

Northern Lights

Christmas 2011

God and Man Go Missional in Jesus

By John Kapteyn

It was the most missional event in history. It changed the world and defined missional activity for the people of God.

Alan Hirsch says that “to be missional is to be an agent of the kingdom of God” and that “every disciple is to carry the mission of God into every sphere of life. We are all missionaries sent into a non-Christian culture. As the people of a missionary God, we ought to engage the world the same way he does—by going out rather than just reaching out.”

As God, Jesus was missional.

John Kapteyn is executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada.

The miracle of Christmas is God’s going out. While God is present everywhere, he has always remained distinct from his creation—until Jesus became human. It was the ultimate missional act of God, who does not sit in heaven waiting for us to come to him, or even govern creation from a distance, but who actually goes out into creation. This missional activity began when he came after Adam and Eve after they hid from him, and it continues today.

By becoming man, Jesus became one of us. He became a ‘friend of sinners’ and rather than condemn us, he came to save us. He even understood us and our sin, sympathizing with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). He saw

our needs and healed us, even defending us from the “holy” accusers of his day (John 8). He loved us and wept for the very people who called for his crucifixion.

As a man, even as a baby, Jesus was missional.

His being born in a stinking stable rather than in the comfort of an inn symbolized Jesus having no place to rest his head (Luke 9:58). His very life was missional after he began his public ministry. He suffered abuse and ridicule, but that did not concern him. His focus was not on himself,

News

- Tim Stotyn at Monarch Reformed Church, Monarch, Alberta, celebrated his 100th birthday on December 6.
- Bart Keefer was installed as pastor in Wainfleet, Ontario, on November 4.
- Marijke Strong was ordained as minister of Word and Sacrament on September 9 at Forestview Community Church in Grimsby, Ontario.



All Canada 2012 Leadership Conference

April 27-30, 2012

Westdale Reformed Church,
Hamilton, Ontario

Register online: www.reformed-church.com/2012Conference.html.

but on glorifying his Father by doing his will, and on the needs and struggles of people.

How do we respond to this? As Hirsch said, “As the people of a missionary God, we ought to engage the world the same way he does—by going out rather than just reaching out.” ■

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Make a Christmas or year-end gift to Mobilizing for Mission to support ministries in Calling Lake, at One Body Ministries and Woodgrove Community Church, and in many other places.



Transformation is Possible

By Stewart Vander Velden

“Transformation is the creation of something new: where all members of a community have a voice and participate in leadership, reflection, and action, where all members of a community seek and experience positive change in the whole of human life...”—Michael A. Mata

Picture with me a community of 175 families with an average of five residents in each household. Most of these are single parent mothers representing a diversity of ethnic groups from across the globe.

I have been involved in such communities for over two years now. As I’ve spent time with them in their communities and homes, listening to their stories and walking with them in their journeys, I’ve come to know that I don’t have the answers for their day-to-day life concerns. What I do have is hope. I share hope that their communities, their schools, their

homes, and their children can be transformed—not just changed, but transformed.

Journeying the past few weeks with family and friends who have lost a 20-year-old to gun violence, I am learning and listening daily. The biggest affirmation I have gained of my presence and ministry is that I don’t have the answers and they don’t “need” my answers. They want to believe that transformation is possible and be part of the process.

I share hope rekindled, hope that is real. I, like Nehemiah, walk alongside them, facilitating their desire for safe places where youth can talk and dream, connecting people to churches, equipping community leaders to start children’s programs, rallying community residents around promoting safety in



their community, and nurturing organizational skills in residents who want to host and plan community celebration events. My call in ministry leaves me assured that God is at work through my faulty efforts, for one woman shared, “I need to get back to church.” ■

Stewart Vander Velden is a community development worker with Youth Unlimited/Toronto Youth for Christ. Previously he was a church planter for Ontario Classis.

A Critical Time for Our Churches

By John Kapteyn

This is a critical time for the Regional Synod of Canada. A number of our churches are struggling, and a few have even been closed.

