



THINKING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

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MORE AND BETTER CHURCHES

vision-ministries.org

I Was a Stranger and You Invited Me In **WELCOMING REFUGEES TO CANADA**

SANDRA REIMER

Most refugees have been through some kind of traumatic experience. Many have witnessed murders and rapes—oftentimes of family members and they have not had help to deal with that,” says David Cottrill, the Director of Community Outreach at North Park Church in London, ON.

North Park takes seriously God’s words in Leviticus 19:33: “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.”

Since 2006, the congregation has welcomed seven refugee families to Canada—three from Burma and four from Congo. Their first family came through a government program that covered the costs for the refugees’ initial year in Canada. For

some of the other families, North Park supplied funds for living expenses and helped them get settled. “We assist them to adjust to a new country. We help them with ESL [English as a Second Language] and to navigate the culture,” says David.

“Each time we get a new family, it’s like adopting children. Except that they grow up much faster.” David says it is a balancing act between helping the families but not letting them become dependent. North Park is careful to involve healthy volunteers with the families. “People can become so wrapped up in these refugees’ lives, that they find it difficult when the refugees no longer need them.”

One of the hardest things for newcomers to Canada is being without their social network. “They are used to seeing family and

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Dreaming of Jesus

Muslim Dreamers Chat with Online Mentors

SANDRA REIMER

ATORONTO church plant,* which is part of the VMC network, is reaching Muslims who have dreamt of Jesus. In June 2014, the church relaunched the www.dreamsaboutjesus.com website in time for Ramadan—the annual forty days of prayer and fasting for Muslims around the world.

Another ministry, Power to Change, originally started the website in January 2010. During the three years they operated the project, more than 700,000 people, most of them Muslim, visited the site. Four thousand visitors requested further information through the website's Mentor Centre. Despite this success,

Power to Change had to discontinue the ministry when they lost funding for the project in 2013.

Muslims discover the site through Facebook ads sponsored by the Toronto church plant. When they click on the ad, they land at www.dreamsaboutjesus.com. On the site, they can watch testimonies, read about Christ, and confidentially email a Christian mentor. Christian volunteers answer questions and help seekers who want more information.

The ministry is very cost effective because the church only pays for the number of clicks on the Facebook ad. At an average price of 3–5 cents per click, they can connect



with many Muslims for a very low cost. Since the ministry began in 2010, the Facebook ads have had more than one billion views, and since the site has been relaunched, about another 55,000 clicks through to the [dreamsaboutjesus.com](http://www.dreamsaboutjesus.com) website. There is potential to expose hundreds of thousands to the gospel who may have never heard about Jesus. This ministry can also penetrate nations that are difficult for missionaries to enter. ■

**not named for the group's safety*

Muslim Woman Dreams Jesus Took Her in His Arms

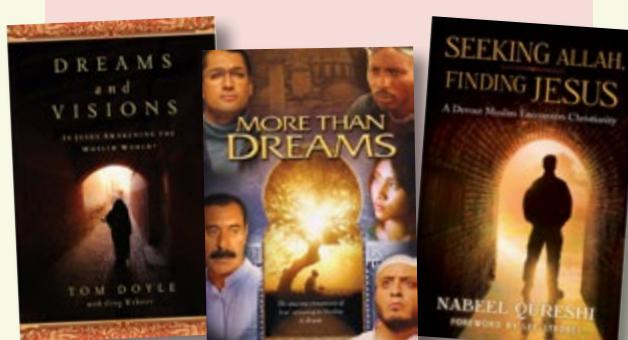
I used to have a recurring dream, where some invisible "thing" was coming straight at me. It felt evil and it wanted to harm me.

I would wake up afraid and anxious. This happened at least twice a week for two years.

Then I had the same dream where this "thing" was heading towards me, and then Jesus was standing to my right in his white attire. He took me in his arms, and closed his robe on me. I started crying uncontrollably in his arms, as this invisible "thing" shrank and completely vanished.

