIS MOVE OF GOD?

#### 1. PRAY

"We believe prayer should be front and centre in the church. When we needed to move to more services with less time between each service, a doorway was created inside the worship centre leading directly to the prayer room. It is staffed by volunteer teams. We have seen God heal, fill people with His Holy Spirit, and provide in practical ways because we made space and a place to pray."

#### 2. ANSWER PEOPLE'S FAITH QUESTIONS

"For nine years, we have run a well-received Alpha Course on Sunday morning. It's much easier for people in the church to bring someone and attend together. Hosting Alpha in its own space during our 2nd service means people can still sleep in on Sunday, enjoy a hot breakfast they didn't have to prepare, and

check in their children at kid's ministries a few minutes ahead.

"Being a larger congregation has helped improve new guests' comfort levels, as they can slip into church without being singled out. Some have stayed after to explore our social spaces or check out the next service."

#### 3. DISCIPLE BELIEVERS

"If we want God to continue sending us people, we must be prepared to disciple them. Our church's mission is 'To make disciples of Jesus Christ, teaching people to follow Jesus.' We're always conscious of that. Our leadership and staff team are studying how Jesus disciplined people so we can develop and integrate these timeless truths into our ministries and those we are mentoring. At the same time, we're learning how to measure our effectiveness."

### SOMETHING SPECIAL COMING

The Medicine Hat Evangelical Association (MHEA) is working in the city, with God-sized plans for their next collaborative effort: the annual combined Good Friday service. Typically held at a venue that seats 1,800 people, there was barely enough room in 2024 for all the believers and those they invited. For 2025, the MHEA has taken the giant faith step of raising funds to book the 7,100-seat Co-Op Place indoor arena, home of the Medicine Hat Tigers of the Western Hockey League. With 3,100 seats available for Good Friday, participating churches, including Hillcrest, are already praying and believing to fill every seat. "The churches have a sense that God is about to do something big," Jamie noted. "We are praying to that end and trusting God will move." ●

Jamie McDonald is part of the Hillcrest Lead Team and serves as Pastor of Community Life. His ministry includes Bible Study Groups, Life Groups, and Next Steps (Alpha Course, baptisms, and membership). His passion is to connect with people and to help people connect with Jesus and the local church. Hillcrest Church, Medicine Hat, Alberta, celebrated 75 years of ministry on June 2, 2024. Their story can be found by visiting [www.hillcrestchurch.net/history](http://www.hillcrestchurch.net/history).





BY JEAN WINKER

# REACHING MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS

The congregation of Cornerstone Oromo Christians Mission Centre (COCMC) in Calgary rejoiced together as they witnessed the baptism of six new followers of Jesus at a church family picnic at Sylvan Lake on September 8, 2024.

“God is giving us new souls again,” said Nuradin Surura, the church’s board secretary, who noted that this is another round of baptisms in the church. The church is based in Calgary but has its roots in Ethiopia with the Oromo people, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia.

The six people baptized this fall came to faith in Jesus after hearing the gospel through the church’s ministry. “Some were family members of people who attend our church. We were invited to go to their homes where we told them the good news and led them to the Lord. The others we had met, phoned, and spent time with. After they believed, we brought them to the church and discipled them,” explains Pastor Mohammed. “Discipleship may take several months to a year, and when they are ready, we baptize them in a river or a lake. That is how we do it.”

Pastor Mohammed Shenkute has been pastor at COCMC for four years. He is full-time and is glad to have a team that supports him as needed. He is a converted Muslim who first pastored in Ethiopia for seven years before immigrating to Canada in 2019. Pastor Mohammed says of the church’s mission, “We are well-rooted to our background, and it is our mission to reach out to people of a Muslim background. We will continue to do that.”



Nuradin adds, “It is a challenging ministry, often requiring the sacrifice of much personal time over long periods. We sometimes face rejection but continue to offer friendship and assistance to Muslims who are firm and devoted in their beliefs and disinterested in the gospel. We have patience with that. We want what is best for them. That is why we do what we do.”

Pastor Mohammed explains, “Here in Canada, we minister to two types of Muslim immigrants—non-believers and believers who have fallen away from the Christian faith. Each requires a different approach, and we balance these to bring both to God’s kingdom. In the future, we want to reach out internationally to people in Africa and some Arab countries with the good news.”

They become acquainted with new arrivals through family connections, the Oromo community association, and sponsorship, a practice in which the church has been actively involved since its inception. “When immigrants come here, whether they are believers or not, we have a responsibility, an accountability to reach out to them with the gospel, whether they came through family spon-

sorship, community sponsorship, or government sponsorship,” says Nuradin.

