



Building *on a Firm* Foundation

TAKING OUR PAST INTO OUR FUTURE

How is what we're doing today (and are aiming for in our tomorrow of ministry) a fresh expression of deep, foundational values? In other words, when you cut the Evangelical Free Church of America, what do we bleed?

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BUILDING ON A FIRM FOUNDATION

Taking our past into our future

BY KEVIN KOMPELIEN

Excavation can be an arduous and tedious experience. Yet when completed, it often reveals a new perspective as information is unearthed and history is brought to life.

What if we brush around the edges of the EFCA? What if we unearth the depths of this movement? What would we see?

In a 2012 issue of *EFCA Today*, author and consultant Will Mancini noted that effective movements know who they are. So, digging down to the foundation of the EFCA has been my aim since becoming president.

But at the same time I'm digging down, I'm looking forward. That's because the direction in which we move is informed by who we are.

For example, living out our faith takes many forms, but we are called to sacrifice for each other, show compassion to the powerless and vulnerable, and work to bring justice on earth. This conviction led the EFCA in 2008 to add Article 8 to our Statement of Faith:

"We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed."

When we take the Word of God seriously, we apply it, and we grow. In *Evangelical Convictions*, we read, "God's saving work is not limited to the forgiveness of sins and our rescue from God's wrath. The God who justifies us also works in us to conform us to the image of Christ, so that we might share in his glory (cf. Romans 8:29-30) in an on-going process we call sanctification."¹

ON THIS ADVENTURE TOGETHER

If we excavate the depths of our EFCA movement, I know that we'll reach deep, solid bedrock—one established more than a hundred years ago and built upon year-after-year in faithful ministry. Over the past two years, I have been working to articulate the foundational values that the EFCA has been built upon from the beginning days of the Free Church movement. What are our "foundation stones"—the bedrock of who we are and how we live, and how we will continue to live and minister into the future?

My original list consisted of four foundation stones: *abide*, *Word*, *gospel* and *mission*. But in conversations with other leaders, I realized the necessity of each stone lived out in a community of believers unified by a set of essentials

(with freedom for disagreement). That's our history. Community is the context in which we abide in Christ, know and obey the Word, trust in the transforming work of the gospel, and live on-mission among all people.

Christianity isn't lived out individually, it isn't built on superstars and it allows freedom in nonessentials. It's the outworking of ordinary men and women using their unique gifts to serve God and serve others. We are in this together and we are better together.

So that led me to add two more stones: *community* and *unity*. Each of the six builds upon the next and overlaps with the others:

ABIDE

Prayerful dependence on Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit

John 15:4-5

WORD

Know and obey God's authoritative Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:16-17

GOSPEL

Centrality of the transforming work of Christ

Ephesians 2:8-9

MISSION

Great Commandment and Great Commission discipling among all people

Matthew 28:18-20

COMMUNITY

Priesthood of all believers in appropriate interdependence

Romans 12

1 Corinthians 12

1 Thessalonians 2:8

UNITY

In essentials unity, in the rest charity

Ephesians 4:1-3

John 17:23

Prayerful dependence in Jesus (*abide*) leads us to the Word as we obey what it teaches and our faith is nourished (*Word*), which causes a renewal as we believe again and again in the saving work of Christ and its power to change one life after another (*gospel*). As we are changed, we feel an urgency to influence the world (*mission*). Out of what God has done in and through us, we move forward together (*community*), tethered to the essentials, with open arms that welcome others (*unity*).

I believe God is calling us to develop discipling leaders who live out these foundation stones. We must multiply churches and ministries among all people everywhere. And as we work together in unity, may we create a new community for the next generation that's anchored in the inerrant Word of God and demonstrates the transforming work of Christ.

Those are the stories you'll see in the following articles. Stories of pastors, leaders and churches used by God to transform entire communities to the glory of God. Of course, each is only one example of how we are, together, building our current and future ministry upon the bedrock foundational values of our movement.

That's why I'm excited about the future of the EFCA and why this issue is so important to me. The way we approach these foundation stones makes us who we are today and will build ministry for decades to come.

Kevin Kompelien is president of the Evangelical Free Church of America. He previously served more than 20 years as a local pastor in the EFCA, and then nine years as international leader of the Africa division with EFCA ReachGlobal. He and his wife, Becky, are members of Hillside EFC in San Jose, California.

¹*Evangelical Convictions: A theological exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, published 2011.

RECOUNTING GOD'S MIGHTY WORKS

As living stones, we tell stories of our faith in the Living Stone.

BY GREG STRAND

In his worship of God, David writes, “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:1-3, English Standard Version¹).

David’s worship is grounded in God and His works. God is great, He is to be greatly praised and His greatness is unsearchable, i.e., although God’s greatness is revealed and experienced, we will never reach its depth. Grounded in who God is and what He has done (and will do), David “extols,” “blesses” (2x) and “praises” God.

