

Appendix 3

MISSION EDGE, YOU, AND YOUR CHURCH:

© Greg Jones

***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new Creation has come:
the old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)***

**“We Cannot Become What We Need to Be
By Remaining What We are” (Max DePree)**

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Week 1: “Why Has God Called <i>Us</i> Here?”	9
For Reflection:	16
Week 2: “Learning to Love the <i>Hard-to-Love</i> ”	21
The CBAC and <i>Mission Edge Churches</i>	25
<i>Joining God in Your Neighbourhoods</i>	27
The Six <i>Mission Edge</i> Markers	30
For Reflection	35
Week 3: “What’s In Our Hand?”	37
For Reflection	42
Week 4: “Mapping Out the Adventure”	45
For Reflection	50
For Congregational Leaders: Making use of ‘ <i>Mission Edge</i> , You and Your Church’	52
Introduction	52
The Hedgehog Concept	53
Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody	59
The Mt. Denson Example	60
Recommended Steps for Using this Resource	61
1. Select a Team	62
2. Create a Checklist	62
I. Prior to the Planning Exercise	63
II. During the Planning Exercise	65

III. After the Planning Exercise	65
3. After Acceptance of Report by Congregation – The Implementation Phase	66
Conclusion to Chapter	67
Resources	68
Strategy Day Seminar “Putting It Together”	69
<i>Mission Edge</i> Covenant	79
Sample Strategic Planning Vision Team Report Template	81
Scriptural Rationale for <i>Mission Edge Churches</i>	83
Resources for Gospel Fluency ... Sharing our Faith	87
What is in Your Hand?	103
Other Resources	104

Introduction

I'm glad you're here.

I really am.

One of my key values in life is that every person matters and is a gift; there are no unimportant people. I'm therefore glad you're here because you are a gift that God has given to the rest of us ... to your family, your church, your community, your world. Our world is different because you are here. This is true if you're 7 years old, 27, 57 or 97.

For that reason alone I'm glad you're here.

I'm also glad you're here (meaning that you're looking at and starting to read this Guide) because it indicates that you have at least some interest not only in God but also in His purposes for you, your church, and for this world. As long as you have life God has a purpose for you. I know that we live in a time when faith can be tenuous for many people, and I hope that if this is the case for you this resource will both deepen and stretch you in your ongoing engagement with Jesus Christ.

I have already said that one of my key values is that every person matters and is a gift. I want you to also know that I believe that every church (i.e. every local gathering of Christ followers) is precious and to be valued as important to God's Kingdom. We live in a world that wants to value everyone and everything for their (or its) utilitarian value, meaning how strong, how fast, how good, how attractive, how rich, how powerful they are. I love how God turns all that on its head in His Kingdom. As the Apostle Paul says "some parts ... that seem weakest and least important are actually most important."¹

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:22

All this is to say that regardless of who you are, how old or young you might be, how big or small your church might be, how firm or how tenuous your faith might be, I'm glad you're here.

I firmly believe in the God of the Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate come-back story. The Great News contained in Scripture is that our future need not be defined by our past. Therefore, I always believe that there's a hope and a future for your church.

You'll discover as you read through this introduction to *Mission Edge Churches* that your future is most dependent upon the degree of your willingness to be the church that God calls you to be – for the place (or neighbourhood) to which He has called you, for this time in which He has planted you, and for the future to which He is leading you. My firm faith conviction is that all churches that are meaningfully and prayerfully striving to be all that God calls them to be will have a future. Such obedience is not easy, and such a journey can be costly. It requires a willingness to step out in faith, being uncertain of where that faith-journey might lead you. It means living sacrificially, whether that involves loving the 'hard-to-love', generously giving of your material means, or letting go of things that carry great sentimental meaning for you.

I trust that as you read through and interact with this Guide you'll consider your personal journey as well as that of your church to be sacred. This Guide is not written to place a burden on you, but to encourage you to be all that God is calling you to be. I am standing on the sidelines, cheering you and your church on, offering you this guide as an orientation map for a way forward.

Allow me to briefly explain the reason for and intended use of this Guide. Its purpose is to introduce you and your church family to what it means to be a *Mission Edge Church*, with the

goal that your church will commit to meaningfully being one of at least 300 CBAC² *Mission Edge Churches*.

It is designed to be read by you a chapter at a time over four weeks (one chapter per week). At the end of each chapter are a series of questions for you to prayerfully consider. Then, for each of the first three weeks you will meet for an hour or two with a small group to share with one another your thoughts and insights about the questions for that week. On the fourth week, rather than meet with your small group (unless your small group happens to be your entire congregational family), you will come together for a day-long workshop where you will be led in exploring more deeply the various themes that you have discussed.

Your church leadership team who are giving oversight to this initiative (perhaps your Deacons or Elders or a specially-created *Mission-Edge* Vision Team) will be listening and recording notes of the various insights and contributions offered during that day-long workshop. They will then take those findings and prayerfully digest them considering what God is saying to your congregation through the entire process, after which they will prepare a report with a plan and/or recommendations which they will bring back to your congregational family for acceptance or further reshaping.

When I was in Grade 12 I had the opportunity to attend the Urbana Student Missions Conference held every third year in Urbana, IL. In truth I don't remember a whole lot of what I heard and experienced at that Conference apart from this: **God can't steer a parked car**. In life I have found that sometimes it's all too easy to become that parked car. This process isn't going to give you all the answers, resolve all your questions, calm every concern, promise easy guarantees, or give you a simple three-step plan. It instead is intended to help introduce you to

² *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*

becoming a *Mission Edge Church*, and encourage you to begin moving ahead so God can do what only He can do, and that is to lead you in the ongoing process of always becoming the Church and churches He calls you to be!!

Week One

“Why Has God Called *Us Here*?”

It was a picture-perfect spring evening. Brand new in my role as a Regional Minister with the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada* (then known as the *Convention of Atlantic Baptists Churches*) I was driving along enjoying the unspoiled beauty of the Belleisle Bay of New Brunswick. Although this province had been my home for all but three years of my life, at the time this was new territory for me.

I was on my way to meet with a Pastoral Search Committee of one of our congregations, and had given myself extra time as I wasn't exactly sure how long the drive might take. I remember thinking that although this was a spectacularly beautiful area, it sure felt like I was in the 'boonies' (I later realized it wasn't nearly as remote as I initially thought). At one point I caught a glimpse of a little white church. I knew it wasn't the church I was heading to, but was curious about its denomination so I turned around and drove back to check it out.

This is when it happened.

Now, before I go further I will tell you that I'm typically a bit of a skeptic whenever I hear claims from those who say they have heard a direct message from God. I think it sounds either a bit hokey (as if it's from the script of 'The Blues Brothers') or at least a bit presumptuous; a claiming for oneself some form of spiritual superiority. It seems like a manipulative way to say "You can't question what I'm saying."

And yet even owning my own baggage, all that I can tell you is I sensed that God met me there as I pulled in to that little church yard. It was a place of epiphany for me.

Whatever it was, I know I wasn't expecting it. Up until that moment I was merely driving along, kind of minding my own business, enjoying the beauty around me, not thinking any deep thoughts in particular.

So what happened?

As I pulled into the parking area, I saw that the church was one of ours ... meaning it was a church that was of our denominational family. I knew of the church by name, but because this was a new area to me I hadn't known where it was located. Sitting there looking at that picturesque but rustic church building, my head dropped and these words seemed to spontaneously well up within me ... "Oh God, why have you brought me here into this role now? So many of these little churches are not going to make it!"

That was not a particularly faith-filled or optimistic sentiment, especially for one who had just come into the denominational role of working with such churches to encourage them towards Kingdom flourishing. And yet, this was the gist of what I was feeling.

Immediately I heard (though admittedly not with my ears) the words "that's not my purpose for them." My initial thought was, "Wow, where did that come from?" But then a whole jumble of impressions erupted. I don't know if they came in a micro-second, or over the next couple minutes. Regardless, here's what I felt I heard God say.

First of all – and this is important – I didn't sense God say that it wouldn't happen; that a number of such churches wouldn't close. In fact, I felt I was hearing that there was real danger and even likelihood it would happen to too many, and not just in rural or other areas coping with out-migration or community decline.

I believed I did hear, however, that these closures weren't what God was purposing for churches, and needn't be inevitable. In other words, it would be wrong for us to blame God if

churches closed, thinking He pulled the plug on them or that it was inevitable as they had lived out their natural life. We also shouldn't chalk it up to the demographics of the area or the spiritual lethargy of these times.

I also sensed God saying: "If my people – this church and all churches – will be the people I call them to be for this place and this time, then they will have a future."³ The clear point of all this was that the future of these churches would rest on whether they were willing to be obedient to whatever – and I mean whatever! – God was calling them to.

Next, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones came flooding into my mind. If you're not familiar with what I'm referring to, it's a great read full of vivid imagery. I won't quote the entire passage but you can read it for yourself in Ezekiel 37. The gist of it is that God is addressing a despondent nation of Israel while they are exiled in Babylon.⁴ Believing that their doom is certain and that the Kingdom has been lost, God announces through his servant Ezekiel that He will yet bring the Jewish exiles back to their cherished Jerusalem.

In his astonishing vision, Ezekiel is led to a valley that is filled with the gruesome sight of dry bones and the Lord asks him "Can these bones become living people again?" "You alone know, O Lord" he replies. God commands Ezekiel to speak to those dry bones telling them that

³ Admittedly, this question – "Why has God called us here for this place, this time, and the future into which He is leading us?" – has been a guiding question that for years has been instrumental in my ministry, and I'll explain more about that shortly.

⁴ If you like many struggle to understand the historical flow of the Old Testament, a very rough approximation of general timeline would be: Abraham to Joseph (approximately 2100 – 1850 BCE); Joseph and the Israelites in Egypt (1850 – 1450 BCE); the Exodus out of Egypt and the desert wanderings (1450 - 1400 BCE); the period of the Judges (1400 – 1100 BCE); the United Kingdom of Kings Saul, David and Solomon (1090 – 930 BCE); civil war divides Israel into the Northern Kingdom [Israel – ten tribes] and the Southern Kingdom [Judah – two tribes] (930 BCE); the Northern Kingdom [Israel] destroyed and scattered by Assyria (725 BCE); the Southern Kingdom [Judah] conquered by Babylonians and its people taken into exile (590 BCE); Jews from the Southern Kingdom start returning to Jerusalem (535 BCE).

He (God) is going to bring them back to life again. Ezekiel does as he is told, and all of a sudden there is a thunderous rattling noise all throughout the valley as those dry bones begin to shuffle together, reassembling and attaching themselves as complete skeletons. As Ezekiel watches, muscles, ligaments and then flesh forms over the bodies. What a macabre scene! Yet even with all this, the bodies remained lifeless.

God then tells Ezekiel to call ‘the breath’ to come from the four winds and breathe life back into these lifeless bodies. Ezekiel obediently does as he is told, and remarkably, living breath comes and enters those dead bodies, they come alive and stand “on their feet, a huge army.”⁵

It was this scene that played like a mental movie clip as I sat there outside that little church. To be clear, I didn’t sense that God was saying all these churches scattered throughout Atlantic Canada were already dead and lifeless. Not at all. The message I was hearing was one of hope, not judgement and rebuke. But too many of these same churches were languishing and therefore fragile and vulnerable, failing to live into the fullness that God purposed for them.

There are two other impressions that were very clear as I sat there in my car.

The first was that we as a denominational family were to open our eyes to the great resource or gift that God had granted to us in having approximately 450 churches scattered throughout the four provinces in Atlantic Canada. In other words, a great opportunity that we as Atlantic Baptists already have is that we have at least some sort of ministry presence within 450 neighbourhoods and communities throughout this part of Eastern Canada.

Some of these churches no doubt had good reputations, others perhaps not so much; but we were at least somewhat known within those neighbourhoods. Other denominations looking

⁵ Ezekiel 37:10

to establish a foothold in this region would be ecstatic to have the kind of existing community relationships that we as a family of churches already have. What this meant was that rather than lament that we have “too many churches” (something that I have heard from time to time) I powerfully sensed God saying that our call was to see all these locations – whether small or large or in between – as gifts entrusted to us by God. It was God’s desire to breathe His breath into all these churches so that they would become vibrant outposts of His love, grace and mercy in the neighbourhoods and communities in which they were located.

The second impression cycled me back to the first message or idea I had initially perceived – the one that said that these churches would have a vital future if they would be whoever and whatever God calls them to be for the place and time in which He has them. I understood that this didn’t mean that all churches were to become clones of one another, but that each was to fully live into their unique God-given identity and purposes that He had specifically for them. For some it would mean recommitting to their ongoing ministry journey for that was still God’s call for them; for others it might mean closing their church and joining with another church or other churches because that was how they could best reach their neighbourhoods today.⁶

I’ll again say, I’m not prone to having experiences like this. But I also will say that I look back to that evening as pivotal, believing that at that time God commissioned me to this role

⁶ One might think this seems contradictory to the primary message that it wasn’t God’s purpose for these churches to close, but an important distinction needs to be made here. A church choosing to cease their affairs and merge with another (or others) so to better reach their region ought not be viewed as a death or closure as much as a rebirth of that church albeit in a different form. A church closure was to be understood as a church ceasing to exist with no new form re-emerging; rebirth – whether as a replant or as merger or as part of a new church in another location and under another name – would mean the church (as the community of Christ followers) was continuing to live on as the church that God was calling them to be.

