



Narrating Our Story into the Mission of God



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Newmarket Church of Christ
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OUR MISSION

Between 2011 and 2014, the Newmarket Church of Christ undertook a journey to intentionally explore and develop new habits and practices to help center our communal and individual lives within a God-centered identity. This journey allows us to explore the neighbourhood with a new set of eyes, invites us to imagine what ministry *with* (not *to*) our neighbourhood might look like, and even to engage in some experiments of loving and serving our neighbours. Being on this journey, undertaking some experiments, and subsequently engaging in reflection upon our journey, we believe that we have finally reached a point where we can articulate, in one sentence, who we are as a congregation. We call this one sentence our *Missional Vocation Statement*. The following statement describes the purpose of our ministries and articulates who we are as a congregation.

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



VISION FOR EMBODIMENT

As we live into God's mission we ask, *How is God calling and sending our congregation?* How we answer this question is determined by the activity of God and our life within the neighbourhood. The activity of God includes what God is already doing in our community and how God is gifting our congregation. Our life within the neighbourhood includes our strategic place in the community, new partner relationships we are forming, and our learnings through the risks and experiments we undertake as we love our neighbours. Reflecting upon the activity of God and our life within the neighbourhood, we sense God is calling and sending our congregation to pay attention to three areas

- Continue to foster relationships with the community
- Continue to develop a focus on the youth
- Continue to strengthen God's family

Over the next five years the above three areas will be our focus. We're open to the guidance of the Spirit, to discern together what doors are opening and closing, and how each area might mature us into the image of God. Under each area we have some ideas how God is calling and sending our congregation. Now we prayerfully journey into the future God is leading us into.

Summer Fun Camp 2013

Newmarket Church of Christ

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY



The decade of the 90s sees the Newmarket Church of Christ as an institutional church. This decade sees the church in existence for thirty years. Her ministries of outreach have waned; her ministers are “keeping house”; her programs and focus are designed to uplift and build up existing families.

During the late 90s and into the turn of the century, turbulent waters begin to rock the congregation to her foundations. Two splits nearly destroy the congregation, both of which revolve around the church’s leadership. A significant group leaves the congregation and begins to worship in the neighbouring town because of leadership issues. Following the dismissal of a minister, a significant group of people leave and begin attending one of two congregations: Pine Orchard Church of Christ or Barrie Church of Christ.

During the 90s and the turn of the century, a significant shift of “togetherness” happens. During the congregation’s infancy and early years, the people do everything together and are united in a common vision for the congregation. As a result, people are unified, sacrifice time and money, and hold “all things in common.” But during this time period, the togetherness of the congregation wanes. A few people leave due to lack of relationships with other members. Some feel they are not welcomed. Others leave because they cannot stomach the splits that are about to occur. The decades of the

90s and into the early 21st century are dark years for the congregation.

But then hope begins to emerge. Dr. Stephen Johnson of Abilene Christian University moves to Newmarket to engage in PhD studies at Emmanuel College of the University of Toronto. While engaging in PhD work, Stephen works alongside the congregation. His time with the congregation helps the leadership heal from deep wounds and fatigue from holding a congregation together over turbulent waters. His guidance helps the congregation imagine a new future. Following Stephen's leadership, Nathan Pickard arrives. The short narratives that follow paint a picture of how God has been at work amongst us giving birth to a community of faith that lives her life sharing the kingdom of God through friendship with the neighbourhood.



MOVING BACK INTO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Living With Our Condominium Neighbours

One afternoon I am leaving work. I throw my bag on the passenger seat of my black S10 Chevrolet truck, jump into the driver seat but discover I forgot a book on my desk. I take my keys out of the ignition, and enter into the building. Picking up my book, I glance out the window and notice my truck is rolling down the hill. I quickly run out, jump the railing of the stairs, slip on the interlock brick and watch as my truck careens down the hill, through the neighbours fence, and back into the ditch. It seems my standard truck slipped out of gear.

I call Avard Lee and he helps me pull the truck out of the ditch and together we tow the truck to Steve's Body Shop. Afterwards, I walk over to the neighbours and introduced myself to Edit, the Superintendent. I explain what happen; I meet the manager of the condominium and again explain what happened. We agree that if I fix the fence in a timely basis, nothing else needs to be done.