This praise of God is not just an individual experience; it is corporate and generational. David continues, “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

The word *commend* conveys more than just recounting events or restating doctrine. It recounts God’s work and ways but does so from the posture of belief, having experienced the truth of God personally. This is why it goes beyond a retelling to a commending—a telling of God’s faithfulness with an exhortation, a plea for others to know, believe and trust so that they can experience similar truths from the same Lord.

In other words, one generation recounts or gives testimony to the truth and benefits of trusting the Lord, and then recommends or entreats the next generation to trust Him too.

These truths are never to be kept to ourselves. This is the way in which thanks, praise and worship of God reaches its purpose: to proclaim His greatness and to commend Him and His works to others.

In the same way, Kevin Kompelien’s presidency (beginning June 2015) has provided a time to remember, to worship and to commend God, His words and His works. Some of the key truths we are focusing on—looking back to God’s faithfulness in order to walk faithfully and obediently into the future—we refer to as foundation stones, which rest upon the Living Stone and are manifested in living stones.

JESUS CHRIST: THE LIVING STONE

Jesus Christ is the one in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9); He is the living fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises (2 Corinthians 1:20); and He fulfills all for which the temple stood (John 2:19-22). The inanimate stones used to construct the temple become a living stone in the incarnation of Jesus. As the Living Stone, who through the resurrection lives forevermore, Jesus serves as the cornerstone for the new temple.

Peter articulates this essential truth when he refers to Jesus as “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious” (1 Peter 2:4). He is the cornerstone promised in the Scriptures (Ephesians 2:20). For those who reject Him, he becomes a “stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (1 Peter 2:8; cf. Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 8:14-15; 28:16). For those who come to him (1 Peter 2:4), those who believe, they will experience life (1 Peter 2:6). Only those who live in Christ can come to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5).

With Jesus as the Living Stone, the cornerstone, the new temple, those who come to Him are living stones.

JESUS CHRIST: THE LIVING STONE

As Jesus is the true temple, those who are in Christ are the people of God. Using terms for God's chosen people in ancient Israel (Exodus 19:5-6), Peter takes these Old Testament Scriptures and applies them to the believers in Jesus Christ, who then become living stones.

Peter writes, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. . . . 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" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Those in Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, become living stones, "being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5; cf. Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16).

The priesthood and the offering of sacrifices were reserved for a few under the old covenant, and those sacrifices were only offered in the physical temple. Yet through Jesus' life and ministry, His death and resurrection, all believers are priests and all of life is the scope and sphere of worship. The people of God are living stones, a spiritual house that is being built as each believer worships ("spiritual sacrifices"). Only this worship is "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

In addition to engaging in a life of worship, offering spiritual sacrifices, believers also "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9b; cf. Isaiah 43:20b-21; Colossians 1:13-14). As living stones, a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, we worship and we proclaim.

The reason God has done this work is captured in the term "that you may proclaim," which is purposive. If God's people are not proclaiming Him and His works to others, they come short of God's design and purpose for them as a missional people.

As we remember our past and look ahead to the future, may we continue giving thanks and worshipping the Living Stone, and then proclaiming/commending Him and His works to others."

Greg Strand is EFCA executive director of theology and credentialing. He also serves on the Board of Ministerial Standing, the Spiritual Heritage Committee, and the ReachGlobal Theology and Missiology Advisory Council. He and his family are members of Northfield (Minn.) EFC.

¹All verses cited are from the English Standard Version.

CONFESSIONS OF A MODERN PHARISEE

How I learned to abide in Christ

BY JAMIE MORRISON

When I finished seminary and moved into ministry, I had a taste for the ascetic. I desired to disciple others into similar levels of devotion and commitment. I delighted in Scriptures that called for “taking up my cross,” “strict training” or “throwing off everything that hinders.”

Needless to say, I had high expectations for myself and for others. High expectations are not necessarily a bad thing. Devotion and discipline are commendable. Yet my efforts were unsustainable, unfruitful and often unloving.

My expectation was that everyone would be energized around a “well-balanced life” that included generous times of Scripture reading and prayer, alongside meaningful engagement in a church. In addition, I expected participation in a small group, serving in the community, evangelism everywhere from the workplace to airplanes, accountability, fasting, journaling and Scripture-memory.

Yet I failed to question whether any of these things were helping me become the person God wanted me to be: more loving, more trusting, more joyful or—more importantly—the kind of person who obeys God’s commands easily.

I get tired just remembering all of it.

CONFRONTING MY INNER PHARISEE

Five years ago I was reading Matthew 11 from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. His translation described “learn[ing] the unforced rhythms of grace.” My way of life was almost entirely forced. I worked hard at being a good disciple and pastor and wondered what this expression might really mean for me. It struck me that while I had received God’s saving grace, I was not trusting in His sanctifying grace to work through me.