I have had with our denomination for these past 18-plus years. Again, forgive me if this all sounds self-aggrandizing. It's simply my best effort to relate what I believe I experienced that night, and why I believe asking and answering that underlying question "why has God called us here for this place, this time, and the future into which He is leading us?" is foundational and fundamental for our effectiveness and faithfulness as local churches.

This has been a crucial and significant question since my earliest years in ministry going back to my first congregation in Middle Sackville, New Brunswick.⁷ Like many churches in the early 1980's, the Middle Sackville Baptist Church was a congregation experiencing a degree of decline such that when a candidating pastor asked the Search Committee what their vision was for the church in five years' time, one of the members half-jokingly responded "that the doors would still be open." The individual who made that statement was one of the finest and most faith-filled individuals in the congregation, but at that time he was simply acknowledging that if they stayed on their current trajectory of decline, their future existence was precarious.

As the story was later relayed to me this caused that particular pastor to withdraw his name, thinking that if the limit of this church's vision was simply to keep their doors open, it wasn't the place for him. (Personally, I was always kind of glad that this had happened, for if he hadn't withdrawn his name I would not have had the blessing of pastoring this congregation/field as my first pastorate.)

I'm not exactly sure how others who were a part of the congregation might remember it, but I recall in the early years a certain ongoing anxiety about what God could possibly do

⁷ This was actually a two-church field which also included the precious people of Midgic, but what I relate to you is particularly about the Middle Sackville congregation.

through them. The memory I have is kind of an ongoing wringing of the hands from worry, and conversations that tended to be something like this:

- *“What can God do here ... after all, we’re such an old congregation?”*
- *“What can God do here ... after all, our building is so outdated?”*
- *“What can God do here ... after all, we’re so small in comparison to the other churches around us?”*
- *“What can God do here ... after all, we’re located so far out of town?”*

As we began to acknowledge these fears and apprehensions and work through them, a new conversation gradually began to take shape. It went something like this: *“What if we were to figure out why God has called us here for this place and this time, and live into that? If we can’t figure it out, then we should just shutter the place up and go and join one of the other nearby churches who knows why they’re here. But if we can figure out what God’s purpose is for us, then let’s get on that, while praying God’s blessing upon every other church around us.”*

For a variety of reasons, we saw God do some amazing things in those next half-dozen years as we sought to be faithful to his call to us. It wasn’t all success by any means, but we started to see that little congregation turn around as it modelled the love and grace of God into the lives of people in that neighbourhood and town and region. Slowly the church began to grow; not that it’s all about numbers, but then again numbers are significant for they represent people being touched in some manner by the Good News that is found in Jesus Christ. The congregation roughly tripled in size, from around 40 to about 125 some eight years later. Even better is that this congregation avoided significant turmoil or conflict as it grew into a thriving intergenerational congregation of children, teens, university students, adults both single and in

families, and seniors. Perhaps best of all is that this church is yet today a thriving, creative, missional presence within their neighbourhood and beyond.

There is a church building (maybe a mission hall) in the town of Wenatchee, Washington, with these words painted on its outside wall: “God could have chosen anyone to be here, but he chose you.” This is precisely it!! God has chosen you and your church family to be the right people to reach your neighbourhood (and the world at your doorsteps) with the life-giving news of all that God offers through Jesus Christ. If He wanted someone else to do it, He would have chosen them and not you.

This journey for your congregation is all about seeking how God wants to use you – the people you are, with your strengths, your frailties, your abilities and fallibilities. God’s purpose for your church is that you would be a vibrant, invitational Gospel community making known both through your words and also through your actions the love that God has for all! This, in short, is what being a *Mission Edge Church* is all about (though it will be unpacked in more detail in the following chapter).

For now the question to wrestle with before God is this: Are you still willing to be used in whatever way that God wants to use you?

For Reflection: (As you work your way through this section, try to resist thinking about what others should do to change. Let your primary focus in all these exercises be on what God wants to be saying to you.)

1. Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 (in the *New Living Translation* if possible ... you can find it at biblegateway.com).
 - a. What stands out to you out of this passage?
 - b. Why is having a good skeleton essential for a living person? What is the problem with being only a skeleton? When you think of 'dry bones' – a skeleton essentially – and then think of your church, what comes to mind?
 - c. Do you think there's any significance for us today that even after the skeletal remains had reassembled and been covered with "tendons, flesh and skin" they still needed to be filled with the "breath."
2. What are your thoughts about the phrase of "being the people/church God calls you to be for the place He has you in, the time He has you in, and for the future He is leading you to"?
 - a. Why is it important to include "and the future He is leading us into"? Do you think churches in general lean with anticipation into the future, or are they more likely to lean back into the past, wishing things could be like they used to be? If you could only pick one, which direction (past or future) should the church's focus be?

3. On a scale of 1 – 10, how willing are you for your church to be obedient to **whatever** God is calling you to? _____

a. After giving an overall score for yourself, similarly score yourself on each of these items (don't get hung up on whether your church would ever need to do these things; this exercise is to ask you about your willingness if it was clear God was calling you to do any of these things in order to be more effective and fruitful in ministry):

- i. Removing pews and using chairs instead _____
- ii. Changing the name of your church _____
- iii. Leaving your building and renting space instead _____
- iv. Ceasing your operations and joining with another church _____
- v. Never singing another hymn again _____
- vi. Singing only hymns in the future _____
- vii. Tearing down your building and building new _____
- viii. Having people different from you using and perhaps at times inadvertently damaging your building _____
- ix. Never being in 'your' church building again _____

4. Can you identify 'internal' reasons why God may be hindered from doing all that He would like to through your church (meaning rather than identifying things happening

around you that you can't really control, confine yourself to internal matters that you can control)?

5. It is important for churches to know why they exist. Sometimes these are called 'Vision Statements'. A Vision Statement is a short statement describing the clear and inspirational long-term desired change resulting from the ministry of your church.

Ideally, a good Vision Statement should be:

- a. Honest (meaning appropriate for you as a congregational family)
- b. Ten words or less
- c. Essentially unforgettable
- d. Intriguing (especially to those who are outside of Christian faith)
- e. Inviting
- f. Energizing

Some examples of Vision Statements that other churches have developed are:

- A Place for Everyone
- Solving Life's Puzzles Together
- Living out what we believe
- A place where faith and real life intersect
- Connecting: To God, one another, our world
- Making a lasting difference
- Solid at the Core, Open at the Edges
- Real People. Real Life.

Write a unique vision statement for your church keeping in mind the five criteria of a good vision statement.

6. As you finish this first chapter, note any insights, thoughts, observations, questions that you have found helpful, and then pray to God asking Him to direct you and your church family in this journey of becoming the people that God is calling you to be.

Week Two

“Learning to Love the *Hard-to-Love*”

He was small, wiry, and volatile. I forget the details, but somehow he made his way to our church and there had found a place where he could belong ... at least on the fringes. I wasn't sure of his story, though I think there had been a period of incarceration in his past. Room was made for Kenny because at our best we at First Baptist Moncton were a church that attempted to recognize and honour the inherent God-given dignity of each person who came to us,⁸ remembering that we – both individually and corporately – were called to be the physical presence of Jesus in our community.⁹

This didn't mean we excelled at loving everyone; we certainly didn't. We were but neophytes on a journey. It was challenging to know how to love some of the people that God sent to us. Kenny was certainly high-maintenance; incredibly exasperating, and potentially even dangerous at times. In fact, I remember how one Sunday morning just moments before our worship service was to begin that one of our Deacons came and asked me to talk to Kenny. He was upset about something and was mouthing off that he was going to kill someone. Thankfully Kenny never did harm anyone, but he wasn't always easy to have as a part of the church, and I and others were frustrated with him at times.

I felt that at best we were probably something of a safe place for Kenny and a place he could belong; likely something he never had much of. I suppose my personal compassion for him came in the realization he essentially was a fifty-year old man with a five-year old's

⁸ Hebrews 13:2; Matthew 25:40

⁹ Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:12ff., Galatians 3:27, Colossians 1:18,

emotional composition. I remember that our youngest daughter Molly was five at that time, and I was struck by the incongruence that while it would be unthinkable that we as a society would ever expect her as a five-year-old to somehow survive on the streets on her own, we expected all the Kennys out there to somehow muddle through.

There's one particular incident regarding Kenny that stands out in my mind. Before I tell you the story, you have to understand that on this particular day I was incredibly upset at him. I don't remember why. As I'm writing this now, I'm wondering if what I'm about to tell you may have happened the day after Kenny had made his threats. Regardless, whatever it was, I admittedly was really irked at him, and I didn't handle or hide my irritation very well.

It was a Monday morning and Kenny showed up at my office asking if I would take him for a coffee so we could talk. I agreed. While we sat together in a nearby park, he said something that I just wasn't expecting. He told me he disagreed with something I said in my sermon the previous day. That he – or anyone – disagreed with me wasn't what startled me; it was the fact that Kenny had actually been listening and had processed something I had said.

I asked what it was he had disagreed with. He told me it was that I had said every person who was a part of the Body of Christ was important to the rest of the body; that everyone had something important and necessary to contribute. He then said "I give nothing. I take, but what do I have to give back?" (After all these years I admittedly can't remember the conversation word for word, but I certainly remember the essence of it and I remember the impact his words would come to have on me.)

I'm not particularly proud of my first thoughts when Kenny said this to me. I was still pretty peeved at him, and my first impulse was to agree with him and tell him that I didn't have any idea what he contributed either. Trying to think of something that I could possibly say, and

still dealing with my own anger at him while also figuring he probably wouldn't really get what I was saying, I heard these words come out of my mouth: "Well Kenny, at least you help us learn how to love hard-to-love people." Not my finest moment I know.

I'm not sure what if any impact those words made on him, but as soon as they were out of my mouth a whole bunch of realizations began to dawn on me.

My first thought was essentially this: 'Wait a minute! That in fact IS why God sent Kenny to us ... *to help us learn how to love hard-to-love people.*' In fact, seen in this light Kenny is more of a gift to us than we are to him! If our goal in the Christian life is to become increasingly like Jesus, then don't we need to learn how to really love even when it is difficult to love? After all, as the Apostle Paul emphasizes "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."¹⁰ In other words, while each of us were "hard to love" Christ out of his love died for us!

As all this was rolling over in my mind, I realized I still had it wrong. I was wrong to imagine that Kenny alone was the one hard to love. The truth is, we're all hard to love. You are. I am. We all are Kennys. We all are hard to love. And this is one of the primary reasons why God calls us into meaningful, ongoing community with one another ... not because it's easy or always fulfilling to be in community together, but because at times it's downright hard, and will require everything we have to give – just exactly like Jesus gave to us.

That's the thing about love. It's easy to talk about. Generally, it's pretty easy to think we are such loving people; of course we love faceless and nameless people – provided they remain at a distance, and particularly if they don't pose any significant inconvenience or threat to us. Those of us who are married, however, or who have been brought up in a family or lived with a roommate or been a part of a church family for any period of time, we all know it's not always

¹⁰ Romans 5:8 (NIV)

easy to love someone when you have to do life up close with that other person – when you come face to face with their annoying idiosyncrasies and disappointing flaws and irritating political views and just plain weirdness. The local church – the place where we are to live life out in covenant-community with our fellow believers – is to be one of the primary classrooms where we begin to learn how to love like Jesus loves.

This love that we are called to exhibit is not just to be confined to fellow Jesus-followers within the Body. We are equally to love those in the wider world with the kind of love with which God has first loved us.¹¹ Think of the verses which speak of this:

- “Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”¹²
- “Do everything with love.”¹³
- “If you love only those who love you [or are easy to love], why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them!”¹⁴
- “What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’ – but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?”¹⁵
- “This is my commandment. Love each other in the way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹⁶

¹¹ 1 John 4:19

¹² 1 John 4:7, 8

¹³ 1 Corinthians 16:14

¹⁴ Luke 6:32

¹⁵ James 2:14-16

¹⁶ John 15:12,13

- “Don’t just pretend to love one another. Really love them. ... Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other.”¹⁷
- “Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.”¹⁸
- “If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.”¹⁹

The memory of that conversation with Kenny always moves me deeply because it reminds me that as followers of Jesus we are called to sacrificial love, loving one another even when it is hard or inconvenient or risky. In short, we are to want to love, and work at loving, as God loves. Through both Scripture and all that God has done – His act of Creation, Jesus’ Incarnation, His death and resurrection, giving the Comforter²⁰ – we see that God is a self-sacrificing, generative, pursuant Love²¹ and that He (Father, Son and Spirit) sends us as His people into our neighbourhoods and into all the world to model and *enflesh* that same kind of sacrificial, generative, pursuant love.²² It is this kind of love that is to at the very heart of *Mission Edge Churches*.

The CBAC and ‘*Mission Edge Churches*’

First the “why” and “what” of *Mission Edge Churches*.