The incident of my truck rolling into the ditch proves to be the beginning of our friendship with the condominium neighbours. Many mornings I am met with waves and hello's from the condominium neighbours; whereas before, communication was next to nothing. We now find ourselves

standing at the fence talking about the weather, my truck, the ditch—we are learning about each other.

This event led us as a congregation to invite our neighbours in the condominiums for a coffee one evening. We talked with Edit, the Superintendent and we were allowed to place a poster asking if there was anyone who could drink a coffee with us so we could learn about each other. Then one Sunday evening, Jerry & Sonya Fortnum show up to drink coffee. We eat and drink together. Just before the coffee runs out, we ask Jerry & Sonya, *“What is it that we can do to love our neighbours?”* Jerry & Sonya at first didn’t know how to answer, but then Jerry says, *“You know, many of us have moved from homes with large lawns and gardens into this condominium and we miss our gardening. If we could have a place to garden, that might be a first step.”*

The idea is born. Soon afterwards we meet after worship and build fourteen garden boxes. The neighbours watch and wonder what we are doing. We call Jerry & Sonya and say their garden plot is ready. We ask if there are others needing a place to garden and soon the phone is ringing. It seems offering a place to grow vegetables is breaking down the fence between us and them.

Living With the Residents of the Longford Subdivision

On a calm, quiet day, a voice echoes through the sky, *“Would Mrs. _____ come to the office.”* I often wonder where this voice is coming from. Eventually I walk through the neighbourhood across the street, known as Longford subdivision, and I see a public school. I ask the congregation about the school and learn this is the school the congregation rented in the church’s genesis. In her infant years, the church rents out the gymnasium and conducts a Sunday school program for the children in the neighbourhood.

During the years of renting space at MLPS, the congregation grows because we serve the people and live alongside the people within the Longford subdivision. When the congregation hires her first full-time minister, Magnar Knutson, he lives within the subdivision and does an excellent job meeting the people of the neighbourhood. Eventually, however, many of the members of the congregation move out of the Longford subdivision and subsequently, the congregation loses her connection with her neighbours.

Discovering the public school within the neighbourhood, I walk in and introduce myself to the office staff and vice-principal. I asked if there is someone I could talk to who could inform me of the characteristics of the Longford subdivision. I am introduced to Andrea Muir. After several conversations with Andrea, I ask if she is open to speaking to the congregation with the purpose of helping us discover our neighbours. Andrea graciously agreed.

One Sunday evening, over coffee, Andrea tells us about the Longford subdivision and Maple Leaf Public School. Throughout the hour, we ask questions, hear stories, and begin to wonder how we can love our neighbours. We ask Andrea how we can serve and she is quick to respond by saying the school needs help making lunches for children who are hungry. We ask if we could drop off thirty sandwiches each Monday morning; eventually we work out the details with the school and the next week a group of volunteers purchase the supplies, make sandwiches, and pack them in brown paper bags along with drinking boxes and some fruit. To date, we have made over 5,000 sandwiches.

The weekly journey of dropping off sandwiches to the school allows us to deepen our friendship with MLPS. Eventually, having conversations with the principal and vice-principal, we dream about starting a reading recovery program. Many children are falling behind in reading skills and the school

wonders if we have any volunteers who could read alongside the children for the purpose of strengthening their reading skills. Eventually, a group of volunteers, arm with love, sit with children and read.

One Friday morning the phone rings; it's the vice-principal

"Nathan, can you come over to the school now?"

"I'm caught up in a few things, can this wait?"

"No."

"I really need this to wait; can it?"

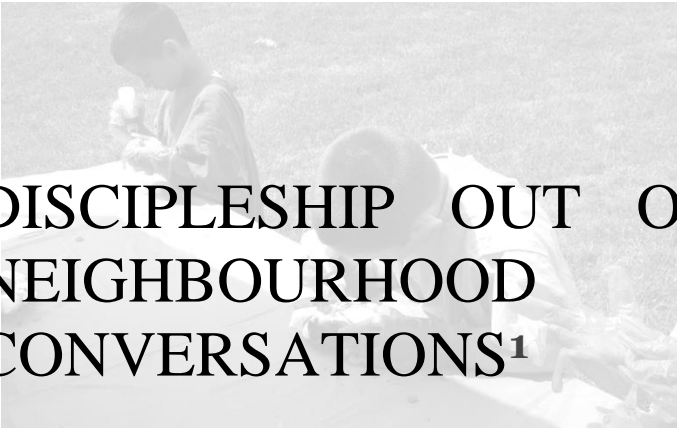
"No. We need you at the school in about 20 minutes."

