

READY FEET

Inviting “ordinary” Christians to be the ones who
build the Church

Your church’s greatest asset is not your pastor’s relevant preaching, your building’s ideal location or your youth program’s vibrancy. It’s the ministry calling of each member.

Do you believe it?

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Equipping the Saints



Inviting “ordinary” Christians to be the ones who build the Church

BY DIANE J. MCDUGALL

A lifetime ago in Southern California, I carried on a crazy-wonderful ministry in my after-work hours, befriending multiple Cambodian refugee families. So much of the *me* I am now was shaped by that time. It all started with a Bible study for teenage girls. Younger siblings emerged out of the woodwork for ventures to rollerskating rinks, and before long I was loading up my '71 Mustang for rides to church (squeezing in more kids than truly fit, but hey, seatbelts weren't yet mandatory).

Soon I was learning how to teach English so I could better engage their mothers. From basic lessons we graduated to simple-English discussions of Creation and the Fall ... and Jesus. The Christmas story came alive in their courtyard, with all available children dressed as shepherds—dishtowels hastily draped over heads.

Eventually I was arranging a 10-week leave of absence to learn to speak Khmer, so that I could better communicate with my friends' grandmothers.

Never, though, in those six years of loving my friends—marveling at their weddings, weeping with them in their distresses and learning how to make eggrolls—did I ever think, *Hmmm... if these seeds of faith take root, this could be the beginning of a church.*

Never.

I'd always assumed that *pastors* start churches. This was just me, loving people. I likely would have been startled if someone had asked: "How can we come alongside you and figure out if God might be up to something bigger, like a church?"

That's why one of the stories in this issue struck home with a poignant force. As I interviewed two couples for "We're Not Pastors But We Plant Churches," I was deeply moved. I thought, *Yes, yes, this is right, this is natural. This is what happens next when talking about Jesus leads to people coming to Christ.*

But somewhere deeper, there was also an ache: My heart wondered what more lasting God-movement might have started to take root if I myself had dreamt bigger.

I routinely hear stories of other believers who *are* dreaming bigger. Whose feet—fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:14-15; Isaiah 52:7)—are going on adventures for Him. Who are planting communities of faith where God has placed them. Will these communities become churches?

One believer in an EFCA church, a young single man, was invited by his pastor to consider a nearby mobile-home community as his mission field. (The pastor had noted the community while driving around looking for pockets of unchurched people on Sunday mornings.) The young man agreed and even chose to move into one of the trailers. A few other guys joined him. And then some single women from the church moved into another trailer. Together, they are investing in this community and its people as *their* people. Their ministry is reorienting all their decisions.

Other believers down through the centuries have regarded their workplace as their mission field. If spiritual conversations cannot happen easily there, prayers certainly can. And as God does His work in hearts, the connections deepen *outside* the workplace. And something wonderful unfolds.

May this issue, as it explores equipping the saints for ministry, build enthusiasm for what God is doing through lay leaders in your church—passionate believers both equipped and encouraged to *expect* God to build His Church through them.

COMMANDED TO FUNCTION AS PRIESTS

Our calling and our privilege

BY MARTY SCHOENLEBER JR.

Why did God choose you? Why did He draw your heart to Himself? Why were you placed in a family or a situation where you heard the truth of the gospel and bowed your heart in belief?

The “penny dropped”; you understood your need for a Savior; you knew you needed to be rescued from the guilt of your sin; and you trusted in the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, English Standard Version).

You don’t have to guess about why God chose you. The apostle Peter removes all doubt. Writing to a group of persecuted Christians, he cites a list of royal privileges and a royal purpose for all who follow the risen Christ:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9, ESV).

We, the people bought by the blood of Christ, are...

- a chosen race
- a royal priesthood
- a holy nation
- a people for his own possession

Before we believed, none of these things applied. But believing in Christ opened up a relationship of privilege, honor and responsibility with the living God. Peter underscores the wonder and awe of this new relationship by reaching back and borrowing the language of Hosea in the very next verse:

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

How are we to respond to this wonder: going from having no part in the family of God to being given the right to be called children of God (John 1:12)? Again, we don’t have to guess. Peter’s already told us: We have been given these privileges and rights and titles and callings that we “may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

PASSIONATE PROCLAIMERS

God has made us part of His family so that we might tell the world about Him and what He has done for us. He wants us to bask in the wonder of being adopted into His family so that we will become passionate proclaimers of His greatness. This is why we were chosen; this is why we were given a royal priesthood; this is why we have been

made into a holy nation; this is why He took possession of us to the praise of His glory; and this is why we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

This passionate purpose was meant to fuel the “priesthood of believers” across all generations. For centuries, however, the privilege, power and beauty of this calling was obscured by medieval clergy-laity distinctions. In the “fullness of time” the Protestant Reformation was the tool the Spirit of God used to chisel it out of the Scripture again, and through which the Church began the process of bringing it to light. But what is it?

The doctrine of the priesthood of believers is that *every follower of Christ has direct access to God without any other mediator than Christ so that each believer can respond directly to God and can minister to other people in the name of Christ*. God has commissioned all believers in Christ to (1) “respond directly to Him” and (2) “minister to other people” in the name of Christ. Paid pastors aren’t needed for this, believers are.