¹⁷ Romans 12:9, 10

¹⁸ 1 Peter 4:8

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:3

²⁰ John 14:26 (KJV) – also translated as Advocate, Helper, Friend,

²¹ Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:37-39; Ephesians 2:4; 1 John 4:8, 16

²² Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 11; Psalm 82:2-4; Proverbs 31:8-9; Isaiah 1:17; Isaiah 58:6-7; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:37-40; Luke 6:35-36; Luke 6:38; John 15:12-13; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 John 3:16-18

Church delegates who attended the 2011 *Oasis* (the Annual Gathering of the churches of the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*) formally accepted a plan that outlined what the CBAC might look like by the year 2025 if we would “humble ourselves and seek the Lord.” Incorporated in this plan were a series of goals, one of which was that by that year “80% of CBAC churches would display a missional culture.”

The term *missional* was not necessarily a familiar term for all, and so at that time some possible markers were identified to express what a church with a missional culture might look like. Such markers included:

- Churches being defined and known by the effectiveness of their ministry in their community and beyond
- Churches understanding that a significant way of addressing and meeting the spiritual needs of their members would be by mobilizing them and their spiritual gifts outward into their wider community
- Whether on their own or in partnership with other community agencies (or both), churches actively engaging the community through ministries addressing issues such as poverty, affordable housing, literacy, justice for oppressed people groups, addictions recovery, disaster relief, stewardship of resources, etc.

Missional terminology emerged in earnest in the last decade or two of the twentieth century. Some contend that this missional emphasis is only a fad or bandwagon that will have its day and will eventually give way to something new. Others see it as calling the church back to the fullness of its mission as the people of God for the place and time in which He has them. This latter understanding is the view of this guide and the CBAC’s invitation to churches to embrace *Mission Edge*.

At the heart of the missional understanding is that God is a God of Love, and it is His intent to bring blessing and wholeness and restoration for His whole Creation. Since humanity is a part of this Creation, God wants to bring you and me and our neighbour next door and those who live on the other side of the world this same blessing, wholeness and restoration. He therefore calls, equips, and mobilizes those who are His people (that is, the Church) to join Him in living into and carrying out this mission.

A decision was subsequently made by the CBAC to tweak the language and to begin using the term of ‘*Mission Edge*’ instead of missional. Although the terms were generally understood to be interchangeable, the expression *Mission Edge* was felt to convey that as followers of Christ we as CBAC churches want to live as agents of God’s love on the front line (or ‘edge’) of His mission into the world. At the time of the terminology change, the goal was also restated that “by the year 2025 a minimum of 300 of CBAC churches will identify as *Mission Edge Churches*.” **This guide is one means to help you individually and your church family understand what this may mean for you, and enable you to covenant together to be one of the 300 *Mission Edge* churches.**

Joining God in Your Neighbourhoods

Mission Edge starts with the realization that in love God by His Spirit is always operating way out in front of us. We deceive ourselves if we think that by our best efforts we need to ‘kick-start’ God into action, as if He is like some old motorcycle engine reluctant to start. Rather, He’s already at work and it is He who invites us into what He is doing in bringing His Kingdom presence and transformation into our communities. Our responsibility is to open up our eyes and

consider all that God is already doing in us, through us, and around us, all in light of how He wants to further use us.

Mission Edge living calls us to look Upward, Inward and Outward:

- Upward in worship
- Inward in getting to know Him through the study of His Word, prayer, meditation, and fellowship with one another; and
- Outward into our neighbourhoods and world, getting to know, love, and serve the people and world around us.

The formal definition of *Mission Edge Churches* is this: “**communities of Jesus-followers who align themselves around His continuing mission of sacrificial love – starting right within their neighbourhoods, and from there radiating His love to neighbourhoods all around the world.**”

Although this is the definition for *Mission Edge Churches*, is this not what every church is rightly called to be? Communities of Jesus-followers, who align themselves around Jesus’ ongoing mission of sacrificial love, living out this sacrificial love starting right where we’re located and from there reaching out into the wider world as we have opportunity. How could any church pull back from that and still consider themselves a church?

In short, *Mission Edge Churches* meaningfully live into their calling of ‘Joining Jesus in their Neighbourhoods’²³ **as His physical presence**. Do you get that? The local, neighbourhood church is to display and manifest the physical presence of Jesus. People should be able to look at the church and see Jesus every bit as much as Jesus’ contemporaries in Galilee could see him in the flesh some 2000 years ago. God’s purpose for the Church – and consequently for each local

²³ This is the Vision Statement of the CBAC

church outpost in every place – is and has always been that we would be His people, living the Jesus-way in this world that God so deeply loves and moves into.

Let me be crystal clear. The *Mission Edge* model does not for a moment suggest that all churches become clones of one another. Just the opposite!! In so many ways each church is to be unique, just as every individual is to be unique. Your church community is unique in terms of the people who make it up, the abilities and other resources that are accessible to them, the communities in which you are located, and the needs and opportunities that exist within your particular community. That's why each church must always honestly be asking the all-important question, "Why is God calling us here for this place and this time?" and then seeking to live out the answer they receive. A note of caution, however: it can be all too easy for even the best intentioned and most devout of us to be guilty of presuming we know the answer to that question without ever really taking it before God and waiting on Him and listening to Him for His answer.

Without minimizing the uniqueness of each local congregation or community of God's people, there are certain core elements of our mission that should be common to every community of Jesus-followers, in every place through all of time, who seek to live out the Gospel.²⁴ We have therefore identified six markers or characteristics that ought to naturally distinguish every *Mission Edge* Church.

²⁴ Central to being a *Mission Edge Church* is grappling with what the Bible means when it speaks of the Gospel (often referred to as the Good News). The Gospel is more than simply knowing that "Jesus died for our sins", though it's certainly not less than that as that is at the very core of the Gospel. The Gospel also rightly addresses concerns such as compassionate care and advocacy "for the least of these", social justice issues, creation care, and so much more, because the central message of the Gospel is that God loves His creation and He is the Initiator in seeking to heal all of creation (Romans 8:21, 22) ... including our alienated relationship with Him and with one another. At the core of the Gospel, then, is that at His own 'cost' God in love has paid the price to restore us to relationship to Him. This is powerfully demonstrated through the Cross and the Resurrection. This is the only way there ever can be true reconciliation between alienated parties. It always has to be the 'wronged' – the one who has suffered the offence – who

Before identifying these six *Mission Edge* markers, let me emphasize two quick points. The first is that these are not listed in any sense of decreasing rank of importance. Imagine a wheel that has six spokes all emanating from the hub. What if someone was to ask you to identify the most important spoke? You couldn't do it, because every spoke is integral to the structure of the wheel. It's the same way with these six *Mission Edge* markers. The first marker is admittedly intentionally placed first, not because it's more important than the others but because all the following markers should be equally evident in both modes (gathered and scattered) of the church which are identified in the first marker.

Secondly, like the spokes of a wheel, all six of these markers require and reinforce the others, not unlike the various fruit of the Spirit.²⁵ Each of the fruit ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control," as the New International Version identifies them) essentially require and complete one another. One can't really say I have peace but not joy, or goodness but not gentleness, or faithfulness but not self-control. It is similar with the six identified *Mission Edge* markers. While it would be appropriate to consider how we might challenge ourselves or grow in effectiveness with regards to any of the particular markers, they are all interdependent and reinforce the other.

The Six *Mission Edge* Markers

- Lives the Jesus Way (Both When Gathered and Scattered) – A *Mission Edge* church recognizes that the local church is like a beating heart, continually contracting and

ultimately pays the price to bring the 'offender' back into restored relationship. As long as I as the 'offended' believe that the offender yet owes me something to make up for the offence, I can't be in truly restored relationship. I have to release them from their debt to me, and I can only do that by 'dying' to the sense that I am entitled to further restitution.

²⁵ Galatians 5:22,23

expanding, over and over and over again, renewing life in the process. This means the church is the church not just when it gathers together, but also as its people scatter or ‘pulse’ out to their normal day-to-day worlds. Coming together we *gather* around Jesus in practices of worship, learning, community, and preparation. Such gathering together around Jesus also renews, prepares and then propels us to scatter outwardly with Jesus into our daily lives: to our families, our offices, the factory floors, the classrooms, the hockey rinks and baseball diamonds and theater groups. In all these places we seek to join in what Jesus is doing as we serve as His hands and feet.

- Radiates Hospitality – In a world with far too much unkindness and isolation, *Mission Edge Churches* are composed of people who extend welcome and kindness to all who cross their paths. The word ‘kind’ comes from the word ‘kin’ or ‘kindred.’ Kin are those people who are close to us, like family. Hospitality is about welcoming all we meet as family, as kindred. In welcoming all as kin, we are living out *kin’ness*, a fruit of the Spirit. Hospitality is viewing all of life as God’s table, where we get to welcome others to come and sit and be family; to know and be known, to love and be loved.
- Fluent in the Good News – People of *Mission Edge Churches* know and celebrate the Story of the Good News and understand how to comfortably and naturally speak it in ways appropriate to the various contexts they find themselves. God’s grand story is one we first heard from others who passed it along to us with joy and hope, with the hopes that it might become our Story too. We are here because this Story of God entered the story of our life. Like people who can hardly wait for the opportunity to tell a piece of terrific news that we have heard, so we want to let others in on what we have experienced and found to be true. Both in our gathering and our scattering, people of *Mission Edge*

Churches want to be fluent as they speak the language of God's love, telling their neighbours who Jesus is and what God is up to, even in the here and now.

- Embodies the Good News – *Mission Edge Churches* understand that God calls us to make His love known not only through words, but also through our actions rooted in grace and truth. This means we also want to tell the story of the Good News through living lives that have been transformed by the power of this story. Both the Incarnation (God taking on human flesh in Jesus) and Scripture make clear that God's love is concrete, tangible, relevant – out of the knowledge that both the physical as well as the spiritual are important to God. Giving a cup of cold water, being the first to apologize and take responsibility, feeding the hungry, providing for those in need, caring for our neighbour's children, driving a senior to a doctor's appointment ... all are ways we can make visible the reality of the Good News Story found in Jesus.
- Embrace Partnerships – *Mission Edge Churches* seize on the truth that God is already at work all around us, and He is inviting us to join Him in what He is doing. People of these churches therefore embrace partnering with others who are similarly moved by God's agenda, whether that's sharing in hosting an *Alpha* gathering, providing after-school tutoring for children, coaching a minor hockey team. 'Embracing Partnerships' can mean welcoming others to join you in what God is leading you or your church to do; or it may mean your partnering with them in what they are doing. Partnerships not only multiply impact but facilitate friendships, and these friendships can naturally become fertile grounds for sharing the Good News Story.
- Contextual Responsiveness – People of *Mission Edge Churches* know that they are uniquely rooted in their place. There is no one who can know and love a place like those

who live in its midst. People of *Mission Edge Churches* understand that even their micro-culture around them is continually morphing, and they have a responsibility to keep abreast, studying and considering how they can most appropriately speak and live into that culture lest they needlessly become a stumbling-block hindering others in their journey to Jesus. Such churches also develop eyes to see the unique way God is at work among them. They understand how important cultural intelligence is and like spiritual detectives they look to discern God's loving purposes for their special corner of the world. Rather than operate out of hostility, fear or arrogance, *Mission Edge Churches* adopt a posture of grace, calmness and humility as they seek to join Jesus in building bridges with those in their neighbourhoods around them.

Is this everything to being a *Mission Edge Church*? Well, no and yes. No in that there would always be more to say and explain and expand and nuance. Yes, however, in that being *Mission Edge* is about a direction that you are headed, a journey that you're on.

When I first arrived in Vancouver as a seminary student, having never even visited the West Coast before and not knowing anybody, I caught the bus from the West Point Grey area and headed downtown to Granville Street and the Pacific Centre. When it was time to head home after completing my shopping, I realized that not only did I not know which bus to take, I didn't even know which direction I should be heading. I got on a waiting bus and told the driver my predicament. He asked where I was headed, told me what bus number to watch for, and then he said "Always look to see where the mountains are. The mountains are to the North (behind North Vancouver) and once you see them, you'll know which direction you should head." That

has stayed with me. Often when the next steps have seemed obscure or murky to me, I at least have wanted to make sure I had reference points in place from which I could orient my next step.

The Mission Edge model offers some helpful ‘reference points’ for us. One reference point is that whatever our mission will ultimately look like, it will be about loving people with a sacrificial love even when we discover their name is ‘Kenny’ and they prove to be hard and difficult and costly and exasperating to love. A second is that rather than imagining we’re looking for God to join us in our mission, we instead are looking to join Him in what He already is doing. Some ways in which we can discern what He is doing is to consider what ‘holy mischief’²⁶ He seems to be stirring in us (i.e. what lights us up – what we may be passionate about), through us, and around us. Some of our mission will be done jointly with our fellow community of Jesus-followers, other parts of our mission will be those things that He calls us personally to as extensions of that local church. And the third horizon-marker really has six smaller markers within it:

As communities of Jesus-followers we want to:

- Live the Jesus Way (both when Gathered and Scattered)
- Radiate Hospitality
- Develop fluency in the Good News
- Embody the Good News
- Embrace Partnerships
- Be Culturally Responsive.