What can we do? First and most importantly, we can pray that God will do with us whatever glorifies him and that we would still be part of his plan to build his kingdom.

Second, we need to recommit ourselves to our God-given tasks and to examine the things that hamper us in doing them.

I believe that as individuals and as churches, many of us have been troubled and defiled. The writer to the Hebrews warns us that we see to it "...that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15, NIV). Harsh words have been spoken in our churches and families.

"My father never told me that he loved me."

"As a child I was told to never show my emotions. I try to deny and hide them but they affect how I act and speak."

John Kapteyn is executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada.

"If pastors cannot deal with strong criticism, that is their problem."

"We seldom make changes or get anything meaningful done in our consistory, because we will only upset people. Some threaten to leave the church unless they get their way."

Bitter words and experiences have left their mark on us. They have left their mark on me, and often these marks make me less effective than I should be at living out my faith.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices that had markings on them were "defiled," unfit as an offering to God. We should be living sacrifices, but we become defiled—unfit or ineffective—when the past has planted bitter roots within us that affect how we live. These bitter roots include:

- Fear of confrontation so we talk to others about people rather directly to them.
- Need for acceptance so we do not say or do the things God wants us to do.
- Reacting to people and issues solely on emotions rather than thinking clearly for our responses.
- Taking it personally when people disagree with us.

- Not being able to process change and conflict in healthy ways.

How do we deal with these roots so that we can be more effective? By:

- Studying God's Word and letting his truth replace the "untruths" that we have been told. This will lead to transformation by the renewing of our minds. Then we will be holy and pleasing (fit or effective) living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2).
- Being sensitive to others, recognizing that their words and actions are affected by their past.
- Becoming aware of the roots within us and prayerfully responding to others in "fit" ways.
- Not defiling others, but speaking and acting in godly ways with others and speaking the truth in love in ways that benefit others (Ephesians 4:29-32).

As we become more effective as godly people, our churches will become effective offerings to God, which he will use to increase his kingdom.

Church leaders will be considering these challenges at our April leadership conference. I invite all of you to pray for that event and these conversations. ■

Stories of Deep Faith

By Angela Van Bergeijk



When I heard John Kapteyn was hosting a workshop about my church's story within the story of the RCA, I was intrigued. I have been going to Emmanuel Reformed Church in Woodstock since before I can remember. I am deeply committed to God, my congregation, and the community we serve. I have been sensing that our congregation is entering a new time in its history where we are going to do and see wonderful and exciting things in the kingdom of God—so the workshop on my church's story seemed like a great idea.

And it was. I had a fantastic day sharing about how God was working through me, how God worked through my church to shape who I am, and how God is working ahead of our church to do new things. I really enjoyed sharing my stories with people in my church whom I had never connected with before.

Angela Van Bergeijk is a member of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario.

But honestly, the best part was hearing everyone share incredible stories with all the other participants! I heard a story about witnessing to a neighbour about salvation and the impact that had in one woman's family. I heard a story about a young immigrant from Holland being welcomed into home after home on Sundays after church. I heard a story about how the church surrounded one family with so much love after the untimely passing of a dear sister in the faith. And I heard a story about how God had called an elderly couple to pray for our current pastor almost two years before he even considered a call to our church! I always knew that our church had a deep faith, that our waters run deep and swift. At that workshop, I learned how and why that faith is so deep.

Probably the most exciting thing was talking about how God is working ahead of our church in our community. I see our church on the brink of something really important in Woodstock. At the close of the day we shared about our visions for our church in Woodstock. I see our

church having a pivotal role in providing Christians in Woodstock an opportunity to worship corporately as the body of Christ. This worship will go forth in waves to express, in a multitude of ways, the unity of the faith. How exciting to be a part of something so important in Woodstock and the RCA! God is so good and his love endures forever.... Blessings to all of you as you discover where God is leading your church in his story! ■

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Congregational discovery workshops are designed to help churches take part in the RCA's denominational discernment process. Visit www.rca.org/discernment to learn more and download materials to host a workshop in your church.

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