I was like a branch consumed with trying to “bear the fruit” rather than learning to “remain” and see God’s power and Spirit at work in me. I had to break free from measuring my life by my disciplines and practices; otherwise I would just value and do exactly what the Pharisees valued and did, both in activity and graceless spirit.

It didn’t mean that I left all spiritual disciplines behind; rather, I understood that it was God I should seek, not perfection in disciplines. The disciplines could be varied and creative as part of a larger process of training in Christ-likeness. They were not ends in themselves.

I began noticing God’s pursuit of me instead of focusing so much on my pursuit of Him. Different verses captured my attention—ones that focus less on my effort and more on God’s goodness:

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

“Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Psalm 1:3).

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

My way of life still includes reading Scripture, but now I focus on entering God’s truth rather than conquering it through study. Instead of working through large passages and going to commentaries and notes to imagine what I can teach others, I slowly read each word from only a few verses and invite God to show me what I ought to notice or meditate on for my life with Him.

In prayer I focus on quiet and on listening rather than listing praises or requests. In small-group time I focus on being present to learn in God’s community rather than hoping to impress others with remarkable insight. My neighbors and my friends are not projects I have to win to Christ through strategic moves and invitations to Sunday services. Rather, I make myself available; I visit them and seek to be loving toward them.

To be clear, my life then was not rigid and evil, and my life now is not entirely peace-filled and resting. But overall I have a new “heartset” in my faith. It rests, it waits, it listens, it trusts and it receives love. It is present to God in new and creative ways. It is established around discovering and inventing creative adventures with God.

Specifically, I pursue three creative approaches to living an abiding life with God:

Slowing: I was struck by Dallas Willard’s instructions to John Ortberg to “ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”¹ He described hurry as counter to spiritual formation. So I am slowing down my life in order to create margin and space for God—all the while trusting that God’s call on me will be accomplished best while I am fully present with Him.

Therefore, I read slowly. I contemplate. I leave a little earlier for an appointment and don’t schedule back-to-back appointments. I pause to pray between activities, or before phone calls, conversations or emails. I fight hurry by letting someone else in line ahead of me. I become available to visitors by not seeing them as interruptions.

Seeking: God is always at work around me, so I seek Him with a holy expectancy, hoping to recognize the potential significance of any conversation. I pray to be a vessel of God’s grace moving in and through the world.

Therefore, moment-by-moment, I ask God what I should say or do in response to a comment or observation. Also, when talking, I try to not craft my response in my head when I need to be listening. I look at inconvenient circumstances as invitations to trust His care and protection. Connections between conversations and longings from members of the congregation become the “bread crumbs” guiding me to what God is doing and prompting in our midst. When making a hospital visit or entering someone’s grief, I look for where God elevates these routine moments to sacred and supernatural infusions of grace.

Reflecting: Busy days can bring a lack of reflection. There is great value in finding time to be silent and still. Rather than filling empty time with mindless surfing or media, I dedicate some of it to asking how my day with God went. Simple, daily questions allow me to make small adjustments and to harvest what God shows me:

Where was I growing, learning or seeing God in action today? What did I discover about Him? When did I feel closest to God and most in alignment with His character and His ways? By contrast, when did I feel distracted, selfish or independent of God? What sorts of things should I do more of, or less of?

The questions serve as reminders to be mindful of God and my relationship with Him. They help me avoid falling into lifeless routines but rather tend to my soul throughout the day. As I see patterns in the places where I feel closest to Him, I develop a rhythm of being revitalized and rejuvenated.

Moving toward a life of presence with God has freed me from my ingrained tendencies toward action, achievement, comparison and seeking to win. After all, what could it possibly mean to win at “abiding”? As ridiculous as it sounds, I confess, I was dedicated to trying like a Pharisee. I prefer the freedom of training to be like Jesus in quietness and love. I prefer the fruit as well.

The author recommends several helpful resources: *Soul Keeping*, by John Ortberg; *Renovation of the Heart*, by Dallas Willard; and *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, by Adele Calhoun.

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¹*Soul Keeping*, by John Ortberg, p. 20.

LETTING THE WORD SPEAK

Some honest realities of embedding God's truth in today's youth culture

INTERVIEW BY MATT PROCTOR

Today, directors of youth ministry must navigate far more than the usual complexities of adolescence. Technology and our culture's sexual conversation have changed the parameters and deepened the ramifications. *EFCA Today* spoke with two individuals who navigate those waters in EFCA churches—bringing the Word to bear on young lives.

TESS CERVENKA is senior-high youth director in the church where she grew up: Calvary Community Church, just outside Williams Bay, Wisconsin. The youth group serves teens from eight different high schools and a wide socioeconomic spectrum.

Tess grew up memorizing Scripture through AWANA, so she is passionate about teens knowing the Word and allowing it to change their lives.

