

EMCCTOGETHER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada



"It makes me wonder what it might take for us to rise in this season and be willing to embrace the change God has for each one of us. Hope is on the horizon but how do we plan for the unpredictable journey? And what is our hope in?" (page 1)

Rising with the Dawn

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RISING WITH THE DAWN

Krista Bennett

I'm not going to lie, it is rare for me to rise before dawn. I hear about sunrises and "ooh and aah" at pictures, but I have not been motivated enough to intentionally set my alarm to experience the sun come over the BC mountains for myself. The potential is there, but I've been content with my comfortable morning routine, so why would I change?

Dawn is coming! Will we rise with it?

This year's Assembly theme is "Rising with the Dawn." It makes me wonder what it might take for us to rise in this season and be willing to embrace the change God has for each one of us. Hope is on the horizon but how do we plan for the unpredictable journey? And what is our hope in? If I may be blunt, we have relied on formulas and programs for far too long as the Church. It's time to rely on the Spirit! We have persevered in planning and brainstorming and good ideas; it's time to persevere in listening to Jesus. We know Proverbs 3:5-6, now is the time to live it. I believe that this is what it will take for us to rise. It will take

intentionally listening to, trusting and obeying God.

We don't have a formula for how to lead well in the midst of a pandemic, but we have full access to a personal God who does.

It would seem that fear is our greatest enemy as we face change. If we listen, what will God ask us to do and how will others react if we do it? I wonder, what would happen if we lingered in Jesus' love a little longer, listening and letting His perfect love drive out all that fear? What glorious light would break through the darkness? All through Scripture we see the darkness before the dawn. David in the cave of Adullam before taking his place as King. Jesus, crucified before ascending to the right hand of the Father. Unfortunately, we also see examples of people choosing not to enter into the promised land because of fear and unbelief. Let's not have that be our story!

Let's be a people, a family of churches, that are known for walking in the Spirit and "Rising with the Dawn."

This newsletter is jam-packed with stories of people who have been doing just that. Behind each story is a person just like you and me. They heard from Jesus, rose up and trusted Him for the journey. You may notice there is no formula; God is creative and highly relational. He wants to journey with each one of us specifically and intimately in our context. As we read through these stories, may we be inspired to go to Jesus ourselves and ask what it looks like for us to rise with the dawn in this season. Let's all experience a sunrise, not just hear about it!

"From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised." Psalm 113:3

Warmly,

Krista Bennett
EMCC Resource Manager ■



POSITIONED TO SERVE

Jean Winker

Royal City Mission has made massive changes to meet the needs of the guests they serve in Guelph, Ontario. When we checked in with the Mission in August 2019, they had just completed a major renovation of their industrial kitchen. In retrospect, the staff knows they would have been unable to meet the COVID challenges if they had not made that difficult decision to undertake the expensive kitchen project.



In 2019, their doors were open to guests 2 1/2 hours, six days a week. With volunteer help, they provided dinner and a safe place to relax and enjoy conversation for people who are homeless, vulnerable or food insecure. Donations came from churches, individuals and businesses, and they served between 400-600 meals each week.

The Mission partners with multiple organizations to provide wraparound care for those who are vulnerable. When COVID took hold, the other organizations shifted focus from daytime programs to finding housing for the homeless. This meant no organization in Guelph provided a daytime space and a lunch meal. Royal City pivoted, and since May, has been open six days a week from 10 am - 8 pm, serving 750-800 pre-packaged lunch and dinner meals. With proper distancing of cafe tables, the Mission can serve up to 40 guests who are experiencing homelessness. Guests who have accommodations, but are food insecure, pick up their pre-packaged meals from volunteers outside the building.

Royal City Mission is a church, but they changed their name to Mission in 2019 to reflect what they were doing in their community. They intended that this would help them stay focused on their purpose and values. Beyond that, God also used the name change to raise their community profile. With funds tight almost everywhere you look, Royal City had more support in 2020 than ever before.

"Whenever we are surprised, it is because God has been planning something," says Lead Pastor Kevin Coghill. He also notes that because they were involved in this ministry pre-COVID, God had uniquely positioned them to take it to the next level.