I reluctantly agree and arrive at the school. The office staff says I am needed in the gymnasium. I walk towards the gymnasium and notice that there is an all school assembly. I sit alongside the wall with the teachers and catch the eye of the vice-principal. After various awards were given out to the students, the vice-principal begins to speak about the Newmarket Church of Christ and all the ways in which we serve and love the school and the neighbourhood. Then Greg, the vice-principal pulls out a framed picture and presents it to the congregation, on behalf of the school. This is the way in which the school is saying thank you to the congregation for loving and blessing her neighbours.

Continuing to grow in relationship with our neighbours across the street, we discover many of the children are not able to attend a summer camp program. An idea is born amongst us: let's begin a summer camp. Through the leadership of Becky Kennedy, we begin to dream, plan, and conceptualize what a summer camp might look like on the church property. Printing invitations and setting up a booth at the school in 2009, we welcome children to the first of many summer camps. For one week we feed, engage in activities, build crafts, strengthen relationships, learn the names of our neighbours, and by the end of the week, even though we are exhausted and tired, we

are sad to see our friends leave. We are always determined to do this again the following year.

Summer Camp for the Newmarket Church of Christ proves to strengthen and deepen relationships with our neighbours. During the school year we can see children walking to school proudly displaying the backpacks they receive as a gift from us. At Tim Horton's the parents stop and talk because we have become friends. And what are unexpected blessings—other organizations within town have partnered with us through a variety of means: giving each child a bicycle, providing funds for the annual BBQ, or sending volunteers our way.



DISCIPLESHIP OUT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CONVERSATIONS¹

A half dozen signs are bolted to the chain link fence that is a barrier between our church property and the high rise condominiums beside us. The signs read, *“Private Property: No Trespassing! Violators Will Be Prosecuted.”* The signs have been posted by the condominiums and I hate to think they are posted in hopes that maybe we will leave them be and not try to make disciples of Jesus out of them.

The four lane road that travels East and West at the front of our building is bumper to bumper with cars. The road stands as a barrier between us and one of the poorest subdivisions in our city. Unfortunately the subdivision has been nicknamed, *The Dog Patch*. Drug addicts, single mothers, criminals, low-rental units – some legal and some illegal, unemployed, employed and even a few retired individuals as well as a host of other people live in this subdivision.

As we look at our neighbourhood we are wondering how to make disciples of those around us. How do we make disciples of the people who live in the high rise condominiums even though we have a barrier between us – a barrier that reads, “No Trespassing”? How do we make disciples of Jesus out of a

¹ First published in the on-line journal,
www.newwineskins.org January-February 2009.
http://www.wineskins.org/filter.asp?fi_key=204&co_key=1716.

neighbourhood that is very different than most of the people who attend our church? How do we make disciples out of a neighbourhood that has the stigma of being called *The Dog Patch*? I am lost and confused because I don't have the answers to these questions and so off I go to across the four-lane road and buy a cup of coffee at the local Tim Horton's coffee shop.

As I am standing in line that is twenty people deep to buy an overpriced cup of coffee I discover that I am in the midst of people who live around our church building. I am standing behind seniors who live in the condominiums and I am standing in front of four single mothers with their strollers who live in the neighbourhood across the street – and then it dawns on me: Let's meet the neighbours by drinking coffee with them.

Neighbourhood Conversations

With this new idea our church began to organize two evenings where we could have neighbourhood conversations. Posters were placed on the information boards in the condominiums while at the local public school in the heart of the Dog Patch subdivision we asked if they would have a representative to help us learn about the neighbourhood.

During the first neighbourhood conversation we learned about the individuals living in the high rise condominiums. We learned that the majority of those residing in the condos were seniors. For many of these seniors they have sold their homes and downsized to more manageable living quarters. Not all of these seniors are married for many of them are widowed or widowers. Many are now beginning to have health complications, some are even losing their driving licenses to failing eyesight and others are simply lonely from losing their spouse.

After learning about our neighbours in the high rise

condominiums our church gathered together and we asked ourselves how we might go about making disciples of the people who live beside us? What program could we offer so that we could make disciples?