²⁶ ‘Holy Mischief’ is a phrase that Michael Beck of Fresh Expressions US is often fond of using.

For Reflection:

1. Read Luke 10:25 – 37. Identify three insights from this passage that speak to being a *Mission Edge Church*.
2. An explicit definition of love has not been given in this chapter. What do you understand Jesus means when he says to “love your neighbour”?
3. How has spiritual maturity typically been understood in your church? What is your response to the assertion that a key part of maturing in Christ is that we learn how to love even when it is hard and costly to love.
4. What is your response to the understanding that the church exists as it both *gathers* and *scatters*? What does it mean to be ‘the church’ when you are at your office or taking care of your grandchildren or at the rink cheering on the home team?
5. *Mission Edge* calls us as God’s people to make known His love through both our words as well as our actions. We typically are wired to want to emphasize one over the other, but we are equally called to do both. Many people find it challenging to think of how to

explain their faith to someone else even if they're interested. Imagine this scenario: You're on an airplane, and the person in the seat next to you has discovered that you identify as a believer, and has been asking you about that. Just as you are landing and you have only 2 and a half minutes before it will be time to deplane the person outright asks you this question: "So, what does it mean to be a Christian, and if I wanted to become one what would I need to do?" In a maximum of 250 words, what would you say to them? (to assist you with thinking about this, you will see a number of contributions others have given to this in *Resources* at the end of this book).

6. Is there any reason you can think of why your church would not want to commit itself to be a *Mission Edge Church*?

7. In finishing, note any insights, thoughts, observations, questions that you have found helpful, and then pray that God will give you a heart that longs for the same things that He longs for. Pray also that He will help you see that your work, your home, your volunteer activities, your places of recreation are all places where He gives you opportunity to serve Him there, and that He also will open your eyes to the ways in which He wants to use you in those various places.

Week Three

“What’s in Our Hand?”

“So let’s think about it. What do we have? What do we have in our hands?”

Silence.

“No really, think about it. We have been given so much. What do we have?”

Blank stares. A little shuffling of feet.

Finally, after an indeterminant time a hesitant voice speaks up, “Well, I have Alzheimer’s.”

“Yes. ... Yes Lloyd. Yes you do. Thank you. And so, for the rest of us ... what do we have?”

Again, crickets, as they say. You could have heard a pin drop.

“We have so much. Let’s list the things we have in our hands.”

Again, no one was speaking up so as always wanting to be supportive of Heather – the pastor of this little church, the one asking the questions, and most importantly his wife – Lloyd again spoke up, “Well, as I said, I have Alzheimer’s.”

Thinking that she should perhaps try to work with this, Heather²⁷ turned to Lloyd and said “Yes Lloyd, you do have Alzheimer’s. But that’s not all you have. You have numerous abilities, interests. Let’s think about those. What do you like to do?”

“Well, I like to sing.”

²⁷ Having entered into ministry later in life, Pastor Heather was serving her first small congregation in semi-rural Nova Scotia. I have Heather’s permission to share this story with you, and although I haven’t captured everything precisely, she assures me it represents the gist of what happened.

“You do like to sing, don’t you? And you’re a good singer.” Turning to the others, Heather continued: “So Lloyd likes to sing. What about the others of you? What do you like to do? What skills, what interests do you have? What kind of resources have we been given that we can put to use?”

The conversation in the room began to open up a bit as people started to chime in. They had a piano, and a piano player (likely it was Heather herself, the Pastor). They had a building people could meet in. They had hymnals. They had a furnace for heat, and electricity for putting the tea on, and chairs to sit on. As Maritimers they certainly knew how to put together sandwiches and sweets ... enough to feed a proverbial army. They had numerous relationships with people in their community, phones to use, cars to drive. Like popcorn starting to pop, people began to catch on and they kept offering their input.

Initially their thinking had been they had very little to work with, as they were just a small congregation – not more than a dozen on a ‘good Sunday.’ They had so many limitations. Their building was small and outdated; no doubt it would be considered quaint by some. Moreover, it wasn’t *their* fault that people had generally lost interest in church, and for those relatively few who still attended, there were all kinds of larger, better resourced churches all within an easy drive that drew them away. As a small church they couldn’t possibly hope to compete with those larger churches.

This exercise challenged them to see things differently. Rather than a preoccupation with all they didn’t have, they began to consider all those things that God had entrusted to them. A weather-tight building. Electricity. A furnace. Chairs. A piano. A piano player. Connections and relationships into the community. Hymnals. Individuals and families in the community coping with dementia. The knowledge of how to put on a lunch. On and on it went.

Truth is, I'm not sure how it all transpired as I wasn't there and only heard about it after the fact, but basically when they began to add all this together – the resources they had available to them, the life-experiences they brought to the table (such as living with and loving those who are elderly and experiencing the effects of dementia), and some of the needs they were able to identify within their community – the idea began to form that one thing they could perhaps do to show God's love into their community was offer a choir for those living with dementia. After settling upon this as one possible undertaking they could attempt, they began to get serious about doing it. Soon, they began a weekly afternoon choir practice/hymn sing for such individuals within their community.

Word began to spread, and numbers began to grow. Interestingly, those impacted by this ministry weren't just those who came to sing, but perhaps even more significantly included the caregivers to these family members. This time offered something of a respite for the spouses, children, and other caregivers, offering them a couple of hours once per week to drop their loved one off at a place where they would be safe and cared for, and they themselves could use that bit of time to go get a few groceries, or stop to get a coffee and relax, or simply to go home and catch a few winks without having to keep one ear open. Soon, invitations began to be received for the choir to go out and sing, maybe at a seniors' residence or a special service. It meant that not only were these individuals experiencing some socialization while they were enjoying singing (as I understand it, singing involves a part of the brain that is often spared by the ravages of the dementia) but they were also able to give back, something fundamentally important for all of us as humans.

And all of this began with Pastor Heather asking the question "What's in our hand?"

This is always a key question for any *Mission Edge Church*. For Pastor Heather the question had come from Luther Snow's book 'Asset Mapping' that she had discovered in a class she was taking at nearby Acadia Divinity College.

As I understand it, Snow's book essentially builds from God's question to Moses in Exodus chapters 3 and 4. Moses is in the process of trying to tell God that he's just not up to the task that God has for him (that of going to Pharaoh with the little message that he should give the Israelites a few days off to wander out to the wilderness to worship). When Moses tries to tell God he's far too inadequate for such an undertaking, God responds by asking him "What's that you've got in your hand?" You likely know what it was. It was a rod; a shepherd's stick or staff. We're not told whether this rod was some powerfully symbolic ceremony-stick that perhaps his father-in-law Jethro had given him, or if it was merely some broken stick he had picked up by the side of the path. Either way it makes little difference to what happens next. Regardless of the nature of this stick or rod, God instructed Moses to throw it on the ground and when he obediently complied the stick became a snake no less!! (I have to admit, I am no fan of snakes.)

Of course, in Moses' day a snake was far more than just a snake, for the deadly Egyptian cobra was a symbol of Pharaoh's power. There's therefore a lot to unpack out of the significance of Moses' rod or staff being turned into a snake, but that can be for another time. For our purposes, the significance is that when Moses obediently laid his ordinary shepherd's staff before God, God did the extraordinary with Moses' ordinary.

God still is in the business of wanting to do the extraordinary with our ordinary, no matter what that might be. It may be our limited skills, our building, our pews, our financial

resources, our relationships ... whatever ordinary things we have through which He can do the extraordinary if we will only obediently lay them down before Him.

This story of Pastor Heather and her little Mt. Denson church is one of my favorite stories that illustrates this principle: God wants to work through those ordinary things that we often feel are too mundane, too commonplace. God wants to work through you and through your church, no matter what your size, your age, your resources, your location. He wants to bless and love your community through your *Mission Edge Church*, and as you serve Him in these kinds of ways He will open up opportunities where you'll be able to share with others "the reason for the hope that you have."²⁸

It is right and natural that as Christians we wish to glorify God. Glorify is one of those words that we can all too easily use but find a challenge to define precisely what we mean by it. The term 'glory' can refer to the presence, the greatness, and the splendour of God. It is also a word that speaks of the reputation or character of God. Therefore, to want our lives to 'glorify God' means that we want to live our lives in a manner that reveals God's presence and helps others have a greater understanding of God's true character, of what He truly is like. As *Mission Edge Churches*, then, we are to live our lives in community in ways that as people observe and experience us, they'll have a greater or more accurate understanding of what God is like AND they'll also experience God's actual presence through our behaviour.

It therefore is important that we as churches think of how God wants to reveal Himself to our communities through us. This little church at Mt. Denson identified that a choir for people with dementia could be one of the ways through which their neighbours could experience God's actual love and care and consequently gain a clearer understanding of what He is truly like.

²⁸ 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

The question for you and your church to explore is, how does God invite you to glorify Him? In other words, how does God want to show your neighbours His loving and compassionate care through you? (Hint ... think about where your abilities and gifts, your passions, and effectiveness for the Kingdom intersect ... this is likely where God would call you to be engaged in serving Him.)

For Reflection:

1. Read Exodus 4:1 – 4. Why do you think God asked Moses to throw his rod on the ground? What might the rod have represented to him? What strikes you as most significant in the rod becoming a snake?
2. Too many of us often think that because we're not the Sydney Crosby (hockey) or the Mozart (music) of anything, that means we don't have any skills, abilities, or gifts. That's not true. We all have some skills. In thinking about "what's in our hand", make a list of all the skills that you personally have. Be as extensive and creative as you can. (You can find a sample list in the 'Resources' at the end of this Guide.)
3. Now, think of the skills that you know other people in your church have that you don't have. Again, be as exhaustive as you can.

4. What resources has God given to you as a congregation? Just like the church at Mt. Denson had a building, heat, furnace, electricity, piano, piano player, hymnals, etc., what are the things that your church has? Be as exhaustive as you can in answering this question.
5. What might it mean for you to “throw to the ground” those things that are in your hands? What might it mean for your church?
6. Think about the neighbourhood/community your church is located in. What are some unique needs and opportunities that you can think of?
7. Can you think of one unique ministry or mission your church isn’t currently doing that you think God is giving you opportunity to do?
8. *Mission Edge Churches* embrace partnerships. This means that at times we are able to support others in the things they are doing (this could include everything from helping out at a Food Bank to serving at a school breakfast program to coaching minor hockey to building homes with Habitat to hosting Alpha with another church).

- a. Identify all the organizations and groups that you can think of that are - in their way - showing God's love or caring about the things God cares about, and note what they are doing.
 - b. Can you think of things you as a church are doing, or could be doing, that groups such as these might be willing to partner with you on?
9. As you finish this section, note any insights, thoughts, observations, questions that you have found helpful, and then pray to God asking that He will open your eyes to see all the various resources that He has put in your hand, and that He also will show you what it means to lay those things down before Him to use. Pray also that He will help your church family likewise see the ways He wants to creatively use you within your own neighbourhood and beyond.

Week Four

“Mapping Out the Adventure!”

Ok, I admit it. I really like trips. Frankly, the longer the better.

I think it goes back to being a kid and going on vacation with my parents. We would (or better said, they would) pack up the tent trailer and we'd head off to places like Sebago Lake in Maine or Kejimikujik in Nova Scotia. I also always looked forward to those weekends when we would head out for the four-hour drive to the home of my grandparents in western New Brunswick. A highlight of the trip would be getting to Fredericton where we would stop for a treat of a bottle of Coke and a bag of barbeque chips (still a favourite!).

As an adult I've been fortunate to enjoy some great trips. One that stands out to me is the summer Wendy and I were married. We stashed all our essentials into our little non-air conditioned Chevrolet Chevette (how's that for a flash from the past?) and drove cross-continent in eight days so that I could begin seminary at Regent College in Vancouver. I loved that trip! I considered it to be Part 2 of the honeymoon, though I am not sure that's exactly how Wendy saw the marathon driving. I still can vividly recall putting up our little pup tent each night (except the night in Bismarck, North Dakota when it was about 105° F/40° C in the evening ... so we used the \$50 my folks had given to us for a rainy night and we got a wonderful air conditioned room at the Comfort Inn that seemed very luxurious at the time), rolling out the sleeping bags, cooking supper on the two-burner Coleman stove, and then the next day again seeing mile after mile of passing countryside and spectacular mountain passes.

In 1998 we took our first cross-Canada trip as a family. Our three girls were 12, 10, and 3 at the time. Molly was only turning 3 on that trip and realizing that she would have few if any

memories of it I purposed then to do one more cross-country trip with her prior to her graduating from high school.

That trip happened twelve years later, the summer Molly was turning 15. For the first leg of the journey (all the way to California) it was just Molly, me, and our dog, Kenzie. In all we had 35 days set aside (having saved a week of vacation from the previous year). Towing a travel trailer meant we weren't able to travel as quickly as I had anticipated, so it was late on many of the nights as we were pulling into a campground or a Wal-Mart parking lot.