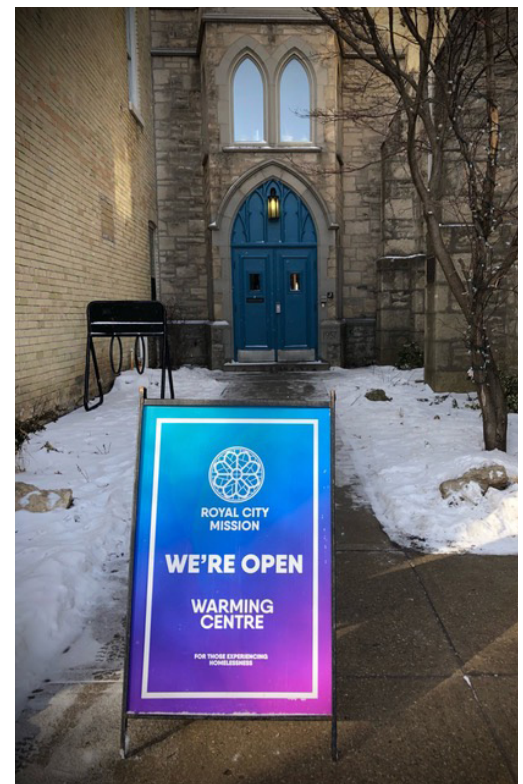
Twenty-four churches drop off food. Individuals, local businesses, and institutions are also a tremendous source of donations. It takes a host of volunteers for prep, cooking, serving and hanging out with each day's guests.

The Mission's work is not without challenge. The hours during COVID have been long, and for the pastors and staff,

the key to daily life at RCM is flexibility. A pastor may be in an office preparing a sermon or down in the kitchen making soup, talking with a guest, or sorting out a conflict; this is an endless source of sermon material. Kevin says, "Our speaking flows out of serving."

Marginalized at the best of times, during COVID, there are even fewer places for people to go for shelter and a kind word to alleviate loneliness. Some guests have issues that lead to behavioural problems, and adhering to necessary restrictions and rules is hard for some.

Despite the difficulties, "The community is super-thankful," says Kevin, "and it is beautiful to be able to serve people who are struggling. Compassion is our number 1 rule." ■



RETOOLING NEXT GEN MINISTRY

Jean Winker

For many years Bethel EMC in New Dundee, Ontario has been welcoming kids aged Junior-Kindergarten to grade six from their congregation, local churches, and the neighbourhood to Kid's Klub every Thursday night. About 45 kids meet as a group and in classes with two leaders each. Lively and boisterous, the fast-paced evenings are filled with music, memory work, crafts, Bible learning, snacks, prayer and sharing, and fun in the gym.

Then came March Break in 2020, the beginning of shutdowns. First, the planned and anticipated VBS had to be cancelled, and then the popular weekly program for kids ground to a halt. After a couple of months, it was apparent there wouldn't be a return to the usual format any time soon. The

three leaders got together with the pastors to re-dream next-gen ministry to this age group. There was some initial apprehension as they settled on switching to video. Learning to speak to a camera instead of the kids was new territory, but the transition went smoothly. They launched in October 2020 and produce a 20-35 minute video each week. Retooling continues, and Pastor Dan Hamill says, "they are getting more and more creative as they go."

Everything they offered in-person before, except the gym portion, can be incorporated into the videos. Video segments are filmed in the church, in people's homes and outdoors. Volunteers and teachers provide variety and visual interest as they give an object lesson or demonstrate a class from their

kitchen or workshop, or while tramping through the woods. And of course, there are costumes too. They are thankful for Jacob, Dan's son, who uses his Visual Arts skills to do all the video-editing. His contribution ensures that well-done videos go out into homes.

The new format requires careful advance planning and the leaders need to stay several steps ahead. For instance, once a month, volunteers pack and deliver boxes for each household. They contain all the supplies and other small items each child needs to participate in the activities appearing in an entire month's videos. The videos premiere each Saturday and families can choose when to watch and take part. Each Thursday night, the two teachers of each class host a Zoom call. They talk about the video, but most of all, it's an excellent opportunity to connect with the kids.