During our second neighbourhood conversation we learned about the Dog Patch subdivision. We learned that 70-80% of the students who attend the local public school (less than 2 miles from our building) are most likely from single parent families. We learned that too many single parent families are stuck in rental units with 2-3 kids per bedroom and the mother having to sleep on the couch. We learned that some parents don't have an education and therefore are unable to help their children with homework on a daily basis. But probably the saddest thing we learned is that too many kids go hungry. One story we heard was of a little girl eating a plain hotdog bun for lunch – and nothing else.

Our hearts were broken and crushed. Our minds were in a state of shock. How could a neighbourhood be this poor and be across from our church property and we have no clue about this sad state of affairs? Again in the midst of our brokenness over these people we wondered out loud what we could offer to make disciples of the poor in our neighbourhood.

Learning To Be Disciples

As our church started to wonder how to make disciples out of the neighbourhood we first came to the realization that our neighbours wouldn't care what we said if they were going hungry, if they were going to remain alone, if they were going to remain sick and in ill-health. So first things first – let's meet the needs of the people and then figure out how to make disciples.

We put our minds together and developed the idea of a community garden. If our senior neighbours who live in the

condominium have downsized from a large home with a backyard to a condo with only windows and no porch wouldn't it be nice to provide a space for them to garden? The dream was born, plans were put in place and the church came together and built fourteen garden boxes and provided the seniors with a space to grow their own vegetables.

We put our minds together again and said that we cannot allow children to go hungry. The public school was contacted to see how we could feed the children – “sack lunches would be a great help” they told us and so we put together a few volunteers and each week over thirty sandwiches are made, with snacks and drinking boxes. These children, our neighbours, will not go hungry if we can help it.

In the midst of all this our hope and our prayer is that through these ministry initiatives disciples of Jesus will be made out of our neighbours. But what we are discovering is that we, the church going people, are the ones who are being made into disciples. We are learning to be the presence of Jesus; to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are learning what it means to be servants like Jesus. We are learning what it means to embrace the brokenness of our neighbourhood just as Jesus embraced the brokenness of the world. We are learning what it means to die for the sake of our neighbourhood just as Jesus died for the sake of the world. We are learning what it means to be humble and not self-serving just like Jesus. We are learning to love the unlovable just as Jesus loved the tax collectors, prostitutes, and those with diseases. We are learning to share our possessions as Jesus calls us too. We are learning to forgive. We are learning to be disciples.

We started the neighbourhood conversations in hopes that we could discover ways to make disciples out of our neighbours but what we are discovering is that Jesus is making disciples out of us.

Garden Boxes To Teach Our Children

Word started to spread in the neighbourhood about the ministry initiatives our church had begun. Word even reached a local garden association and they inquired if they could use our building for monthly meetings in exchange for some advice and help in our gardens. Over conversation with the garden association they asked a question, "Are you using the gardens to teach your children?" At first I didn't understand the question and then several months later it dawned on me, why are we not using the gardens to teach our children about creation, stewardship, giving? With this we are making plans to use our community garden to teach our children.

In May, our children will begin to learn the stories of creation and how God created the heavens and the earth. In addition, they will learn the stories of how God gives us life through food: stories such as the widow of Zarephath and Peter and the disciples being nourished through bread and fish. As the children learn these stories they will then begin to plant vegetables in one of the garden boxes and they will be responsible for the watering and weeding of the garden over the summer months. In October, the children will then begin to learn stories of stewardship, giving, gleaning. As the vegetables are harvested the children will then be required to give the vegetables to their neighbours.

Becoming Disciples

We started this journey with the desire to make disciples out of our neighbours. Along this journey we discovered that God was working in our midst to make disciples out of us. With our eyes opened our church prayer has become these words:

May you O God help us to be your hands and feet in this neighbourhood. Lord, teach us what kind of church you want us to be. Teach us what discipleship in your name looks like. Through the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.



UNEXPECTED PARTNERS²

The Newmarket Church of Christ is located on Davis Drive, a major four-lane street in the city of Newmarket. The church property fronts Davis Drive but its building sits back from the road and is hidden by a long and deep ditch and four large blue spruce trees. To the west of the church property is an empty field waiting to be developed into townhouses (row houses) or possibly high rise condominiums. On the east side of the property five high rise condominiums and apartments illuminate the skyline. The subdivision across the street has a reputation of being a dangerous and poverty stricken neighbourhood. Unfortunately, it is a wrong reputation for we have discovered in our friendship with the neighbourhood caring, generous and loving individuals and families.