COCMC church sponsors Ethiopian refugees in partnership with EMCC and other Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) from many asylum countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Egypt, South Africa, and Thailand. They handle the refugee sponsorship process from the start, welcome people once they arrive in Canada, help them settle, and support them until they become independent. COCMC sponsors not only believers but also many Muslim brothers and sisters because they are passionate about reaching the unreached with the good news of Jesus.

Several years ago, the church leadership approached Centre Street Church in Calgary while looking for a facility to hold services for their growing congregation. From this beginning, they were introduced to EMCC Regional Minister Brian Archer. In determining whether it would be good to be part of a denomination, the church leadership team did their homework, carefully studying EMCC’s Statement of Faith and governing documents. The eight-year-old church is working toward becoming an EMCC member church.

Cornerstone Oromo Christians Mission Centre is currently a congregation of 170-200 adults and about 100 children. They are bursting at the seams in a rented community hall. Nuradin remarks, “We are praying about this and would ask the EMCC churches to pray with us that we will be able to get our own building. Our kids and our members are growing. Sunday services are in the community hall, and on Wednesdays, we have a two-hour time slot for two purposes—a prayer meeting and discipleship classes for new believers conducted by Pastor Mohammed. Everything else choir practice, meeting people, happens in homes.”

“Even in cars,” adds Pastor Mohammed. “We have influence in the community association and are expanding the gospel. Our biggest challenge is not having enough space,” concludes Nuradin.

COCMC is grateful to EMCC for the partnership and help with sponsorship, enabling them to continue sponsoring both Christians and Muslims. As the church continues to share the gospel with others, Nuradin says, “We are helping people, showing the kindness of Jesus that He left on earth for everyone.” ●

Mohammed Shenkute is a full-time pastor at COCMC. Nuradin Surura is the church’s board secretary.

Cornerstone Oromo Christians Mission Centre (COCMC) is located in Calgary, AB. They are a congregation of 200 adults and about 100 children with a mission to reach out to people of a Muslim background.

Pastor Mohammed Shenkute



Nuradin Surura







BY RAYNA LANDIS

# High Power Soccer Testimony

When Wilma Schweitzer announced that she would not be leading High Power Soccer (HPS) this year, she said, “For this to continue, one or two people will need to step up to direct it.” That was when Marc Robins, one of my closest friends, suggested that the two of us should lead.

At first, I thought his idea was crazy. I couldn’t direct HPS! However, the more I prayed about it, the more I felt led to step up and co-direct with him.

I had recently moved back to Callander and to Callander Bay Church because God called me here. And so, the more I thought about it, co-directing HPS was a perfect opportunity to continue to grow in leadership and learn to trust God more. I knew that if I gave God my yes, He would provide everything Marc and I needed to lead HPS. As you read this testimony, you will see that this was true.

Making the decision together, Marc and I met up with Wilma to announce our interest and get advice on how to direct this Christian soccer camp. Neither of us had any prior experience co-directing, but I had been involved with HPS for a few years, and Marc was bursting with new ideas for it. Our roles, ideas, and experiences balanced each other as we took on this responsibility. Even though multiple people told us it would be stressful and difficult, Marc and I didn’t accept these statements and chose to accept the peace, joy, wisdom, and strength God was giving us to run this camp. It would work out how God needed it to. We ran into some speed bumps during the planning phase: trying to get volunteers, organizing t-shirts for the kids, dealing with volunteers dropping out or not being able to make it because of unforeseen events. But despite these challenges, we continued to put our trust in God.

Marc was in charge of the two soccer drill stations outside, which occurred in the afternoon, and I was responsible for mornings in the large hall; helping out with both the worship and bible lessons. We had lessons written out for the week ahead of time, but occasionally, I felt like some of the fundamental truths of the bible and God’s love and forgiveness were missing. Rather than relying on my own knowledge and understanding, I trusted God and simply let the Holy Spirit lead me as I spoke. It was fascinating how during the soccer drills, kids would come up to Marc with questions to talk more about the Bible lessons I helped lead in the morning.