Feedback from the parents has been positive. And it encourages the leaders and teachers when parents send in photos of their kids doing the crafts and activities.

Leadership has been praying for several years about how to better minister to parents. Yes, the parents dropped their children off at the church and came to the classrooms to pick them up. At best, this provided a couple of minutes to talk, but it was a hectic few minutes.

Pastor Dan notes that these videos go right into the homes each week, making the good news available to all. ■







World Partners

PASSING IT ON IN KUCHA

Nicole Jones-Qandah & Jean Winker

EMCC WP has worked together with the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church for twenty years. Various Food Security Projects (FS) in Kucha District, a continued initiative of EMCC through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank concluded few years ago. The initial beneficiaries carried on with what they had been resourced with. Still, there was more to do to promote sustainability and to mobilize past trained beneficiaries and their church communities to be catalysts for community development and spread their enthusiasm to other nearby Kebeles (Wards).

To meet this goal, EMCC and Tearfund Canada collaborated to launch a year-long program. It was designed to refresh the skills and knowledge beneficiaries learned during the FS project, and to empower and equip churches to direct community development initiatives moving forward. Called *Church Community Transformation*, (CCT), this series of refreshment trainings took place in 2020. The focus of the trainings was to empower the church and community in Kucha District by training 50 leaders from 20 selected local churches. The goal was to mobilize them to use their untapped local resources to undertake sustainable development based on the skills gained and the resources identified. This holistic approach is taught within

a discipleship framework, whereby these trained churches are intended to be models for other churches in the Kebeles.

As members of the EMCC gave, the trainings were completed and a graduation ceremony was held at the end of December 2020. The graduating leaders were encouraged to continue doing sustainable development with passion and a sense of ownership, and to train others to do the same.

Kucha is the first to begin the new approach. EMCC is excited to see the legacy of our investment in Kucha District as churches and past project participants are now leading community transformation. They are owning the responsibility of supporting themselves, and they are becoming the teachers of their neighbouring Kebeles. This trajectory will result in more and more churches leading holistic/integral transformation through development along with disciple-making.

According to feedback, almost all 20 churches started self-initiated, local resource driven, development activities. Many who had been through the FS project and the CCT shared that this exposure influenced their mind-set to focus on development initiatives that are church and local resource

driven. They believe that donor-based development interventions must not be relied upon long term. This shift to self-sustained development is celebrated by The EMCC and the Ethiopia Kale Heywet Church.

Here is what one of the participants, Mr. Uba Eltamo, shared from his experience.

I welcomed the [CCT] concept, because since the phase-out of the project four years ago, I have been using the skills and knowledge I gained through trainings and continued doing sustainable development. I will be contributing my part to encourage my fellow farmers and community [to] use their available local resources to help their family...True development comes when beneficiaries of any project start using not the resource donated only, but using the knowledge or skills gained through the whole process of project implementation to keep on doing the activities in the absence of the implementing organization.

As the believers in churches in Kucha continue to train, apply their learnings, and teach others, their reach will extend to assist yet unreached Kebeles, who can discover the resources and skills untapped in their context. ■

NO RESTRICTIONS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jean Winker

God's redeeming work is not hindered even if Covid has us stuck at home. This lesson was brought powerfully home to Ray* and Wai Liu recently when an 'out of the blue' text message led to an acquaintance finding Jesus.

Ray has loved and played volleyball since he was a kid, and for the last 15 years has played on and off in a competitive Asian league that travels each year to Labour Day weekend tournaments in five cities in the States and Toronto. As a Jesus follower, Ray is in the minority among his teammates, and although they know he is a pastor they haven't talked about it much. The pandemic has curtailed tournaments over the past year but hopefully they will be able to play again soon.

One winter evening, while at home like many of us, Ray was listening to a sermon when his phone alerted him to a text message. He picked it up and saw it was from a teammate but he was astounded by her message.

"How do you know you are saved?"

This was the end of the ordinary evening Ray and Wai thought they were going to have.

