

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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CAPTURED BY GOOD NEWS

Nathan Pickard

Cheryl was standing at the door of my office. We were just talking about the church in a secular society; in a "Post-Christendom" context. What I mean by this is that Christianity is one option of faith among many options (secularism) and Christianity is no longer the dominant religion of choice (Post-Christendom). As Cheryl and I are talking we hear voices outside of the building and than I hear the sound of our outdoor water faucets being turned on and off.

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PANDEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

In a pandemic filled year, even though we "closed our doors" and moved our worship services to a virtual platform, we discovered new partnerships, strengthened existing partnerships, and with the help of these partnerships, proclaimed the in-breaking kingdom of God.

We found our relationship with the local schools (Maple Leaf Public School and JLR Bell Public Schools) strengthened. Each month staff and teachers from these schools join our faith community in providing food boxes for families in the neighbourhood who struggle with food security. The local chapter of the Lions Club walked alongside our faith community and helped feed nearly 100 families during the month of December. With the Lions Club partnership providing groceries, this gave us the ability to join in the organization of helping provide assistance to 80 families during the Christmas season.

One of the great stories that has emerged out of these partnerships is the story of Dwayne. Dwayne's vehicle was stolen and it just so happened that the one responsible for stealing his vehicle lives in our neighbourhood. Roughly three weeks after Dwayne's vehicle was stolen and returned, he messaged me and asked about the Christmas program. Dwayne was put in touch with Sandy and Sandy told Dwayne all about the work the church is doing in the neighbourhood. Then one night Dwayne showed up with \$500 worth of gift cards. As he handed me the bag he said, *"Use these to help families who will struggle with purchasing gifts for their children."*

A pandemic filled year certainly has brought its challenges. Surprisingly, however, the pandemic has opened up new partnerships and strengthened existing partnerships in such ways that we continue to proclaim and embody the in-breaking kingdom of God. These partnerships have become and will continue to become the fuel that will help us burn the midnight oil (Matthew 25:1-13). These partnerships are the means through which we are discovering "outsiders" are providing what is necessary to live into the mission of God (Luke 10:4, 7). These partnerships are allowing our faith community to have trust and therefore, we have been able to invite others into the life of God (Matthew 28:18-20). In a year when the pandemic has brought many challenges, we have discovered co-laborers and partnerships (Luke 10:4).

These partnerships will become part of the building blocks the Parish House will rest upon. The Parish House will strengthen these partnerships so that we can be a Christian faith community that continually bears witness to the variety of ways God is setting this world right. Thanks be to God, Amen!

Captured by the Good News, cont'd

It's March and our outdoor faucets are turned off from inside the building so we don't have any issues of freezing pipes. I look outside and see three teenagers, one of whom calls this faith community his home. They all have basketballs and are covered in mud. Seems they walked through the field, set up the outdoor basketball net, and somehow got all muddy. They were trying to wash their hands. I opened the door invited them inside to get cleaned up. As they were leaving I heard one of the teenagers say, "*That's the first time in my life I've been inside a church.*"

This is not the first time nor will it be the last time I heard someone say these words. I live in a society that is increasingly finding God less and less interesting. Most of my friends outside the Christian faith community find my beliefs about God, Jesus, Spirit and the Church completely obsolete. They cannot imagine why I believe what I believe. Sometimes I feel as if some of my friends think I'm practicing an extinct profession, the kind you see demonstrated at museums and cultural centers: such as blacksmiths and basket-weavers.

The longer that I live in this kind of context the more I discover that Christian faith is not something to be assumed. In fact, I no longer assume my children will have Christian faith (I hope and pray they do--but it's no longer assumed). Thus, developing faith in children is, in itself, an act of evangelism.

Evangelism in a secularized and post-Christendom context is not convincing others we have the truth; evangelism is about helping people become captured by the good news of God. Evangelism is helping people become captured by what God is doing in and through the crucified and resurrected Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. If we are not captured by what God is doing; if our lives are not captured by the good news that is breaking into our midst, then it won't take long for us to stop believing God is saving this world and Christian faith will become a footnote in our lives.

For this reason, one of the most important questions the church must be asking in an emerging secular, post-Christendom context is, "*What do we think God is doing in our midst?*" If we cannot answer this question then we cannot name the good news of God and therefore we are failing to be captured by God's good news.

Reading the stories of the gospels we discover the crowds of people gathering around Jesus because they saw God's in-breaking kingdom. The people saw the blind being able to see, the lame walking, the death hearing, the sick healed. Their lives and hearts were captured by God's good news.

Over the years I have watched several people walk away from the Christian faith--they finally decide Christianity is no longer a faith they can believe. I've also seen people explore Christian faith and this leads them to participation in Christian worship but after a few months their participation wanes and soon I hear from them that Christian faith was interesting, but not just for them.

Whenever this happens I am sometimes quick to judge our worship practices, our styles, our language of God. But as I take a breather and calm down, sometimes the reason is simply that the good news of God has failed to capture their attention. God and the work of God just isn't all that interesting to them.

The above has led me to ask another set of important question, *When was the last time we ourselves have been captured by God's good news? When were we last captured by God's forgiveness? By God's gift of welcome? By God's peace? By God's generosity?* If we cannot answer these questions, I wonder if sometimes the temptations we face from living in a secular, post-Christendom context might make our Christian faith a footnote in our lives? If we cannot answer these questions, we fail to have something to evangelize about.

May each of our lives be captured by God's good news! Thanks be to God, Amen.

Anticipating Our New Neighbours



Images from a new 15-storey condominium being built just east of church property

"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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God through friendship
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