

HOW LEADERS CAN ENCOURAGE

LOCAL OUTREACH AND CHURCH PLANTING

by Kevin Groff

This is a message to elders. Church planting will change the way you think about church. When you do a church plant, it changes the dynamics if you come out of a Mennonite hub like Lancaster or one of the bigger places as you take your church from being a discipleship center of Mennonites, or whatever denomination or conference you are, and move you from that point to thinking of being a sending church and you send someone out. Being a church plant will cause you to think about many of the things that we learned in life as we grew up ... if you grew up in an Anabaptist world.

Church planting has helped us to think about things in good ways. It has challenged us to really think about why we do what we do. There are very good results from coming through that.

Do the practices and applications that we have brought to our life style really make sense when you leave the group of Mennonites or Anabaptist that are living in a tight community? In our mission we have young people who come to us who grew up in Mennonite homes. They went to Mennonite schools. They shopped at Mennonite stores. Their fathers worked in Mennonite businesses. Their friends were Mennonites, and they ran around in Mennonite youth groups. They come into town and in a matter of weeks we introduce them to a world where there are only 12-15 Mennonite families in the entire town. Everything you do and everywhere you relate is pretty much non-Mennonite. Sometimes it is a serious shock to them. We have been there for twenty years, so some things seem really normal, but to them it is suddenly... Totally in their face, and they are not sure how to respond to that. That is not all bad. But sometimes we can get a little bit green-housed with the Mennonite hub ... the kind of thing that happens in Lancaster.

The people who are willing to leave those home areas and go out to do church plants - it takes a special kind of person. Some of the reasons there are conflicts

on the mission field is because a certain kind of person goes out there. You have to be a little crazy to go out there sometimes. When you do, and all these people get together who are of this personality, it is bound to make some conflict.

One of the things I see as a challenge in church planting is personal relationships. Personal conflict happens because of the type of people who go out and do this sort of thing. Then on top of that Satan gets a hold of those differences. He knows that if he can drive a wedge between us, he can just take us out, and make us ineffective.

We moved to Bradford, PA in 1991 to a town of 9,000, predominantly Catholic. The home church who sent us bought a building that had a 9-bedroom parsonage behind it. As Mennonites, what do you do with a 9-bedroom parsonage attached to your church? You know pastors live in their own house. Frugal as we are, we felt that would make a good mission house. We weren't intending to open a mission house at first. After we were there two years, we decided the parsonage would make a really good mission house. We should open a VS Center. Then the next question was... what can we do with VS'ers ... we had the cart before the horse.

We were there to plant a church. We hadn't really thought through what we were going there to do. The pastor who came with us was a seasoned pastor who came to live with us for 2 years. His family served as house parents those first couple of years. The school teachers lived with him and his family.

We founded a mission program called Reach Out Ministries. It is still operating. I am the administrator of Reach Out Ministries. Our school is Chestnut Street Christian School. We also have an elderly care ministry. We shovel snow, mow yards and do whatever we can to help older folks who live in town. Bradford has a rather depressed economic situation. A lot of young families have moved out of town and older folks are left in town with no one to take care of them. So we take care of them.

We also do a couple of different kinds of children's ministries; boys clubs, girls clubs, Bible studies, etc.; and then we also have a Christian school with grades K-12 program that is discipleship for our Mennonite children and evangelistic to community children as well.

In the early years, we did some prison ministry at a federal prison that is close by.

In 2010, we started a second church, thirty miles south of town. There were 6 young families who came into town from Lancaster. Our church goal is to plant a new church every 10-12 year.

When you go out and start church you begin to relate to people who have never met us as a culture before. Some funny incidents happen. Before I go into thinking about some of the obstacles that we may see in church planting, I would like to tell you a story.

Robert came to our church because he was invited by some children to come to the children's ministry. He said, "I'm an old guy. They won't want me at their church." They told him, "Oh, no at this church anybody can come. You can come. Everybody can come." He replied that he will go one time because he has a question he wants to ask, and nobody ever answers his question. So, he came to our Bible clubs that night and his question was: Why did God keep Moses out of the Promised Land? And Troy, our guy who knows him, answered his question. He has come back, maybe 5-7 years now. I don't know how long it is that he's been coming, but he is now a member of our church.