Halfway through the week, on Wednesday, everyone was pretty tired, even Marc and I. We realized we had been trying to keep the camp running smoothly by our own strength. But Wednesday night, when we refocused our eyes on God, and relied on Him for strength and wisdom, both Thursday and Friday went beautifully. I had the strength to lead it even though I was working 1pm-7pm on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

On Thursday I was supposed to share my testimony. The more I prayed about it, I felt led to share the lessons that I learned rather than focus on my personal story. After I spoke, the kids went into their small groups and shared with their leaders if they would like to start a relationship with God. Out of the 91 kids that attended camp that week, 21 of them started their relationship with God Amen and praise the Lord!

Patricia, my Bible study helper, and I had the pleasure of going to each of the kids and praying with them. I also had the honour of sitting with one of the kids on the sidelines during the soccer drill stations, because she was too tired to play. We had

chatted before about some things, as she was one of the girls who wanted to start a relationship with Christ, but I felt like I didn’t know a lot about her. So I simply asked, “What’s your story?” The number of burdens that she had experienced in life just poured out—all the pain and suffering she had been through at such a young age. For the most part I just sat with her and listened. I signaled Patricia to take over my job of keeping everyone on time with the megaphone, so I could be there for the girl. After she finished sharing, I prayed with her. The next day I personally wrote a note in the cover of a bible with a bunch of bible verses for her and gave it to her before the end of camp, which she was so excited to read. These moments were my favourite parts of the week, being there to support the kids spiritually, as both a leader and friend.

There is no doubt that God was at the front of HPS with how everything turned out. Even the volunteers were all amazed how smoothly everything ran and how good most of the kids behaved. I am so very blessed for everyone who was there to help out. Multiple volunteers and kids have been asking Marc and I if we will lead HPS next year. Right now, our only response is we will continue to pray and see where God leads us. If it continues next year, I am so excited to see how God will move, whether it is through Marc and I, or someone else. But if it doesn’t continue, I’d say this was a pretty good note to end on.

I am so thankful to God, for how faithful He is and how He chases after each and every one of us. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8 ●



Rayna Landis, Co-Director of High Power Soccer.



# ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

BY REV. DEVE PERSAD

“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.” (Mark 4:26-27)

“If your church ceased to exist, would the community miss it?” This question was asked by a transitional pastor in Sarnia almost 19 years ago. The answer at the time was, “No.” We were faced with a choice: do nothing different, or make changes to engage with our community. To the credit of those who engaged in the transition, we have watched seeds of Kingdom truth sprout and grow, though we don’t always know how to define it.

The approach hasn’t been easy, nor uniform. As those entrusted with the seed of God’s Word (Mark 4:1-20) we must learn to apply His truth with the fullness of grace represented by Jesus. Following The Way of Jesus, we are continually challenged with how His life provides tangible evidence of compassionate action and sacrificial service toward others (see Ezekiel 34).

As churches, we have an incredible resource: individual followers of Jesus. Through these seed carrying disciples, the needs of our community can be met. Through us all, we can serve the organizations, schools, and people in our neighbourhoods as a first priority. We can take initiative to achieve common goals that impact the real needs of our communities. It’s like releasing seeds of truth and then faithful rising each day to see where God is enabling growth.

## RELEASING SEEDS OF TRUTH

A couple of years ago, our mid-size church in Sarnia was invited to be part of a neighbourhood end of school street party. It was a county initiative seeking to bring positive family experiences to our corner of

the city, which generally does not have much good news. Over the past 19 years, there have been about a dozen community organizations whose efforts we have supported. No, they have not all shared our faith perspective. However, we do share the common ground of addressing the needs of the poor, protecting the vulnerable, and desiring the peace and flourishing of our community. We carry seeds of truth in all these relationships and encourage those who serve among them to scatter these seeds liberally, in their graceful conduct, integrity, eagerness, and their words.

This past year, this same county group wondered about hosting an outdoor movie event. However, the cost for space, and the location of available space wasn’t working out. In addition, there was a desire to do an asset map of our part of the city. However, budget restraints have limited county staff from learning about this and implementing this inquiry. After seventeen years of patiently scattering seeds of truth, they asked us for help.

Our response was an emphatic, “Yes!” And in very short order, an end of summer outdoor movie night happened. The community team was re-energized by those who willingly gave what God had entrusted to us—our parking lot, and our people to serve in such a way that a fun and safe family night could be enjoyed.

As part of that night, we invited several organizations, with whom we have developed mutually beneficial relationships, to be present with something interactive, so that they could share about their services in a non-crisis environment. In so doing, these organizations were encouraged, and the people of our community felt more at home.

In addition, we hosted an “Asset Mapping” booth. From a biblical community development perspective, asset mapping is a means of discovering the resources that God has already placed in our com-

munity. Through these interactions, we learned more about the needs of newcomers and the values of those who have lived on our streets for many years.