Every follower of Christ has direct access to God without any other mediator than Christ so that each believer can respond directly to God and can minister to other people in the name of Christ.

This is why Paul says, “I appeal to you ... brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1, ESV).

We are invited—no, commanded—to function as priests in the holy task of giving ourselves to the service of God. This is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes that we should offer up a “sacrifice of praise to God... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:15-16, ESV).

And right there in these verses is the outline of the tasks that churches and shepherds need to give themselves to in the equipping of the saints for ministry (cf. Ephesians 4:11-12).

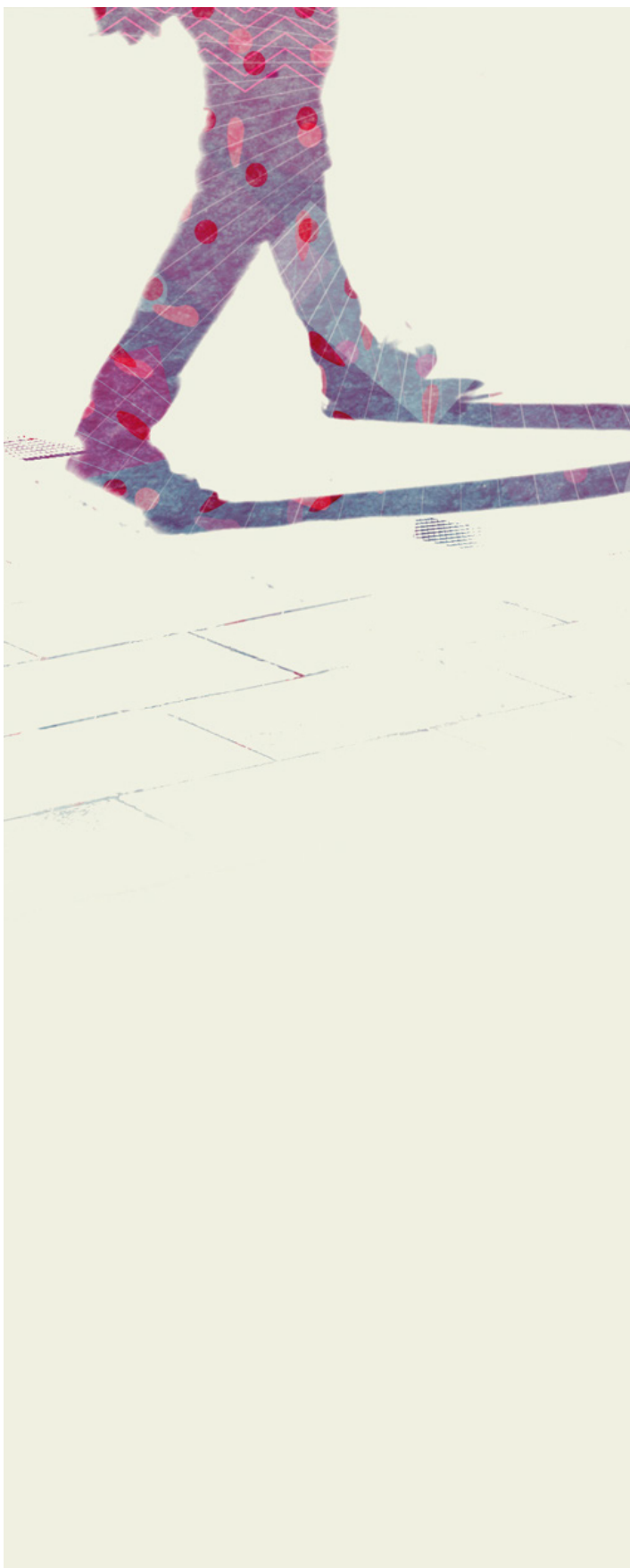
The saints need to be trained and equipped in at least these three areas:

- how to pray to and praise the Living God in the name of Christ
- how to do good in the name of Christ
- how to be hospitable in the name of Christ

This is the work of the ministry. Equipping the saints for their priestly role is at least this: training them to offer worship and prayer to God as they do good in the world and show hospitality. We do these things because they ensure that the gospel is adorned with credible lives. We desire that the world, in seeing our good works, would “give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, ESV).

Local churches that take this ministry seriously, that give real substantive thought as to how to equip the saints for these and other scripturally mandated activities (teaching, counseling, intercession to name a few), will change the landscape of the culture. When the saints function well in the priesthood that they have been given, the result is that “the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light” are proclaimed. And it is indeed these excellencies that we, who have been rescued, so fervently want the world to see.

Marty Schoenleber is lead teaching pastor of Trinity Church (EFCA) in Watseka, Illinois, and has also served as adjunct faculty at three different seminaries including Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He loves Jesus, his wife, his four kids and two grandchildren, and nearly any food from Philadelphia.



“CHURCH” ISN’T ONLY ON SUNDAY HERE

How thinking like family has transformed one church

BY JENNIFER M. KVAMME

“I tried to ‘preach people into mission,’” Mike Jarrell says now, “and that didn’t go well.”

