

KINGDOM EXTENSION

The following words were the header to my March 2018 NMT report:

Church Planting. Kingdom Extension. The same? Yes. No. Sort of. Confused yet? Don't feel bad if you are; we are too. As we floated out of our first year of settling into our new role as the Kingdom Extension Community – missional ministry resource – we were suddenly exposed to new ideas and ministries that are stretching our capacity to keep up.

Dinner Church. Is it a church? Or simply an outreach? If an outreach, at what point does it become a church? If a church, what are the marks of a church? If it might become a church, then does that make this kind of outreach a missional work? Please pray with us as we journey with our ministry peers as they journey with Jesus.

Since I penned those words, we have also discussed a similar collection of questions regarding a “virtual” church. Is it a church if there is no street address? What does “gathering as the Body” really mean? How far can we stretch that idea? What might this mean for the future of the Church, of the EC Church, of our local congregations?

In the end, I think we might find the future of the local congregation wandering away from the church grandma attended. Why? People have changed. The world around us has changed. And yet, the same mission stands before you and me as Christ followers . . . “go and make disciples.”

Let's talk! You and me. You and your leadership team. You and anyone more concerned with “go and make disciples” than they are with “must keep what we have no matter what.” The latter doesn't seem to be working for most of us. The former is downright scary. Maybe together, as we talk and pray and imagine something other than what we currently are struggling to keep afloat, we will find and embrace something new, something we've not done before. Maybe we will once again embrace God's redemptive mission for his creation . . . somehow wrapped up in reclaiming and re-envisioning the Great Commission for our current contexts.

Kingdom Extension Community Members

(We are all listed in the National Conference Journal. Drop us an email or text, give us a call. As time allows – we all have day jobs – we will chat with you, brainstorm with you. Together, we can learn from each other, and then go and make disciples.)

Rev. Leslie Cool, Associate & Chair; Bishop Rev. Bruce Hill; Rev. Ronald Anderson, Mr. Andrew Brubaker; Rev. L. Allen Giles; Rev. Matthew Hill; Rev. Carlos Kelly; Mrs. Linda Miller; Rev. Adam Roberts; Mrs. Michelle Roberts; Rev. Timothy Seiger; Rev. Michael Snedeker; Rev. Byron Whitaker; Rev. Todd Wolfe.

Before you read the next section . . . keep in mind that some of our “church plants” continue to be listed as such for a variety of reasons. Some remain small/smaller yet continue to minister the gospel in their communities. We have refused to press them to charter before they have mastered the art of being a chartered church (e.g. submitting all the reports, adequate leadership, financial stability, etc.). Others are in transition – refocusing, considering mergers, relocating, or deciding how they fit in the EC world. The restarts will probably become something other over the next few months (may even have changed by the time you read these words). The several informal partnerships and missional works are either too new to relabel, still sorting out who they are, or pondering their next steps. Please continue to pray as we walk with pastors, leadership teams, and congregations eager to become what they need to be to effectively “go and make disciples” in their communities.

Current Kingdom Projects

(CAPS SIGNIFY SOME FORM OF CURRENT BUDGET/FINANCIAL SUPPORT)

Currently . . . we are supporting and/or encouraging . . .

- **5 Planters and 6 Plants**
 - Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abimael Montanez)
 - LANCASTER, PA . . . CHRIST HOUSE CHURCH (TIMOTHY KING)
 - Lehigh Valley, PA . . . Horizon (Robert Daneker, Jr.)
 - Pottstown area, PA . . . Journey53 (Richard Christman II)
 - York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)
 - YORK PA . . . THE NEXT STEP (Carlos Kelly & TIMOTHY KING)
- **2 Restarts / Revitalizations**
 - Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
 - TALLMADGE, OH . . . NEW DIRECTION (TIMOTHY REAM)
- **2 Informal Partnerships* / 5 Missional Works / 0 Potential Adoptions**
 - Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
 - Millersville, PA . . . The Gathering (Juan Carlos Morales)
 - MOHNTON, PA . . . DINNER CHURCH (ROBERT SHUEY)
 - Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Christopher Bronico)
 - Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeffrey Byerly)
 - Sinking Spring, PA . . . Fresh Expression Launches (Matthew Hill – Pastor of Missional Ministries)
 - SLATINGTON, PA . . . DINNER CHURCH (BRIAN KERN)
 - WILLOW STREET, PA . . . VIRTUAL CHURCH (ADDISON ROBERTS)

*An “informal partnership” is just that, a loosely defined relationship between an established church and another church or church plant or church planter that is transitional or less precise than an adoption, plant or “out of that church” ministry. Some informal partnerships are based on use of space in a building; others involve overlapping ministry events. In the end, these partnerships may become more formal or will dissolve when the dust finally settles.

Church Plant / Planting Updates

Church Planting and Kingdom Extension conversations continue to shift as we walk with our missionally focused congregations. Instead of beginning by identifying location and planter, we’re often more concerned about mission, community needs and target audiences, AND options for new or fresh expressions of church. The location and planter concerns follow.