Through this one opportunity we recognize the need to throw more seed, knowing that the presence of the Kingdom of God is something people deeply need, even if they don’t possess the vocabulary to express it. We need to collaborate with other organizations, and reflect Jesus’ prayer of unity, by working alongside other congregations and denominations to meet the increasing needs of the growing diversity in our communities.

## PARTNERING WITH GOD—SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

At the SEMC, we abbreviate our strategy with this statement: “Partnering with God---Serving Our Community.” It’s the means by which we introduce ourselves and it is the means by which God continues to move us outward. The seed of truth that it represents is found in Luke 10:27: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” Jesus’ response to this summary is two-fold: “Do this and you will live, (v28) Go and do likewise (v37).

**Mission isn’t one thing we do. Mission is everything we are called to do.** When we marginalize mission on our balance sheets and in our ministry, then we abandon the marginalized to whom we are sent.

As we consider this one story, and reflect on some others, may we be encouraged to fill our pouches with the seeds of truth ready to scatter. May we also rise each day looking for the evidence of the Kingdom of God that is rising up around us, and join Him in serving those whom He so loves.

Deve Persad serves on the EMCC National Team on a part time basis as a Regional Minister. This role allows him the opportunity to listen to, coach, and resource pastors and church leadership in the Southwestern and Huron regions of Ontario. Deve is also the lead pastor of Sarnia EMC.

The Sarnia EMC is located in beautiful Sarnia, ON on the shores of Lake Huron bordering the US. They aim to partner with God as they serve their community, which can be summed up with one word: SPRinG. We Serve, Pray, and Respond in Grace to those among us and around us.





# COLLABORATION WITH THE CHURCH OF CUBA

BY PHIL QANDAH AND NICOLE JONES-QANDAH



The Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, through World Partners, has the privilege of being connected to sister denominations and ministries globally. This past year, John Cressman (EMCC President) and Nicole Jones-Qandah (Director of World Partners) engaged in prayerful discussions regarding Cuba's economic crisis during visits to Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.

Inspired by our Latin American counterparts, national leadership initiated a call to action for EMCC churches through a Pentecost Offering in Spring 2024. The Cuban church was among the recipients of this offering, with other donations going to initiatives in Canada, Nepal, and India.



The EMCC invited Rodolfo Rodriguez and Lissette Olivares to Canada to share what God continues to do in Cuba amidst shifting and uncertain circumstances. Nicole had the opportunity to interview Rodolfo and Lissette at the Alberta Pastor's retreat in late September. "Seeing Rodolfo and Lissette here, sharing stories of resilience, lets us witness the impact of this Pentecost Offering."

Rodolfo and Lissette's presence was a beautiful picture of interdependence in the global church. EMCC pastors were able to receive the gift of their stories, and Rodolfo and Lissette were able to be encouraged by our partnership with them as brothers and sisters in the global body of believers. We are happy to share their stories for you to engage with their testimony.

## AN INTRODUCTION

Rodolfo and Lizette have been together for 37 years, dedicating much of their lives to sharing the Gospel in Cuba. While Rodolfo is the President of the Missionary

Church of Cuba, Lissette supports him in various outreach efforts. Together, they serve the churches in their nation by supporting communities, discipleship, and instilling messages of hope.

## CONDITIONS IN CUBA

Cuba is experiencing one of the most severe crises in its history. Economic instability and social struggles have worsened conditions for the Cuban people, forcing many, including professionals and young families, to seek opportunities abroad. The elderly, often left behind, face particular challenges, including loneliness and lack of access to resources. But amid these dark times, a powerful spiritual awakening is spreading across the nation, led in part by the Missionary Church of Cuba.

"The church is on the side of the people," Rodolfo explained. "We want people to see that they are not alone, that Jesus is with them."

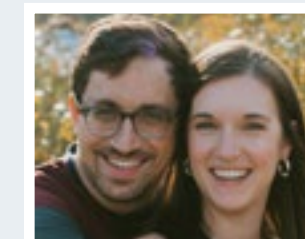
Through discipleship, prayer, and acts of compassion, the church has become a source of practical help, visiting the elderly, providing food, and even supporting healthcare workers during the pandemic. From feeding healthcare workers to extending love to the lonely, the Cuban church is demonstrating that Jesus cares about their community.