In its infant years the congregation grew out of a ministry with the neighbourhood across the street. However, once the church building was built the congregation transitioned from being a church on a mission to being an established church that forgot about her mission. We soon forgot about our ministry roots with our neighbours across the street.

Nearly a half a century after its birth, the congregation realized it didn't know her neighbours. In an attempt to

² Article first published in *Church Innovations Partners in Missions Newsletter*, January 2013.
http://www.churchinnovations.org/05_news/pii_v13_i1/pii_v13_i1_pickard.html

change this reality some years ago the congregation hosted a series of Sunday night neighbourhood conversations with individuals who either lived or worked in the neighbourhood. Through these conversations it was discovered that the high rise condominiums were predominately occupied by seniors who had sold their homes because of the need to downsize. It was also discovered that a few of these seniors missed gardening. When the congregation discovered this, an idea emerged: why not build some garden boxes for the seniors to grow their own vegetables? With the help of our new friends in the condominiums, the congregation built 14 garden boxes and invited the neighbours to grow their own vegetables.

Theologically this new ministry effort was in keeping with our own Church of Christ tradition. Our offering of hospitality is rooted in the receiving of God's hospitality. Each Sunday we gather to share the bread and wine, and we believe that in the bread and wine God offers himself to us so that our bodies are sustained and nourished. Being nourished allows us to live into the redemptive work of God. The way in which we receive the hospitality of God is important; we receive God's hospitality through food and drink. Therefore, if we can receive the hospitality of God through food and drink then we can also share the hospitality of God through food and drink. And this, theologically speaking, is what we believe the community garden is doing. Our neighbours can experience God through our hospitality of sharing food.

We began the journey of a community garden because it was our churches' unique way of entering into a friendship with our neighbours. Many in the church hoped this friendship would translate into numerical growth of the congregation. To some degree, it has. But at the same time our friendship with the neighbourhood has provided unexpected partners as we live into and out of the mission of God.

For three years Enza and Marisa received the hospitality of the church through their garden boxes. During this time Enza and Marisa were enigmatic to us—they simply came and went to their garden plot and no one from the church established a relationship with them. Then one Sunday, three years later, Enza on her own accord decided to attend worship with us. That Sunday the church offered Enza hospitality, and in return Enza has offered hospitality to many of the church members as she has invited many of us to have food and drink with her in her condo.

Offering hospitality to the church isn't all that Enza has done; through Enza we have bumped into other unexpected partners in the mission of God. Enza's daughter Marisa heard about the church's lunch ministry to the neighbourhood school—a ministry where we feed 20 children lunch each week. Marisa was so impressed she is now the purchaser for all our supplies.

While our providing the garden boxes for our neighbours is nice, the leadership on our Partnership for Missional Church team became convinced that those community garden plots can be so much more. This arose because of the listening exercises we undertook in year one of the PMC process. As a result, the church is taking on the adaptive challenge of “finding ways to use our community gardens to be a place where we (intentionally) announce ‘the kingdom of God has come near’.”

At this point Enza enters the story once more. One Sunday Enza invited her close friend Elisabeth to attend worship with her. While in worship Elisabeth heard about our community garden and decided to join a committee to explore how the gardens can be a place where we announce “the kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:1-12). A few days later as Elisabeth was purchasing a coffee before arriving at a garden committee meeting, she ran into Joe, a good friend of hers

and a ward councilor in the city. Elisabeth shared with Joe where she was going and what the Newmarket Church of Christ is doing. Joe immediately set up a meeting with me and has offered his services and a financial gift to explore further ways in which the community can partner with us to make our community garden a place to feed the neighbourhood.

Enza, Marisa, Elisabeth, and Joe are unexpected partners in the mission of God. When we started the gardens we didn't know any of these individuals but now it is these individuals who are walking alongside the church to rethink how the gardens can be a place to proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom.

But these are not the only unexpected partners; there is also Adam & Kelly.

Adam is an alcoholic and one day two years ago he stumbled through the garden and stole a watermelon. He ate the watermelon then stumbled into the church office. Now sober for two years, Adam is actively involved in the care and maintenance of the gardens. Kelly lives in the subdivision across the street. After visiting us for worship one Sunday morning and hearing about the church's desire to discover ways the gardens can be a place to announce the nearness of God's kingdom Kelly asked if he too could be a part of the brainstorming sessions.

