

partners

THE KINGDOM EXTENSION NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

END GAME: Expanding the Kingdom of God

Reverend Bruce D. Hill

Bishop, Evangelical Congregational Church

JESUS SAID on numerous occasions that the Kingdom was “near” or “here” (See Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15). That confused a lot of his listeners. Many were looking for a kingdom, like that of David, which would exercise political power and authority and also displace those nasty Romans in the process. You may recall that prior to the crucifixion, Pilate struggled with the concept of Christ’s kingship. So what do we, as 21st century followers of Jesus, mean when we talk about Kingdom Expansion?

Jesus gives us more insight into his Kingdom when he taught the disciples how to pray; “May your Kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Kingdom is essentially about following, implementing, actively living out the will of God in every aspect of our lives.

Kingdom ministry is so much more than what we have traditionally understood as the work of the church. Church-work is focused

on making a particular church, my church, bigger. Now that’s not a bad thing. I would love to report that all of our EC congregations are growing in the number of attendees. But I also understand that the number of people sitting in the sanctuary is not the same as the number who are actively living out the will of God in their daily lives.

The adventure of Kingdom Extension is found in living out God’s eternal Kingdom principles here in a broken, hurting and lost world. I trust that as you read this edition of Partners you will get a sense of the unlimited length and breadth of Kingdom-work opportunities all around us. And it’s much more fun than church-work! ■



Finding Faith in the Public (School) Forum

By **Linda Miller** (Bushkill Community Church/St. John's E.C. Church)

Public School and Faith. For some, those two words may not seem to go together. We have the perception that God is no longer allowed in the public school setting. We make Facebook posts that we need to return prayer to our schools to fix our ills. We believe that students cannot share their faith in this setting and are being indoctrinated into a "religion" counter to God. While there are definitely challenging areas in this public setting, Christian children and teachers do actively live out their faith to those who so desperately need to know that God loves them.

As a parent who always sent her children to public school and as someone who has worked in the public school setting for the past sixteen years, I have experienced many opportunities to minister to others and to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." I have never felt ridiculed or "persecuted" for expressing my faith in this setting, and view each day as an opportunity that God has given me to impact this world for Him. It is my mission field.

Most of my students and co-workers know that I am a pastor's wife. When I introduce myself to my classes each new year, I tell students about my family and mention that Mr. Miller is a pastor. Paul has dropped by the classrooms a few times throughout the years and some students have met him at football games. One of my students last year was interested in becoming a pastor, so the guidance counselor arranged for Paul, me and

the student to meet and discuss the expectations and schooling involved in this profession. Since this student was open with his faith, we had the opportunity to discuss how that faith could impact his life and help him with his choices.

Throughout the past four years at the high school, I have had the opportunity to get into interesting faith discussions with students in the middle of class instruction all initiated by them. The key is to see the open door and to take advantage of it, often times posing questions to them to make them think. They are never going to come to faith simply by me telling them this is what I believe, but if I can make them think about their life and their purpose for living, that plants seeds of seeking. They know I am available if they want to discuss things further.

Three years ago, I was given permission to re-start a Faith Club at the high school. My own girls were involved in one while they attended the school, but it currently did not have a leader. Spending time with the students after school and listening to their questions and their convictions has been a blessing. They are surprised that we are allowed to pray in school, as we do during each meeting. It is unfortunate that students have been conditioned to think that they have to stifle their

faith in the public school setting. This year, they even organized a "See You at the Pole" event in September where kids (and yes, teachers) gathered at the flagpole prior to school for prayer. We were allowed to publicize this throughout the student body as well. It is an encouraging time for students to recognize that they have other friends and teachers who support them in their faith.

Two years ago, one of the other teachers approached me about meeting for prayer before school. We pray for the kids, for the staff and for God to use us in this setting. Others have joined us at different times, always remarking about how it was a helpful start to their day. People need to know that we care!

While there have been other

interactions and faith discussions both in the school setting and at events where my children were participating, the one that stirred me the most involved a co-worker who shares a classroom with me. She is essentially an agnostic. She was raised Catholic and is very well educated; however, her life experiences have left her questioning many things about God and faith. I listen. I let her

share her concerns. I do not rebuke her for her questions and doubts. I share with her what God has done in my life and how important it is to

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me. We share our convictions with each other even though we differ at times. She has mentioned how she is surprised that I treat her with such respect and care given that I am an "Evangelical Christian." It saddens me that her perception of our faith is not a positive one. She has told me

numerous times that she respects my faith, how I share it and live it out among our school. She appreciates that I give her the chance to speak, to question, to voice her concerns and experiences without being condemning. I give the glory to God. Building the Kingdom is daily

work wherever God has placed you. It is not confined to Sunday mornings, prayer meetings, youth meetings, VBS and a host of other programs that we call ministry. Ministry is our daily life. Pray that God will help you see your mission field and that you would be faithful to His calling. ■

KINGDOM EXTENSION COMMUNITY

The KEC team is available to assist you, to walk with you, as you seek to improve your Kingdom serve. Each team member, a practitioner of both discipleship and missional ministries, is eager to listen to your questions and concerns, your dreams and struggles. We will brainstorm with you and cheer on your leadership team as you take steps toward the vision God has given you for your church and community. Consider the following ways we might be helpful.

