

The Cnossen Connection – Fall/Winter 2016

Church Planting/Home Building

I have always loved the story, found in the Book of Nehemiah, of the Israelite's experience of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. That may come from my natural interest in construction – I have been a builder all of my life. What I like about Nehemiah is how the practical and spiritual stories are woven together. This is a picture of life because life is both practical and spiritual. It is also a reflection of what has been going on in our lives this past year and throughout the life of our ministry for the past thirty years.

This has been a year of home construction for us – home construction and church planting. A few years ago our son-in-law felt a strong urge to invite us into an idea he had. He felt the idea was from the Lord. The idea was to someday team up and build a home together. There were several reasons for the idea – more involvement & input in their family, a place to someday “retire” with family to help as we age, and sharing of resources so there would be more for the Kingdom. There were more reasons, and we committed to the Lord to see if he would open the doors. He did this a couple of years ago when we were able to purchase a few acres just outside of Ponoka, AB, where we live. He did it again, when we were able to arrange financing from the bank to go ahead with the project a little over a year ago.

Since then a house has gone up which will be ready, this week, Lord willing, to move in to.

Reflecting back on this process I have thought of several ways the work of building a house ties into the work of church planting. Church planting is our calling, our ministry, our job. In spite of spending many hours this year on this project, we were able to maintain our ministry in the Maskwacis community and stay involved in other lives God has led us to touch over these thirty years. Let me share with you a few of these insights:

Building always starts with a good plan and a firm foundation.

In our project we were fortunate enough to have a good architect to give us a good start. This architect helped us in getting a plan that would fit our vision. One of the suggestions of that architect was to hire out the foundation work. It needed to be solid, level and square. The foundation determines the rest of the house. If you have a bad foundation you will fight it the rest of the way. Our foundation was built level and square and true and it was a joy building the house on it.



Over the years we have found this to be true in church planting. We have always felt the foundation we need to lay down is Biblical truth. There is nothing else worthy to build lives upon. As we were building, this year, we were also teaching, in our Bible study, the chronological story of the Bible, from Creation to Christ. The neat thing was that people were getting it even when it challenged their worldview. They understood the Story. We saw this in our sister church, the Louis Bull All Nations Church – the biblical teaching of Pastor Mario Swampy was giving folks there a solid foundation, and the church is growing. Many more adults are coming to services there.

It takes a team to build a house.

The prospect of a project like this was daunting, but made possible through lots of help. My son-in-law Jerel had a special friend who is a contractor around Ponoka. He offered advice, tools and equipment and even crews to help us with the work. Friends came out and volunteered hours or even days to the cause. It was an opportunity to work side by side with Katie and Jerel. I would like to say this was easy and fun all of the time, but no, sometimes it was a struggle. Sometimes our personalities clashed or got in the way. But the neat thing we learned from all of this was cooperation and how things go much better when we cooperate. The bottom line of cooperation is humility and love. We also saw how some people were better than others in some things, so those areas were given to them. Home building is not a one man show, that is for sure!

Church planting is the same. It takes a team to make things work. A lot of times the hardest thing is finding the niche we fit into – the “sweet spot” where talent efficiency and spiritual giftings meet. This is called working in our giftedness, and when we find it we can go ahead. We have experienced this over the last year. Our experience in Louis Bull has shown us that many can make a thing work better. It is not all us. And when people find their sweet spot –like the Lahucik girls doing Sunday School and girls club, Jonathan tutoring on the Montana Reserve, Bert and Carol Gibson coming alongside for encouragement and help, Mario pastoring and preaching and getting better and better at it, native men in our church reading, praying and cleaning up – well when this stuff happens , things get done in ministry. And we thank God for you – our supporters, who stay with us faithfully praying and giving and hoping that God is going to do great things out there! Thank you! Yes, there are some hiccups along the way, but the job is getting done – Praise God!

Building can be a venture in faith.

For some reason I wanted to do the wiring on this house. The bottom line, I think, was the challenge, plus I like wiring. The bad thing was that I was not totally confident in myself, which led to quite a few sleepless nights. But I pressed forward, in what seemed like weeks running romex and connecting outlets, switches and circuit breakers. In the end, believe it or not, it all works! Even three way switches and smoke detectors – they all work!



A lot of time, in church planting, we exercise faith. This kind of work calls for it because we are trusting God, not ourselves, for positive results, and God says, “Just go, in my strength, and believe and trust me for the results.” So if that is rebuilding a city wall like Nehemiah, or just speaking into the life of a troubled teen at camp or on Facebook , it is venturing into the unknown of faith. And Jesus is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. And so, with faith, we are seeing lives changed, and like house building, this change is a step at a time, a day at a time, but it is there and we are seeing it. Praise God! Do we know what we are doing? Probably not – but God knows, and He completes what he starts.

Perseverance pays off.

Building a house take perseverance. I remember last winter when we were in the framing stages. Getting up in the dark and getting up on that cold deck to lift walls and trusses – hard work! Or this summer and fall, juggling through the finishing stages. It was get out there and get going and don't stop till it's done. There will be life after the house is done, but it won't get done unless you do it. We were all in this mindset, Donna, Katie and Jerel, and a lot of our friends – let's get the job done.

Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." This reminds me that Jesus is not looking so much for spiritual talent, but he is looking for spiritual tenacity and faithfulness. He wants us to stay with it. He doesn't want us to give up or lose heart. I like what it says in Nehemiah 4:6:

"So we built the wall. And the wall was joined to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."

There have been times over the last thirty years when giving up looked like an option, but it never lasted long. There was and still is a job to do. Where there is much sin there is always more grace and this is our job – to go out every day into a grace-less world and spread grace. To pour out hope. To bring light where there is darkness. In spite of ourselves, our age, our aches and pains and our short comings.

Paul wrote: *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ...so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*(2 Cor. 4:16,18)

We don't see it, but we know that God has something grand in mind when it's all done. All the truth that has been shared and the love that has been poured out in Jesus name, day after day, will have some eternal consequences, and they will be good.

So , again, thank you so much for supporting and praying for this work. Thank you for your encouragement as well. It was great to see many of you this summer when we were out east for Jody's wedding. We hope to get down to California this winter to visit family & friends down there. Thank you for your faithfulness, and for the hope you give us and our people up here – have a happy Thanksgiving!

Tom & Donna

This Year's Highlites:

- Construction & Completion of our new multi-family house outside of Ponoka
- Finishing up Chronological Bible Study with quite a few participating
- Great Camps (Men's Fishing Camp, 2 Higher Challenge Camps, All Nations Family Camp)
- Louis Bull Congregation/Woodynook CRC joint service & ongoing partnership
- Jody & Laurie's wedding in South Carolina & trip home through Michigan
- Startup of a Men's Group with Fellowship Church & Louis Bull All Nations Church
- Good health

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