He told us he has had that question and has been in churches for most of his life and every time he asks the question the pastor pushes him off. No one had ever answered his question. When he came to our church, it was the first time anybody ever took time the first time he asked the question to answer it and take time to talk to him.

All we must do in order to meet people and lead them to the LORD is to use common sense in relationships. Use hospitality... we have the doctrine... We have the gospel. We have all the pieces. It is just a matter of being friendly people and using the history, the heritage, that we have to meet them.

As church leaders who have individuals among us who want to plant churches, what are the things that we are afraid of? Do they feel like we are not supporting them, or do they feel like we are not behind what they want to do, or we are not enthusiastic about evangelism... what are the things that get in the way? What are the ideas that might be there?

One pastor relates his story of church planting with the uncertainties and fears and reservations that he felt himself.

My experience is not as a church pastor, church planter, but rather as a pastor that resources, coaches and invests in other pastors who are planting a new church. Without a doubt the actual planting of a new church is where almost all of the true risk lies. But I will say that life as a parent church or multiplying pastor does not mitigate risk either. As soon as we decided to step out and plant our first church, I felt the pull of fear on my soul. What if everyone leaves my church and goes with the church plant? What if larger givers leave and I am left with nothing but bills? What will happen if my attendance drops? What will my peers think of me if I end up pastoring a smaller church? (Now you know we are not talking Anabaptist. We don't worry about that so much. At least I hope we don't) I dealt with those fears by setting some guidelines. I had met with our first church planter Pat Summers and I told him, "You can recruit any one you want to from Allison Park Church (a large church north of Pittsburgh) on two conditions; first, you must tell me who you are recruiting before you talk to them. And second, you must stay away from two key leaders that I am depending on right now."

Pat was thrilled with the arrangement and kept his word to me. On the first Sunday before the launch of this new church, I put it out there to the church. I said out loud. Announcement: Whoever feels called by God to go with Pat and help him plant this church is free to go. In fact, why don't all of you who feel called to go, come to the front so that we can pray over you before next week. I guess, I didn't really think through at the moment because as soon as the statement left my lips, a stream of people left their seats and came to the front. And wouldn't you know who was in the group, but one of the leaders that I had made Pat promise he would never take from me.

God reserved the right to override my restrictions. God, how could you do this? I am willing to be generous and all I asked was for two guys. I said this under my breath as I led the prayer. In a flash as I protested before God, I felt him speak to me. I know you are sacrificing by being generous. But if you are not going to give me your best, then why are you even doing this? From that moment on, I have chosen to die to any effort to control my own church.

The only way you can be a multiplying leader is break with fear. The very decision we make when we decide to plant churches is a decision to break free from fear and live in faith. That decision must be made repeatedly because the tool of fear will always be something that you have to purposely overcome. As we step out in faith to do church plants, there are significant amounts of fear that are involved but that should never keep us from going forward.

Jeff Leake is the pastor of the Allison Park Church in Pittsburgh and recently it says that they have planted 100 churches in the last ten years.

I offer this simply as a starting point into thinking about what are the things that we fear? What are the things that keep up from getting on board?

I don't know that I have ever lived in a congregation where I felt directly that the pastor or the church leaders were against evangelism in any sense. I think that most of us if we really get in the middle of it, if we feel that our church leaders are not supporting ... I don't think any of us would be in a situation where our pastors are against evangelism. They might function that way. It might look that way. But I think if we really got in there and had conversations with them, I doubt that any of us are truly in that situation.

I have listed twelve reasons that may be involved if church leaders are struggling with supporting evangelism or church planting.