Through our congregations' participation in the Partnership for Missional Church we have been engaged in a process called Dwelling in the Word. From September 2011 to September 2012 we lived in Luke 10:1-12. Early in the practice of dwelling we were arriving at these words with a sense of scarcity. After all, our church is less than 100 members and out of these 100 members we have a hard time finding volunteers. We often wondered how we could participate in the mission of God with such few people. Yet we heard Luke

10 instructing us to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” so we asked God to send laborers. And God has. We have unexpected partners in the mission of God.

Now as we find ways to address our newly defined missional challenge, we are faced with some new, perhaps even more challenging questions: Will existing families in the church welcome the new laborers God has provided for God’s harvest? Will we extend hospitality to non-family members? Will we see these new individuals as people whom God has sent us? Will church leaders welcome the new laborers and allow the new laborers to have a voice and possibly direct how the community garden might announce the nearness of God’s kingdom? These are tough questions to wrestle with. Of course they are not the only questions we must wrestle with. Other questions are: How will these unexpected partners continue to bless the church and her mission? How will these unexpected partners help the gardens be a place to announce the nearness of God’s kingdom? How will these unexpected partners (and others whom we are now looking for) push the Newmarket Church of Christ deeper into the mission of God?

As we enter into year two of the PMC process, we are being asked to practice hospitality. In one sense, we have already begun to practice hospitality to the neighbourhood by offering our neighbours a space to grow their own vegetables. Hospitality however, is a two way street: we give and receive hospitality. As we continue to offer hospitality to our neighbours, I find myself asking if we as a church will receive the hospitality our neighbours will extend to us? If in some way we can find the grace to accept the hospitality of our neighbours will not their hospitality be a sign of God’s activity in our midst?



PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH

Imagine a network of congregations sharing this vision:

To listen to God's specific call to us, to let God send us and, through the Holy Spirit, empower us to participate in God's mission in the world, so that both our communal and individual lives are a witness to Jesus Christ.

This vision is ambitious. To live such a vision takes time—even years. As we live into this vision we begin to change, take reasonable risks, attempt to be a different kind of community, cross boundaries, learn new habits and practices, while strengthening key habits and practices known to our faith tradition. Within *Partnership for Missional Churches* we are continually journeying towards being an instrument of God's future.

We begin *Partnership for Missional Churches* in September 2011. We join five other churches in Ontario/Michigan on a three year journey to work towards a rediscovery of God's future for the Newmarket Church of Christ. We undertake this journey because we discover the church is in a different social and cultural setting than the 20th century. And when social and cultural settings change, new habits and practices are needed to keep us grounded in the image of God. To use technical terminology, when we realize we live in a post-Christendom context and not a Christendom context, how we

live out our mission will be different. We cannot do and be a Christendom church in a Post-Christendom context.

Two years into the journey we learn some important habits and thought processes. First, we learn there are unexpected partners in the missional journey. The church does not have a mission; the mission of God includes a church. Thus, we are not alone. Engaging in the mission of God means we are partnering with God. And when we partner with God we have the Spirit of God. There are also other partners: MLPS, people within our community, other churches, and even strangers. As Luke 10 reminds us, God will send other harvesters as we ourselves are harvesting.

Second, we learn a new reading strategy: *Dwelling in the Word*. Dwelling involves deep listening practices. We listen to Scripture and to each other. By listening we are discerning what God is doing amongst us. Dwelling has also allowed us to have the text shape us in ways other reading strategies might not shape us. Dwelling in the Word allows the text to grab a hold of our imaginations and thus provoke us to think and act differently.

Third, we learn about our history and social location. Over the course of the last two years we engaged in congregational exercises. These exercises were undertaken so the congregation is able to see a wider picture of its history, social location, current context and also to measure the collective understanding of the congregation. Reports have been made available to the congregation.

As we learn important habits (*dwelling*) and thought processes (*partners and social location*), as a congregation we develop an adaptive challenge (how do we allow the community garden to announce the nearness of God's kingdom?), develop practices of hospitality, and strengthen the church's leadership. Meanwhile, we become more

involved in the lives of our neighbours because we are sensing our future lies within the neighbourhood—our future is tied up to the lives of our neighbours.