As a pastor, Mike desperately wanted to see each church member living on-mission to his or her own neighbors, co-workers and friends. However, it became increasingly clear that people were either not motivated or not equipped to do so. And the Sunday-service-based structure of the church was not conducive to accomplishing that vision. “It was very frustrating,” he says.

That was four years ago. Narrow Road Communities (EFCA) in Summerdale, Pennsylvania, has now completely reversed that reality. And it started with upending the church structure and focus.

Mike began by launching what he called a missional action group—not a traditional small group (aimed at fellowship and Bible study) but an intentional gathering for living-out a missional lifestyle together. He describes that first MAG as “a smaller group of people where I tried to preach them into mission again, just in a smaller setting.”

Over time, however, the group became more like a family. Members connected with each others’ kids and attended their sporting events. They planned parties to build friendships with each others’ neighbors. They shared life over the dinner table. And as they began drawing others into this contagious, gospel-centered community, they experienced the joy of watching God transform lives through them.

Far better than a Bible story about evangelism is watching your friend come to faith in your living room.

SLOW DOWN YOUR LIFE

Today, in this church of about 120 people*, that first MAG has become 10 as people have come to Christ, friends have joined and groups have multiplied. “The Bible comes to life and people get excited about growing when they’re applying it with you,” Mike explains. “Far better than a Bible study about fellowship is having a party together. Far better than a Bible story about evangelism is watching your friend come to faith in your living room.”

As a result, Mike can’t imagine going back to a Sunday-morning-based church. “I’ve had people ask, ‘Am I part of the church if I’m not in a MAG?’” he shares.

“I’m so glad they’re feeling that way! I say, ‘You are always welcome to come here on Sunday, but my dream and my prayer is that you will go from sitting and watching to living out your faith in community and on-mission, ignited and excited about how God can use you.’”

The biggest pushback Mike gets is people saying it sounds too busy. Their lives are already stretched too thin, and committing to meeting frequently with a MAG, plus reaching out to the lost, seems overwhelming.

He used to tell people that MAGs weren’t about adding something new to their schedule but about learning to do, in community, what they already do—inviting others to watch football or have dinner or go shopping together.

He’s realized, though, that many people *do* need to adjust their schedules because they’re simply too busy for quality time with God or their families, much less others in community.

Now he asks, “How is God calling you to slow down with Him, with your family and with people your heart is breaking for?”

Mike finds that mindset to be freeing. “What Jesus said is actually a breath of fresh air: ‘Break away from the chaos of life and come rest with Me.’ We’re calling people to slow down with God and do life well. The best discipleship will happen over tacos in the kitchen. Have enough margin in your life to relax with [those you care about].”

EXPAND YOUR FAMILY

Although most of the church’s MAGs do meet weekly as a group, Mike encourages people not to think about these communities in terms of weekly meetings but rather in terms of family. It’s about choosing to keep growing with the same people and keep reaching out to the same people. So it’s not a burden but a joy of focus and of deep friendships.

By nature, MAGs grow because they are focused on bringing more people into relationship with God. And these groups are often more accessible to the unreached than Sunday morning church services. “It’s hard to get my neighbor, who turned his garage into a man cave and drinks beer, to come to a place where we sing and read,” Mike says. “But he’ll come to a bonfire in our backyard, and then I build a relationship and can start to bring the gospel into conversation.”

The activity at a MAG gathering varies from group to group. In addition to bonfires and casual conversations, members might discuss a Bible passage or plan a future party, or simply pitch in for dinner together—their discussion dependent on who’s visiting that day. The major difference from MAG to MAG is the chosen “avenue” for mission. Some groups identify a people group they all care about. Other groups may be centrally located in a common neigh-

borhood. In other groups, members each have their own neighbors/friends they want to reach, and they creatively plan ways to help each other do so.

Some members of Mike's MAG were friends with a young woman who was a heroin addict, had demon tattoos and said she wasn't interested in God. She was, however, interested in dinner with her friends and some of their friends, and through that she got to know others in the MAG. She opened up about her story and heard her friends talking about Jesus a lot.

Her views of God being distant, angry and hard to please were at a stark contrast to the way she heard her new friends describe Jesus, and she commented at one point, "This Jesus sounds pretty bad-ass."

Her friends responded: "Well, you know what Jesus said? He said if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. I am what God is like. I am God."

The young woman's image of God was shattered and redrawn. Not too long after, she asked to be baptized and even invited her drug dealer to her MAG. (Although he hasn't yet visited, several other of her friends have.)

Because of these kinds of stories, there are many more people in the MAGs on a given week than show up to the Sunday morning gathering. That's fine with Mike, because they're being disciplined and learning to do life together with God and each other, on-mission. As their desire to learn grows, they'll often decide to come on Sundays, as well.

BECOME A COACH FOR OTHERS

Even with frequent multiplication, the groups can grow rather large, so Narrow Road encourages everyone to also be part of a smaller huddle *within* the MAG—a group of three or four men or women (or a family unit) who regularly meet and pray together. The more intimate group is a place to check in on their home life, their walk with God, their outreach to others and, most importantly, their hearts.