1. The first one is the need for more discipleship among my own members. We are not ready for this. There are problems that we need to deal with before we go. There is discipleship that needs to happen in our own membership, and if we cannot disciple our own people, how are we going to disciple others who come to Christ later on? Well, if we always wait till everything is perfect in the home church, then we will never go. We will never go. It is not my intention to answer all these fears. I am simply laying them out as possible reasons why people might struggle.
2. We fear too much close association with an unsaved world.
3. We fear too close an association with other Christians of a different persuasion.
4. We will lose people on our congregation who we count on to make this congregation happen. I am today a leader. I wasn't a leader the last time we sent out a church. I wasn't one of the church leaders. But I am today and as I

look at it IGO just called one of our key men. They're headed off to IGO, and I blessed them in going. Now we think about doing a church plant and I'm thinking who else am I going to see leave? We are going down to bare bones here, and we only have 15 families to begin with. We have churches out there with 80 families or 60 or 50, go plant a church. There are lots of people. What I find is that when we were young ... when our church was in the early ten years and there was only between 6 and 8 families, we were a much tighter group than we are today with fifteen. Now when we reach that 15, you are already starting to have people who have backed off and aren't doing as much anymore. It is healthier for a church to have smaller groups of families. Where we are with 15 is okay, but I really don't want to get any bigger than that. I don't want to see our church larger than that, I want to see us move out with a couple families pretty soon then. But even as I am there, I am thinking, well if we send out our best ... it is a fear that I feel. But when you sent out those that are already trained and ready to do, you find people ready to step up behind their place. I was ordained a couple years back and the holes I left in Sunday School teaching and things that I was doing in church; other men came in behind and filled right after. So, the same thing is true when you plant a church. When people go out, then there are other families, younger people, who come in behind and fill those holes. It becomes a blessing instead of a scary thing as you see other people pick up in maturity and grabbing a hold.

5. Church planting is scary and requires change. We dislike change (Period). Sometimes we dislike it just because of the fast change that is coming.
6. We know more what we are against than what we are for theologically. We know more what we are against than what we are for and so we are ill equipped on the evangelistic edge. We are ill equipped to be offensive.
7. We are already too busy with church programs and activities. As I prepared, one of the things that Ernest and I talked about was: Am I going to get up front here and simply promote program? Okay. Programs actually work against you. They can be helpful in certain way. Now, I run a mission program. That is my job. We do operate some programs in our church. What programs do is that they help you meet people. But the actual church growth that we have seen happen on our congregation comes from individual persons and families who have been out in their neighborhoods meeting people and working with people. Programs are okay, but you've got to be careful that you don't let

programs take over all your time. They can become a problem that side tracks you from your real work of evangelism.

8. I don't know if this is too heavy a charge or not, but I would say that the Anabaptist church as a whole is largely in retreat and hold mode rather than an advance and attack mode. And as that is true in our churches we are lethargic in being ready to step out and go somewhere.
9. Here and there you might have a few who find a need to control everything. When you have a need to control everything, a church plant is a dangerous thing to allow to happen. It often ends up functioning outside of the box of what is normal in our conference. If you have home pastors who have a strong need to control everything, church plants are scary things to endorse.
10. God forbid, but we might be lazy and apathetic.
11. Our theological bias, our theological system, may not promote a life style of evangelism for spreading the gospel beyond the discipleship of our own people.
12. Lastly, we might not be a people of fervent prayer.

My family just came back from India. One of the things that we were struck with as we relate with our Indian brothers and sisters is that they pray with authority in a way that we don't. I want to learn something about that kind of prayer. They pray with authority in a unique sense. I don't know what more I can say about that, but I was very impressed that if we are going to be moving out and planting churches we need to do it with fervent prayer, prayer of authority and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What we do has to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. We need to know how to function in the power of the Holy Spirit working among us.

I'd like to share 6 points in preparing to plant a church, and I would like to use the illustration of building a fire.

1. You have to recognize the need for a fire.
2. We need to gather the materials that are necessary for a fire.
3. We need to prepare a safe place to burn the fire.
4. We need to arrange the materials in a manner that will produce a fire.
5. You need to have some kind of an accelerant to get the fire going, to start the fire.
6. Then lastly, you need to light the fire.

If you are out camping, I would suspect that a fire is something that would be easy to recognize that we need. If you are going to cook, or if it is damp and cool you need a fire. We have a wood stove in our house, and when it drops down to 60 degrees and damp, it is time for a fire. We recognize the need for a fire.

