

# partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

## Bishop Hill on Churches, Church Planting and the Missional Approach.

by Kolleen Long



**B**RUCE HILL, who took office as Bishop of the Evangelical Congregation in Fall 2011, points to an indisputable source to confirm why church planting, and specifically missional outreach, is crucial for the kingdom.

"In Scripture, we see that the church is missional at its core," he says. "We are given the commission by Jesus to go out and tell people the good news about Jesus and to use whatever means we can to do that. In our culture, [a culture

that] isn't very comfortable and sometimes is even anti-church, they need to see the church in a new light. I think missional ministry can help to do that."

Hill began pastoral ministry in 1977 and also spent eight years as CEO of the retirement village in Myerstown. Just prior to becoming bishop, he pastored Community Evangelical Church in Sinking Springs, where church planting was definitely on the radar.

"We always felt as a congregation that one day we would plant a church," Hill explains. "As we developed ministry and as people came to church and it grew, we always had in the back of our mind that, sooner or later, an opportunity would arise for a church plant. We were always keeping that as an open option."

Planting possibilities were often part of ministry council and staff discussion, as well as a corollary desire to build a small-group mindset. "We had decided pretty early in my tenure at Community Church that part of our DNA would be small group ministry," Hill says. "The way we stated it was that we would be a church of small groups rather than a church *with* small groups."

Small groups indeed became an important strength of the congregation.

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**SAVE**  
THE  
**DATE**

**FRESH  
EXPRESSIONS  
VISION DAY**

THURSDAY, MAY 3, 2012  
YORK, PENNSYLVANIA

**A** VISION DAY is designed to inspire and encourage, display models of Fresh Expressions and answer questions. The day is for anyone – pastors, leadership team members and ministry representatives – interested in renewal within an established congregation, or building relationships and serving the communities in which they live or work. Speakers touch those who have real questions about fresh expressions and mission-shaped church or who have started something new and need some practical help.

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Commission

# CHURCH PLANTING: A Fresh Perspective

**C**hris Backert is the national coordinator for Fresh Expressions, an organization begun in the United Kingdom as a way to help the Church connect to an increasingly secular society. Fresh Expressions expanded to the United States about 18 months ago to assist stateside congregations facing similar challenges.

## **What is Fresh Expressions?**

An effort to help all congregations, but more specifically existing churches and denominations, to move in a missional direction.

## **Missional ministry is a term we are hearing more and more these days.**

I prefer the word missionary. What missional ministry is about is helping a congregation develop a missionary posture to the community they are in. We're in a post-Christian culture, where the church is not the center of the community any longer. What we need to do is make our churches look like centers of missions, much like we'd be accustomed to thinking of how we would set up a mission center in, say, Mongolia.

## **So the church needs to change its mindset toward outreach?**

Yes, change the mindset but also provide practical tools to move in this direction. We've learned a lot in church planting over the last 15 to 20 years about reaching new groups of people. One aspect of Fresh Expressions is taking the best of what we've learned and integrating it into the existing church.

## **Are there other terms we should be defining here?**

People of peace is a bedrock principle. There are people [Jesus] is already at work in, people who we believe will be open to the gospel because they are open to us. So the way of finding a people of peace is finding someone who is open to you.

Jesus gives us (in Matthew 10 and Luke 20) his basic plan to reach other people. He tells his disciples that he wants them to go and look for the man of peace. He tells them to go to town and stay with these people rather than moving from house to house. "If they receive you, they will receive me," he said, and, if not, wipe the dust off your feet and move on.

## **How does Fresh Expressions relate to today's culture?**

About 40 percent of the US population is within the reach of the existing church, the Sunday morning, worship-centric type of church. That doesn't mean the 40 percent attend, but I think it's possible that the 'normal church' when done really well, could reach 40 percent of the population.

## **And the other 60 percent?**

Whether they know it or not, [these people] have predecided that the church is not going to connect with them. And they're a growing percent of the population. What Fresh Expressions is trying to do is to help the 40 percent reach the 60 percent.

Also, about 30 percent of the US population works on Sunday morning. Since 98 percent of churches meet then, we've effectively excluded a massive amount of people just by meeting at that time.

## **And this is where ministries like Fresh Expressions come in.**

Yes, we help people to see who are the people of peace God has put in their path, to find pockets of openness in their community and provide a focus. We need to think in ways of what will reach, say, this neighborhood of 50 houses. And instead of thinking, how do we get these people to come to church, we need to think of what an expression of church would look like in this specific group, and how can we help people in this group grow closer to Christ.

## **How do you define a successful missional ministry?**

People following the call of God to have a missionary posture to their community. A Fresh Expression is successful when it's pursuing the plan of God by trying to discover places where God is at work. They get into those places, begin to build community and start connecting with people who are outside of the reach of the church.

