

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERS

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Here's a way to understand the relationship between church and culture. In a world where the church is the center of society, the church sits at the bottom of the mountain while society lives at the top of the mountain. Gravity will eventually force society to roll down the mountain and participate in the church's life. In a world where the church is not the center of society, the church lives at the top of the mountain singing her praises to God, while society lives her life at the bottom of the mountain.

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Describing the Neighbourhood

When we read through the book of Acts we discover God's people are always playing catch-up with God. Not only does the church play catch-up to what God is doing, the church is constantly discerning what God is up to and the mission that God's people are being called into.

On a recent Sunday morning we invited some of our "partners/people of peace" to reflect with us about the kingdom work we are engaged in, with the intention that we will continually discern what God is doing and where we think God might be calling us to focus our energies and resources. During this period of reflection a very important question was asked, "Can we describe the neighbourhood?" The following description is needed to help us discern how we might focus our energies and resources.

As we stand on the church property and overlook our neighbourhood, here's what we're seeing:



The **Longford subdivision**, located directly north of the church property and can be described as:

- Socially, economically, educationally impoverished
- High rent making housing affordability a developing crisis
- tight-knit community . . . a community that is very connected with each other
- A generous community. Though this community is plagued with difficulties, this community is very generous with the resources they have



Deerfield development & 212 Davis is a high rise apartment building and the construction of three new high rise condos and apartments. Current and future tenants of these buildings include:

- Middle to high income retirees
- Middle to high income working individuals
- Seniors who have downsized
- Young professionals



Directly East of the church is a network of high rise condominiums, with one building being co-operative housing. Descriptor words for this neighbourhood are the following:

- middle to high income retirees
- homeowners
- young professionals moving into condominiums
- Families who struggle with poverty (co-operative housing)

When the church lives at the bottom of the mountain, the church doesn't have to think critically or seriously about its "partners" because gravity pulls society down the mountain to participate in the church's life. However, when the church lives at the top of the mountain, gravity is working against the church's life, mission and message. People will not naturally gravitate towards the church. Thus, the church must come down off the mountain to be with the people (Nigel Rooms & Elli Wort, *Fuzzy Church*, 61-62).

Thus, the importance of partners.

Pat Keifert with *Church Innovations* says there are multiple partners as the church comes down off the mountain. First, God is our chief partner and agent. A second partner is those who live and work in the communities where our churches reside. It's this second group that I want to highlight. As the church comes down off the mountain, it finds that the cultural gravitational forces working against the church makes the church's message unbelievable, shameful, obsolete, or superstitious. Thus, if the church is going to have any "good news" to speak, the church is going to have to find "partners."

In Luke 10:1-12, Jesus sends out the disciples to "every town and place where he himself was intending to go." These sent out disciples, as they entered various towns were to look for people who would offer them hospitality. Jesus calls these people "people of peace." Thus, if we listen to Luke 10:1-12, the church, coming down of the mountain must have eyes to see those who are offering the gift of hospitality. Who are the people/organizations in our neighbourhoods that are welcoming God's people? Who are the people/organizations that are willing to host the church? **Partners give the church a chance to stay rooted in the local community.**

I have always been fascinated by the story of Joshua 2 where Rahab (an outsider) welcomes the spies of Joshua. God's people have not yet inherited the land promised to them by God. Joshua, the leader of God's people at the time, sends spies to Jericho to look over the land. Of course, the people of Jericho do not care or want God's people and so they seek out the spies to kill them. Rahab, recognizing who the spies are, offers them hospitality and helps them escape. Remember when Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus? Rahab is mentioned. Imagine that, an outsider plays a role in the salvation of God. **Partners play a role in the in-breaking kingdom of God.**

Every context is different. Churches in Nashville, TN or Dallas, TX., might find themselves being the church at the bottom of the mountain where they still experience the gravity forces that bring people into the church. Where we are (Newmarket, ON), we find ourselves at the top of the mountain where gravitational forces are working against us. As a result, we've had to come down off the mountain and what we have found are partners--unexpected partners.

These unexpected partners have given us a chance to stay rooted and connected in the local community. These partners (whether they realize it or not) have played a role in the in-breaking kingdom of God. Who are your partners? Can you name your partners? Can you name people/organizations that are helping you live faithfully into the mission of God?

Christmas 2021

Nearly a decade ago three lifelong friends wanted to help provide some help in providing a Christmas to families living in the Longford subdivision. Over the years this initiative has expanded and evolved. When our faith community became involved, the organizers and neighbourhood was skeptical at best. But over time, as we slowly and carefully became involved, we discovered a friendship and partnership.

This year, through our partnership, the church helped provide 110+ families with a food voucher (generously provided by the Lion's Club) and a turkey dinner. We also helped 90+ families with a variety of gifts, including books, board games, and clothes. One story that I will carry with me for awhile was when a friend showed up at church to do some "Christmas shopping." Leaning against the wall was a cot. I carried the cot upstairs and to a waiting car. When I looked back, my friend was dancing on the church sidewalk. I started to laugh and ask why the dance. *"Because my 10 year old son finally has a bed to sleep in."*



"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

**NEWMARKET
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Sharing the kingdom of
God through friendship
with the neighbourhood

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