Because MAGs and huddles are so decentralized—with only one under the direct care of the pastor—Mike has found good coaching to be an essential piece of the puzzle. Mike coaches a team of coaches who each oversees a few MAG leaders. And all leaders and coaches gather for ongoing training once every six weeks.

Mike's passion for multiplying these MAGs has also led to coaching *other* pastors—such as Mark Fesmire, who has shepherded Grace EFC (Lynchburg, Virginia) since 1988.

Mark and other leaders at Grace EFC had once tried to encourage their small groups to function more like missional communities, too, but it didn't catch on; most groups seemed to remain inward-focused fellowships or Bible studies. Mark couldn't help but admit: His church members found it easier to support foreign missionaries than to build deep friendships with non-Christians nearby.

And Mark knew it was true for himself too: "I got to a point personally where I realized I'm trying to tell people to be involved with non-Christians and I'm not myself. I need to fix that."

When Mark and his wife, Kathy, heard what Mike Jarrell was doing up in Pennsylvania, they asked Mike to coach them into starting their own missional action group. They handed their current life group to another leader, invited a second family to join them and started their own MAG with the goal of reaching the lost around them. As the group grows, they hope to see it multiply to include and reach others.

Evangelism isn't Mark's spiritual gift, and he's honest about not yet having non-Christian friends in his life. But his desire to live God's mission and to practice what he's calling others to is leading him to be creative. He and Kathy plan to join a local book club in order to get to know others and then look for opportunities to introduce them to their community and to God. They're excited about the potential for themselves, their church and the unreached people in their community.

Missional action groups can't be taught from the pulpit; they have to be experienced. And the real-life nature of them means that there are many unknowns and few prescriptions, so church leaders need to be willing to release leadership and control. At the same time, once Christians get a taste of what it's like to act as the family of God, to grow deeper in their walks with God and each other, and to live missionally toward the lost around them, together, there's no telling what kind of ministry God will do through His people for His glory.

To learn more about starting missional action groups at your church, email Mike Jarrell at michaeljarrell@me.com.

**Church attendance is not the primary measurement at Narrow Road Communities. While about 120 attend Sunday services, closer to 175 are part of missional action groups.*

Jennifer M. Kvamme is student ministries coordinator at Centennial EFC (Forest Lake, Minnesota), writer, wife, mother of two beautiful and energetic preschool girls, and an active member of her own gospel community, which is wrestling with what it looks like to live life together on-mission.

EVANGELISM FOR THE REST OF US

It's not about our personality, gifts, skills, training or courage. God has to do it, but we get to help.

BY JUDY AND NEAL BROWER

Evangelism pretty much is the “E” word. If you are among the majority of good, church-going Christians who do not have “the gift”; who have never led another to Christ; who, if the pattern continues, probably never will; it may very well be that you have an allergy ... to evangelism.

Like me, you've spent quality time feeling guilty about all the opportunities you pass by. Once in a while, we pastors wax eloquent on the subject from our pulpits and then go back into hiding in our offices, relating almost exclusively with believers.

Am I striking any cords here? Am I finally saying what no one's been able to admit? Is it just me?

We know the Bible verses: Acts 1:8, Matthew 4:19 and 28:19, Mark 16:15, 2 Timothy 4:5, Romans 10:14 and more. But still we wonder: *How many opportunities have I let go by? How's my light shining? Have I ever seen someone come to faith through my influence?*

Part of our problem is just how dependent we've become on church programs, including evangelism events and materials, to do the work for us. We're dependent on the “professionals” (pastors, missionaries).

But there's always that voice in the back of our head, God's voice, saying, *Hey you: You are the light of the world.*

“But,” we contend, “I am not an evangelist. It's not my gift.”

**We cannot persuade, convince, love or share anybody to Jesus.
We cannot save a soul.**

That's precisely why I call this “evangelism for the rest of us.” The ungifted. The untrained. The novice. Those of us not so good with words. The unpersuasive. The mother, the contractor, the athlete, the teacher, the businessman, the realtor, the soldier, the clerk, the burger flipper, the introvert. Even the pastor.

Each of us needs to grasp: We cannot persuade, convince, love or share anybody to Jesus. We cannot save a soul. The famous Great Commission—Matthew 18:18-20—offers power as well as a promise: He is going to do it and we get to go along for the ride.

GOD DOES THE INVITING

I'm reminded of when Jesus invited His disciples to feed the crowd of 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21). It wasn't because He needed a staff of servers. He could have created lunch ex nihilo, you know, like He created that other thing: the universe.

Instead, Jesus used a sack lunch and some resentful fishermen because He wanted them to be part of a miracle.

Jesus was anticipating that moment of unrivaled joy when gown men stood in a circle, thousands of full-stomach-folk behind them, silly grins on 12 bearded faces and said: “Let’s do it again.” When Jesus got through with the disciples that day, they had a taste of eternity in their mouths, and now only eternity could fill their stomachs.

Just as with the loaves and fishes, God invites us to participate in the miracles He is working all over the earth as the gospel takes hold of people. Not because He needs us, but for our relationship and the thrill we’ll get in taking part in the only thing truly worth living for.

