THE Messenger

Summer 2016

The Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada

Content:

Community: Slow and Sacrificial
By Julia Sandstrom ____ p.3
From Jeff's Desk ____ p.4-5
Welcome ____ p.6-7
Sunday Conversations
By Jeff Gooderham ____ p. 8
AGM Summary ____ p. 9
Connection in a High Growth Season ____ p. 10-12
By Jeremy Duncan
Mark Your Calendars ____ p. 12

Community:

Slow and Sacrificial

I was introduced to hens and chicks, the succulent pictured on the cover of this issue, last summer. After a friend told me about these little cactus looking plants, I went out and bought a few for my garden. The beauty of these little perennials is threefold for me. First, they are physically attractive to look at and come in a variety of types. Second, they are perennials—even in Winnipeg. Third, they multiply and spread in an amazing way. It's this third characteristic that excites me the most.

The hen is the centre of the plant and the chicks form the outer cluster. Eventually the hen flowers, goes to seed, and dies. While this may seem sad, it's actually quite the opposite because the chicks will fill in where the hen once stood and become hens themselves. It's a very apt picture of the circle of life. It's also a very apt picture of community. We know that Jesus initially called a few disciples to follow him (12). We also know that he sent out a larger group to evangelize the region (72). In acts we read about thousands of converts coming to faith. If Jesus is the hen, we are his chicks as disciples. Our call is to help grow the community of Jesus followers not as though we become the centre like Jesus, but so others can know Jesus.

Community takes time to nurture and grow. Hens and chicks take a long time to spread throughout a garden area, but their clustering forms eventually can cover a large area. It's the same with community. There can be an initial spike in attendance at a church, but that doesn't mean there is real community. It takes time and effort to make that happen (see page 10 "Connection in a High Growth Season").

Community not only takes time, it takes sacrifice. (It's not lost on me that Jesus also had to die for the sake of his chicks to continue to flourish.) If we are to follow Jesus we have to serve and sacrifice for Him/His Church. This take shape in all sorts of ways. It means generosity in giving financially so that others may participate in the Kingdom. It means opening our homes to people we may not know very well in order to become better acquainted and build community. This is how our church plants have grown from plants to established churches (see page 6"Welcome").

My hens are flowering right now which means they are about to die. I'm eager to see the little chicks cover the empty spaces that will be left. It won't happen this summer, but this time next year I'll have more hens and more chicks in my garden. Community building is like that: slow and sacrificial. Let this edition of *The Messenger* encourage you to continue in the journey of church community and maybe ask yourself: how can I be a community builder in my context?

Julia Sandstrom is the Associate Pastor of Holy Community Covenant Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba and editor of *The Messenger*

From Jeff's Desk
Superintendent

From the very beginning, the Covenant has been a connectional church. The very first sermon text was Psalm 119:63: "I am a friend of all who fear you…" In the days before the formal organization of the Covenant the term "Mission Friends" was used to describe our forefathers and foremothers. When the ECCC task force on congregational health and vitality met over a year ago there was clear agreement that how we do life together—the dynamics of community—will greatly impact the health of our churches.

Our focus for this years' AGM was on the topic of community. In advance of the AGM we distributed a survey to all leaders and delegates addressing the topic of community. The response to the survey was somewhat surprising in that 158 people (and there were under 100 delegates) completed the survey. There were a number of encouraging statistics revealed through the survey:

Over 99% of all respondents knew at least 10 people at their church by name. None of us really wants to be a number or a "hey you" when we attend any kind of group gathering. Part of feeling truly accepted is having our name known. Part of our theology is that the Lord knows us personally and so we seek to live that out in relationship to one another. At a practical level, people who know more than seven persons are far less likely to leave their faith community because they have found community.

Over 85% of all respondents has either been in the home of someone from their church or had someone over. One of the dynamics of true friendship tends to be spending quality time together and that is often found in when we share where we live. Our interests, values and style are seen when someone enters our home in ways we don't catch in a casual conversation in the church entry. Something happens when we eat together.

Nearly 65% of respondents are either in a small group or ministry team that meets at least twice a month. Community is often forged through serving together or studying together. There is something about the regular gathering together with a focused purpose that takes us deeper into community.

Almost 92% of respondents had assisted a part of their church in a practical way (financially, with a meal or by using their skills). This clearly goes to the matter of walking the talk. Jesus talked about the fallacy of telling a person in need of a coat to "be warm" without providing a coat. When we share with others we build deeper community.