These pondering conversations have moved from “where can we start a new work?” to “how can we enhance what we are currently doing?” and/or “how can we better connect with our neighbors?” There is a subtle, or not so subtle, fear (is that the right word?) that if we’re not bigger or better or blossoming then we can’t plant churches. It’s the same fear that young couples face *until suddenly*, they’re pregnant. And then they usually manage to do just fine! What if your church is pregnant and you just don’t know? Maybe your first concern ought to be mission focus and discipleship rather than location, building and planter. Let’s talk!

We – DFDs and KEC – continue to keep in touch with our longer-in-the-field planters. Pray with us as we encourage these exciting ministries. Pray for them as they continue to touch lives.

KEC Training Opportunities (sponsored or promoted)

- **Fresh Expressions National Gathering 2018 and Exponential’s Live Stream Event**

Fresh Expression’s “From the Steeple to Street: Leadership in a New Mission Era” theme for this year’s gathering (3/16 – 3/17) was in Reston, VA. We were represented by leaders from Community EC, Sinking Spring.

Exponential's 2018 theme was "Hero Maker," focusing on the five essential practices of moving from hero (standing on the platform) to hero maker (building a platform for others). We held a local gathering (2/27) at Community EC. We discussed multiplication thinking, permission giving, disciple multiplying, gift activating and kingdom building.

One walkaway from these experiences is the need to create time and space for soul and ministry stretching conversations about pastoral, leadership, and church health as we look to consider next steps for our ministries.

- **Rooting for the Underdog: churches striving against the odds**

Barnabas Initiatives is a multidenominational group of church leaders (many members are denominational executives) looking to connect with and walk beside pastors of smaller churches. As a function of my KEA role, I have partnered with them to help make possible local (near clusters of smaller churches) gatherings for encouragement, resourcing, and healthy conversations. I have been part of two such events. Both were powerful. You will hear more from us about future events, as well as about other agencies providing similar support for the pastor of the smaller church.

Other KEC sponsored or promoted training and ministry conversations and events will be posted as they are developed. We desire to respond to our pastors and churches regarding their interests, needs, and opportunities, as well as stretch us toward more intentional Kingdom-focused endeavors. You can help us by letting us know what you need, or what you hear others discussing or asking about. Contact Les Cool (717-951-8433 or revcool@ptd.net).

KEC Community Resourcing

Last year I spoke of the need to deepen and widen the discipleship network wherein we partner to journey together toward personal and corporate health and strength for serving our King. The idea of moving beyond a free-standing training event to life transformation teaching-learning experiences and conversations is still on our radar. We are discovering just how hard it is to make these kinds of events and connections happen. Pray with us as we continue the conversation that will lead us there.

EC Partners Newsletter

Issues of our Partners Newsletter continue to be developed and distributed. Focused on stories of missional ministries that are making a difference, we hope to inspire others to "try something new." In addition to the stories, we provide resource suggestions (for discipleship, church health, and outreach/planting ministries) and suggestions on how to pray for our church planting initiatives.

We would love to hear your missional, Kingdom ministry story. Please pass your story or the contact info for an interview to Les Cool (717-951-8433 or revcool@ptd.net), KEC Associate. Les will make sure people hear your story!

KEA on the Road

Les continues to entertain conversations regarding Kingdom ministry ideas and models. One current focal point is sharing tools for recognizing your church's gifts, skills, and strengths, as well as the needs of the community. The next steps involve imagining and developing bridges from the church to the community. This process enables a congregation to fulfill the Great Commission by obeying the Great Commandment.

Les continues to promote pastoral self-care and soul-care. Balancing life and ministry is not always easy, but is essential for long-term, effective ministry. Though we cannot “fix” leaders, we can and do seek to encourage our pastors and leaders to be proactive with their health.

KEC Conversations

KEC members are currently discussing various ways the KEC can effectively support EC churches looking to engage new people groups, unreached people groups, in gospel conversations. Once again, we are finding ourselves stretched as we stare into the headlights of foreign (read: strange) ministry models. Most recently, we have watched the launch of two “dinner churches” hosted by our Mohnton and Slatington congregations. Rev. Shuey is building on a longstanding food pantry, while Rev. Kern is seeking a new connecting point with unchurched neighbors. We are also in the very early stages of walking with a virtual church being launched by Grace Community Church in Willow Street.

As your Kingdom Extension Community presses forward, know that our goal is to keep an eye on the mission – go and make disciples – while we seek to encourage and equip congregations to “love one another” and “love others.” These loving relationships are bridges into the lives of others, bridges across which the message of God’s love and grace and mercy might pass. Isn’t that what we are to be about?

We serve with an awareness of our need for your prayers for our ministry team, as well as for your faithful prayers and support for our church planting and missional initiatives. We are grateful for your support – hands and feet, skills and abilities, and faithful financial gifts. It is together that we will realize greater Kingdom impact.

For the privilege and opportunity we have to serve Christ’s Kingdom, our churches, and our planters, we thank you.

Submitted,

***Rev. Leslie Cool, KEC Associate
for the Kingdom Extension Community***