He knows, in advance, every mistake we’ll make. He will use our failures and brokenness as effectively as He uses our talents and wholeness.

It’s not about our personality, gifts, skills, training or courage. Remember, we can’t do this crazy thing God has invited us to do. God has to do it, but we get to help; He uses what we bring to the table. If we will firmly believe this, then the Great Commission becomes a “great invitation.”

What a relief. What a privilege. What a life purpose.

PRAY & WATCH

Imagine every believer in your city praying for the movement of God’s Spirit as they work, play and live in it. Imagine each of us considering our own “presence” as more about people finding Jesus than whatever we happen to be doing. What if we believed that praying a quick but profound prayer as a way of life would change the landscape around us?

Throughout the day, we voice what we’ve taken to calling “the five-second prayer,” containing two very important parts: “Father, please send Your Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of these people. Draw them to Jesus and make them kingdom laborers.”

I can’t help but smile when I think about people having no idea that I’m praying for them and that God is at work in them.

This prayer can focus on someone as close as your mother or as distant as the guy standing over the manhole cover. In the first part, we’re asking that God would do the heart work and bring someone from darkness to light.

Each person is on a journey, and how the Holy Spirit works to bring about salvation is a unique process. So we respect that process. We’re praying for the soil of each heart to be prepared so that the seeds of the gospel can some day be planted there and bear much fruit. As God has promised about the gospel: “In all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing” (Colossians 1:6, New American Standard Bible).

In the second half of the prayer, we are asking God to thrust someone into the ripe harvest field as a kingdom laborer (Matthew 9). If someone comes to faith but is left without vision for others, then his faith essentially dies with him.

You are an evangelist when you are praying this prayer, even as it puts all the responsibility and burden on God. And this Pray & Watch lifestyle is satisfying in a fun sort of way too. I can’t help but smile when I think about people go-

ing about their life having no idea that I'm praying for them and that God is at work in them.

We ask the Holy Spirit to go to the heart of people. If you believe He went, you'll live with anticipation, watching for evidence of what He is doing.

WRITE IT DOWN. THEN ANTICIPATE.

The most practical way to remember our ever-increasing number of people is to simply make a list. When we do so, we begin to see divinely appointed connections. (Read one example of such a connection at now.blogs.efca.org.)

When you share something personal regarding faith with someone on your list and you sense tension or withdrawal, you know the soil of that heart is not yet cultivated. It's not yet ready for the planting of seeds. So just keep praying and watching. And remind yourself that you can't save a soul; God is at work. One of these days, you'll probably get to see the fruit of it. If not here, in heaven.


Any way you slice it, you are watching with anticipation for evidence of the invisible in the context of the visible.

What if each of us were living the Pray & Watch lifestyle—living and breathing, working and playing with respect and love for those yet to find Jesus in our circle of opportunity? Nothing else in all of life matters as much as people finding Jesus. We're asking you not only to believe in it, but also to live in constant awareness of it.

Adapted with permission from Pray & Watch: Find what's worth living for, by Neal and Judy Brower.

Neal and Judy Brower are disciplemakers in their neighborhood in San Francisco, California, where Neal also serves as superintendent of the EFCA Western District.





WHY NOT TRAIN SCHOOL- TEACHERS TO BE CHURCH PLANTERS?

Getting creative in Tanzania

BY CAROL LYONS

The young grade-school teacher's voice on the phone was still that of the gentle, unassuming Michael we'd come to know. But we also heard a new confidence: "We have a church here now. There are about 10 of us who meet in the school building every Sunday."

We were astounded. Michael had started a church? Could it be the same young man who had sat so quietly in our English classes and discipleship meetings? The same one who, when the government first sent him to teach in a remote Tanzanian village, was afraid to speak to us in a voice above a whisper, lest he be overheard?

My husband and I had come to Tanzania 20 years earlier as EFCA ReachGlobal missionaries, hoping to serve as a catalyst for church planting among several unreached tribes. We prayed, made contacts and shared the gospel. And God began calling people to Himself. Eventually, a Tanzanian-led church was planted, and our prayer was that it would send lay missionaries to those unreached tribes.

But that never happened. Cultural and financial issues blocked our discipling vision, not to mention that it had been our vision and not theirs. So we asked the Lord to enable us to think outside our box.

We began looking at local professions that would allow a bivocational, church-planting lifestyle, and teaching seemed the best fit. Teachers are respected in Tanzania. And after graduation, these individuals are hired by the government and assigned to schools all around the country—many of which serve the unreached tribes that were our original focus.

Can you see where this is going?

So we contacted one of the teacher training colleges and volunteered to teach English with hopes of getting to know the students. The college happily accepted our proposal and even asked us to teach a class in religion to the student body.

These ordinary grade-school teachers are taking Jesus' Great Commission into Tanzanian villages.

Now, our team teaches conversational English to these future grade-school teachers, and once a week we also teach the biblical story of redemption to well over 250 students (those from other religions being excused). From that class, we invite those who want to go deeper into God's Word to meet with us outside of school hours. We have the joy of seeing them grapple with Scripture and watching the Holy Spirit change them. By the time they finish college, they know how to feed themselves spiritually, share God's Word narratively (a key in this culture) and gather new believers into house churches.