There were a couple of issues that would need more follow-up research, but may signal potential weaknesses within the life together of our congregations:

Although only 8% of respondents listed trust as being "low" or "very low" only 46% said trust was "high". There is no doubt but that a high trust culture has deeper community. It is trust that helps us through times of disagreement. It is trust that takes a community through crisis whether it is externally or internally based.

Less than 80% of respondents felt that either pastoral leaders or other leaders within the church dealt with conflict quickly and well. No community is perfect and every community will have conflict. Strong communities are those who are able to address conflict with grace and truth.

Under 50% of respondents felt that "spiritual conversations" happened naturally and often. This is clearly a response that needs follow up. How does one define a spiritual conversation; must there be a prayer or bible verse spoken? So this may or may not be an issue but part of being the body of Christ is being something different than a caring social club. Deeper community is found in places where our core beliefs are known and discussed.

My prayer is that we as a community of communities would continue to grow not only in number but also in true depth of community. I would encourage you, whether you are a formal leader or not, to think about and talk with others in your church about the ways deep community can be fostered. I would welcome your thoughts regarding ways the ECCC can have better community (email jeff@covchurch.ca or call the office 204.269.3437 and we can have a conversation). In the end, we will be more of who we are called to be as heirs of the Mission Friends movement of the 1800's!

Jeff Anderson

AVENUE COMMUNITY CHURCH

HOLY COMMUNITY COVENANT CHURCH

Lake Ridge community church

On Friday, June 24, 2016, the Evangelical Covenant Church formally welcomed three new Canadian churches into the denomination at the annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. Avenue Community Church (Toronto, ON), Holy Community Covenant Church (Winnipeg, MB), and Lake Ridge Community Church (Chestermere, AB) are products of a renewed work of the Spirit in the ECCC for church planting.

We celebrate this milestone in the lives of these churches. We praise God for new church planters and new communities where fresh manifestations of the church are forming.

If you want to know more about church planting in the ECCC, please contact the Director of Church Planting, Glenn Peterson at glenn@covchurch.ca.

Marc Vandersluys was also ordained at the annual meeting. We pray God's blessing on him and his family as he serves God and the Church.

Right/counterclockwise:
Jeff Anderson, ECCC Superintendent and Glenn Peterson, ECCC Director of Church Planting;

Gavin Jenson, Pastor of Holy Community Covenant Church with Lisa Gietz and Hillary Friesen, Leadership Board members;

Darrick Tam, Sam Williams, Tammy Cho, and John Cho, pastors and members of Avenue Community Church;

The whole gang!

Marc and Dixie Vandersluys

A few years ago we, as a congregation, sought the Lord for a vision for the church going forward. We clearly felt the call to passion for God, family, and discipleship. We set out from there with a desire to discover ways that we might draw the church family closer and give opportunity for all congregants to feel that they have a place and a voice within our church. We placed a small lock box on the wall of the church and invited our people to write down ideas or questions or struggles they may be having and place them in the box and we would do our best to work through them. From there we decided to set aside one Sunday evening every three months to simply sit down as a church family and enjoy a very relaxed conversation on some of the questions or challenges that were offered.

The idea is for the evening to be a relaxed time of conversation. No real agenda and (we're still working on this) not really even pastor led, just a chance for the church family to sit and share a casual and safe conversation about things that the family feels are most pressing or most important. We have talked about many things such as, how do we lead our families in devotions and Bible study, Christianity 101, baptism and membership, and we even had a wonderful conversation about creation. We have watched videos, received handouts, read Scripture, sat and prayed together, and of course just had a good old conversation together. The turn-out has been better than expected with a wide demographic of age and church participation.

We begin the evening with a covenant to do all things in love. So we speak and share in love, remembering that the whole idea is for encouragement, growth, and community fellowship. The intent is for the evening to be created and guided by the church family, with no real pressure on anyone person to have all the answers or carry the conversation. We simply allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to move within the church family. So far it has been a wonderful experience for our church and there is always an excited anticipation for the next Sunday Evening Conversation!

Jeff Gooderham is the Senior Pastor of Faith Covenant Church in Breton, Alberta

112th AGM Summary | 2016 | Breton, AB & Toronto, ON

Superintendent's Report

- Talked about our theme of community, the hope that this meeting would be significant for those in attendance.
- Thanked Ray Wall and Sam Williams for serving on the leadership board. Two new leadership board members were later approved; Lavern Arnt (Saskatoon, SK) and Terence Barg (Breton, AB)

Start & Strengthen Churches

- God is at work in Canada - 5 years ago we would not have been meeting in Toronto.
- Three new church plants were affirmed and welcomed into the ECCC and recommended for membership in the ECC: Avenue Community Church, Toronto, ON; Holy Community Covenant Church, Winnipeg, MB; Lake Ridge Community Church, Chestermere, AB
- Church planters Phil and Sharon Nethagani hope to launch Abundant Life Covenant Church this coming year.
- Other opportunities in church planting, such as in southern MB and additional parishes in Calgary in connections with Kensington Commons.