Our journey in PMC helps us see the neighbourhood and our neighbours with a new set of eyes. We are beginning to see our neighbourhood as a locus of God's redemptive activity. God is at work amongst our neighbours and as we discover more and more the ways in which God is at work within this neighbourhood, we are discovering the life God is calling us to live. Furthermore, by becoming friends with our neighbours, we are discovering the multifaceted ways our neighbours are helping us discover our identity within God's future. Through the hospitality and gifts of our neighbours, unexpected doors are opening so that we can continue to partner with God in the redemption of this world.

Approaching the end of our journey in PMC, we are asking on a continual basis, *to what is God calling us to?* The answer will arise out of the exercises we have undertaken in the last three years, the new habits we are fostering, the new relationships we are building, and through deep reflection. When the journey is complete we should be able to say, "We believe God is calling us to be this kind of community because . . ."



PRACTICING FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

When Dennis and Sheila Bromley and Clare and Elsie Preston joined together and dreamed about planting a church in Newmarket, ON, did they understand the sacrifices and sharing in the sufferings of Jesus a church plant would entail? Did they know the time commitments involved? Did they know how their families would be impacted? Did they know the financial commitment they were undertaking?

The Newmarket Church of Christ began as a ministry to children living in the Longford subdivision. Each Sunday the Bromley's and Preston's would knock on doors and invite children to the gymnasium of Maple Leaf Public School (MLPS). Every Sunday teaching materials are transported by car to the school. With the ministry flourishing, soon other families join the work of ministering to children and eventually the group begins meeting on Sunday mornings for worship.

The families ministering in the name of Jesus believe in the importance of owning a piece of real estate so they could further the work of God. A vacant field at 230 Davis Drive is purchased and the erection of a building is dreamt about. But how can the members of the congregation ever pay for the property and the building?

The congregation approaches Harvey Mashinter who gracefully secures financial loans for the congregation. The congregation also approaches Allen Park in Michigan to see if the congregation could hold bonds for the congregation. Through these two avenues and the weekly sacrificial financial giving by members of the congregation, the Newmarket Church of Christ is able to financially support herself and eventually pay off all debt.

We skip ahead into the early part of the 21st century. The congregation has spent some years without a minister. As a result, the savings in the bank account grew substantially. Combine the savings of not having to pay a full time minister with the trust funds received from the estates of Bert Witty and Ruth Widdifield, along with funds received when the Fern Avenue Church of Christ ceased, and the Newmarket Church of Christ had over \$100K. But all this would change within a decade.

In 2003, Dr. Stephen Johnson arrives from Abilene, Texas and begins part time work with the congregation while he was performing his PhD studies at University of Toronto (Emmanuel College). Following Johnson's one year ministry with the congregation, Nathan Pickard arrives from Abilene, Texas and begins full time work with the congregation. During the first couple of years during Pickard's tenure, the congregation continues to have revenue exceed expenses.

However, shortly after Pickard's tenure, the congregation saw families leave the congregation for various reasons, which includes loss of faith, prominent families moving away, and in some cases, death. As a result, the financial health of the congregation begins to waver. Eventually the congregation sees a year-to-year deficit become the norm. The yearly deficit with an aging building desperately needing maintenance upgrades, the savings in the bank account begins a fast downward spiral. On average, for the years

spanning 2006 to 2013, the congregation has an annual operating deficit of \$18,465.25.

The financial component of the congregation is headed by a group of volunteers. This group of volunteers is responsible for investing the cash portfolio and paying the bills. Each year, while operating a deficit, the financial team speaks how the financial health of the congregation is unhealthy and unsustainable. Each year the congregation is asked to increase her giving, but very few people ever increase their giving on a year-to-year basis. All this changed in 2014.

In February 2014, the congregation begins telling stories of people experiencing generosity through the life of the congregation. Stories of camp, a family receiving a bed, hungry children being fed, and many other stories are told every week. These stories grow out of years of investing considerable time and energy in learning how to love our neighbours. As a result of loving our neighbours, a community garden is established, sandwiches for hungry children at MLPS are made each week, and a summer camp for children in the neighbourhood takes place. Many of the stories told each week grow out of these ministries. At the end of each story the following phrase is spoken, "Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this."