SETH DUNHAM leads the student ministry at Church at Charlotte, in North Carolina, having previously served EFCA churches in Colorado and Wisconsin. He expected that, in moving to the Bible belt, he'd be able to dive deeply into Scripture. After all, about half of his students attend a private Christian school.

But somehow, he says, "I feel like Paul speaking to the Corinthians about what type of food they should be eating: milk or meat? I feel they need meat [to live] in today's culture, only to find that more often than not, they need milk. Somehow we need to make a smoothie..."

Interviewing Tess and Seth for *EFCA Today* is **MATT PROCTOR**, pastor at Cornerstone Church (EFCA) in Marion, Iowa.

WHAT MAKES IT CHALLENGING TODAY TO CONVINCe STUDENTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD?

TESS: Social media makes my role super challenging. The world is pouring into them daily, without them realizing it. The Bible has answers for them—it is fresh water to their dry souls. What they learn through media to be "normal" or acceptable doesn't always correspond with what the Word teaches.

SETH: Snapchat and Instagram are certainly not inherently bad or evil, but they do allow students to create a veneer. The stronger the use, the stronger the veneer. The stronger the veneer, the less need there is for the cross. The less need for the cross, the less need for God's Word. The escapism social media provides isn't new or revolutionary—but it's effective.

Consider the basic words of the gospel: “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Where is the need for grace when our veneer is so thick we see little wrong with ourselves? By extension, where is the relevance of faith when students don’t need the grace?

Teenagers are much, much smarter and more intuitive than we realize. Deep down, they know it’s just a veneer.

WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON IN KIDS’ LIVES AND HEADS THAT BATTLES AGAINST THE WORD GAINING A Foothold?

TESS: Busyness! Many of my students are crazy-busy with sports and homework. And then, it doesn’t help if their parents don’t see church as a priority.

SETH: I think about Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” Students have so little time to be still. It’s not uncommon for a kid to get up at 5 a.m. for some before-school activity, practice till late, and then tell me they are doing homework till 2 or 3 a.m., only to start over the next morning. Then add to it both academic pressure and peer pressure, and the escapism of video games and social media, and God can become a small slice of a very large pie.

TESS: I also have a lot of kids from broken homes. They are trying to please mom; they are trying to please dad; they’re between two homes and carry the baggage of their parents’ emotional problems. So this adds to the stress.

HOW DO YOU KEEP FROM SIMPLY ADDING MORE TO-DOS TO THEIR BUSY LIVES?

SETH: That’s a great question. I think every student ministry worker would agree that it is all about relationships, which take time. But if we take a good look, we may find that our ministries *promote programming over relationships* much more than we think they do.

Did you know that out of the years Jesus spent with His disciples, almost half was spent just in the “follow me” phase? At the end of the day, we want to make following Jesus a lifestyle—where Jesus is the hub of the wheel instead of a slice of the pie.

TESS: I don’t want them to see youth group as one more thing to add to their plate but something that helps them with all that is *on* their plate—a safe place to come and be themselves, where they can let their guard down and get filled up by good friends, leaders, God’s Word and encouragement that they are not walking it alone. Isn’t that what Hebrews 10:24-25 is all about: spurring one another on to love and good deeds?

WHAT METHODS HAVE YOU TRIED TO EMBED THE WORD IN YOUR STUDENTS?

TESS: I have asked students to write devos in their own words for their peers. We made a peer-to-peer devotional, and some of the students are using it. Each week we also discuss in small groups how the Bible can be applied to their life. I’m encouraged to see more of them desiring the truth.

SETH: We’re letting students teach. That seems to bring a whole new sense to the authority of God’s Word, when it comes out of a peer’s mouth. It takes work on our end to prep them to teach, but it’s sometimes more effective. Ultimately, we would love to move to a model where our Sunday nights are more student-led than leader-led.

We’re also teaching our kids a new concept of Hebrew friendship called *haver*¹—where groups of two to five students dialog over the meaning of a text and then live it out together. With some guidance from leaders, they discover the relevance of Scripture and learn to feed themselves. The peer-to-peer thing seems to be working.

Simon Sinek’s research—and subsequent TED Talk on “Millennials in the Workplace”—has revitalized in a positive way how we think about millennials and how to come alongside them. Our job to make the truth of God’s Word appealing may be more challenging, but it’s not so much a problem as an opportunity to be seized for God’s kingdom.

¹“Haver: A whole new level of friendship,” the Cadre Blog, Oct. 24, 2016, Cadre Ministries.

FRONT-ROW SEAT TO TRANSFORMATION

Boldly living out the gospel in our everyday relationships

BY RUTH ZYLKA

Three years ago, Liz was just a local hairdresser I had never met. My friends were all on the hunt for someone new to cut our hair, and through a series of connections we found Liz. One by one my friends began making appointments. And as they sat in Liz's chair, God began to build friendships and open doors for deep conversations about life and faith.