## THE POWER OF A LETTER

One of the most poignant stories Rodolfo and Lissette shared was about a letter that reached a woman (we'll use the name "Sofia") on the verge of ending her life. In 2005, a hurricane devastated a remote area of western Cuba and Lizette read about the town in the national newspaper. Moved by the story, Lissette wrote a letter to someone mentioned in the article, simply including her phone number and a message of hope. She had no address or detailed location, just the name of the town, and faith that it would somehow reach the right person.

Incredibly, the letter found its way to a woman in that very town. Fifteen days later, Lissette received a phone call from Sofia, who shared that she received the letter, and it moved her deeply- likely saving her life. Just before receiving the letter, she planned to commit suicide.

Speaking to Lissette, Sofia said, "You reminded me that God sees me and cares for me." Because of this small gesture, Sofia accepted Christ. By the time Rodolfo and Lissette made the journey to visit her, she had led 22 people to faith. Lissette continued to disciple them over the phone, and Sofia and her husband became ministers in that region, planting three more churches in the mountains.



Phil and Nicole live in Calgary with their dog, Ferguson. Nicole is the Director of EMCC World Partners, and Phil works as a copyeditor and social media manager.

This story serves as a testament to the power of faith-driven action and the unstoppable reach of God's love and care.

## A FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Rodolfo's closing remarks struck a chord with many. "We're not a church hiding in the corner. We're moving forward."

Despite adversity, the Cuban church stands resilient- a powerful example of what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in times of crisis. Their courage and compassion remind us that, no matter the challenges, the church's enduring mission is to love and uplift others. Through prayer, support, and personal action, we can all be part of this global family of believers.

## OUR NEXT STEPS

Rodolfo and Lissette's testimony challenges us to consider how we can support others with what we have. Here are some steps you can take:

### 1. Pray for the Cuban Church:

Rodolfo and Lissette request prayer for their leadership to remain focused on God's purposes and for the current spiritual awakening in Cuba to continue even when conditions improve.

### 2. Contribute to Global Partner Efforts:

Donate to projects, like those featured in the Pentecost Offering. You can directly support ministries of global friends who understand that addressing community needs includes harnessing its assets. These initiatives are unique demonstrations of the gospel. Consider making a direct contribution to the Integral Development Projects: [emcc.ca/world-partners/what-we-do/integrating-development/](https://emcc.ca/world-partners/what-we-do/integrating-development/)

### 3. Reflect and Act Locally:

Whether through a letter, phone call, or volunteering, there are countless ways to spread hope in your community. The Cuban church's actions in feeding and visiting the sick illustrate that simple acts of service to the common good can have a powerful ripple effect. ●



# Recruiting and Training Leaders for Multiplying Home Churches

BY JEAN WINKER



About eight years ago, Ron Stone, Pastor at Parkdale Grace Fellowship in Calgary, began teaching about and encouraging the congregation to start meeting in home churches.

“We had been praying as elders because we were seeing our western society and the Christian church on a sharp downward and unsustainable trajectory,” says Ron. “We read the warnings of the Bible that perilous times were coming, and that Christ’s followers must expect to experience opposition. We were asking God how we should prepare our church.”

They studied Acts, read biographies of Christians living in places of persecution and consistently noted the vital role of the home church. A history buff, Pastor Ron saw similarities in cultural attitudes towards the church in other historical periods that mirror some of the

negative rumblings we are noticing today. As he continued his research, he concluded that in times of crisis or persecution, the model that fared best and even caused the church to flourish was the home church. The home church is, after all, how churches began.

Sensing the leading of God, they began prayerfully moving Parkdale Grace Fellowship in this direction. The idea started slowly but took root in the pandemic years when the existing two home churches grew to five gathered in small numbers to worship with the help of live-streamed services. When the congregation finally all met as one group again in their building, they were surprised to discover that instead of the 120-130 people who had gathered before the pandemic, they were now over 200. Many of those first attended a home church, drawn by the opportunity for fellowship. Since the pandemic, most have stayed.

Parkdale continues to focus on this model since the intent was never for the home churches to dissolve following the pandemic. “We encourage people to consider the home church to be their church. They go there to worship. It is not a Bible study group or a small group fellowship. We are not planning on building a bigger facility down the road. Our church model is to grow through multiplication,” says Ron.

## GETTING READY FOR MULTIPLICATION

“On an ongoing basis, we are recruiting and training new elders to keep pace with the multiplying number of home churches. Currently, we have nine.” Having a trained elder who functions as a pastor overseeing each home church guards against false doctrine. Some of their elders are developing their ability to preach so they can start preaching in their home church. The home church elders are also elders sharing in the ministry in the broader church. Their home church is their priority, but they bring updates and receive counsel at the church elders’ council meetings.