We travelled all the way to Vancouver Island, then down through Washington to the Oregon Coast and on to the California coast. It was there in San Francisco that Wendy finally was able to join us for the rest of the trip back home.

The reason why I tell you about my enjoyment of travel is because taking a trip is something of a metaphor or picture for the journey that you as a church family are on.

There have been plenty of trips that I have planned that haven't worked out. One that my wife will often remind me of is that I had promised her that we would go to England while my brother and his wife were living there. It is now nearly 30 years since they moved back to Canada, and we still haven't made it to England.

Here are a few observations about trips that might have relevance for this journey that you and your church are on.

First, understand that planning a trip is not the same thing as actually taking the trip. As I have already said, I have planned a number of trips that we haven't been able to take. Similarly, I have seen numerous churches make plans for a trip, only to end up never actually taking the trip. On many occasions I have later consulted with these same congregations and when I talk with them about strategic or intentional planning for their future they will tell me they have

already tried, but to no avail. When I press a little deeper I discover they did do some planning at one point, but never actually followed through by putting the plan into action. Don't do that. As important as it is to plan your trip, don't stop there. Be intent for your congregation to actually follow through in "taking the trip."

Second, embrace the trip as an adventure. I find there are two kinds of travelers. The first are those who essentially moan and complain about how far it is, how it's not like home, that they're missing their bed and their television and the food back home. The second kind of travelers are those who are always eager for what yet lies ahead, the new territory they'll see, the progress that will be made. Be traveler number two. Commit yourself and keep a positive spirit. Lean into the journey; adopt a can-do spirit of adventure. No matter how tired you might feel at the end of one day, be excited about all that will happen the next.

Third, recognize that any trip requires distinguishing between things you need to take with you and things you need to leave behind. When Wendy and I moved to Vancouver to start married life, there were many items we needed to leave behind, that we just couldn't fit into our little Chevette. However, Wendy still reminds me that we took too much ... my books, a sewing machine, good china, and more ... all crammed into our little Chevette along with our tent, camp stove, cooler and more. The point remains we just can't take it all with us; not for a trip that's going to be worthwhile. Like the Israelites leaving Egypt, we need to be prepared to travel light, taking the essentials with us and leaving the non-essentials behind.

Fourth, understand that as a congregation you likely won't get to do everything you've planned to do, but also be prepared for many new opportunities that will emerge that you hadn't initially anticipated.

I know that Molly and I (and Wendy after she joined us) were able to do lots of what we anticipated doing. We saw the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa; camped at Pancake Bay Provincial Park in Ontario (we had great memories of camping there some 12 years previously); reconnected with plenty of friends along the way; saw the Rocky Mountains; visited Waterton Lakes and Glacier National Parks; drove along Howe Sound, visited Vancouver Island; saw the Redwoods Forest and the coastline of California; and visited Mount Rushmore.

There were also lots of things we thought we'd get to do but which ended up not working out. We really wanted to visit Alcatraz but that wasn't to be. There were other landmarks that Molly wanted to see that we missed. All my life I had wanted to drive over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and although we did get to do that, it was very anticlimactic as it was cold, rainy and foggy and I really didn't manage to see the bridge at all. (In fact, one huge surprise was that the California coastline was far cooler than I was anticipating; it was almost like being on the Bay of Fundy. Admittedly, a friend of ours did try to prepare us when she told me "remember what Mark Twain said, 'the coldest winter I ever experienced was one summer in San Francisco.'")

But there was much we were able to do that we had never anticipated. A few highlights that stand out in my memory were: Driving the 'Highway to the Sun' in Glacier National Park; discovering the rugged beauty of the Oregon Coast; visiting Hearst Castle on the coast of California; and really every view and vista we saw as we rounded a corner or crested a hill.

You see, the point is we wouldn't have been able to experience all that if we didn't do the planning for the trip, and then even more importantly actually follow through in taking the trip ... in putting our plan into action.

Fifth and finally, embarking on a new journey can be daunting. I remember the anxiety I felt in the pit of my stomach that foggy morning Molly and I drove away from Saint John, wondering whether we would really make it all the way. Were we crazy to think we could? Would calamity befall us? Would the Jeep and trailer withstand the rigors of the trip? To this day I am so glad that we didn't let the apprehension deter us, for in the process we made life long memories that we as a family continue to savor and talk about.

I hope you and your church family will similarly plunge into this exciting trip of intentionally becoming a *Mission Edge Church*. I am glad you have made the commitment to be a part of this planning process that will culminate with you and your church family spending a day together working on some of the final plans exploring what being a *Mission Edge Church* could look like for you.

During that day you will revisit many of the matters you have considered thus far, especially as they relate to the vision and the mission of your church. Together you will consider the needs and opportunities that exist everywhere around you in your neighbourhood and in your world. You will itemize the various resources and abilities that God has placed in your hand. You will identify those things you absolutely must take with you into this future journey; and those things you now will have to leave behind. Together you'll consider what Jesus would do with the same resources you have if he was in your neighbourhood in the same physical manner that he was when he was walking around Galilee with his disciples some 2000 years ago. You'll also ask yourself if (i) you are currently doing those same things, (ii) if not why not, and (iii) are you willing to do those things?

God is not done with you as a church. As long as you have life He has a plan for you and purpose for you. So plunge into all that He has ahead for you!

For Reflection:

1. Read Exodus 16:1 – 4. If you're not certain of the context, check out the chapters that come before it. It is early on in the Israelite's Exodus from Egypt heading for the promised land.
 - a. What strikes you about this passage? How might it relate to your situation?
 - b. What has happened for the Israelites just two chapters earlier? What's the significance of that to what's happening here in the early part of Exodus 16?
 - c. In what ways are we prone to behaving like these Israelites?
2. What will it mean for you to lean into this journey you as a church are embarking on?
3. Will you covenant that you will:
 - a. Pray for the Pastor and others giving leadership through this exercise
 - b. Be supportive of the journey through your prayers, patience, positivity, participation and philanthropy (meaning financial support).
 - c. Encourage others to equally participate in a positive way.

4. In finishing, note any insights, thoughts, observations, questions that you have found helpful, and then pray asking God to give you a continued right attitude about this exercise, and that you will commit to completely doing your part to be fully supportive of it. Ask him to multiply these efforts and bring Kingdom blessing out of them, just as Jesus multiplied the few loaves and fish to feed the 5000.

In Closing: For Congregational Leaders
Making Use of *Mission Edge, You, and Your Church*

Introduction

One of my favourite quotes might not even be an actual quote. It is often ascribed to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry²⁹: “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

Whether an accurate transcription of anything Saint-Exupéry actually wrote,³⁰ I think it’s a great quote. Obviously, if one wants to build a ship it would be necessary to find workers (both men and women!), divide the work, and give the requisite directions, but if we don’t first instill a “yearn(ing) for the vast and endless sea,” the love, passion and commitment for the undertaking will be lost.

However true that might be for a great project such as building a ship, it is even more true for Jesus-followers as we look to carry out the love-mission that God calls us to in these days. I think that if we are honest, many of us find ourselves questioning how and where we fit into the communities that God has placed us in.

That’s where this resource and strategic-planning process comes in. Not only is it meant to introduce your congregation to *Mission Edge Churches*, but it also is about cultivating a vision of what God wants to graciously do through them. The *Mission Edge* invitation is not about

²⁹ Saint-Exupéry (1900- 1944) was a French writer, poet and aviation pioneer, perhaps best known internationally for his work ‘Le Petit Prince (‘The Little Prince’).

³⁰ Researchers have not found a precise match for this statement in the translations of his work, although there is this passage from his 1948 book ‘Citadelle’ (Section LXXV): “Building a boat isn’t about weaving canvas, forging nails, or reading the sky. It’s about giving a shared taste for the sea, by the light of which you will see nothing contradictory but rather a community of love.” (from www.quoteinvestigator.com)

trying to guilt people into endlessly doing more and more. Instead, it is intended to help them discover ways God wants to work through them in those places where He already has planted them and in ways that are in keeping with who they are.

The Hedgehog Concept

In his book *Good to Great*³¹ author Jim Collins introduces the ‘Hedgehog Concept.’ This understanding is based on the ancient Greek parable that although the fox knows many things, the hedgehog’s advantage is that it knows one big thing. In the parable the fox uses many strategies to try and catch the hedgehog. It sneaks around, plays dead, pounces quickly. Not so for the hedgehog. Unlike the fox it is not quick, agile, or particularly sly. In fact, there’s a long list of things it doesn’t do especially well. There is, however, one big advantage the hedgehog has, and it is this one advantage that has enabled the hedgehog to not only survive but thrive in spite of the fox’s best efforts. The hedgehog’s advantage is literally its protection. Like the far-larger porcupine, the hedgehog is covered by a coat consisting of sharply-pointed quills. When feeling vulnerable or threatened, it flexes its muscles in such a manner that causes those quills to rigidly stand up erect becoming crisscrossed, interlocked, and unyielding. It then protects itself by curling its head and feet into its body in a circular shape, in essence becoming a prickly ball.

Collins’ point is that like the hedgehog, healthy and effective organizations (which includes congregations) similarly know, rely on, and utilize the one big thing that is its natural advantage.

³¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t* (USA: William Collins, 2001).

You might have at least two questions as you consider this in regards to the congregation you're a part of. The first question could be "Isn't every church supposed to have the same mission – hence, shouldn't every church have the same Hedgehog Concept?" Your second might be, "How does an organization know what it's unique Hedgehog Concept is?"

Let's address the initial question first. While it is true that every church should have the same essential mission – making God known, glorifying Him, embodying His love, growing disciples – the truth is that every church will not only verbalize that mission in a slightly different way, but will also live it out in ways unique to who they are in their particular context or setting.

Let's use the example of two restaurants to illustrate. Both restaurants share a common mission. They both seek to provide great-tasting, locally-sourced food for an appropriate cost while providing exceptional customer service.

The first restaurant is what is typically known as a fine-dining restaurant. Situated in a repurposed warehouse overlooking a harbour in a trendy part of town, attention is given to every part of the experience: the music that is played, the art that hangs on the walls, the uniquely designed china and stoneware that has been exclusively created for them. This is the kind of restaurant that prides itself on minute attention to detail, perfect execution, culinary excellence, and brilliant service.

Contrast this first restaurant with a second restaurant. Again, like the first restaurant, this restaurant shares a common mission: to provide great tasting, locally-sourced food at an appropriate price while providing exceptional customer service. The second restaurant is a family diner fronted by a large parking lot situated in a blue-collar section of an industrial city.

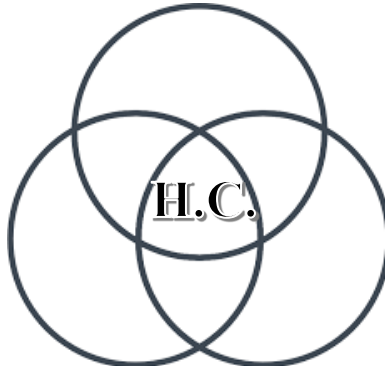
This restaurant bills itself as providing quality homestyle food, served in large portions, in a pleasant and family-friendly environment.

Both restaurants have a similar mission, but they are two very different kinds of restaurants and hence each has a very different Hedgehog Concept.

Now imagine two churches. The first is a small, elderly congregation with 18 in attendance ‘on a good Sunday.’ This church is located in a small Maritime town that just four months ago lost its primary employer that directly or indirectly provided 38% of the wages in the county. The second church easily has an average attendance of over 600 in two weekend services, is debt-free with a new facility that is only five years old and is located in a prosperous, growing section of a major city.

The two churches have fairly similar mission statements: one says “Love God, Love People, Make Disciples”; the other “to Reach Up, Reach Out, and Reach In.” Both churches genuinely want to love God, love people, and see people come to and grow in their faith in Jesus Christ. The way in which they each live out this mission in their diverse contexts is most different, however. They would have very different Hedgehog Concepts from one another even though they share a common mission.

This leads to the second question of how can an organization know what their unique Hedgehog Concept is? The Hedgehog Concept (H.C.) is identified by answering three questions. Imagine that each circle in the following diagram (a typical Venn diagram) represents one of those three questions. You’ll see that the three circles all have a common overlap or intersection with one another. Similarly, your Hedgehog Concept is found by looking at where your answers to the three questions all overlap or intersect with one another.



The three critical questions you need to ask as you prayerfully seek to identify your Hedgehog Concept are:

1. What is it that we do incredibly well?
2. What is that we are incredibly passionate about?
3. What is it that will truly grow God's Kingdom, including but not limited to our church?

(This third question is not exactly Jim Collin's third question ... his is 'What will fuel the organization's economic or resource engine?' I think as local churches we have even a higher priority such that while we obviously need to be financially viable to survive, our understanding of flourishing is more connected to the growing of God's Kingdom.)

As you as leaders are exploring what it means for you to be the church that God calls you to be, I encourage you to wrestle with these three questions. This is why I find Collins' Hedgehog Concept so helpful for us, as these answers help identify what God is calling us to.

You see, we can be good at certain things but have no real passion for them. We might have people who are good at teaching Scripture or balancing financial books or taking care of children or visiting shut-ins, but if those same people don't have a passion or a zeal for doing those things they will only do them half-heartedly and reluctantly, if at all.