Developing Direction

We are prepared to help you define and implement a mindset and strategy for extending the Kingdom within your ministry context. We will walk with you as you adopt biblical ministry concepts that will lead to church health, growth and expansion, as well as planting the gospel among unreached people and, if possible, launch new ministries leading to new churches.

Defining Potential

We are prepared to help you assess the potential of your congregation for extending the Kingdom within your community. We will explore with you extension models for your local context, including cultural differences. We will help you assess your needs and potential for planting the gospel and churches in your community.

Discovering Possibilities

We are prepared to help you discover and adopt (or adapt) Kingdom extension concepts that make sense in your ministry context. We will help you think through opportunities and solutions for Kingdom extension in your community, including processing the various aspects of cultural diversity.

Delivering Resources & Training

We are prepared to help you access up-to-date seminars, workshops and resources (books and web-related materials) that address creative solutions for extending the Kingdom. We will help you discuss as leadership teams or congregations these Kingdom extension concepts.

Developing Partnerships

We are prepared to help you engage others – pastors, leadership teams or congregations – in discussions about Kingdom extension within your cultural setting. We will help you connect with district and affinity cohorts concerning Kingdom extension learning and ministries. ■

Contact **Les Cool**, Kingdom Extension Associate, to begin the conversation: (717) 951-8433 or lcool@eccenter.com



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KINGDOM EXTENSION COMMUNITY MEMBERS: Rev. Leslie Cool, Associate & Chair; Bishop Rev. Bruce Hill; Rev. Ron Anderson, Mr. Andrew Brubaker; Rev. David Dick; Rev. Al Giles; Rev. Matt Hill; Rev. Carlos Kelly; Mrs. Linda Miller; Rev. Adam Roberts; Mrs. Michelle Roberts; Rev. Tim Seiger; Rev. Mike Snedeker; Rev. BJ Whitaker; Rev. Todd Wolfe.

Modeling Our Faith to the Next Generation

By **Tim Seiger**, Pastor, Lewisberry, Wyndamere Heights

Everybody has been disciplined and every one disciples. I think that this is an indisputable fact. The only issues to be discussed are whether that discipleship was for better or for worse and whether that discipleship prepared or is preparing others for life in the Kingdom of God that comes with our obedience to Jesus' way; "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

When my twins were four years old, we were worshipping in church one Sunday. It was not unusual for me at some point to raise my hands in gratitude to God or in symbolic submission to him. What I didn't realize was that my son had his eyes glued to me and was doing whatever I did. It was not a game of mimicking; he was intently trying to figure out what was acceptable and expected behavior in that situation. I know of this scene because someone behind us observed the whole thing and told me about it later. I started paying attention and realized the responsibility I had, not just to speak into my children's lives as a parent, but to live in a way that was worthy of being emulated. If I am

honest, I didn't and don't always live that way. But there can be no mistake that how I live matters in relation to what I will teach and pass on to my children about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, a father, a man, a human being.

Fast forward a decade to a conversation I had with a youth leader after youth group one night. This leader, who knows he and I hold different theological viewpoints, told me about teaching on an issue he knows is a hot button for me (the nature of God's will for individual humans), that when he had finished his short explanation he had asked for questions. He asked if I wanted to guess which hands went up. Of course, I knew he meant my children, who had clearly been paying more attention to what I was teaching and preaching than I had realized, again a kind of parenting "aha" moment.

Without any plan or curriculum, I have taught my children a way of living and thinking and being in the world that, for better and for worse, is pretty representative of who I am as their parent; it seems to me that this is discipleship. Discipleship is life training

and - when we choose to follow Jesus - discipleship is learning the ways of our Father in Heaven and obedience to him. This formation in the ways of God has to be intentional as does parenting. But like parenting, the most effective way is rooted in presence and a desire to see our children flourish as adults. For Christians, that flourishing is inextricably tied to knowing, loving and living as Jesus teaches us.

Discipleship can happen in structured ways but it also happens, perhaps more effectively than we realize, as we simply share life with others. Discipleship always requires intentionality and probably a reordering of our lives to make space for community, not just gathering, but truly living and engaging in our neighborhoods and the lives of those around us.