"Her question was a lot to answer by text message, so I asked if she was up for a Facetime call," says Ray. "When she said yes I was totally surprised. A couple of years back she had mentioned in passing that she was going to church. I said, 'cool,' and that was the extent of our conversation about spiritual things.

"Anyway, I got a hold of myself, called to my wife Wai, who also knows my teammate, and quickly told her what was happening. The two of us spent the next couple of hours with her on Facetime. We got to share our testimonies, God moments in our lives, and did our best to answer her questions about who God is and what it means to be a Christian. She soaked it all in. We shared the Gospel with her, and best of all, we got to pray with her while she invited Jesus into her heart."

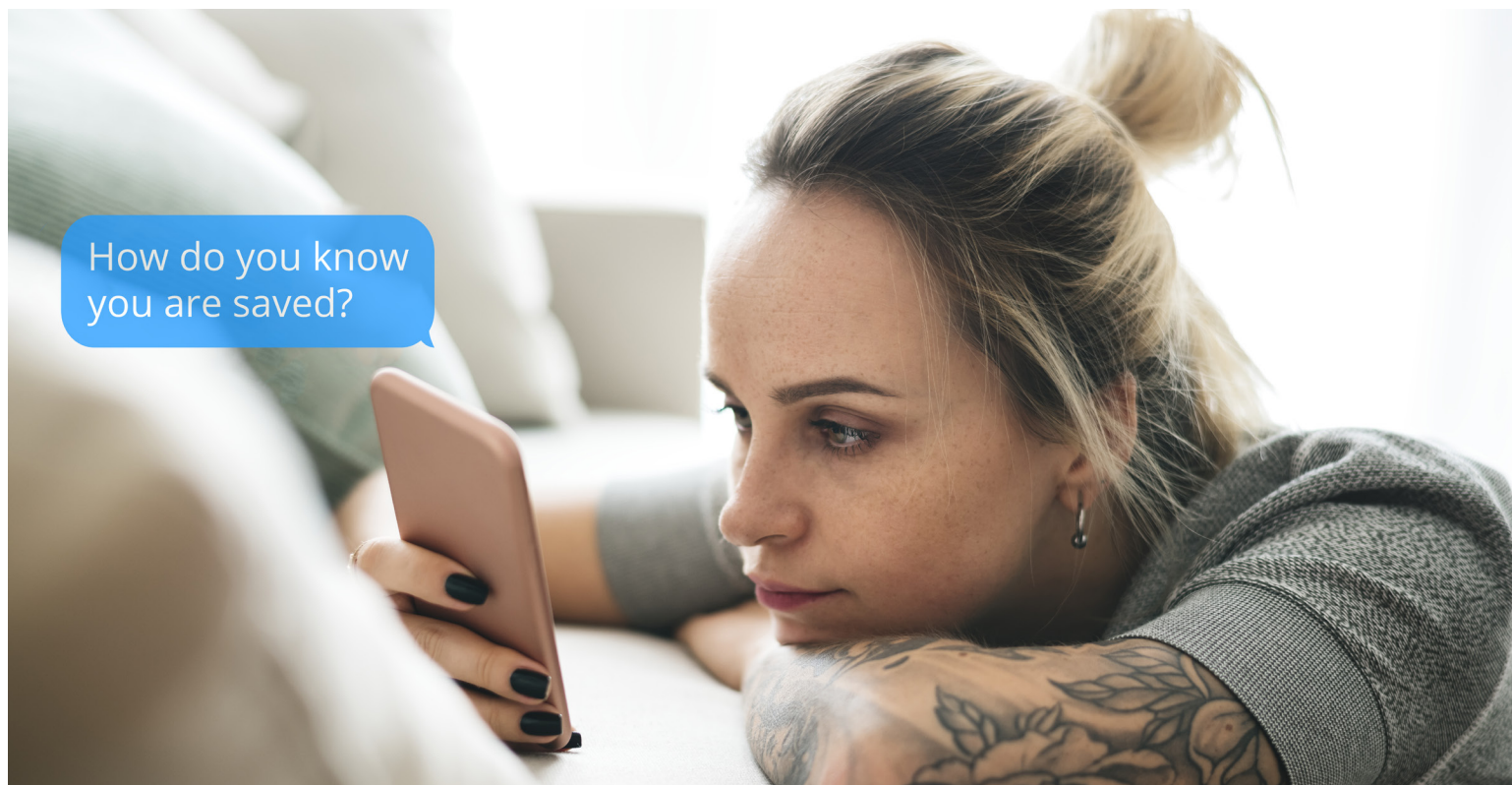
Before they ended the call with their new sister-in-the-Lord, Ray and Wai both found themselves with the same

thought – *Alpha*. Ray is finding that *Alpha* is great for use in these times of not being able to meet in the same physical space.