My friends shared about their own struggles and trials and how God had been faithful in their lives. The more vulnerable they were with Liz and the more care and love they showed her, the more open Liz became to sharing about her own life.

As friendships blossomed, a few women invited Liz to attend Unveiled—a monthly women's event at our church, Hillside Church (EFCA) in San Jose, California.

One Friday night in January 2014, Liz walked through the doors with her best friend, Megan, both in their 30s. At this point, I still had not met Liz but had been praying for her and for Megan. I spent most of that evening praying that God would touch their hearts, that they would feel safe and comfortable, and that they would want to return.

Liz's first impression of Unveiled, she later told me, was that she "felt part of a community and never felt judged, looked down upon or out of place for being new." Liz and Megan found community at Unveiled and continued coming back month after month.

For my group of friends, each haircut continued to be an opportunity to deepen the relationship. There were many group texts asking for prayer and open doors to share the gospel as one of us would be heading to our appointment. We began to see how God was using some of us to plant and others to water the seed of the gospel.

As 1 Corinthians 3:8-9 says, "The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building."

As time went on, Liz and Megan grew more connected in the community of women at Hillside, and they decided to attend our women's retreat in February 2015. According to Liz, the weekend was "life-changing," giving them both a desire to learn more and to attend church each Sunday.

Four months after the retreat, Liz and Megan were invited to join a Bible study, and this is where we saw their community deepen. They began to study God's Word and see how they could apply it to their lives. "My focus was no longer on how alone I felt or how I didn't fit in somewhere," Megan says about that time, "because I learned that I belonged with and to God."

My friends and I continued to pray, and after Liz and Megan had been attending the study for just a few weeks, they both made the decision to surrender their lives to Jesus. They *and their husbands* then joined the same growth group that my husband and I are in, so I have a front-row seat to how God continues to change and transform their lives.

Looking back to the start of it all, Liz said she had already been “curious about going to church and pursuing a relationship with Jesus, but never knew how.”

So her heart was already prepared when her new friends issued their invitation. “I absolutely loved spending time with these ladies in the few short hours while doing their hair,” Liz says, “and I felt so special they would even think to invite me.”

God can use any relationship and any situation, even a haircut, as an opportunity to plant or water a seed of the gospel. And we get to stand back and watch the transformation.

Ruth Zylka is the communications coordinator at Hillside Church in San Jose, California.

WE'RE ALL-IN, IN NORTH TULSA

We have a mission that drives us every single day.

BY RONDALYN ABODE

When we helped start Crossover Bible Church (EFCA) 11 years ago, we made it a priority not to just be another church. Our hope was to create a church family that so impacted the community that if the doors shut, our absence would be noticed. Our vision is one of “restoring our community.”

“In an under-resourced area, a church must help its community get tangibly better through the gospel,” says my husband, Philip, who serves as CBC’s senior pastor.

“There are a ton of churches in north Tulsa. And they don’t all have a reputation of caring for the community. For us to get respect, we have to demonstrate that we care.”

Honestly, it reminds me of 1 John 3:18: “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

So we put all of our eggs in the basket of becoming a church that is effective at discipling and committed to the principles of Christian community development, or a “community-focused church.”

Lamont is one great example of the ever-expanding ripples of our involvement in north Tulsa.

Philip discipled Lamont, age 33, in one of our micro small groups or “huddles” (I call them “discipleship groups on steroids”). Lamont came to know the Lord during CBC’s men’s basketball league back in its early years. At some point he stopped going to church altogether, but then he re-connected with Philip through our ever-broadening efforts in the community.

Now Lamont is preparing to be one of the teachers and coaches for Crossover Preparatory Academy—an all-boy private school for grades 7-12 that we plan to open this fall.

Lamont had been against the “institutional church” when he was younger—namely because, in his opinion, many churches in the community weren’t doing anything for the people in the community. So he went from not wanting to be part of a local church to preparing to teach in a school that comes out of a church. Only God can do this type of transformative work.

THE 3 R’S

From the start we connected through sports. (Philip often says he has conversations as “Coach Philip” that he would never get to have with people as “Pastor Philip.”) Yet we knew that would only be one venue, so we launched Crossover Community Impact¹ in 2011 as CBC’s nonprofit outreach arm.

We apply a comprehensive approach to a narrow geographic area: the 1-mile radius that comprises the Hawthorne Elementary School neighborhood. Crossover Community Impact is our way of being the hands and feet of Jesus to north Tulsa.