“As part of the process to develop elders, we offer a three-month midweek evening course training in leadership and eldership basics. As people show aptitude and interest, they are recruited to serve as apprentices in the elders’ council. We’ve also begun to train some teenagers. Although not yet ready to take on eldership, the training moves them towards future capability,” says Pastor Ron.

## BLENDING HOME CHURCHES WITH SUNDAY SERVICES IN THE CHURCH BUILDING

A typical home church at Parkdale Grace meets at least one Sunday per month in a host home and at least one Sunday a month in the church

building with the entire congregation. Usually, they connect to Parkdale’s live-stream service and hear the message brought by Pastor Ron. Home churches with musicians may use their own music or participate by livestream. The home churches have communion together and add other service components as they wish. The weeks people attend at the church building are when there is Sunday School for the kids. Youth groups and other church activities run on weekday evenings at the main church building.

“We encourage our home churches to prayerfully consider moving towards being fully functional without depending on the live stream if this ever becomes necessary. If a home church with an elder sensed God moving them to become independent of us, we would walk along with them to make it possible, although this scenario is not a requirement of the model.”

## A USER-FRIENDLY MODEL

Ideally, each home church should have at least two host homes available to lessen the host’s responsibility. All that is needed is a large-screen TV and room for a group to meet and afterwards eat together. The size of the group is dependent on the size of the space. Most home churches are made up of people who live nearby, but not necessarily. All age groups attend. At Parkdale, a highlight following each home church service is sharing a pot-luck lunch and fellowship time. Often, people enjoy themselves so much that they spend most of the afternoon together. They hold quarterly meetings of hosts and elders to share stories, exchange ideas, offer counsel, and pray for one another.







### MID-WEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO INVITE FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

Besides meeting on Sundays, home churches are encouraged to meet during the week. These get-togethers are barbecues, sports watch parties, hikes, and other enjoyable activities or projects that are fun to do as a group. “These are good opportunities to build relationships with others while not in a ‘churchy’ environment and may open doors to further enquiries as people get to know believers in a non-threatening way.”

### A COUPLE OF CHALLENGES

Pastor Ron noted a couple of challenges they work through as they arise:

1. When a home church outgrows its space. Usually, real bonding has taken place, and people find it hard to split their group in two.
2. People miss worshipping with other members of the larger body who aren’t in their home church.

### BENEFITS OF THE HOME CHURCH MODEL

Among the most significant benefits of the home church model, Pastor Ron cites the following:

1. Relationships are deepened.
2. The needs of people in the church are met. People are aware of one another’s needs. They may help you when you move, visit you in

the hospital, prepare meals for you when you’re sick, and pray for and with you.

3. The number of people who are active in ministry increases.
4. People who may not have been doing so before are exercising their spiritual gifts, and the variety of gifts at work may not typically be seen in the larger church on a Sunday morning.

### WE’RE GETTING THERE

Not everyone at Parkdale Grace is part of a home church right now, but about 70% are involved. “It has been a slow process,” says Pastor Ron, “but I am encouraged.”

### PONDER POINTS

For a church considering launching a home church model, Pastor Ron offers the following:

1. Make it a matter of prayer. It must be of the Lord.
2. Move ahead only after sensing God’s leading in this direction.
3. Study the book of Acts and draw Scriptural principles for home church from it.
4. Begin to teach the congregation the scriptural basis and the advantages in terms of giving opportunities for every member to exercise their God-given gifts within a worship context. ●



Ron Stone has served as Pastor at Parkdale Grace Fellowship in Calgary, AB for over 20 years. Parkdale is a grace-oriented, Bible-based, Christ-centered family of believers who exist to joyfully exalt Jesus above all else.