So while it's understandably important to itemize the skills and abilities which you as a congregation bring to the table (for instance, if you as a congregation don't have dentists within

your congregation, or have access to dentists who are willing to partner with you, then opening a free dental clinic might not be a viable option for you at the present time) it is equally important to consider what the people of your congregation are naturally passionate about. Admittedly, within every church there are always some necessary undertakings that simply require people to step up and do out of faithfulness, even if it's not what they are most passionate about. That being said, it is nonetheless true that if our people don't bring a passion or love to what they do, that lack of enthusiasm will inevitably show itself.

What do I mean when I speak of having passion for something? By passion I mean it is something you love to do and just can't wait to do. Imagine that right now it's Tuesday evening and you have plans for doing something on Saturday that you just love to do. If you're like me, you go to bed wishing Saturday would hurry up and get here. That's a picture of being passionate about something.

Let me give you an example. A few years ago, a Pastor-friend of mine invited me to spend a day with him on Grand Manan Island where we would go 4-wheeling together. He borrowed an extra 4-wheeler from his cousin, made stacks of lobster sandwiches and thermoses of coffee, and we spent the better part of the day exploring spectacularly beautiful parts of Grand Manan I had never seen before.

It was a phenomenal day! In fact it was so good that when I arrived home that evening I enthusiastically told my wife Wendy that it was the best day I ever had! (She asked if I was saying I thought it was a better day than our wedding day, or the days our children were born.)

The point is that for me, if today was Tuesday and someone was to invite me to go 4-wheeling with them this Saturday, I would go to bed tonight wishing tomorrow was Saturday. And I wouldn't be doing it out of some burden or obligation; it would be my privilege, my

delight. This is because when we're passionate about something, it's not a chore or duty but rather it's something we find great meaning and/or enjoyment in and we do whatever it takes to pursue that passion.

So that brings us back to the second question for you: what could you as a congregation do that everyone would enthusiastically be on board with? I know this is a tall order, and maybe engaging in ministry isn't always going to be the kind of fun that a day 4-wheeling might be, but it should lie in that direction. Passion breeds joy, dedication, enthusiasm, energy. When we're passionate about something, it's hard to hold back; no one needs to be telling us that we ought to be showing up and doing it.

My point in all this is as you explore where God might be leading you as a congregation, start with these two questions: first, "What are we good at?" (in fact, really good at) and second, "What are we passionate about?"

These two questions alone are not enough, however. It's easy for us as churches to do things we're both good at – that we have the ability to do – and that we really enjoy and are passionate about, but from which we have not for years seen one iota of new life or Kingdom fruit. Not to be unkind, but I could give plenty examples of where I've seen this. I'm sure you probably could too.

This is why it is essential that we also drill down on that third question of 'what is it that we could do that will truly grow God's Kingdom?'. What is it that we could do – that we're good at and passionate about – that will also enable us to meaningfully live out our Gospel-calling of connecting with those that we haven't been connecting with, embodying God's love to those we haven't been ministering to, edifying and encouraging our fellow believers, creating new joy or energy in our fellowship? In exploring this third question we have to ponder

considerations such as who *we* are, the context we find ourselves in, our locale, the micro-culture we're a part of, the resources we have to work with. Questions we therefore need to explore are: Who are the people around us that God is calling us to? What would be meaningful and relevant to them? How do we relate with them in ways that open up conversations and relationships rather than prematurely close them down?

This then is the caution for you. As you as leaders seek to plot your future direction, think deeply and talk honestly about who you are and where you are. While you certainly want to incorporate faith and stretch yourself out of your comfort zones, avoid coming up with a plan or objectives that look spectacularly good on paper but which really don't fit with your congregation or your context. You want to avoid ending up with a plan the congregation half-heartedly endorses but which they won't personally embrace and commit to. It's too easy for church members to simply affirm a plan, thinking they're not opposed to it and will go along with it *as long as it's up to somebody else to carry out*.

Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody

This reminds me of the story about Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. It goes something like this. "There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have."³² This is what you want to avoid. Churches often fail to carry out their objectives or new directions because they fail to really tap into the

³² Author unknown.

abilities and the passions of their people, giving them an opportunity to see how their participation and dedication can truly contribute to the growing of God's Kingdom. If we settle on a plan which we think everybody has committed to but nobody really has, then we haven't hit upon the Hedgehog factor for our church.

The Mt Denson Example

Chapter 3 of this Guidebook titled "What's in our Hand?" includes the story of a little Baptist Church located in Mt. Denson, Nova Scotia, and the neighbourhood choir they developed. Although not everyone necessarily became equally involved in the choir which they developed for their neighbours with dementia, that undertaking became a ministry focal-point for the whole church to rally around and support in whatever manner possible. This 'ministry of excellence' also created a positive 'buzz' about the church within the wider community, as neighbours began to take note of what they were doing. It was like the Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:12 "Live an exemplary life among [your neighbours] so that your action will refute their prejudices."³³ An integral part of our calling as communities of Jesus-followers is for the faith we profess to be visible by the kind of lives we lead. We are to live distinctly winsome, other-centred lives that will contribute to a dismantling of walls that can otherwise exist between churches and the wider community in which they are located.

There is one other lesson from the Mt. Denson story that I want to emphasize. Although this choir became something of a 'signature ministry' for that church, it never became the only thing they did. They still met and worshipped regularly. They still had weekly Bible Studies. Seniors were still visited and the sick were cared for. And it will be the same for you. Although

³³ Adapted from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*.

through this process you may find that this will be a time to draw some of the ministries you have been doing to a close, it doesn't mean that everything will cease as you create some new *Mission Edge* directions or steps for your congregation. In most churches there will still be worship services, benevolent ministries, youth groups, care for seniors, house groups, crisis-care, those kinds of things. In fact, I hope that this strategic planning exercise may cause you to rethink the things you're doing, asking what it would take to make them even more effective and fruitful for God's Kingdom purposes. This may be a catalyst for reimagining and/or reinvesting in some of those core ministries you've been doing.

This strategic planning exercise can be, however, an important time to recalibrate, redefine and refocus your congregation's various ministries and endeavours to better align with what God is calling you to and in keeping with the identified six *Mission Edge* markers. Remember, the goal in all this is not for your church to become something it's not, but that it will become even more of what God is calling you to be (which admittedly might look quite different from the look you currently have).

Recommended Steps for the Using this Resource

As simple as this resource is designed to be, it nonetheless will require a degree of oversight, attention and guidance from leadership within your congregation. What follows is an overview of recommended steps and considerations to assist you. It is impossible to be thoroughly exhaustive and answer every possible question or address every conceivable scenario, so you should feel free to adapt and shape all this in ways that will make it a positive and meaningful investment of your congregation's time and energy.

1. Select a Team to give oversight to the *Mission-Edge* Strategic Planning Initiative:

The first step is to select a team that is tasked with the responsibility of giving oversight to this undertaking. Being responsible to give oversight does not suggest that it is on this team to do everything themselves. Rather, their role is to ensure that tasks are appropriately delegated and there is suitable support so people can successfully engage and participate.

This team could be an existing group – so perhaps the Deacons or Elders, depending on your governance structure – but it may be more advantageous to create a new team or working-group. Whoever the team is, it is imperative that those serving on it are passionate about your church being on mission.

The team could be called ‘The *Mission Edge* Vision Team’ and be composed of both formal leaders of the church (i.e. deacons/elders) as well as others from the congregation who likewise are trusted, future-oriented and discerning. It also is strongly recommended that this Team include the Pastor/Lead Pastor, though the Pastor should not be the one carrying the main load.

Other qualities to look for in a team member should include the ability to “see what could yet be”³⁴ and that they be spiritually insightful and mature, collaborative, harmonious, humble, and attentive to details. In the end you want your team to be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and length of time in the church.

2. Create a check-list of necessary steps.

One of the first responsibilities of your *Mission-Edge* Vision Team is that they brainstorm and create a master list of required steps that will ensure success in carrying out this

³⁴ Cf. Hebrews 11:1, 6 in *The Message*

exercise. The following pages are not presented as a comprehensive list, but are offered to help prime their thinking as they build the list:

✓	DATE	TASK
I. Prior to the Mission Edge Strategic Planning Exercise:		
		Ensure that this initiative has been presented to and properly approved by the Congregation (that it is duly approved according to your church's governance policy)
		Individually read through " <i>Mission Edge, You, and Your Church</i> " to familiarize yourselves with both the intent of and the content of <i>Mission Edge</i> and this strategic planning initiative for your church. It is important that you have a good understanding of the process so you can answer any questions people may have about it
		Develop a Prayer Engagement Strategy for your congregation for upholding this initiative. You could recruit a prayer team who commit to praying daily for this undertaking for a period of ten weeks: two weeks prior to its start; the four-week duration while you are engaged in small groups; and for four weeks after as the Vision Team prayerfully discerns all that they have heard and work on formulating a future strategic plan to be brought back to the church.
		Identify and recruit leaders for the small groups (you can estimate the number of groups by approximating the total number you think will be involved, and divide that number by eight): Each group should have a Discussion Leader and a hospitality host (if meeting in a home different than the group leader). Each small group will also appoint a 'scribe' who will record the essence of all the conversations.
		Provide orientation for group leaders so that they understand their primary responsibilities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the tone of meetings friendly and safe for all • Ensure that all have good opportunity to participate, and that the opinions/views of a few don't dominate the others • Manage the time so all the questions can be explored • Ensure that a Scribe is selected who will record the essence of the conversation, feedback and ideas and that all written notes are gathered and forwarded to the Vision Team • Understand that this is a facilitator's role which they'll be undertaking; not a teaching role
		Identify the time(s), location(s) for each of the weekly group meetings

✓	DATE	TASK
I. Prior to the Mission Edge Strategic Planning Exercise: (continued)		
		Champion and promote this initiative to your congregation, encouraging as many as possible to commit to taking part; your primary sign-up period will be in the three weeks prior to the start of Week One (while the ideal goal is of course 100% participation, it is important that you have at least 50% who sign up and participate for this to have value for your church)
		Ensure that each person participating knows which group they will be in and where and when they will be meeting
		Order sufficient copies of “ <i>Mission Edge, You and Your Church</i> ” from the CBAC office
		Select the Facilitator for the Week Four Day-Seminar ... this could be someone from your own congregation or an outside consultant (it is important that whoever this is has good experience as a facilitator and a good understanding of the process so as not to impose his or her own biases)
		Arrange for the details of the Week Four Day Seminar (promotion, registration, room set-up, refreshments, lunch, clean up, etc.)
		Have all involved personnel (<i>Mission Edge</i> Vision Team, Pastor, Deacons/Elders, Group Leaders, etc.) read entirely through the <i>Mission Edge</i> Guide and then have a combined meeting to answer any questions that these leaders may have (if you’re not exactly sure of the proper answer to some of the questions, feel free to improvise and give what seems most reasonable as understood by the Mission Edge Vision Leadership Team)
		Encourage your Pastor to do a lead-up series of sermons on relevant themes ... some possible suggestions could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The definition and the six markers of a Mission Edge Church • God’s purpose for His Church • What’s in Our Hands? (Moses and his Shepherd’s Staff) • Making Much out of Little ... God’s Economics (the story of the Feeding of the 5000) • Being Found Faithful (the Parable of the Talents) • (also see ‘Scriptural Rationale for <i>Mission Edge Churches</i>’, p. 398)
		Other:
		Other:

✓	DATE	TASK
II. During the Four Weeks of Mission Edge Strategic Planning Exercise:		
		Be available to trouble shoot, answer questions, problem solve, provide encouragement
		Fully participate
		Ensure that all written feedback is collected each week from the various groups, collate the input received, disseminate to the Vision Team members, begin to review the insights and observations of your fellow congregants
		Other
		Other
III. After the Four Weeks of Mission Edge Strategic Planning Exercise:		
		Ensure that all Notes and Summaries from the Week Four Day Seminar have been gathered and disseminated to all the Vision Team members.
		<p>Vision Team Members meet weekly for the next two weeks (longer if necessary) to prepare a Report and Plan for the Congregation. Included in this report will be: (See Sample Template in Resource Section)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on all the conversations and insights gleaned, a SWOT assessment of your local congregation (<u>S</u>trengths, <u>W</u>eaknesses, <u>O</u>pportunities, <u>T</u>hreats) [Note: this was not explicitly addressed in small groups, but it is for you as a Team to consider in light of everything you heard] • A draft Vision Statement for recommendation to the congregation (see <u>Week 1</u>/[Question 5 at end of chapter] and <u>Week Four/Day Seminar</u> [Part 1/Question 2/e./ii.]) • A recommendation for the church to identify as and commit to being a ‘Mission Edge Church’ (see <i>Mission Edge Covenant</i>) • Identification of current ministries which are to be continued and sharpened in light of <i>Mission Edge</i> Markers • Identification and recommendation of current ministries that should be concluded • Recommendation of one - three new ministry priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 – 2 new priorities if congregation’s weekly attendance is less than 40 ○ 2 – 3 new priorities if congregation’s weekly attendance is between 40 – 150 ○ Maximum of 3 new priorities if the congregation’s weekly attendance is greater than 150 • Recommendation of 2 – 3 measurable action steps for each of the new ministry priorities

✓	DATE	TASK
III. After the Four Weeks of Mission Edge Strategic Planning Exercise: (continued)		
		Facilitate a congregational gathering where you as the <i>Mission Edge</i> Vision Team will bring your report and recommendations for consideration by the congregation, seeking feedback and/or approval. Two matters to note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This congregational gathering could be a Saturday morning, Sunday afternoon, or some other time that works for your people. • The spirit in which you as the Team are to bring your report is one of humility essentially conveying “this is what we believe we are hearing God saying”; “Have we heard right?”
		Other:
		Other:

3. After Acceptance of Report by Congregation – the Implementation Phase

At this point in the process it is important that you realize the work of the Vision Team is not yet done, but in many ways is just beginning. So far you as a congregation have been planning your adventure. Now the adventure begins as you enter into the Implementation phase.