We operate by the 3 R's of the Christian Community Development Association:²

- *Relocation.* We ask our members to consider moving (or staying) in north Tulsa to build relationships with people and point them to the Lord. Full-time staff are required to live here, as we believe it's the best way to be effective disciples and disciplemakers.
- *Reconciliation.* This, of course, entails people being reconciled with the Lord but also with one another, resulting in a beautiful multiethnic church.
- *Redistribution.* People in the church are using the gifts, skills and talents they have to build up the community. "We ask, 'What does this community need and who in our church has God already blessed with the ability to do that?'"

These three components, together, create an opportunity for our church to be more than a church—to be a movement. Everyone at CBC who moved into or remained in our community became "urban missionaries," using their skills and passions to address real needs around us with the grace and power of the gospel. After all, in under-resourced communities, unmet physical needs can be so overwhelming that people tune out their own spiritual needs.

RESTORATION TAKES MANY FORMS

In addition to connecting through sports, we also engaged in educational tutoring, because there's a noticeable achievement gap between schools in under-resourced communities and schools in the wealthier surrounding communities. The local high-school's graduation rate is only 42 percent, yet 100 percent of the teens being mentored through our *StreetLeaders Youth Jobs* program are graduating,

When property we acquired *happened* to include a medical clinic, and our church family and board of directors *happened* to include trained physicians, we started a family medical practice that now serves almost 2,000.

Without Crossover Health Services,³ many needs would go unmet, as confirmed by one resident in an interview with Tulsa World:⁴ "This is the poor side of town and we don't have the advantages [available in other parts of the city]. . . . It makes me feel good to see investments in health care (in north Tulsa). Anything we can get out here is appreciated."

Home ownership is also a complex issue here, with 40 dilapidated homes (out of 400) in the Hawthorne Neighborhood. By building and renovating homes, we help residents go from renters to owners, and also help members of our church find a suitable home if they desire to move into our community.

Every step of the way, we are building relationships while simultaneously developing the community. Again, our vision is to bring restoration through discipleship and the gospel. It's likened to Jeremiah 29:7, where God tells Jeremiah, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you. . . . Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Each of these community mission efforts is connected to its own missional team from our church, and within each missional team are multiple huddles: small, gender-specific discipleship groups. Currently, 55 percent of church

members participate in missional teams and huddles.

We understand, without a shadow of a doubt, that God does the heavy lifting—moving people from knowing about Him to knowing and loving Him. We could not do any of the things we do without Him doing what He continues to do: the miraculous, the “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

We’re a church of 150, for crying out loud, and more than half of the congregation is under age 18!

I am always amazed by the unfathomable things God does. And my prayer is that we will indeed be witnesses to the restoration of this community we love.

Rondalyn Abode is director of development for Crossover Community Impact. She and her husband, Philip, helped a team to plant Crossover Bible Church in 2006. They live in north Tulsa, Oklahoma, with their children, Temple and Priest, and their fur boxer babies, Ali and Rocky.

¹ Visit our website to learn more about Crossover Sports Association and all the programs under the Crossover Community Impact umbrella (<http://crossoverimpact.org>)

² Learn more about the Christian Community Development Association’s passion to see Christians engaged in under-resourced communities. (<https://ccda.org>)

³ Watch a video about Crossover Health Services on Fox 23 News: “Health care center in north Tulsa serves community,” Fox 23 News, June 3, 2015. (<http://www.fox23.com/news/local/health-care-center-north-tulsa-serves-community/66814605>)

⁴ “Life expectancy gap between ZIP codes in Tulsa County narrows,” Tulsa World, Apr. 11, 2016.

AND THE BELIEVERS SHARED ALL THEIR TOOLS WITH EACH OTHER

What community looks like here

BY DENNIS HESSELBARTH

For a guy who loves to build, fix and help others, I was in heaven: a brand-new laser level. I lovingly nestled it among my other prized tools.

When Abdel asked to borrow it, I hesitated. *Ooh. Well, OK. But bring it right back.*

I never saw that level again.

It turned out that Abdel and a few other guys from his church used it to help repair the home of a struggling single mom in their church, *Iglesia Evangelica Libre Genesis* (Genesis Evangelical Free Church). Then another brother needed to install cabinets for his cousin, so he borrowed it. Somewhere along the line it got misplaced.

I was bummed. Rebuying tools that somebody else lost frustrates me. But I bit my tongue. Abdel, after all, was my new son-in-law.

But then one day, I was the one needing some project help and didn't have a needed tool. Who shows up? Not just a tool, but Genesis: many hands, many tools and a fiesta to boot! *Mi herramienta (tool) es su herramienta.*

This wasn't a "father-in-law special," it turned out. At Genesis, everyone's tools, time and skills belong to whoever has a need. I could tell story after story:

- Maricela, widowed: Ten people showed up to replace her broken sewer line.
- Mitch, disabled: When his garage (which hosted a home-based business) needed more repair than he could handle, all the Genesis men teamed up to rebuild it.
- Pepe and America, new neighbors without a lawn mower: They returned home exhausted after long days at work to find their lawn mowed.
- Illness? A new baby? Meals pour in.
- Alone for a holiday? There's a place at someone's table.