I woke up very relaxed as if I had cried out all my sorrows, and I never had this bad dream again.

—Woman from Egypt who visited dreamsaboutjesus.com



Learn More

Books

Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World? by Tom Doyle

Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus by Nabeel Qureshi

DVD

More Than Dreams: the stories of five Muslims, from different countries, who dreamt of Jesus.

See www.morethandreams.org

friends every day," says David. In the beginning, he checks in on them frequently. While churches can't replace a refugee's family, they can help them form a new network and get connected in the community.

North Park also assists families with employment and housing. They try to find affordable dwellings so that when financial support from the government or church ends, the family won't need to move.

A number of the families the government has matched North Park with have been Christian. In one Muslim family assigned to them, the mother became a Christian just before arriving in the country. David says that it has been great to see families they have sponsored share Christ with others from their culture in Canada.

After successfully settling a few families, North Park applied to the federal government and received approval to become a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH). They are one of only 85 such community groups in Canada that can officially sponsor refugees—65 of them are churches. Sponsorship Agreement Holders can receive a predetermined number of refugees annually. They are responsible for the emotional and financial support for the newcomers for about one year.

Fast Facts about Welcoming Refugee Families

- ▶ Churches can sign up to resettle families in a program where the government covers the financial costs for the first year
- ▶ Churches can also cover refugees' initial costs (about \$25,000 to \$30,000/family or about \$15,000/individual)
- ▶ Emotionally healthy volunteers can help refugees become independent
- ▶ **Find more information about government refugee sponsorship programs at www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/**

North Park belongs to the VMC family of churches. As an SAH, they are willing and able to act as an umbrella for other congregations wanting to welcome refugees. David can also help groups connect with sponsoring organizations in their communities.

Despite the complexity of becoming a sponsoring organization and the 24/7 nature of working with the refugee families, David says, "We have had really positive experiences."

David believes that as Christians we are called to welcome strangers into Canada—especially brothers and sisters in Christ. "They have lost family members, their homes, and their place in their country. Our job is help them rebuild in a new country." ■



Seventeen-year-old Gloria and her family were welcomed to Canada by members of North Park Church and daughter congregation, Mosaic Church, in London, Ontario. Gloria was baptized in 2014 by Mosaic pastor David Cottrill. An active part of the Mosaic congregation, Gloria leads worship on some Sundays.



More and Better Churches

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THINKING AHEAD is published three times per year in an effort to connect like-minded Christians and their local churches and encourage them to work cooperatively, especially in evangelism, through church planting and church extension.

Subscriptions are free, but VMC encourages supporters to send \$15 per year to help cover costs (no tax receipt given for subscriptions).

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

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Drinking from the Firehose

FOURTEEN IN '14

JAY GURNETT

I grew up with a couple of brothers close in age to me, so have a unique take on an old expression. The modern helicopter parent probably bans this practice (for good reason), but we used to love to drink from the garden hose. After you've flushed out all the warm water, you're supposed to allow just enough flow so that your brother can swallow every cold, refreshing (and rubber-tasting) drop. But the temptation to quickly twist the tap to high pressure, can be hard to resist. It may not be a firehose, but trying to sip from a full-pressure garden hose seems almost as impossible to a nine-year-old.

At Vision Ministries Canada these days, it feels like the flow of new initiatives (new church plants, new congregations, new missional communities, and the like) is more like the tap on high than at swallowing rate.

From the beginning back in 1992, God gradually brought us alongside more and more church planting. Over the next couple of decades, he grew our capacity (and the opportunities) from about two per year for the first 13 years, to an average of five and a half (not sure you can plant half a church!) for each of the past eight years. But in 2014, to varying degrees, we're coming alongside 14 great new things that God is doing, as we fill our "paraclete" role. And we have lots more possibilities in 2015.