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# 2025 NEWLY CREDENTIALLED MINISTERS\*

<b>O</b>	Nathan Weber	Verity Community Church	Waterloo, ON
<b>L</b>	Justin Fox	Bonavista EM Church	Calgary, AB
<b>P</b>	Kyle Upton	Bethany EM Church	Kitchener, ON
<b>O</b>	Krista Bennett	EMC of Cda	Chilliwack, BC
<b>O</b>	Paul Westerholm	Emmanuel EM Church	Elmira, ON
<b>P</b>	Brian Smith	No Organization Assigned	Ontario
<b>O</b>	Jared Harrison	Centre Street Church	Calgary, AB
<b>P</b>	Jigs Gonzales	No Organization Assigned	Alberta
<b>P</b>	Salim Pani	Yesu Mandli	Calgary, AB
<b>L</b>	Jeremy Hoover	St. Clair Community Church	Sombra, ON
<b>O</b>	Shiloh Nott	Bethel EM Church	Three Hills, AB
<b>P</b>	Sid Thomas	Ridgeview EM Church	Kelowna, BC
<b>L</b>	Don Timmons	Kenaston EM Church	Kenaston, SK
<b>P</b>	Lena Blain	Centre Street Church	Calgary, AB
<b>O</b>	William Knelsen	Hoadley EM Church	Bluffton, AB
<b>L</b>	Robbie Oleniuk	Calvary EM Church	Owen Sound, ON
<b>P</b>	Melanie Nelson	Centre Street Church	Calgary, AB
<b>P</b>	Timothy Gibb	Aylmer EMC	Aylmer, ON
<b>L</b>	Salim Pani	Yesu Mandli	Calgary, AB
<b>L</b>	Jessi Kurtz	Centre Street Church	Calgary, AB
<b>P</b>	Ron Stone	Parkdale Grace Fellowship	Calgary, AB

**O** Ordained Minister    **L** Licensed Minister    **P** Provisional Licensed Minister

\* As of November 30, 2024.

## Ways to GIVE

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# RECENTLY RETIRED



**Ruth Ann Elliott**  
Active Retired  
March 31, 2024

In 1980, after language school, Ruth Ann and Keith began serving as church-planting missionaries in a remote area of Ecuador. Here, Ruth Ann discerned what became the core of her ministry, inspired by Titus 2. "I began helping women understand their roles, their value before God, their calling, and ministry." She developed Spanish teaching materials for her own ministry and has assisted with research and design as Keith prepared his resources. She frequently team-taught alongside Keith, supporting pastoral couples in Ecuador, Mexico, and Cuba, and has been deeply involved in one-on-one ministry, particularly with those healing from trauma.

Now back in Canada, Ruth Ann is facing 5th stage kidney failure with one kidney, awaiting a transplant. Despite low energy, she enjoys knitting, sewing, gardening, and family time, while continuing remote ministry with contacts in Ecuador, Mexico and Costa Rica. "I'm excited to see what the Lord has in store for us," she says.

Keith was accepted for missionary service in 1978 while pastoring at Evangel, Kitchener. He served two remote churches on the Northwest coast of Ecuador. He was church planting in Ecuador when he accepted a position at the EMCC National Office in Calgary as Executive Director: Missions & Administration (1998-2005). Restructuring ended his position, and they moved to Mexico City to work with Pastors (2006-2011). Pastoral care in Ecuador was the next assignment (2011-2015). Stepping away from WP, Keith was the Canadian Director of Camino Global until 2020. Keith and Ruth Ann then returned to WP as Developers for Latin America--ministry with Spanish-speaking churches in Cuba, Ecuador, and Mexico. Keith has developed many ministry resources in Spanish.

Now in Canada, tending to Ruth Ann's health, they hope to return to Costa Rica where they had recently settled. "We have loved our work, and I'm very grateful for all the Lord has allowed us to do," says Keith.



**Keith Elliott**  
Active Retired  
March 31, 2024

# MINISTERS



**Dianne Kuglin**  
Active Retired  
Nov 30, 2023

In 2016, Dianne founded Standing Stones Counselling, Coaching and Consulting Inc., now with offices in Innisfail and Stettler, Alberta. Dianne manages and is a Counselling Therapist. Between 2005 and 2015, she held pastoral positions involving counselling at Hillcrest Church in Medicine Hat. She now serves on one of EMCC's credentialing teams.

Of her pastoral ministry, Dianne says, "I loved connecting with people and helping them grow deeper with Jesus." And of her private practice, "It's an honour to pray with people if they are open to it, and to help people find peace, a different perspective, and healing. I want people to have hope if they've talked to me."

A recent workshop has re-ignited a passion in Dianne to equip churches to do more to help people struggling with sexual brokenness, one of her areas of expertise. "I'd like to do more consulting."

Dianne has two adult children and two teenage grandchildren. She enjoys quilting, sewing, watercolours, and camping.

After serving Ontario churches, Hillside, Mt. Albert, and Almaguin, South River, Andre left the pastorate in 2018. Since then, he has been behind the wheel of a tractor trailer driving long hauls into the USA. His Active Lifetime Grant credentials became Active Retired on July 31, 2023.