We go from there, as you think about evangelism, recognizing a need for a fire, to leaders having an eye to look around you and see where you are in the world. Where are the neighbor hoods? Where are the places around your church? Where are the places that are within a locality near you that you can send people off to go plant another church? Are you listening to what people are thinking/saying and are you able to judge where the need is? That is part of what we would have to do as pastors. Recognize that there is a need for a fire.

There is a need to be aware of the realities in the world. The Syrian refugee camp is a serious need in our world today. There are needs all around us.

One of the jobs we have as leaders is to help our people be aware, or at least we need to be listening, to others who are aware in our congregation. There are people in our congregations who are geared into those things all the time. They need to have an ear with us. They need to be able to talk with us about those kinds of things and help us to stay keyed into the things that are going on in the world around us. We need to be thinking about how we can use our congregation to be a blessing in those places.

Do we know that most of the world does not live like America? Do you realize that most of our neighbors even here in America around you do not live like we do? Our ethics, our ways of saving and planning create a different way of living than most of the world lives. Most of them do not come from generations of a Christian faith.

Consider the Great Commission in Matthew 28:28-30. "Go ye therefore" – it's a command. It is not an option. It is as you are going. Sometimes we think, I wasn't called, or we make the statement "I don't know if I'm called". We are all called. Everyone is called. Going is normal. Going should be normal. Going should be as normal as teaching Sunday School or accepting a trustee job at church.

"Teach all nations". Discipleship is intended to go beyond our families. When we think about discipleship usually we are actually just talking about discipling our

own believers. But this says to teach all nations, and so we are actually called to go out and disciple the nations of the world, not just ourselves.

“Teaching them to observe all things”. Much is made of the phrase “all things” today. That is good. This is one of the places where the conservative Anabaptist can shine in regard to some other groups in the world.

Secondly, gather the needed materials for a fire. We are going to be look at what it takes to build a fire. I have along with me some pieces of wood. I’ve got some newspaper. I’ve got some lighter fluid. If you go to Bald Eagle or some the boy’s camps, when they build a fire ... have you ever seen them build a fire at boy’s camp? They don’t use this stuff. This is girl scout fluid, they call it. They take their knife and they make these little shavings like this. After they have a whole pile of shavings, this is boy’s camp, they have lots of time. They make their shavings and then they make this square and they put all their shavings in the middle of that thing and light it. Right? We are gathering the needed materials for our fire now.

What else do we have here? We have a lighter. With the ingredients that I have up here, I can make a fire. We gather together the things we need to make a fire.

As I relate this to church planting, we are thinking about preparation. It takes forethought. If you think that it is all just going to work together, and everything is just going to come out right, it won’t. We have to take time to think it through.

I helped to start a school year ago and we were a very methodical board. We plodded along, and we lost board members. Some guys would come in and expect action in the first months. We were meeting – a couple of months and then we were meeting a year and then we were meeting a year and a half, and we really didn’t have anything to show for what we were doing yet. But we were laying a ground work. We were writing policies. We had documents and lists and all kinds of things. There was a point when we were wrestling with – is it time to do forward? Some had the sense that if we don’t move forward soon, we are going to lose the momentum of support of people who are paying attention to what we are doing. All of the ground work that was laid in that early first couple of years ... probably took two years. We laid the ground work well and we have an organization down there that is functioning very well. They have 60 children in their school.

One of the examples that we have in Scripture is Nehemiah. As you follow the book of Nehemiah through, Nehemiah began by talking to the king. Then Nehemiah told the king what his concern was, and he went to Jerusalem. The king provided resources for him. Then it says that Nehemiah got on his donkey, he went out, he circled the wall at night. He surveyed the damage, and he made a plan. Then he got people to work. Nehemiah was a classic organizer. He was able to get people together and work, building the wall. Then the three men that came against them and wanted to tear down the wall. They asked them to come out into the plain and meet with us. Nehemiah says, no. I have a great work going. I don't have time to come down and talk with you. Nehemiah was dedicated to his job because he had taken time to think it through. There was a plan of action happening.