There may be wisdom in the *Mission Edge* Vision Team continuing their work for another 6 – 12 months for the purpose of providing follow-up and any required support. In this way they can serve as champions and encouragers of the priorities and objectives and can ensure that progress is being made in implementing the strategic priorities and corresponding objectives.

This may mean that they will continue to periodically meet with individuals and groups as required (Pastor, Board, other’s delegated with responsibilities) to inquire of the progress being made. Their role is not to be heavy handed but to ensure the priorities and objectives are kept before the congregation and that they are being accomplished within the established timeline.

As appropriate, after a period of 6 – 12 months the Vision Team will dissolve and pass the responsibility of ongoing visioning and shaping the continuing journey back to the leadership Board(s) and/or committees of the congregation.

Conclusion to Chapter

We began the chapter with the reference to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's statement that in order to build a ship you need to first cultivate a love for the "vast and endless sea."

This entire initiative has really been about that ... helping your congregation cultivate a love and passion for continually becoming the church that God is calling you to be as an outpost of His blessing and hope within your community. My goal for you is that through this investment you as a congregation will discover your Hedgehog Concept (or you sweet spot, your unique gifting) of how God wants to uniquely work through you.

This resource is not offered so much as a solution to all your congregation's challenges as it is meant to stimulate an ongoing openness to the new life that God wants to stir up within you as you together discover more of your unique giftings as a church in your community and continue to live into your calling of being God's people, here and now.

This will not happen without leadership, however. That is why I am grateful for your willingness to serve in this way. Don't be fearful that you will do it wrong; with both humility and trust in one another knowing that God will guide you through it all. Allow me to conclude with these words the Paul speaks to Timothy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love [humility], and self-discipline."

Let the adventure begin!!

RESOURCES

Strategy Day Seminar

“Putting It Together”

9:15 – 3:30

Guidelines for the day:

1. We will intentionally welcome the Lord to be with us in this day, and entrust that everything we say will be consistent with Colossians 4:6 ... *“Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”*
2. While this will be a day to talk about both the strengths and the weaknesses of our own church, it is not a time for any of us to speak accusingly or ill of anybody or cause anyone to feel defensive.
3. Understand that this is a time to speak freely and there will be no bad ideas. Ultimately our goal today is to be listening to what God through His Spirit is saying to us as a community of faith, and one way we will hear from God is as we listen to one another. Not every thought offered is necessarily of God, but one of the signs that it might be of God is if it resonates deeply with most of us and is clearly obedient to what God calls us to through Scripture. Our congregation’s Vision Team will take the results of today’s discussion, prayerfully reflect upon and consider all that has been discussed, and at a later date will return with a report/proposal for the congregation’s ultimate acceptance.
4. Please appreciate that this is not a day for making a ‘shopping list’ of all the things we personally might want our church to be. Rather it’s a day for exploring and discerning what God’s future purposes are for us so that we might continue to be effective in extending the love of His reign into our community and world.
5. We will need to manage our time. Although we might wish to spend more time on some of the topics/questions, our leaders may at times need to limit our discussion to keep us on track.
6. In the discussions we have today, somewhat controversial topics may arise that could easily divert us from the central purpose of the day. If this should happen, it may be wise that we note them and refer them to our congregation’s leadership for them to follow up on at another time, as necessary.

Schedule and Outline

9:00 – 9:15 **Arrival ... Coffee/Tea/Refreshments**

9:15 – 10:30 **Prayer**

Part 1: *Why Has God Called Us Here?*

1. Read Ezekiel 37:1 – 14. (15 minutes total for this question)
 - a. What stands out to you from that passage?
 - b. On a scale of 1 – 5, to what degree might we see our church represented by the “dry bones”? Why might you choose that number?
 - c. If God wanted to put His ‘breath/wind’ in us in a new way, would we be open to it? Why or why not? What might that look like?
2. Regarding the question “Why has God called us here for this place, this time, and the future that He’s calling us to?”:
 - a. On a scale of 1 – 5, how well do you think we already know the answer to that question? (5 minutes)

- b. Describe the composition of our congregation in terms of size, ages, gender representation, occupations (retired, professional, blue collar, self-employed), etc. (5 minutes)
- c. Describe in a general sense our neighbourhood(s) that our congregation comes from and/or which are within our congregation's wider community. If there are a variety of neighbourhoods in terms of affluence, needs, etc. consider the unique needs each may have. (10 minutes)
- d. How has our society/culture changed in the past 25 years, and how might that have an impact on ministry? (5 minutes)
- e. We know there are verses such as Matthew 28:19 & 20 (*"Go and make disciples"*), 2 Corinthians 5:19 (*"he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation"*), Luke 10:27 (*"Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and strength and mind, and love your neighbour as yourself"*) and 2 Peter 2:9 (*"as a result, you can show others the goodness of God"*) all of which speak to the mission of all churches everywhere, but
 - i. How might our God-given mission be uniquely shaped given who we are with our composition, the community we live in, the culture we live in, and the time we live in?" (5 minutes)

- ii. A vision statement is a short statement describing the clear and inspirational long-term desired change resulting from the ministry of your church. Ideally a Vision Statement should be:

- Honest
- Ten words or less
- Essentially unforgettable
- Intriguing (especially for those outside of Christian faith ... therefore not to be preachy or written in 'Christianese')
- Inviting
- Energizing

Compose a vision statement that would describe us for who we want and are committed to be? (30 minutes)

10:30 – 10:45 Break

10:45 – 12:00 Part 2: *Learning to Love the 'Hard to Love'*

1. *Mission Edge Churches* – “Joining God in their Neighbourhoods” (10 minutes)
 - a. Definition – **Communities of Jesus-followers who align themselves around His continuing mission of sacrificial love – starting right within their neighbourhoods, and from there radiating His love to neighbourhoods all around the world**

b. 6 Markers –

- i. **Lives the Jesus Way (both when *Gathered* and *Scattered*)** – this is the understanding that the church is the people, and the church is wherever its people are ... living lives patterned on Jesus both when gathered together and when scattered throughout their neighbourhoods doing everyday life. (The remaining 5 markers are all to be evidenced as the church is both *gathered* and *scattered*.)
- ii. **Radiates Hospitality** –Extending genuine welcome and kindness to all who cross their paths
- iii. **Fluent in the Good News** – People of *Mission Edge Churches* know how to comfortably and naturally speak the Good News in ways appropriate to the various contexts they find themselves in
- iv. **Embodies the Good News** – People of *Mission Edge Churches* also understand that God calls us to make His love known not only through our words, but also through our actions rooted in grace and truth.
- v. **Embraces Partnerships** – *Mission Edge Churches* stay alert for others who are moved by God’s purposes, and naturally form partnerships (whether formal or informal) to pursue such purposes
- vi. **Contextually Responsive** – *Mission Edge Churches* are attentive to the unique context (place and time) in which they find themselves, and seek to live as bright lights of God’s love in ways that can be recognized by the wider neighbourhood.

2. To what extent are we actually “a community of Jesus followers who want to align with his continuing mission”? Are there times when we might have a different mission than what his mission is? (10 minutes)
3. Read Luke 10:25 – 37. How many of the *Mission Edge* markers are you able to find evidenced in this passage? (10 minutes)
4. Identify why each of these markers are important for a church to effectively minister into its neighbourhood and beyond? (20 minutes)
 - a. Lives the Jesus way (both when Gathered and Scattered) -
 - b. Radiates Hospitality -
 - c. Fluent in the Good News -
 - d. Embodies the Good News -
 - e. Embraces Partnerships -
 - f. Contextually Responsive -
5. While acknowledging that these *Mission Edge* markers are truly inter-related and interdependent, which ones would you identify to be our strongest two and which do you think would be our weakest two? (10 minutes)
6. Dream of some new ways in which our congregation might encourage or exhibit each of these six markers, be that while gathered or scattered. (10 minutes)

7. Ask yourself this question: Does the *Mission Edge* model represent the kind of church we are seeking to be ... a church that wants to obediently live out the Good News of the Gospel in the neighbourhood and community in which God has placed us? Are we willing to commit to growing in being this kind of church? Discuss. (5 minutes)

12 Noon – 1:00

Lunch (on site)

1:00 – 2:15

Part 3: *What's in Our Hand?*

1. Read Exodus 4:1-4. (10 minutes)
 - a. What do you think the rod or staff might have represented for Moses?
 - b. What was the significance of the rod becoming a snake?
 - c. What lesson(s) should we learn from this passage that applies to us today?
2. Make a list of all that God has put in our hands ... the abilities, skills, gifts that God has blessed the people of our congregation with. (10 minutes)
3. Make a list of all the other kinds of resources God has blessed us with as a local congregation? (5 minutes)
4. Needs in our community: (20 minutes total)
 - a. What are the needs that exist in our neighbourhoods? (5 minutes)

- b. What organizations/groups are addressing these needs. (5 minutes)
 - c. Are there some needs that aren't already being (adequately) addressed? Circle those needs that are not being addressed, at least not fully. (5 minutes)
 - d. Are there some needs that aren't being (adequately) addressed that God might be moving us to address? Which ones? How might we do begin to address them? (10 minutes)
5. Are there two or three priorities that we believe God might be calling us to move towards? If so, what might they be? Are there changes we would need to make? Are there some things we might need to stop doing? (25 minutes)

2:15 – 2:30

Break

2:30 – 3:45

Part 4: Mapping Out the Adventure

1. Read Exodus 16:1 – 4. If you're not certain of the context, check out the chapters that come before it. (10 minutes)
 - a. What has happened for them just two chapters earlier?

- a. What strikes you about this passage? How might it relate to our situation?
 - b. In what way are we prone to behaving like these Israelites
2. In Session 1 this morning we explored drafting a Vision Statement for our church, which we said would describe in a clear and inspirational manner the long-term desired change resulting from the ministry of our church.
 - a. Keeping those statements in mind, discuss and dream up between 3 possible new key priority areas which you believe your church would be well suited to address, and which you believe God is calling you to address (at least two of which should be directed towards those who are currently not a part of yours or any other church family). [Examples of key priority areas could be: caring for isolated seniors in our community; serving homeless youth in our area; providing practical life-skills training to people in our community; ministering to single parent families; filling gaps in food security.] (30 minutes)
3. Having identified up to three key priority areas, now brainstorm possible ‘action steps’ that would provide practical steps towards addressing the three key priority areas
 - a. there should be a minimum of three ‘action steps’ for each key priority area. (30 minutes)
4. Close the day by asking people to: (5 minutes total)

- a. Pray for the Vision Team who will take all the feedback gleaned from this day
and will prayerfully prepare a final report/proposal to bring back at a later date as
a plan for the church to adopt
- b. Pray that God will bless this initiative and will multiply the impact from it.

The Mission Edge Covenant

Understanding that *Mission Edge Churches* are **communities of Jesus-followers who align themselves around His continuing mission of sacrificial love – starting right within their neighbourhoods, and from there radiating His love to neighbourhoods all around the world**, and believing that this expresses God’s purpose for Christ’s Church as He animates and empowers it through His Holy Spirit, and affirming that at our best this is what we have always believed our church should be, we hereby affirm our commitment to live out our identity and calling as a *Mission Edge Church*.

To that end, we commit – together and individually – to fully being and becoming this kind of church. We believe the church is a people, and as Jesus-followers we are His church in our neighbourhood (along with all other Jesus-followers of other fellowships). We are church when we’re gathered together, and we are also church as we pulse into our day to day world, living into our calling to be the aroma and presence of Christ in each of those places.

As we gather and as we scatter, individually and together we will look to live out the six *Mission Edge* markers of:

- Living the way of Jesus wherever we are
- Radiating Hospitality to all
- Developing Fluency in Telling the Story of the Good News
- Embodying the Good News through our actions, especially through how we care for those around us

- Valuing and Embracing Partnerships
- Being Contextually Responsive

We acknowledge we won't do any of this perfectly but the Lord being our helper and enabler this will be the direction in which we will walk.