"Anyone can run their own *Alpha*," he says. "We told her about it and she said, 'I'm in.' She even invited a co-worker. Some others we know also joined and the group is thriving."

Ray has even noticed an advantage to holding *Alpha* with the participants all in their own homes. "It has been phenomenal, really. Everyone is affected by Covid, so everyone starts off having something in common. It also seems that people are more comfortable in discussions, as if being in their own homes provides a secure feeling conducive to sharing."

**Ray Liu is Lead Pastor at EastRidge Church, Stouffville, Ontario. ■*





LEARNING TO LEAD: ALL AGES WELCOME

Jean Winker

Next-Gen ministry for children at Powers Creek Church in West Kelowna, BC is evolving into something new and beautiful. Each week children and adult volunteers create a three to six minute video geared to children ages one through grade six.

The church integrates the videos into their live-stream service on Sundays.

"It's important for every generation to see the others."

"It's important for every generation to see the others," says Erin Zilke, Director of Family Ministries. "As more and more people from the congregation become involved, the feeling of community grows."

The videos take the place of the pre-COVID children's church. When meeting in person went on hold, they experimented with sending sheets and materials to homes but soon realized that these didn't serve families well.

There was a big learning curve while making the first videos but they persevered. Each video features short segments with kids or adults telling a Bible story, doing an object lesson, going over a memory verse, singing, playing an instrument or demonstrating a craft. Several people take turns creating the videos and every week a leader involves kids and people from the church in the segments. Since children's church left

the building, creativity has exploded. Indoors or out, locations are anywhere that suit the purpose. Horses on a ranch were on hand to illustrate the point of one object lesson about trusting God.

From his parents, Erin learned of a seven-year-old boy in the congregation who creates YouTube videos. She wondered if his skills could be used for the Next Gen program. With help from his mom and dad, he makes one video a month. Benton is at ease in front of a camera whether talking about a concept, demonstrating a craft or explaining a group project. His younger sister, Addie often lends a hand as well.

Before the live-streamed services, a couple of adults host a half-hour Zoom call for the kids. "They miss their friends,

and this is a time to see each other and catch up. It gives them a chance to be heard."

Erin is thankful for the guidance and support of Pastor David Barbour, the church's fantastic tech guys and the many volunteers. "We wouldn't be able to do this without all the people doing what they do to make it happen."

Creating videos is time-consuming but well worth it. Before COVID struck, children were not involved in the teaching. "Kids love to observe other kids and learn from them. It is powerful and helps them express and own their faith," says Erin.

When the church doors re-open, this change is a keeper. ■





STANDING IN THE GAP

Jean Winker

COVID caught all of us by surprise. When the unprecedented closure of schools came in Red Deer, it didn't take long for CrossRoads Church to realize that, for many families, food security was going to be a crucial issue. For some children, their schools were providing breakfast and lunch 5 days a week; some even received take-home supplies to cover the weekends. With those doors closed, there was going to be a big problem.

CrossRoads Church in Red Deer AB, has been answering Jesus' call to show compassion and love to their neighbours for many years. With a focus on vulnerable youth and the single parent home, they have become increasingly involved in the public-school district, comprised of 28 schools. CrossRoads' Local Initiatives Director, Laurie Whitaker, works to build relationship and trust with the school social workers. They support three breakfast clubs as well as providing non-perishable food that can be given to families whose grocery dollars are scant or may be in between food bank visits. It is not uncommon for Laurie to receive an urgent call from a school social worker who has learned of a child with particular clothing needs such as a winter coat, hat, mitts and boots. The congregation regularly donates

food, clothing and other items which are stored until they are able to be given away. At the invitation of school principals, CrossRoads congregation members have gone into schools and laid out clothing according to gender and size; families are then invited to come and take what they need.