In our last five years, we've seen three teams of about a dozen graduates each assigned to villages around Tanzania, few of which have any gospel witness. Two more teams are waiting for placement. These are all ordinary grade-school teachers who have come to take Jesus' Great Commission seriously.

God is at work, sometimes surprisingly. Going back to our gentle teacher friend Michael, assigned to the isolated village of Tapika (whose name literally means "vomit")—there, in that forsaken place, among that unreached tribe, Michael started faithfully teaching the village children. He began to gain respect, developing friendships with some of the village men. He also shared the gospel. Soon one man professed faith in Jesus, then another. The growing Christian witness then gave some secret believers the boldness to openly identify with them, and ...

Thus, a church was born.

Carol Lyons and her husband, Steve, have served with ReachGlobal for 36 years, initially in Congo DRC and then stateside with Hispanics. They have been in Tanzania for 21 years.



WE'RE NOT PASTORS BUT WE PLANT CHURCHES

Two couples explain how discipling and church planting are just their “norm.”

BY DIANE J. MCDOUGALL

When John and Kitty DeMeester met as 20-somethings back in the '70s, their church was The Sonshine House—a coffeehouse in the bar district of downtown Dubuque, Iowa.

There, a mutual friend had started an evangelistic outreach that featured Christian bands and drew crowds for lively conversation. John and Kitty were integral to its launch and growth.

After they married, they started attending Kitty's parents' church instead, as well as a Bible study at her parents' home. Kitty's father was a truck driver and attracted people from all walks of life. “My dad loved God,” she says. “He was a simple man and shared Christ wherever he went and led other truck drivers to the Lord wherever he pulled over.”

So the Bible study drew a diverse crowd with some off-color language, but John and Kitty knew that it came from hearts truly curious about Christ. “By watching her parents,” John says, “we were being disciplined in how to care for people.”

IF YOU CAN'T FIND ONE, START ONE

When a more legalistic element permeated their church and people with rough edges were no longer welcome, Kitty's extended family started looking for a new church home.

Eventually, they were introduced to leaders in the EFCA, with whom they discussed their desire for a church that cared about evangelism and discipleship and welcomed all seekers. “The first thing you know,” John recalls, “we were making plans to *start* a church.”

That was 1978, and their church plant—Hope EFC of Dubuque, Iowa—is now a thriving congregation of 1,100.

Church planting as a family gave them children who grew up wanting to disciple people too.

“The coffeehouse was our first plant,” John says now. “And Hope was our second.”

And sure enough: Before long there would be a third.

In November 1983, John’s employer for all those years—John Deere—offered him a job in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin (“a frigid, snowy, no-man’s-land,” John called it). The DeMeesters prayed and said yes.

The closest church they liked, Randolph EFC, lay 15 miles east. But driving 15 miles to church on rural roads at 20-below-zero “wasn’t our favorite idea,” John admits, so he eventually asked an EFCA friend, “When are we going to plant Beaver Dam EFC? I want to reach my friends and co-workers.”

A Bible study in their home grew into Harvest EFC in 1992 in the town of Beaver Dam, with an attendance today of about 300.

Church planting was an all-hands-on-deck affair, all the way down to erecting the building itself. Even the three DeMeester children pitched in, hammering shingles. “We never found it took away from family,” John says about those years of overtime invested in both work and church. “You know what it gave us? It gave us kids who want to disciple others too.”

NEW DISCIPLES MIGHT LEAD TO A NEW CHURCH?

John’s EFCA friend, who had encouraged him to plant in Wisconsin, was none other than veteran EFCA church-planting coach Bruce Redmond—who eventually recruited the DeMeesters to join his team as coaches in the Southeast District.

Although the DeMeesters aren’t seminary-trained, John is working on his ministry license via GATEWAY1. But it’s the couple’s hands-on, organic church-planting experience that gives them “street cred.”

Even as they officially train future church planters, the DeMeesters, in their sixth decade, haven’t stopped their lifestyle of making disciples. For all they know, it’ll lead to church plant No. 4. “Since we’ve moved to Nashville,” Kitty says, “God has brought a lot of singles into our lives—in their mid-20s to early 30s. Our home is open all the time for them.”

HOW TO INDOCTRINATE YOUR PEOPLE AT A YOUNG AGE

The DeMeesters are only one part of the creative church-planting team in the EFCA’s Southeast District. Bruce Redmond recruited another lay couple, in their late-40s, to also be self-supported missionaries to the district. Perhaps what Greg and Nancy Cole share most with the DeMeesters is a rich spiritual history: spending many forma-

tive years in environments that naturally lived and breathed discipleship.

“I remember my pastor buying me my first Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance when I was 19,” Greg says. “The fellowship I was part of focused on on-the-job training. We were given the opportunity to build a small group from scratch, teach/preach there and disciple people in that group. As young adults we were being indoctrinated in church planting and didn’t even realize it.”