Our involvement varies. Much of the time we coach church planters, adopt their new community into our full church incubation package (that includes charitable receipting, online bookkeeping, basic insurance, payroll system, etc), and provide financial support. But some of the 14 in 2014 are cooperative projects where we are either the senior or junior partner with other denominations. For other projects, we provide much less help and mostly cheer from the sidelines.

Here's a quick taste (just a sip!) of what's flowing...



PHOTO: FRANK BOSTON // CREATIVE COMMONS



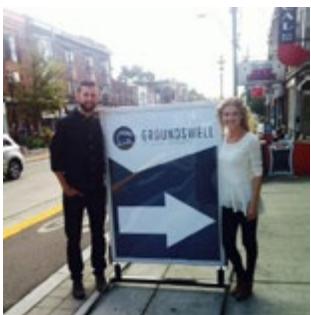
1. Roland and Colleen Mechler (pictured left) have been feeling the call of God on their lives to start a discipleship-focused church plant for more than a decade. So beginning in October, they're hoping to see "**T.E.A. (Teaching, Equipping, Applying) Community**" grow towards that dream. It will have the good

foundation of an established young adult group (TEA) that has already been meeting for more than four years on most Saturday nights in the Mechler house just outside **Drayton, ON**. Others who live nearby are also very interested.

2. Over the past month, **Randy Hein** (pictured right; an old friend of VMC) and a group of a folks with a similar vision have been gathering in basements and making their presence known on the scenic beaches of **Victoria**. While the beach gatherings have been responsive and simple, a group of core leaders has assembled to discuss the more deliberate process of becoming a recognized church community. The newly forming community has a special interest in public art, local justice initiatives, and "seeking the peace" of the neighbourhood.



3. The Light: A Church on Campus in **Winnipeg** re-launched out of a small group Bible study in late September. They expect to grow into **South Pointe Church** over the next year. **Charleswood Community Church** intern **Brad Williams** is leading this new work.



A team of USA Southern Baptists boosted the group's efforts as they helped run a giant carnival in July in the community where the church will eventually be located.

4. Groundswell Church, helmed by **Jeff and Mika Pike** (left), launched on September 21st with a full house in a beautiful old theatre, on the west side of downtown Toronto. This followed a year of gathering in apartments and a dance studio. The group is an Association of Related Churches (ARC) church plant, but this Canadian/Australian couple (Jeff grew up at North Park Church in London, ON; Mika is from Hillsong) are also our friends. VMC provides coaching and administrative support for Groundswell. See www.groundswellchurch.com

5. The sixth congregation of Toronto China Bible Church (TCBC) began meeting at People's Academy in June 2014. We are encouraged by the good things God has done through this long-time partner of VMC. Now TCBC is talking about a new vision, which they believe God has given them, to start dozens of new Mandarin and English speaking congregations over the next decade.

The TCBC church planting vision is one of the first five projects sponsored by the Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) collaborative partnership. For the very first time (after two years of discussion), 15 key churches from across the country have, and will continue, to select, pray for, and financially support new initiatives from a list they compile together. Among VMC's 14 new initiatives in 2014, eight involve MMF churches.

All in all, there are lots of refreshing things in our little world these days. And we don't really mind that it's so much more than a sip. ■

Permission to Speak Freely?

Recently God has helped to transform my paralyzing “fear” of people into a healthy “respect” for them. It took some painful disappointments and conversations to put me into a contrite learning posture. In that place, I finally had a heart ready to understand Paul’s words in Thessalonians:

On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.

I Thess. 2:4

The transformation is hard to explain. I emerged out of a dark night with a new conviction that I could no longer tell people what I knew they wanted to hear. I had to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Speaking truthfully is not just something that is helping me to become a better leader—it is the foundation of true Gospel community. Our courage to speak the truth in loving ways demonstrates that we believe in grace.