## **What factors stop a missional ministry from taking off or succeeding?**

Fear of failure. And lack of patience, churches not realizing the amount of time it takes to reach into new groups of people today. Mission is messy. Sometimes you encounter difficult people, sometimes the match or the focus is really not right. That's ok. The point is to recognize and rediscover.

[Many Christians have] too much of their life consumed by programs of the existing church. Those things aren't bad, but they need

## What does a Fresh Expression ministry look like?

It's a group of moms meeting to talk and bond while a church provides free childcare. It's an outreach among a senior citizen community. It's whole families meeting for group events some weeks, and on alternate weeks allowing just the moms or dads to get together while the spouses watch the kids. Missional ministry looks different in lots of way, but here are some common characteristics:

- Easily led by lay people instead of official clergy.
- Low maintenance – no big drain on time or money.
- Connection to the “unchurched” community.
- Ability to reproduce or duplicate.
- Room for experiments and even failure.
- Time to grow.

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to be mediated so people have time to be out in the community, in their neighborhood and making friends outside their church.

Another problem is churches not realizing they are at the point that they need to move in these directions soon enough. If they wait too long, it's too late.

**For more about Fresh Expressions, visit <http://freshexpressionsus.org>.**

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And as the groups grew in strength and number, missional outreach became a natural expression of the participants. In other words, just as small groups became part of Community's DNA, reaching out to friends and neighbors became part of the groups' DNA.

“Their ministry went beyond themselves to their neighborhoods and the people around them,” Hill says. “It was really wonderful to see Life Groups that did some amazing projects in the community.”

Some of this involved collaborative efforts with a third party agency, such as the Salvation Army or Lebanon Christian Ministries. Others reached out to specific neighborhoods or families. Small groups met to help with a home remodel, or worked with underprivileged kids through an after-school program.

Then, Community joined forces with a sister congregation, Mohns Hill Memorial, to sponsor a Life Tree Café. “That just presented – and continues to present – some wonderful opportunities to reach people who would never step inside a church,” Hill says. “And we've seen some really neat spiritual conversations.”

As pastor, Hill was primarily

involved in planning this ministry. He saw a significant impact on his congregation. “It changed the way they interact with people who are nonchristians. It allowed them, in a natural way, to develop spiritual conversations with people who don't know Christ but are interested in talking about spiritual things.”

As bishop, Hill hopes to see all EC congregants embrace discipleship and support church planting.

“One of the concerns I have is that we as a denomination need to do a better job of supporting and encouraging our current church planters,” he confirms. “Being a pastor is a difficult job, a challenging job. You add on to that being a pastor in a church plant and it adds another level of stress and worry. We need to do a better job in the short term of supporting those church planters and encouraging them and their families.”

Hill also has long-term goals for EC Church Planting.

“We as a denomination need to consider various types, various ways of planting churches,” he says. “I don't think there is just one way to plant a church. That may be an existing church mothering a church, giving birth to a new congregation and living in a mother-daughter

relationship. It may be a church taking on more of a multi-site model. It may be where we as a denomination identify a location that needs an evangelical witness and we begin to develop it as a denomination site with the help of a district or a congregation.

“Church planting really is an excellent opportunity for a district to consider working together,” Hill says. “One church may not be able to plant a church and may have a difficult time giving up a certain number of people to do so.”

By working together, churches can share that load and pool resources in order to successfully start a new congregation.

“And we're going to have to be open to our understanding of what a church looks like,” Hill concludes. “In the future, [churches] might look different than they do today. A church plant may look very different than what we have traditionally seen as a church plant, from the way they worship to the frequency of when they worship to how they're organized.”

“In a nutshell, as a denomination, we need to be open to various ways God may lead us to plant churches.”

# PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

**Pray for our church planters, their families and their ministries by name (see the current list of planters and plants).**

## ASK GOD TO:

- Provide wisdom for preaching, teaching and counseling
- Remove harmful or distracting obstacles
- Arrange for meetings that will lead to relationships and witness
- Increase the provision of daily needs
- Set a hedge of protection around each family
- Energize our planters for effective leadership

## CURRENT PROJECTS

### RESTART/REVITALIZATION

- Tallmadge, OH . . . New Direction (Tim Ream)
- Gratz, PA . . . The Dwelling Place (Bob Stoner)
- Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)

### PLANTS

- Allentown, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . Comunidad Biblica Cristiana (Rolando Diaz)
- York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)

### INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS / POTENTIAL ADOPTIONS

- Bethlehem, PA . . . Sunrise (Rick Sergi)
- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Martinez)
- Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring & Mohns Hill, PA . . . Lifetree Café (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- Harrisburg Area . . . missional outreach (Brian Parker)
- Boyertown Trinity . . . missional outreach (Rick Christman)



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