In every case, Genesis does it together. It's a party.

Flavio Gonzalez planted *Iglesia Evangelica Libre Genesis* in 2000. Now his son Abdel serves as pastor and Flavio has gone on to plant *Iglesia Evangelica Libre El Faro* (The Lighthouse Evangelical Free Church)—also in Wichita, Kansas.

Neither church is large. About 90 people are part of the Genesis family, with another 35 attending the 3-year-old *El Faro*. Pastor Flavio is not only an experienced church planter but also a gifted evangelist. Still, he observes about his churches that “most who come to Christ do so because of the testimony of the church body and their love,” rather than any one person’s evangelism.¹ The church body is its best evangelistic tool.

It’s obvious from the moment someone walks in the door. According to Flavio’s daughter, Sarahi Philip, to be a first-time visitor to Genesis is to be mobbed, “like someone who brings a new baby for the first time.”

Attorney Ross Hollander put it this way: “There are no strangers here. You walk in the door, you’re embraced. They are always looking for a new person, even Anglo lawyers, for heaven’s sake.”

“Everyone wants everyone else to come to everything they do,” adds Roxanne Turner. She and her husband had long been active members at a nearby Anglo EFCA congregation. But God drew them to Genesis, and the church’s mission and warmth compelled them to stay.

“If someone isn’t [at an activity],” she continues, “it’s like part of their family is missing. I don’t remember being in a church that is so loving and welcoming.”

At first I figured this was just Hispanic culture. But even some Hispanic families who visit have been caught off guard by the love and care. “Hispanics *do* tend to be better at living together as a family,” Flavio agrees, “but they [naturally] get together with their own kind: the rich with the rich, the poor with the poor.

“But we followers of Christ, we try to look out for those less favored: the poor, those in need, those who are not loved by many” (James 2:1-4).

When one member was battling cancer, Abdel shares as an example, “each Sunday instead of everyone going out to eat, we collected that money to pay for his next week’s radiation treatments.”

LOVED INTO THE KINGDOM

It all seems to tie back to the atmosphere that both pastors have fostered and modeled. They preach “the church being the church”—all members doing their part, going beyond simple kindness to a lifestyle of contentment, self-sacrifice, service and sharing the good news. Each one uses the “tools” they have: a warm welcome, meals, counsel, prayer, witness and, of course, wrenches, hammers and laser levels.

“The pastors are that way, and they teach us,” says Mitch Zuniga. “When I first walked in there, everyone gave me a hug, and after a while, you know, I started doing it, without even realizing it. It’s the love that you feel—it sinks into ya.

“They helped me a lot, and I want to be able to help back in return,” he adds. “Before, maybe I’d help, but it seemed like a burden. It’s not like that anymore.”

There’s a growing list of those who have come to Christ after being touched by the body’s caring: Mara and Victor, and Manuel and Araceli, whose marriages were also turned around in the process. Socoro, Dulce, Pepe, Tony, Raquel and many more—all “loved into the kingdom.”

Of course, Genesis isn’t perfect, and people are only human. Abdel bemoans that the church’s spontaneity—the quickness to drop everything to meet a need—is often not matched with forethought and organization. Efforts get scattered and disorganized. Even Genesis can occasionally turn inward and care only for its own rather than remain open to all ethnic groups, all ages, and both first- and second-generation immigrants.

Still, when I think of Genesis and El Faro, my mind turns to Peter’s pastoral admonition to the church: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:8-10).

Without a doubt, Genesis has rubbed off on me. I grew up treasuring and hoarding my tools. Genesis taught me to place my tools in the hands of the body of Christ. Together, what we each have to offer becomes a light, a city on a hill that transforms and rebuilds lives in Christ.

Pssst! Hey, can I borrow your tool?

Dennis Hesselbarth is interim pastor at United EFC in Seattle, Washington. He served for 26 years as pastor of Hilltop Urban Church (EFCA) in Wichita, Kansas—just down the road from Iglesia Evangelica Libre Genesis and Iglesia Evangelica Libre El Faro. Both church plants started their meetings in the Hilltop building, and El Faro still meets there. “And I can’t help but add,” Dennis says, “that standing beside Abdel is an amazing and loving pastor’s wife named Holly.”

¹This is John 13:34-35 in action.

MAJORING ON THE MAJORS

Valuing our shared gospel above winning an argument

BY BILL KYNES

My first month at National EFC (now Cornerstone EFC), I met fellow EFCA pastor Jim Ramsak. We became fast friends, enjoying fiercely competitive tennis matches as well as attending many district and national conferences together. I grew to respect Jim's deep faith and his love for the Word, though we had some theological differences.