He and Janet live in Sundridge. "I'll serve where I'm planted," says Andre. "My church is the company I am working with. People know I'm a pastor. My life verse, Isaiah 40:31, reminds me to keep walking, trusting Him, and to take advantage of the opportunities He gives me to share the good news with others who don't know Him yet. EMCC's Way of Jesus statements are important in my life."

In his spare time Andre builds and flies model airplanes. Janet and Andre are parents of a daughter, Sydney, a second-year university engineering student. When Andre's schedule becomes more local, the couple hopes to resume figure skating, a former hobby.



**Andre Wedseltoft**  
Active Retired  
July 31, 2023



# RECENTLY RETIRED



**Tim Hayes**  
Active Retired  
June 30, 2022

After 26 years of bi-vocational ministry in the UK, Tim & Christine arrived in Prince George, BC in 2001 to plant Riverside CC, an EMCC ministry to First Nations people. They felt called to serve together and did so there and at Bridgeland, a campus of Centre Street Church in Calgary where they ministered from 2011 until retirement.

Now, Tim assists with weddings and pastoral care and is helping a church plant. Also, they are hosts at Rivers Edge Camp. They intend to move to a lakeside community in the Shuswap, BC, where they will be near family. "We want to focus on our family and invest in our 11 grandchildren here and in the UK." Of the future, Tim says, "The God who has sustained us through ministry will be faithful and continue to provide and open doors of opportunity. We want to serve God's purposes in our lifetime" (Acts 13:36).

Hugh and Deb first served in Markstay, Ontario (81-84). In 1984, they accepted a call to a 2-point charge, Shrigley EMC, Dundalk, and Mount Pleasant MC, Singhampton (84-88). Pastorates followed at Collingwood MC, Collingwood (88-90), Elgin MC, Stratford (90-92), Faith MC, Wasaga Beach (92-94), back to Shrigley MC (94-2000), and Tavistock MC, Tavistock (2000-2024).

"What a privilege to serve so many congregations—preaching, baptizing individuals, marrying couples and dedicating their children. I described myself as a 'GP pastor'—a 'general practitioner' in ministry."

Hugh hopes to find the right balance between rest and serving God. They look forward to spending time with their two sons and their families, enjoying six grandchildren. "Serving our Lord always remains one of my greatest joys. Retirement doesn't end my calling to love God, love my neighbour, and share His Word. I want to be flexible, receptive to new possibilities and ready to step out in faith as God leads."



**Hugh Rutledge**  
Honourably Retired  
June 30, 2024

# MINISTERS



**Marilyn McIlroy**  
Active Retired  
June 30, 2024

Marilyn was a full-time missionary nurse in Haiti from 1983-94; deployed by WP in Fort Wayne, IN, until the work was turned over to the national church. Returning to Canada, she worked as a nurse in Ontario. In 2002, she began full-time with World Partners Canada as Coordinator of Health and Community Development while continuing to hold a casual Public Health position for the Region of Waterloo.

Marilyn raised awareness of worldwide health and development needs. She trained and led medical and building teams to Haiti, El Salvador, Romania, and Tanzania. "Haiti will always be in my heart. I loved being in the villages with the women and babies, assisting with preventative health care." She was also involved with two ongoing projects in Haiti, Farming God's Way and a Home for Seniors.

Now retired, Marilyn is processing this latest transition and is enjoying walking, biking, bird watching, gardening, and listening for God.

Between 1952 and 1985, Virgil served four PAOC churches, two missionary deployments, and taught in two Bible Colleges. In 1986, he became pastor at Faith MC, Kitchener. While there, Virgil became a Homiletics professor at Emmanuel Bible College. After Faith, in 1992, Virgil planted Royal City Church in Guelph, staying until 1995. He taught until 1999 while doing interim pastoring and pulpit supply until 2010.

"Preaching and teaching put the sparkle in his eye," recalls daughter Sharon. His son Fred comments on some aspects of his dad's legacy: "The importance of good preaching and integrity in ministry. Theology is not a box to fit people into but an invitation to explore the nature of God and the work of the Holy Spirit."

Virgil and Della, his 'essential ministry partner,' were married for 71 years until she passed in January 2024. They raised two children and have six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Virgil has Dementia, and strokes limit communication. Our thanks to Sharon and Fred for contributing the information for this bio for their dad.



**Virgil Gingrich**  
Honourably Retired  
April 30, 2024





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Following Jesus Together

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