A conversation I initiated with someone who had faithfully served in my congregation for many years reinforced this lesson. The person was extremely effective in a particular area of ministry—but had a brutal track record for dealing with the congregation in very disrespectful, demeaning, and discouraging ways. For

years, leaders avoided addressing the problem behaviour because of how much we valued the ministry contribution. It finally dawned on me that by maintaining the person’s service we were facilitating the contamination of our community’s integrity.

I prayed. I prepared. I prayed more. I picked up the phone and began a conversation that I knew could be volatile. It was tough—but in a way that I didn’t expect. I shared specific examples of behaviour that was clearly unbiblical and could not be tolerated or excused. With my spiel finally finished, I tensed up and waited for the response. There were some fireworks—but what saddened me most as I listened to the protests was that it was clear to me that the person felt “blindsided.”

I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realized that this was maybe the first time that anyone had actually shared the truth about how the person related to others. My fellow believer’s sanctification process had been stunted because no one was willing to risk the chaos of confrontation.

I think that I avoid tough conversations because I am afraid to test whether the grace of the gospel can handle it. We avoid speaking truthfully to each other as faith communities because glossing over sin and

unmet expectations seems more effective than the messy chaos introduced by truthtelling.

Paul says that it is through “speaking the truth in love” that “we will grow up”! That means that when I avoid telling the truth in loving ways that I am in effect stunting people’s growth and the growth of my congregation.

Some questions to chew on:

- What are you afraid of?
- Is there a person or person(s) who paralyze you?
- Who prevents you from doing or saying what you need to?
- Is there a “truth” about your church or ministry that needs to be addressed in love?
- What would it look like for you to “respect what people think of you” as opposed to “fear what people think of you”?
- Is the danger of speaking the truth without love a real danger or just perceived?

Jay Lehman is pastor at True North Church, a VMC church plant in Peterborough, Ontario. He also coaches emerging leaders including youth pastors.

JAY LEHMAN





Mark Buchanan and Ray Aldred share a laugh during one of their keynote addresses. It was a warm, rich dialogue about Canada's historic and current relationship with our First Peoples and where Ray and Mark fit into that story.



THINKING SHREWDLY VI HIGHLIGHTS

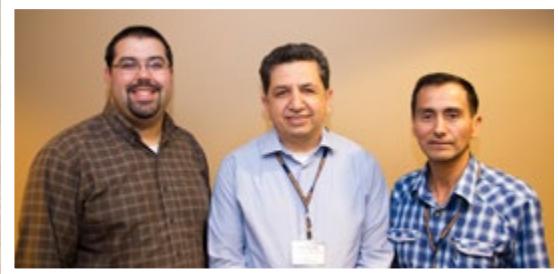
O Canada: Mission from Sea to Sea
May 1–2, 2014



VMC church planting coach Pernell Goodyear and his wife Margie taught a workshop on new and evolving forms of church.



A group of chaplains that belongs to the VMC Network met at the conference. Pictured left to right, Adam Nickell, Kevin Jolly, Jessica Baker, Rob Heinitz (VMC Chaplain Network Coordinator).



About 150 pastors, elders, ministry leaders, and church planters from across the country attended Thinking Shrewdly VI. They learned about effective team work, disciplermaking, starting new churches, reaching youth in today's context, conflict resolution, pastoral care, mental health, and First Nations.

We were delighted to have Ishmael Ochieng, Executive Director of Vision Ministries Kenya, at Thinking Shrewdly this year.

VMC Network News

Let's work together to see many more Canadians become life-long followers of Jesus!



VMC National Consultation

A Dialogue about Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) in Canada

April 24 & 25th, 2015

145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo ON

MMF helps churches and church leaders in the VMC Network collaboratively launch new churches and church-like expressions of ministry.

MMF also helps existing churches become more fruitful.

We encourage one to two leaders per church to attend this free event.