When God stirs the hearts and souls of men and they follow what God is leading, God will move in their behalf. I am convinced that if we will take the time to pray and seek God before we go out that God will meet us. We can't just expect things to just pan out in the end, but if we put forethought and planning into it, I believe that God will go with us if, in fact, it is his will that we go out.

So how can church leaders equip people to go to the mission field? How can we do that? Again, I want to go back to our home church. I do that with humility and yet I do it with a sense of ... (I can do this because it wasn't me. It was the pastors and bishops who were leading the way before I came to leadership.) One of the things that happened in our congregation was when a Sunday School schedule was made, no one asked – Do you want to teach Sunday School? Everybody taught Sunday School. I am not sure how your churches function, but everybody taught Sunday School. When they had a lady's class, the ladies all took turns teaching Sunday School. It wasn't just one or two that think they would like to or felt they were skilled at it. Everybody took turns teaching Sunday School, and our church still functions that way after 20 years. Everybody took their turn.

That is one of the things that has happened, and as I look at the men in our church as they are growing and maturing, every single one of those guys can preach a sermon. At times when some of us pastors are not around we do use lay preaching in our congregation.

As our church has grown and matured we are now at a point where we either have to start a church or mission are going to call and take them from us and that is happening. There is one family that is already promised to go to GTL. Another family, they are not sure if they want to go. What we are finding is that our men have been out there, and they have been doing some speaking. If we don't keep our men busy working, they are going to be out there on the mission field somewhere else because somebody will find them.

My challenge is this. Avoid having pastors who are so busy that they are exhausted. Get your men to work. Keep them working. Keep them studying. When we had a conflict in our church here a couple months ago, a doctrinal conflict we were wrestling with. Usually when that sort of thing happens ministry go to the next level up. They call bishops and say, an you come help us solve this problem? Well what our bishop did – He said, let's go talk to the congregation. So, it was placed back in the hands of all the men of our church and I never saw our men study like they studied that week. For two weeks, these guys were in their Bibles and they were studying.

I've been asked to help you understand or how to equip a church. People have to study. The men have to study. The men have to be in the Word.

There are stories of early Anabaptists who had to be chained to the porch, so they wouldn't go talk. When you are planning events at church – who plans? Is it the ministry or the people?

Ladies, when you are raising your family and you have got wash loads and diapers and six children at home when you are asked to coordinate a fellowship meal at church, sometimes that can just about put you over the edge of what you think you are capable of handling. But if you do it, if somebody in the church is doing it every month, it actually becomes something like – I have done this before. I can handle this.

One of the things that happened in our church in our ladies have been very active with lots of events. As our mission program functions, lots of youth groups have come into town for work weekends and our ladies are cooking and organizing some of these events.

When we go to start another church, our ladies are not going to be saying, “I never did anything. This is brand new stuff to me.” They are prepared too. They are prepared to take the load as strange things are expected of them.

We have a whole church full of people who can go out. I don’t want them to all go out. That would be a problem for us. But there is ... there is the fear. Right? If I send them all out, then I don’t have any left.

In Acts chapter 6, there was a problem. There was something missing in the church. The apostles said, “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost.” FULL of the HOLY GHOST and power.

Acts 13, verses 2 and 3 – with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2. “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

This was a church that had prepared men to go out to do a prepared work. It is the principle of passing the torch. II Timothy 2:2 “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

God has placed all kinds of gifts in the church. It is the job of elders to choose faithful men who will also train other faithful men, who will also train other faithful men. That is the principle of equipping the church to go out and do work. It doesn’t have to hang back on the leadership all the time. It is our job to pass that torch along.

Prepare a safe place to burn you fire. As we build our fire you always prepare some sort of fire ring and you set bricks or stones around. You prepare a safe place.

How does that relate to church planting? Preparing a safe place to burn a fire means that we take time to heed the questions and concerns of those who have caution. When the cautions and dangers are raised, they are not just brushed off. We pay attention to them. But we don’t let them completely steer us away from the end goal. We take time to consider the dangers and obstacles that may be encountered, but we don’t let that derail us from the goal.