When the Public and Catholic schools closed in March 2020, Laurie was quickly on the phone with the social workers in schools where family poverty is more prevalent. She knew something had to be done. Along with her missions team, Tracy Minke, Karen Marriott, and Chantelle Schmidt, she set about devising a plan to help mitigate the food insecurity these children and their families were about to face if help didn't come.

They decided to provide food care packages for school families referred by school social workers. With family permission, the social workers supplied the particulars of each family so Care Packages could be customized to suit; for example, a family with 4 teenagers in the home would receive a more substantial package than would a home with one elementary student. These care packages contained on average enough food for two weeks for the



family. They converted their gym into a "grocery store" and over the next 13 weeks sent out 506 food hampers (which often meant several large boxes), and cared for 1,915 people. 183 volunteers served by sorting and packing--all while following current AHS guidelines--and 113 served as delivery persons.

Part-way through the Initiative, it became obvious that school families were not the only ones suffering. Through partnership with the Mustard Seed, they began to provide care packages for other families in need in the city.

"It was so beautiful to see the church come forward," said Tracy. "They were so responsive."

Some days volunteers would notice they were running out of a particular food item. "We'd put out a request over social media for pasta, peanut butter, or cereal--and within the same day we saw the increase of that item in our bins."

"We felt like it was, 'Ask and you shall receive,'" agreed Karen. "'Hey, we don't have enough apples,' and there they'd be--in the bin."



The CrossRoads Cares Food Initiative is finished but Tracy says it was humbling and invigorating to be part of it.

"It puts you in a sweet spot of being grateful for what you have, but also so grateful for being put in a position to help. It was important to us that people would feel dignified and loved and cared for. We were careful to do nothing to degrade their dignity. That could be me the next day. We just don't know."

As much as possible they customized the hampers, sometimes tucking in donated colouring books and crayons. One day a social worker indicated a Mother had asked if there could be a cake mix in her box as it was her child's birthday that weekend. Imagine Laurie's surprise when she discovered a recently donated birthday cake in the church freezer, a

box of donated birthday candles, and one lone bottle of Gingerale amongst the apple & orange juice. Who but God could have planned for that? A further look around produced a few birthday gifts, including a hula hoop.

"Dance away sweetheart," said Laurie. "God knows you and loves you and we are so honoured to be a part of making your birthday a special day."

For Easter 2020 a group of friends from the church donated absolutely everything needed to provide 30 families with Easter dinner, including turkeys and pumpkin pie. Another person donated a side of beef. A local family with a greenhouse donated vegetables and fruit. "We loved it when we could include fresh food," said Karen.

Creativity soared. One day the care packages that went out included everything for a taco night. For Mother's Day they went the extra mile, put on a 2nd delivery that week so that all the mothers received a potted plant, a special picture and markers for kids to colour for their Mom, and an encouraging hand-written note. For Father's Day, delivery teams took root beer, sausages, barbeque sauce and chips to all the lone-parenting Dads on the list.

Stories abound from this hamper ministry, most of the effects of which will never be known this side of heaven. CrossRoads is grateful to be a trusted partner of the school district and looks forward to seeing what doors will open in future.

The church is blessed with a facility that includes an amazing youth wing that they have opened to school groups for events, although this is on hold due to current restrictions. Church volunteers also serve in the schools as reading buddies, in literacy classes, preparing and serving breakfasts at breakfast programs, and being in-school mentors. One of the Pastors and other members have coached basketball, while many more are involved in afterschool programs and special event days.

Tracy was quick to point out they are not the only organization helping city residents during Covid, mentioning The Mustard Seed and Hope Mission as valued partners. "It wasn't all us," she said, "but we are so grateful for the part we were able to play." ■

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RISING WITH THE DAWN

2021 EMCC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

APRIL 30, 2021

9am - 1pm PT | 10am - 2pm MT | 11am - 3pm CT | 12pm - 4pm ET

For information visit: emcc.ca/assembly