I love the instruction from Deuteronomy 11 where the author talks about how a generation of people following the events that gave shape to Israel's identity in the Exodus need to be told about those events and the God that made them all possible. The writer explains that it is important to teach, dare I say disciple, God's people in the ways of God. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase from **The Message** of Deuteronomy 11:18-21 beautifully explains that we must integrate the teachings and ways of God into our daily living as witness and testimony to others as well as instruction.

While this passage explicitly talks about children, I think it reaches beyond that to anyone of us who "...weren't in on what God did, didn't see the acts, didn't experience the discipline, didn't marvel at his greatness, the way he displayed his power in the miracle-signs and deeds that he let loose in Egypt on Pharaoh king of Egypt and all his land."(Deut. 11:2-3 MSG)

Everybody has been disciplined and every one disciples. Let's make sure we are intentionally disciplined and discipling in the way of Jesus and his Kingdom. May his Kingdom come as his will is done, on earth as it is in Heaven. ■

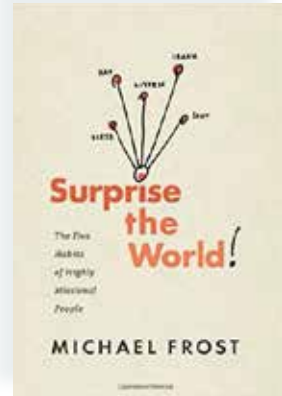
Place these words on your hearts. Get them deep inside you. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder. Teach them to your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning until you fall into bed at night. Inscribe them on the doorposts and gates of your cities so that you'll live a long time, and your children with you, on the soil that God promised to give your ancestors for as long as there is a sky over the Earth. DEUTERONOMY 11:18-21

RESOURCE CENTER

Surprise the World! The Five Habits of Highly Missional People

by Michael Frost / Navpress

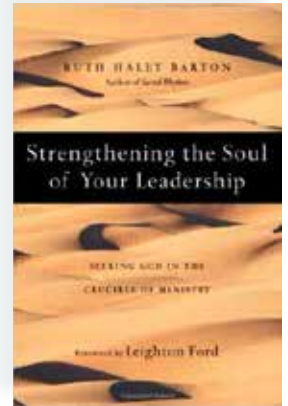
Frost offers a story and a few simple ideas on how to engage people so that we earn permission to tell them about the Kingdom of God. What he offers are a few attitudes or intentions that radically change our daily lives. Frost calls his approach the BELLS model (Bless others, Eat together, Listen to the Spirit, Learn Christ, and understand yourself as Sent by God into others' lives). Just think, we can eat with people as a tool for developing and deepening relationships! What if we did that with people who don't know Jesus?



Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry

by Ruth Haley Barton / Intervarsity Press

Barton helps us consider the danger of ignoring the health of our souls as we lead. It is possible to do good things while destroying ourselves or even our churches. She helps us identify the danger areas, teaches us the art of paying attention to our souls and guides us toward healthy rhythms in ministry. A good resource for the leader, Barton's book becomes even more valuable when read by leadership teams. Strengthening the soul of your leadership conversations create a network of relationships that will serve each member and your church for years to come. ■



PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

PLEASE PRAY FOR . . .

- Each planter and plant by name – for personal and corporate growth.
- Our planting families – for protection from threats to family life.
- Planting leadership teams – for focus to serve God's redemptive mission.
- Planting communities – for contacts that lead to healthy relationships.
- Ministry structures – for wisdom to design effective ministry structures.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

5 Planters and 6 Plants

- Ephrata, Pa . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Lancaster, Pa . . . Christ House Church (Tim King)
- Lehigh Valley, Pa . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Pottstown area, Pa . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
- York, Pa . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)
- York Pa . . . The Next Step (Carlos Kelly & Tim King)

2 Restarts / Revitalization

- Slatington, Pa . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
- Tallmadge, Ohio . . . New Direction (Tim Ream)

3 Informal Partnerships*

4 Missional Works

0 Potential Adoptions

- Lancaster, Pa . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
- Millersville, Pa . . . The Gathering (Juan Carlos Morales)
- Palmerton, Pa . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)
- Reedsville, Pa . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring & Mohn's Hill, Pa . . . "Red Plate" and "Canal Street" Lifetree Cafés (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- Sinking Spring, Pa . . . Fresh Expression launches (Matt Hill) ■

*An "informal partnership" is a loosely defined relationship between an established church and another church/plant/planter that is transitional or less precise than an adoption, plant or "out of that church" ministry. Some informal partnerships are based on the ministry of an EC pastor, the use of building space, or overlapping ministry events or conversations regarding future partnerships. These partnerships may become more formal or will dissolve when appropriate.