VMC Africa Team Encourages & Equips Kenyan Churches



(L to R) Bert Frey, Gary Goodkey, John Ferris, Gord Martin, Doug Loveday, and Nathan Harris went to Kenya in August on behalf of VMC. The team trained church leaders and provided other support for Vision Ministries Kenya and its network of churches. They preached in Nairobi churches and taught at a conference at Pan Africa Christian (PAC) University for 120 participants. As well, they visited and preached in a Maasai district and in a rural community close to Lake Victoria. We are also pleased to report that with significant financial help from Canadian congregations in the VMC Network, two church buildings are being erected in Kenya.

CONTINUED FROM BACK

ministry?" This is where most of the discussion took place.

The response from the regions was diverse but much more positive than we anticipated. Church leaders were more eager to buy into the mission at the local level than they were in becoming partners with VMC at a national level.

On Saturday morning a post-conference dialogue continued with about 35 church leaders. Together we carefully reviewed a draft document of how regional expressions of Moving the Mission Forward might work. There was lots of discussion, and at the end, every participant spoke to the proposal. All were warm to the idea, but expressed concerns about what it might take to collaborate in their unique regions.

Moving Forward

Following the conference, our VMC staff held a Visioning Day on June 19th to discuss leaders' feedback. Since then we have been laying the groundwork for regional expressions of Moving the Mission Forward.

This fall, we will facilitate regional church leadership dialogues. A consultation will be held in Waterloo, April 24/25, 2015 for all who are interested in National or Regional Moving the Mission Forward partnerships.

Talk to us if you have questions or an opinion. ■



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Spontaneous Dialogue is Surprisingly Fruitful

GORD MARTIN



Just a few days before the conference, we realized we had over-planned. We made adjustments to the schedule and are glad we did!

Dialogue about Moving the Mission Forward

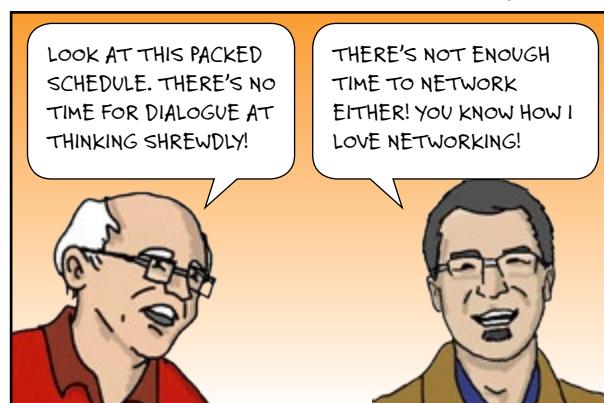
On Friday afternoon, we facilitated an open dialogue with about 100 church leaders. They sat in circles with others from their geographic region—BC, Alberta, Quebec, Ontario, etc.

We briefly reviewed the good news that VMC's Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) initiative is doing quite well, and reminded everyone of our purpose: we are trying to draw more and more Canadians into a life-long journey of following Jesus.

Through MMF, we want to jointly launch a new church or new church equivalent per month, as well as help three existing churches per year to overcome a “leadership hump.” The partnership will also stimulate collective praise and prayer.

At the conference, we also reviewed the not-so-good news: the level of commitment to the VMC agenda by

KINGDOM ADVENTURES WITH GORD & JAY



church leaders is not as high as we'd like, something that is even more evident at a congregational level. Reasons were suggested; feedback from the gathered leaders confirmed those hunches.

Learnings from the First MMF Partnership

Over the last two years, we have learned several things as we brought together leaders from 15–20 churches to form our first Moving the Mission Forward partnership. We discovered that it took lots of time to develop such a mutual relationship, more time than we expected. Every level of church leadership needed to ask questions—and each church had a different approach to making such decisions. And finally, not all of those who wanted to participate were able to do so at the present time.

Discussing Regional MMF Partnerships

At the conference, we asked the critical question, “Is there interest in pursuing regional expressions of Moving the Mission Forward?” We also asked, “Is it worth the effort to work through the obvious challenges for this kind of collaborative

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THINKING AHEAD



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