Also in February 2014, under the leadership of the Finance Team, the congregation will not be allowed to project operating with a deficit: "The well has run dry." A proposed budget is developed, and for the first time ever in the history of the congregation, the congregation is asked to fill out pledge forms with the intention of matching donations with expenses. The pledge forms are scrutinized and the congregation is \$7K short. For several weeks the Finance Team asks the congregation to increase their weekly giving by \$5/week. If all 32 giving units could give an additional \$5/week, the operating deficit would be null and void. For

several weeks only a handful of families respond and so the Finance Team will begin the difficult task of cutting expenses. The week prior to the April 6th, 2014 business meeting, the church's budget is handed out and the congregation is asked to show up at the business meeting with an itemized list of expenses they wanted to cut. On a barebones budget, the meeting is going to be difficult.

But surprisingly, families find a way to practice generosity on a deeper level. As a result, the operating deficit is quickly brought to zero. The congregation finds an additional \$7K through people's generosity.

Families who are already giving sacrificially graciously offer to find a way to increase their giving. Individuals confirm they have not filled out a pledge form but will increase in financial giving on a regular basis because they desire to see the church's life flourish. Families who have not increased their giving in several years finally increase their financial giving. Even some members who traditionally give nothing financially begin to be financially generous.

Why? What happened that paves the way for the Newmarket Church of Christ culture of giving to be on the journey of transformation? Several factors. First, telling gospel stories of lives being changed. On a weekly basis the church tells stories of people experiencing generosity and the nearness of God's kingdom. No one wants to increase their giving if it's simply going to pay a hydro bill. But to see lives being changed--people want to be a part of lives being changed. Second, for the first time in the history of the congregation, the Finance Team tells the congregation they would cut expenses. And after weeks of telling the congregation cuts are being proposed, the congregation finally understands the severity of the problem. Unlike the prior years—the congregation depending upon the savings of the church to fund the shortfall—now, the Finance Team will not allow the savings to

fund the operating deficit; it is either cuts or an increase in financial giving.

The congregation is maturing. Her ministries are allowing the congregation to form meaningful relationships with the neighbourhood and thus the neighbourhood is experiencing the nearness of God's kingdom. The financial stewardship of the congregation is turning a positive corner and it seems (hopefully) the operating budget will be matched by revenue. The congregation continues to dream and position itself to become an urban church in the heart of a revitalized Newmarket. And more importantly, the congregation is devoting considerable time and energy in developing and maintaining a God-centered identity. The future life of the congregation, with the help of God through the power of the Spirit, is promising!



THE STORY CONTINUES

To what will the next decade bring for the Newmarket Church of Christ? I have some visions and dreams (renting an apartment in the new complex beside us, purchasing a house in the Longford subdivision so our teens can have a safe place to serve, the hiring of a 2nd and maybe a 3rd minister). Are there visions and dreams for us that we have not yet discerned? Is the Spirit of God giving others dreams and visions for the congregation?

Living into the future God is calling us into; we're going to keep asking the following questions:

- As we have various experiences, what might these experiences be doing to us? How might these experiences help us speak more about God's redemptive work?
- What practices keep us rooted in a God-centered identity?
- How are we proclaiming and sharing the kingdom of God?
- What kind of people do we become to be people who can keep doing what we're doing?
- How do we continually discover God's presence and work amongst us so that we can envision how to live into the future God is calling us to embody?

With God as our partner, undertaking deep reflection about what we are learning about God, our neighbours, and ourselves, through the guidance of the Spirit and our

engagement with Scripture, the future will emerge. We know our collective future will be serving and loving our neighbours in ways that will allow us to give up our life so that others can have life. In such ways of living, our lives will reflect the cross-shaped life we are called to embody.

Narrating Our Story

into the

Mission of God

This short booklet is not a complete history of the events that have unfolded in the life of the Newmarket Church of Christ. In fact, the events described are a very small snapshot of the past ten years, told in such a way to open our collective imaginations to where we think God is leading us. When Luke wrote Luke/Acts, he picked stories to tell so that he could show the church as a prophetic community bearing witness to the reign of God. This booklet contains a small amount of stories so we can see ourselves being a prophetic community bearing witness to the work of God amongst us.

Two things are accomplished. First, telling the narrative of how we as a church have become friends with our neighbours. By being friends with our neighbours we have been invited into unexpected partnerships with people who have joined us in bearing witness to the nearness of God's kingdom. Second, painting a picture of what is happening within our community of faith and the life we believe God is calling and sending us into. This is accomplished through a description of our missional vocation statement, a vision for embodiment, and a narrative of how we are changing the culture of financial stewardship.

Newmarket Church of Christ

www.newmarketchurchofchrist.ca