“I’ll never forget the night I began to believe that God wanted to use me. My heart has never been the same.” — Greg Cole

The kicker came one summer at a biannual conference in Southern California, when their fellowship announced new churches that fellow members were starting. Greg remembers hearing: “And going to Portland, Oregon, out of the Buena Park church, Darren and Lisa Billings.”

He looked at Nancy and said, ‘Hey, we know them. If they can do this, we can too.’

“I’ll never forget that night,” he continues. “I began dreaming of being able to reach people who did not know Jesus. I began to believe that God not only could use me but wanted to use me. My heart has never been the same.”

“I GET TO BE THE GUY I ALWAYS PRAYED FOR”

The Coles would indeed go on to plant a church and lead it for 11 years, starting as a neighborhood Bible study in their Whittier, California, home. Greg was working 50-60 hours a week at the time as a safety consultant. “We passed out a gazillion fliers and began the study in our home with 12 strangers,” he remembers.

Soon they needed to rent meeting space. Praise Chapel Christian Fellowship of La Habra continued to grow, with Greg serving as pastor and still working full time. Evangelism and discipleship anchored the church’s mission. “Some of those we disciplined felt called by God to pastor,” Greg says. “So we trained them, equipped them and then challenged them to step out and start a church in another city.”

With that continued pattern, Praise Chapel Christian Fellowship planted two other churches, one of which also went on to plant.

Greg eventually started his own safety consulting business, and he began training his fellow church planters in the business, so they could support their families with a career that didn’t drain their time.

Greg pastored the church until 2010, when he and Nancy moved to Orlando, Florida, to join the Southeast District. In the past, he used to beg God for someone to come into his life, “to help me figure out the challenges I was facing as a church planter. Now, as the church-planting catalyst for Florida, I get to be the guy I always prayed for.”

Without a doubt, Greg, Nancy, John and Kitty are just four ordinary believers who grew up assuming that disciple-making was the living, breathing “normal.” From that conviction, as they gathered new believers around them, it seemed only natural to start planting churches.

¹ *EFCA GATEWAY offers theological and pastoral training for those lacking the time and resources to access traditional seminary education*

ARE YOU HOGGING THE PRIESTLY ROLE?

Or do you want to release a priesthood of believers into your community?

BY LARRY OSBORNE

I am often asked by pastor friends if any of my grown kids are in ministry. I always proudly answer, “Yes, all of them.”

Inevitably, the next question is, “Are any of them serving at North Coast?” Again, I’m proud to say, “All of them.”

That usually elicits a third question: “What do they do?”

When I explain that one serves as an executive for a software company, another as a schoolteacher and a third as an estimator for a government contractor, I get some strange looks. And therein lies a major problem.

We’ve co-opted God’s universal call (for every believer to minister in Jesus’ name) and relegated it to a handful of us who serve in vocational ministry. Worse, we’ve created traditions and protocols that limit certain tasks to those who lead the parade.

In short, we’ve become ministry hogs.

Nowhere in the Bible do we find authorization to limit things like celebrating the Lord’s Supper, counseling, teaching the Bible or baptizing to a small group of folks who have jumped through the right hoops.

China’s underground church exploded when Jesus followers were freed up to do everything usually restricted to those who had been properly trained and vetted.

The history of the church shows that God’s kingdom tends to spread most rapidly when ministry is released into the hands of everyone who follows Jesus, no strings attached.

Consider the Church in Acts. It experienced initial explosive growth, yet it also disobeyed the Great Commission by staying in Jerusalem to wait for the Lord’s return. It was only after a great persecution broke out and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria that the rapid expansion of the kingdom began.

We see the same principle at work in modern history. When missionaries were kicked out of China and professional ministry became impossible, the underground church exploded, fueled by Jesus followers who were now freed up to teach, baptize, celebrate the Lord’s supper, counsel, evangelize and do everything usually restricted to those who have been properly trained and vetted.

Admittedly, there were cases where aberrant and even heretical theology gained a foothold. A few rogue leaders rushed in to fill the leadership vacuum. And the church’s theology, ecclesiology and other “ologies” were often immature.

But let's admit it: The same thing happens everywhere. It's a product of our sin nature. Allowing a select few of us to hog the ministry won't put a stop to it.

As our culture becomes increasingly hostile toward Jesus, Christians and biblical values, we must stop merely teaching the priesthood of believers and actually live it out. And it starts with those of us in vocational ministry making a serious commitment to give away every aspect of ministry—even those we enjoy and cherish the most.

Larry Osborne has served as a senior pastor of North Coast Church (EFCA) in Vista, California, since 1980.



EQUIP ME

Just a few resources to get you thinking

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Calling: Most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people, by Frank Tillapaugh, Richard Hurst

“Four Stages of a Movement,” by Steve Smith, Neill Mims, Mark Steves—powerful article explaining how movements grow ... or falter. Published October 31, 2015, by Mission Frontiers

“Four Ways to Better Engage Women in the Workplace,” by Lauren Hansen—practical advice for church leaders to equip their women who work. Published November 7, 2015, by The Gospel Coalition.