In our understanding of the working of God in Christian conversion, Jim is Arminian in his theological framework, while I come from a Calvinist perspective.¹

You can imagine some of the theological tussles we've had over the many years. I admit that I had to contain my competitive nature and not seek to "win the argument" at the expense of our friendship.

Several years ago I was asked by our district superintendent to lead a seminar talking about living with our differences, particularly in the Calvinist/Arminian debate. I agreed, but only if I could do so in tandem with my friend Jim.

At the seminar I presented the Arminian view, while Jim presented the Calvinist, and then we discussed our differences. We gave each other great respect by learning the other's position well enough to present it credibly. Those attending said they most appreciated the spirit in which this discussion took place—two brothers, united in Christ, agreeing on essentials, dialoguing our differences.

This is one of the features of the Evangelical Free Church heritage that I most appreciate: that we are a fellowship of believers united by the saving work of God in Jesus Christ—the gospel. Our very Statement of Faith is centered on this good news:

- It sets forth the nature of God, who initiates the gospel, and the authority of the Bible, which expounds the gospel.
- It affirms the nature of humanity, which makes the gospel necessary; the person and work of Christ, which is the heart of the gospel; and the work of the Holy Spirit, who applies the gospel to our lives.
- It tells of the new community of the church, which the gospel creates, and the new life to which the gospel calls us.
- And finally, our Statement of Faith looks to our future hope in the coming of Christ, which the gospel declares, and the response of faith, which the gospel requires.

We are a people formed by this glorious gospel!

Along with our focus on the gospel as that which unites us, we in the EFCA have also affirmed a commitment not to let secondary issues divide us. We talk about "majoring on the majors." Though all that God has revealed is important, we recognize that we ought to emphasize what is more central to the Bible's gospel revelation, as that has been clearly affirmed by the Church through the ages.

Certainly, we can have convictions about other issues, but they ought to be held with some humility and grace in our relations with other believers.

This attitude was on display again in February 2017 at our annual EFCA Theology Conference. At the pre-conference event, Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, and John Collins, Old Testament professor at Covenant Seminary, debated the question: “Does the Bible speak definitively on the age of the universe?”

Dr. Mohler argued in the affirmative, Dr. Collins in the negative. Both believe in the inerrant authority of the Bible and both hold that Adam was a historical figure, the first human being made in the image of God who was accountable to God and whose sin led the human race into corruption.

Their interaction was respectful and engaging as they argued vigorously for their opposing positions. In the end, they shook hands in Christian fellowship, recognizing each other as brothers in Christ.

Jim Ramsak and I have held similarly vigorous conversations. Yes, I have tried to persuade Jim of the truth of my position, but I have also sought to listen and learn from views that differ from my own. I’ve learned that it is important to ask good questions, treat the convictions of others with respect and honor the relationship.

In the end, Jim and I have walked away from our conversations with greater respect for one another and a more lasting friendship because of our mutual commitment to the gospel.

Let’s not be afraid to enter into those discussions, but let’s do so with respect and grace, recognizing our unity in Christ.

Bill Kynes has been senior pastor of Cornerstone EFC in Annandale, Virginia, since 1986. He is also a member of the council of The Gospel Coalition, the Trinity International University Board of Regents and the EFCA Spiritual Heritage Committee.

¹Simply stated, these two theological views differ, among other things, on the emphasis given to divine sovereignty and human freedom in Christian conversion. Explore this in more detail at Strands of Thought (<http://strands.blogs.efca.org/2015/07/15/faq-arminian-and-calvinism/>)

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The EFCA's Roots, and My Own

BY KEVIN KOMPELIEN

Am I willing to live out these foundation stones?

As EFCA leaders, we must ask ourselves this question. If I can't commit to each stone, then I shouldn't be asking others to do the same.

Each day I run to the Word of God for truth, wisdom and leading. "Where stands it written," was a vibrant conviction for the early leaders of our movement, and it still guides us now. As a leader, I begin each morning with Scripture, allowing its pages to illuminate my life.

In 1969, I gave my life to Christ because of small-town Minnesota Christians who were committed to Great Commandment and Great Commission discipling. They understood the centrality of the transforming work of Christ and passed it along to me. It stuck with me as I became a lead pastor and then director of the ReachGlobal Africa Division, and today as president of the EFCA.

I am committed to multiplying transformational churches among all people and raising up an entire generation of disciplers because that's the mission and vision of God. In the words of our late friend and colleague Jeff Sorvik, we must have a "hand-back/hand-forward" mentorship, and I wouldn't be where I am today without those who poured into my life.

I'm so grateful for this community known as the Evangelical Free Church of America—where I get to live out my faith with other believers, unified by essential doctrines and allowing charity in nonessentials.

May we be a denomination that knows its identity and returns to its roots—not to remain in the past, but to propel the EFCA forward as we continue to have an impact on the world with the good news of Christ.