Arrange the materials in a manner that will produce a fire. As we build a fire in your campfire ring, you set it up together in some way – a tepee. Arrange it in such a way that the fire is going to sort of have a chimney effect as soon as you put that match to it. You want that thing to start drawing some air from the bottom.

I liken that to the gifts. We go into Romans and Corinthians and Ephesians and God has said, He has given gifts to the church. When you have your meeting here in July or wherever you have your meeting, you re-elect the Sunday School officers, and you have your superintendents and your ... well, I don't know how you all do it. That is how we do it. But do you think through that the person you are electing is capable of doing that job? How much do we spend time thinking about putting the right person in the right job? When we ordain leaders in our church, are we taking time? One of the things that we have done in our church is actually take some personality tests and check, what are the skills? And how do we bring these things together?

God has given us gifts in the church. One of the things that we need to be busy about as leaders is working to see that we have the right people working in the right job. When you have the wrong people working in wrong jobs, you have stressed out people. You have stressed out families and conflicts arise, and things don't work very well.

Take the time to think through what my skills are and what are my gifts. Talk about these things. What are my weaknesses? How can we benefit one another? How can we work together in ways that God has given us gifts that we can use them?

Thinking about a church plant, locate your congregation strategically. Don't just take the first building that is available. When you go into a city, don't just buy the first building that fits into your budget. Think about what group of people you actually want to work with. Are you going to work with the poor? Are you going to work with the welfare people? Are you going to work with the middle class? Are you going to work with a religious group? Who is it that you want to work with? And do the people in your church actually have a heart to minister to. Take time as you are building your church. Who is it that you want to work with? Who is it

that God is calling us to? Choose your city, your location, your buildings according to that thought process.

Pastors, see yourself as leading the way, not as making all the decisions. Your job is to lead the team, but if you are equipping and leading the team, you don't have to do all the work. Your men will come behind you and take it away.

The exciting part that comes on here now is adding an accelerant. We are getting closer to starting our fire. We need an accelerant. We need some way to start it. If I would take this chunk of wood and I would hold this flame to it, not very much would happen. I could hold it there a long time and as soon as I take it away, it might be smoking, but there would be no fire. Smoke stings the eyes. Smoke doesn't help.

Smoke is like conflict. Smoke is a problem, and when you go off to do something and all that thing does is sit there and smoke it is really irritating. We want a fire. We don't want smoke. So, I am going to add some newspaper or some shavings.

Does anybody know anything about white birch bark? White birch has that stuff that peels off very easily. When you peel off that birch bark and make a pile of that and put that flame right to that bark it just flares right up. It burns so nice and if you add little twigs to that, in no time at all you can have a fire.

When supper is late, and you need a fire, then you get out the lighter fluid. These are accelerants. These are things that we need to add some energy into the fire.

Let us consider the accelerant and all the things we need for a fire. You can have an equipped people, and you can have your church in the right place targeting the right group of people. You can have your whole organization thought through and everything is just perfect, but fellow brothers and sisters, if we haven't prayed, and if the Holy Spirit isn't blessing it, it is not going anywhere! My idea is that the Holy Spirit is the accelerant. We need to plant a church that will succeed.

My cry here is that as a church, whether it is leaders or all of us together, before we head out to start a church, let's have prayed about this thing. Let's know that this is what God wants us to do. Let's be sure that the Holy Spirit is blessing and anointing this thing. That God is going with us. Moses said, if you are not going with us then don't take us there. Okay, it is a wonderful thing to go out and start a church, but let's be sure that God is leading the way.

Let's go to Acts 4:31, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken." That verse grabs me every time I read it. I have never been in a prayer meeting, yet the place was shaken. I wonder what that would be like! I have prayed for the day. I have looked for the day when we are having a prayer meeting, and something shakes. I don't know what that is going to look like. Maybe it doesn't mean the building shook. I am not sure. But it says – "when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled," to me that says the building shook.