Giving the Ministry Away: Empowering single adults for effective leadership, by Terry Hershey, Karen Butler, Richard Hurst

“More Pastors Preaching About Faith and Work”—with links to other trends and tips re faith and the workplace. Published November 5, 2015, at Facts & Trends.

Unleashing the Church: Getting people out of the fortress and into ministry, by Frank R. Tillapaugh

Saturate Field Guide: Principles and practices for being disciples of Jesus in the everyday stuff of life, by Jeff Vanderstelt and Ben Connelly

UNIQUE GRANT OPPORTUNITY

While church leaders tend to be comfortable talking about faith, they are usually less fluent in the areas where people spend most of their time: the spheres of work and the economy. So the EFCA is facilitating grants to church leadership teams that wish to more fully explore the intersection of faith, work and economics as part of their disciplemaking vision. An initial grant supports in-depth learning; a second supports creative implementation of ideas that will shape churches and bless communities.

DIGITAL SOURCES

“Fitted for Work: Celebrating the power of a vocational calling,” summer 2012 EFCA Today issue

“Faith at Work: Made to flourish”—audio presentation from the 2015 EFCA One conference, looking at the intersection of faith and work

“God at Work” and “Church, Faith and Work”—blog posts by Greg Strand, EFCA executive director of theology and credentialing

“Luke 10: The stewardship of work and collaboration for the common good,” October 2015 chapel message at Trinity International University, by Tom Nelson, senior pastor of Christ Community Church (EFCA), Leawood, Kansas

“Work Matters to God”—PDF collection of sermons by Dr. Kurt Trucksess, senior pastor of CrossWinds Church Spirit Lake campus (EFCA) in Spirit Lake, Iowa

NavWorkplace: Transforming Worker, the Work and the Workplace—a website focused on integrating your faith at work

Made to Flourish—digital network for pastors to better integrate faith and work. Including the article “Is the Sunday to Monday Gap More Perilous Than We Think?” by EFCA Pastor Tom Nelson.

“Challenges to the Faith and Work Movement,” podcast by Darrell L. Bock and Greg Forster, produced by Dallas Theological Seminary. Other faith and work podcasts, blog posts and resources are also available from DTS.





LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Equipping the Saints

BY KEVIN KOMPENIEN

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

—Ephesians 4:11-16, English Standard Version

These words from the apostle Paul make it clear that Jesus gave leaders to the church to be equipping the saints for ministry, not to be doing all the ministry. The ultimate effectiveness of a leader is not simply measured by what he or she personally accomplishes, but rather by the lives of those in whom the leader invests.

I’m afraid that “equipping the saints” is one of those ministry concepts we as leaders can easily acknowledge and at the same time pass over—all without deeply assessing our own personal investment in the lives of others.

Who is the Lord putting in your life now, to help equip them in some ministry skill?

Too often in my years of ministry, I felt good when people asked, “How do you find the time and energy to do all that you do?” I eventually realized that I was so busy “doing” all of those things because I wasn’t equipping others to serve and lead so that we together could share the load. After I began looking for people to join me in various ministry settings, I found great joy in watching them grow and effectively serve.

As you consider how the Lord would have you “up your game” as an equipper, let me challenge you to consider some next steps:

- Take a look at your schedule over the past month and assess the opportunities where you were investing in others.
- Ask who the Lord is putting in your life now, in order for you to help equip in some ministry skill.
- Do as few things alone as you possibly can. Look for opportunities in the next month where you can intentionally take someone along with you into a ministry setting, so they can watch, learn and serve together with you.
- Consider launching mentoring and coaching ministries in your church. Have apprentices serve alongside existing leaders.
- Prayerfully look at establishing internships in your church for college and seminary students to learn ministry skills.
- Be intentional about equipping the people in your congregation to live out their faith effectively in their neighborhoods, schools and places of employment. Remember, this is where they spend the vast majority of their time each week.

We celebrate what we value. Find ways to celebrate in the public services of your church where people are serving and how they are being equipped to both serve and lead.

In the church where I grew up, we didn’t have a paid youth pastor; we had a junior-high teacher who led our youth group and a community college instructor who led our youth choir. Two normal guys working their jobs, raising their families and serving in the church. I wouldn’t trade that experience for anything.

Not only did these men serve willingly and effectively, but they also invested their lives. They loved us and taught us, taking risks by giving us responsibilities to do things that made a difference. I preached my first sermon in a Sunday evening service when I was 16 years old. I still have the notes! It wasn’t very good, but they encouraged me, taught me and gave me another opportunity to speak.

Over the past three decades, kids from that youth group have served as pastors and missionaries, as elders and ministry leaders, as behind-the-scenes servants and leaders in business and education, as a seminary professor and even as denominational president. I learned firsthand the significance of equipping the saints for ministry where it is done best: in the local church.

My prayer for the EFCA is that we would maximize ministry impact for the kingdom of God by equipping, encouraging and releasing people to serve in our communities and churches to the glory of the Savior.

Kevin Kompelien has served as president of the Evangelical Free Church of America since June 2015. Previously, he served as international leader for the Africa division with EFCA ReachGlobal and as pastor of two EFCA churches. He and his wife, Becky, are members of Hillside EFC in San Jose, California.