Make & Deepen Disciples

- High school students attended CHIC last summer. It was a great experience for students and leaders. Churches were given the opportunity to continue the theme SHIFT with their youth groups and congregations at home. Next CHIC event will be summer 2018.
- Trellis Foundation carries on the discipleship legacy of CBC. Many ministries have benefited from grants. Currently working on collecting mailing addresses to develop a contact list.

Love Mercy, Do Justice & Serving Globally

- Christ at the Checkpoint video was shown.
- Darrell Winger (World Relief Canada) and Ray Baloun shared about this year's Kernels of Hope Project. It has been 10 years since the first field.

Resourcing the Mission

- The 2015 financial statements were approved.
- The 2016 budget was approved.
- An update was given on the closure of Edmonton Sanctuary Covenant Church and its remaining funds. 80% will be invested in new church plants and 20% will be given to Covenant Bay Bible Camp. Most of the funds are tied up in the house in Edmonton, but the funds will be distributed accordingly once they are available.

Develop Leaders

- Last year the ECCC partnered with churches to send leaders to the Global Leadership Summit. This year, we will plan on attending the Winnipeg location, Oct. 20-21, 2016. Churches are invited to send leaders.
- Marc Vandersluys (Associate Pastor at Malmo Mission Covenant Church) was recommended for Ordination to Word and Sacrament.
- First-time ministry licenses were granted to Jeff Strong (Nelson, BC), Jamie Kim (Toronto, ON), Philips Nethagani (Brampton, ON), and Deana Verge (Edmonton, AB).

CONNECTION in a HIGH GROWTH season

By: Jeremy Duncan

Growth is a great thing. It's an exciting, tangible expression of some of the deeper and less visible work we do in ministry. It's exciting because a "crowd draws a crowd" and once we get rolling it tends to pull even more people into the orbit of our work.

At the same time, growth actually presents challenges when it comes to doing the most important work of the church; that is, discipling people in their relationship with Jesus and drawing them more deeply into connection with the faith community.

At Commons Church we've been overwhelmed by the grace God has given us. We had over 300 people join us on our launch Sunday, we had grown to over 500 at our one year anniversary, and we just passed 800 people on our second Easter Sunday. However, with close to a thousand people now coming regularly we recognize how difficult it is to actually meet people, learn their names, and find appropriate places for their gifts in our church. We are still fumbling our way along and trusting the Spirit to guide us, but there are a few things that we've learned since we launched in September 2014.

Make connection a priority

One of the dangers with growth is that it can very quickly move our focus away from the initial vision we had and onto the immediate needs of all these new people coming in. Since new people generally don't have established connections within the church community they can look to the staff of the church, particularly the teaching staff, for all of their pastoral needs. Certainly we want to be present to people, but pastoring larger communities requires that we push the work out into the congregation. We've worked hard to regularly remind our community that Sundays are a great place to start but that real community happens in our Home Churches. This is our language for small groups but it's designed to teach our community that the most important spiritual engagement we have in our week, is the one we have with those who know our story well.

Make the pathway clear

Growth can present us with all kinds of new idea, new opportunities, and new ministries through which to serve the community. That's beautiful, but it can also be to our detriment. Especially when you are in a high growth season where you can't personally connect to each

new person, having a simple, clear pathway is essential. New people need to know how to connect, how to learn, and how to serve in community even without a personal conversation with the pastor. Adding more programs is not a solution and sometimes it even muddies the waters. Growth is time to scale back and simplify. Everything you can do to reduce the mental clutter your new people have to wade through the better.

Communicate consistently

One of the things we've learned to be aware of in this season of high growth is that we can't take communication for granted. You can do a really great job communicating a connection pathway but if you grow by 100 people in the next month then that's 100 people who have no idea about how to get connected. We have found that we needed to strip our announcements down to only those announcements that impacted everyone in the room, and then we needed to make those same announcements almost every single week. Yeah, it gets a little boring, but if you're growing then there are people who are hearing this for the very first time. Focus on them. (as a side note: This goes for more than just your announcements. Make sure your teaching consistently points people toward community and make sure you are talking about your vision regularly so that new people coming in quickly get to know the lay of the land)

Jeremy Duncan is the Senior Pastor of Kensington Commons in Calgary, AB

Mark your calendars:

2016

October 3-5 : Pastor/Spouse Retreat, Canmore, Alberta

October 28-30 : ALIVE: Adult Discipleship Weekend, Canmore, Alberta

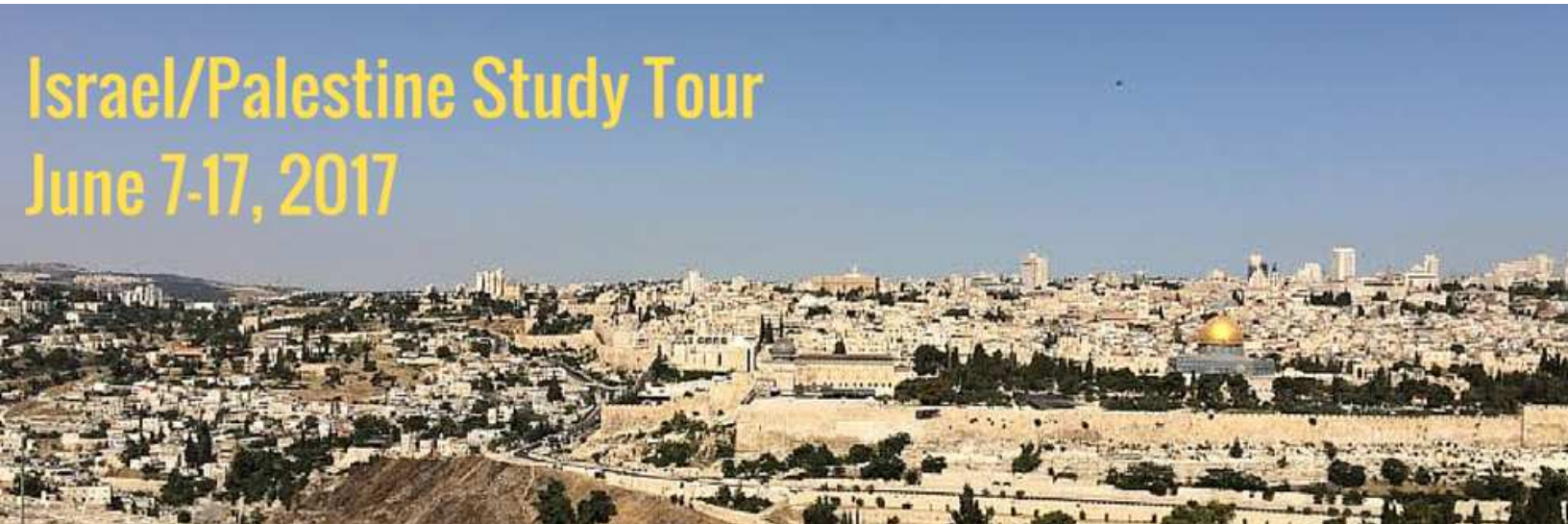
November 1 : Trellis Grant Application Deadline

2017

January 30-February 3 : MidWinter, Louisville, Kentucky

May 5-7 : Annual General Meeting, Location TBA

June 7-17 : Israel/Palestine Study Tour



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A LEGACY OF COVENANT BIBLE COLLEGE

TO BE A CATALYST

of biblical, intentional and innovative discipleship in the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada

"A trellis is a tool that enables a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive." –Peter Scazzero

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The definition of a disciple is simply *a person who is learning from Jesus how to live their everyday life.*

In the legacy of Covenant Bible College, Trellis Foundation aims to support fruitful growth in God's kingdom. Sometimes all that's needed is getting an idea 'off the ground.'

Application Deadline: November 1st of each year

If funds remain available after the fall granting cycle, a second cycle will be held with a deadline of March 1 of the next year. For updates on funds available for the potential 2nd granting cycles, join our email list or like us on Facebook by visiting trellisfoundation.ca.

Trellis Foundation distributes grants to Canadian Covenant charitable organizations (i.e., the ECCC, its member churches, camps & other future affiliated ministries) doing the crucial work of discipleship in Canada. See website below for application, funding criteria and full details.

TRELLISFOUNDATION.CA

The Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada

PO BOX 23117
RPO McGillivray
WINNIPEG, MB R3T 5S3

Ph: 204-269-3437
Fx: 204-269-3584

office@covchurch.ca
www.covchurch.ca

The Messenger is a publication of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada.
Editor: Julia Sandstrom

Staff:
Jeff Anderson, Superintendent/President
Hanne Johnson, Office Administrator
Glenn Peterson, Director of Church Planting
Sally Carlson, Financial Officer
Monica Doerksen, Bookkeeper