"together; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

Whether the place shakes or not, the end result of the prayers that they had together was that they were filled with the Holy Ghost. It doesn't say they spoke in tongues. It says they spoke the Word of God with boldness. When we are moved, and when God is with us and the Holy Spirit is moving in our heart, it gives us the ability to speak the Word of God with boldness. They prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. The end result was they had boldness and confidence as they spoke the Word of God ... the filling of and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

We need men and women who are full of the Holy Ghost. We need men and women who are sold out for the kingdom. We need men and women who are skilled, educated and knowledgeable but that is just human strength. We need all those things, but you take away the Holy Spirit, you take away prayer, and you don't have a church plant. It's not the work of the Holy Spirit. I don't want to be part of it.

Finally, light the fire. We take the match, or lighter, and we put the flame to the accelerant. We start the flame and the fire grows. It burns, and if God is in it something incredible will happen.

Be a man of God. As pastors you have to be the agent of the Holy Spirit to the congregation. You have to be the one who has enthusiasm for the work that is beginning. Without enthusiasm coming from the leadership it is really hard to get the thing going. When those people go out there, they are going to have discouraging times. They are going to have troubling times.

One of the things that was incredible for us when we went to Bradford. There were some leaders behind us. There were older people in that church who prayed for us. When they died, we felt their prayers weren't with us anymore. There was an incredible amount of prayer coming from the home area. So be that spark that lights the fire for the folks that go out.

Be full of enthusiasm, personal enthusiasm, full of the Holy Spirit. If we are not as a body full of the Holy Spirit, if we are not, then I call us to fall on our faces before God and ask Him to give us that burden. We can spend time looking, and maybe we need to ... if we don't have a fire. If we don't have a desire, then we need to start taking some time to look at the world, look at our neighborhoods around us and ask God to show us where the needs are if we can't see them. The needs are there. The needs are here in America. The needs are around the world.

As a pastor, do not be the one who is pouring cold water of negativity all over the whole project. That is not helpful. Be the person who is maybe recognizing some of the dangers, but then get behind it and help them fix them. Prepare for those trouble spots. Troubles are going to come. Troubles are going to happen. Conflicts are going to happen. Take them in stride and be the mature person who can help fix that.

We have spent a lot of time thinking about church planting. I wanted to finish with thinking about the Gospel. The Gospel is the incredible message that God has given us. The verses I want to look at come from John 12, where Jesus says that His hour has come. "Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. But if it dies, it will bring forth much fruit. That is the genius of the Gospel. Death ... death brings life. That is the message that we have to offer.

Romans 1:14 "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; ... 15. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel ... 16. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; (why? Because) for it is the power of God unto salvation."

One of the things that should spur us on, is the Gospel message itself. There is no reason for us to be ashamed. Paul says, he was a debtor. He had an obligation. Why are we hanging back? Why are we not going? Why do we not tell our neighbors? We have a debt. It is an obligation. But then he goes beyond that. It is not just an obligation. He says, he is eager, he is ready, he wants to preach the Gospel and he is not ashamed at all because it is the power of God unto salvation.

The picture that I get out of John 12 of the kernel of wheat that is just a small thing and it is by itself. It is a perfect little grain. It has its own little bit of nourishment, but unless that grain is willing to die and become nothing no multiplication is ever going to happen.

We can have our perfect Mennonite churches. We can have our perfect Mennonite churches, but unless we are willing to sacrifice and suffer in the same way Christ was willing to sacrifice and become nothing, we will not go anywhere. As Christ died – multiplication is for us, in the same way for each one of our lives. It goes on in John 12:25 “He that loveth His life shall lose it;” It is the same principle as the corn of wheat. That corn of wheat was thrown into the ground and died. Then we get multiplication. If I am never willing to sacrifice my life, multiplication can never come to my life. I can only get life out of my life when I am willing to die and sacrifice for the cause of Christ. That is the atonement that God has offered us.

Church plant is an exciting thing. It is a wonderful thing. How can we get to places where we have successes? Where can we see hundreds of people coming into the Kingdom?

With the years we have spent in Bradford, and what I have seen God do amongst our church, it would be difficult to convince me that we have been wasting our time. I know God is in it and I feel God with me as I work there. I call anyone who is interested to keep heading that direction. But don't do it without the Holy Spirit! Don't do it without lots of prayer!