Sample Report Template

Presented by: The *Mission Edge* Vision Team

Based on the feedback received from the *Mission Edge* Strategic Planning Process

Church:

Date:

Team Members:

A SWOT Analysis of our Current Ministry:

S – Strengths

W – Weaknesses

O – Opportunities

T – Threats

A Draft Vision Statement:

A Recommendation that We Formally Commit to being a ‘*Mission Edge Church*’ (if the commitment has not been made at a previous time ... ensure you register your church as a *Mission Edge Church* at missionedgechurches.ca.)

Current Ministries which we recommend recommitting to and sharpening: (Note ways in which they can both be sharpened through the Mission Edge Markers and/or are expressions of these Markers)

Current Ministries which we recommend no longer doing:

New Mission Edge Mission Priorities:

1. Mission Priority Number 1

- a. Action Step 1
- b. Action Step 2
- c. Action Step 3

2. Mission Priority Number 2

- a. Action Step 1
- b. Action Step 2
- c. Action Step 3

3. Mission Priority Number 3

- a. Action Step 1
- b. Action Step 2
- c. Action Step 3

Scriptural Rationale for *Mission Edge Churches*

The definition of *Mission Edge Churches*: **communities of Jesus-followers who align themselves around His continuing mission of sacrificial love – starting right within their neighbourhoods, and from there radiating His love to neighbourhoods all around the world**

Proverbs 9:17 ... *If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord.*

Isaiah 1:17 ... *Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.*

Micah 6:8 ... *O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*

Matthew 5:13, 14, 16 ... *You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world. ... In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your Heavenly Father.*

Matthew 25:37 – 40 ... *Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will say, “I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!”*

John 15: 12 – 13 ... *Love each other the way that I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*

Ephesians 5:1, 2 ... *Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.*

Ephesians 4:1, 2 ... *Therefore I beg you to live a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.*

James 2:14 – 17 ... *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well” – but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.*

1 John 3:16 – 18 ... *We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion – how can God’s love be in that person?*

6 Markers:

1. Lives the Jesus Way (Both When Gathered and Scattered)

Proverbs 3:5 – 6 ... *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*

Luke 9:23 – 24 ... *Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.*

Ephesians 2:10 ... *For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

Colossians 3:16 – 17, 23 ... *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. ... Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. ... Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

1 Thessalonians 4:11 – 12 ... *Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others*

2. Radiates Hospitality

Leviticus 19:33 – 34 ... *Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land.³⁴ Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

Luke 14: 12 – 14 ... *He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

Acts 28:2 ... *The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us.*

Hebrews 13:2 ... *Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!*

1 Peter 4:9 ... *Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.*

3. Fluency in the Good News

Matthew 4:19 ... *Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!”*

Matthew 10:7 ... *Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*

Mark 16:15 - 16 ... *And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved.”*

John 4:35 – 36 ... *You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!*

Romans 10:14 ... *But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?*

1 Peter 3:15 ... *if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way.*

4. Embodies the Good News

Luke 6:35 – 36 ... *“Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.*

Galatians 6:2 ... *Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*

Philippians 2:5 – 11 ... *You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave.*

Hebrews 13:16 ... *And don’t forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.*

1 John 3:16 – 18 ... *We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.*

5. Embraces Partnerships

Ecclesiastes 4:9 ... *Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed*

Luke 5:6 ... *And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.*

Luke 10:5 – 6 ... *“Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you.*

Acts 18:3 ... *Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.*

Colossians 3:14 ... *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*

6. Contextual Responsiveness

Acts 10:15 ... *But the voice spoke again: “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”*

1 Corinthians 9: 22 – 23 ... *When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. ²³ I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.*

Hebrews 12:14 ... *Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life.*

1 Peter 2:12 ... *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.*

Revelation 7:9 ... *After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.*

Resources for Gospel Fluency ... Sharing our Faith

(With Reference to Chapter Two; Question 5) Integral to being a *Mission Edge Church* is a high commitment to expressing the Good News of Jesus Christ through our words. This we call being ‘Fluent in the Good News’ (or Gospel Fluency for short). *Mission Edge* also affirms the equally high commitment to demonstrating this same Good News through our actions, but actions are not to be thought of as substitution to the importance of our telling of the Good News. This articulation of Good News is to be present both in the Gathered and Scattered modes of the church ... meaning the creative telling of the Good News is to be a normal part of our life when we gather (so in teaching sessions, sermons, small group studies, etc.) and also when we scatter, as we’re given opportunity to speak with others of the “reason for the hope that we have.”³⁵

The fact that we are committed to telling the Good News does not mean that we necessarily find it easy to know what to say, especially as we’re out in the so-called ‘normal’ world living our day-to-day life. To this end I have approached a number of friends and colleagues for whom I have a great deal of respect, and have asked them to share with you something of what they would say if presented with the following scenario:

You’re on an airplane, and the person in the seat next to you has discovered that you identify as a follower of Jesus and has been asking you about that. Just as you are landing and you have only two and a half minutes before it will be time to deplane the person outright asks you this question: “So, what does it mean to be a Christian, and if I wanted to become one what would I need to do?” In a maximum of 250 words, what would you say to them to them?

³⁵ See 1 Peter 3:15,16

You'll see I have listed their responses alphabetically, and also that some included a response to a secondary request I made of them to describe what we are speaking of when we talk of 'the Gospel' (or Good News). Their titles and/or roles are listed as of 2020.

Rev. Dr. Chris Backert – Chris is National Director of *Fresh Expressions US*, he also serves with the *Baptist General Association of Virginia* in the area of growth and venture development.

What is a Christian and how do I become one?

A Christian is someone who has committed themselves to following Jesus Christ, because they believe that he was raised from the dead, and that the key to all of life is found in trusting that what he did and what he taught, above trusting in anything else (including ourselves), is the way to finding true life. A Christian believes that the quest to find true life cannot be found without Jesus because of something called "sin". Sin is a word that has fallen out of comfort in our modern vocabulary, but it is such an important word because it is one word that describes everything that is wrong in the world, including the things that are wrong in ourselves. A Christian is someone who has recognized that they are unable to be free of the sin that hurts them, and others, by their own efforts and that this lack of freedom keeps them stifled from becoming the person that God, in all God's wisdom, created for them to be. It also puts up a barrier to the presence of God being active in their life. In order to become a Christian, you make a decision to submit your will or heart to the way of Jesus and choose the way of Christ above the path you have been following. If this is genuine, you receive God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness, and you are enabled to receive the life of Jesus into your actual life, which can transform each day, and give you a power to life that you haven't had before.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is that the life of Jesus Christ, because he was raised from the dead, is available to each person in whatever circumstances they find themselves, to restore what has been broken in their lives, if we will trust in the power of his resurrection.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck – Michael is Director of Re-Missioning for *Fresh Expressions US* and Cultivator of Fresh Expressions for the *Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church*. An author and adjunct seminary professor, he also serves as co-pastor of *Wildwood UMC* along with his wife Jill.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

I'm not sure I've ever met a real Christian. That term comes from the idea that a human being would be identified as a "Little Christ" or someone who lives and loves like Jesus of Nazareth in such a way that their lives are intertwined and almost indistinguishable. I'm more comfortable with the language of E. Stanley Jones, "I know many Christians-in-the-making." I consider myself to be one. And what that means for me is someone who has encountered and submitted their life to Jesus Christ. This is a daily journey of denying our own selfish impulses, which are often contradictory to Jesus' way of selfless love.

Jesus came to me on the floor of a jail cell, I had essentially burned down my life and had nowhere left to go. I felt his presence and he spoke to me, not in an audible voice, but certainly a voice I could hear. My whole life as a street kid and an orphan I had accepted the title "bastard." Jesus called me his "beloved child." Every day since then I've been doing my best to live in relationship with Jesus, and listen for his voice. I just encourage you to find a safe quiet place when you have a chance, really try to tune out all the chatter of the world, and invite Jesus to talk to you and see where it goes! Depending on how that conversation works out, I would encourage you to find a church nearby, you can Google them, they are everywhere. Find one that seems interesting to you, call the pastor, ask them the same question you asked me and see what they say.

What is the gospel?

The gospel is a historical person who lived 2000 years ago named Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was God in the flesh. In his incarnate life he showed us how to be human beings. In his death on the cross he took everything that was wrong with the world into his own body and broke its power. This includes anything that was wrong in us. Through a relationship with his risen self, lived out in community with others, we can be the fullness of who God created us to be.

Mr. Shawn Branch – A licenced evangelist with the Anglican Church of Canada, Shawn currently works in Parish Development with the *Anglican Diocese of Fredericton*. In this role he helps mobilize congregations to reach out into their communities and help raise up innovative leaders for the church.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

A Christian is someone who lives their life modeled after Jesus – they strive to be people of Hope and Good News that God loves them. As followers of Jesus, we believe that living our lives the way He lived involves caring for those around us. We aren't meant to live in isolation or fending for ourselves, we are called to come alongside those around us – celebrating the good and suffering with the bad.

Our relationship with God means that we are connected to the One who created us. The Bible tells us that He breathed life into us and that He knew us even before we were born. God wants to be in relationship with us – so much so that the Father, sent His son Jesus to live among us so that we could see the life He intended for us.

We are still human and broken people. Our lives do not automatically become perfect, because we are not perfect. But through our relationship with God and each other, we learn to walk with each other. His desire is that we would have a full life.

When I became a Christian, I knew that the “thing” I was searching for was found – that hunger was satisfied. And because of this, the difficult days have been easier, the challenges can be put into perspective and I know that I'm not walking it alone.

Rev. Dr. J. R. Briggs – A National Trainer & Equipper for *Fresh Expressions US*, J.R. is also a Pastor, author, adjunct Professor, and Founder and President of *Kairos Partnerships*.

What is a Christian and how do I become one?

War. Racism. Pain. Death. Loneliness. Famine. Shame. Sin. Disease.
We know the world is broken, not as it was intended to be – and it needs to be set right. And despite technological advances we cannot rescue ourselves from the pain and brokenness.

What humanity needed was (and is) *shalom* –wholeness, rightness, restoration back to goodness. The good news is that God, who created this world, has initiated a hope-filled, cosmic rescue plan – enacted and fulfilled in and through the life, death, and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ – in order to redeem all of creation.

Jesus ushered in a new kingdom – the rule and the reign of God – marked by grace, justice, love, and hope. We are all kings and queens of our own kingdoms/queendoms, anything by which we exert our “reign” over (our house,

our bank accounts, our cars, etc.). Jesus invites us to transfer our kingship to his kingship.

Anyone at any time who rethinks their way of life and submits to King Jesus by acknowledging God's kingdom of love - available *right now*. This impacts everything – our individual lives and the entire world. Jesus, sent by God the Father, is here to heal, redeem, reunite, rescue, and put back together what has been broken.

This invitation of grace and forgiveness is free, accessible, and available to anyone - regardless of background, age, ethnicity, gender - through the work of Christ through fully surrendering our kingdom to his, and through a hopeful, life-long commitment to learn from Jesus how to live in the new reality of the rule and the reign of God.

Redemption. Renewal. Reunion. Restoration. Reconciliation. It really is good news.

Rev. Dr. Rhonda Britton – Rhonda is the Senior Pastor of New Horizons Baptist Church in Halifax, NS, a historic inner-city church that traces its roots back to 1832 when it was established by black refugees. Rhonda is currently Moderator of the African United Baptist Association, and will serve as President of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada for the year 2020 – 2021.

What is a Christian and how do I become one?

Being a Christian is committing to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Human beings are imperfect. We commit sin every day. Our sin causes us to be separated from God, but God wants to be in relationship with us. God promised to send a savior to reconcile our relationship. Christians believe Jesus is that savior. We believe Jesus was God incarnate—a perfect being that came in human flesh to redeem the flesh. The Bible teaches that eternal condemnation is the price for sin. Jesus died for all of humankind to pay that price. He died for you. The best news is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and is alive today. Awesome! His resurrection is the proof of his divinity. It is the promise that his followers will have a friend and advocate through this earthly life and an eternal home with God after our earthly death. To become a Christian all you have to do is believe that Jesus died for you and accept his gift of salvation. Give him your heart and your life. Discipleship means you no longer live for yourself. You live knowing your life is intended to glorify God, your Creator. You must surrender your life to God beginning today. Pray this with me: *“Holy God, I am a sinner. I need your mercy. I believe Jesus died for me. I want to follow Jesus; loving and living as Jesus taught. Save me by your grace and shape me into who I should be. Amen.”* You are saved! Hallelujah! Here's my card. Let's stay in touch.

Rev. Dr. Rupen Das – Formerly a professor of *Humber College* in Toronto and a Global Field Staff with *Canadian Baptist Ministries*, Rupen is currently the President of the *Canadian Bible Society* and also Research Professor at *Tyndale University*.

What is a Christian and how do I become one?

To be a Christian is to know that there is a God who is worthy to be worshiped and that He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. To know this God and worship Him, I have to acknowledge 1) that I have ignored Him most of my life and chosen to do my own thing, and 2) that the only way to know this God is through Jesus Christ. As I read about Jesus in the Bible, I see that He forgives people for them ignoring God or for their rebellion against Him. I see Him healing, answering prayer, and providing for the needs of people. Jesus reveals what God is like – that He is not a God who is distant and unconcerned, but a God who is deeply concerned about each of us. In fact, the Bible refers to Jesus as Immanuel – meaning God who is with us.

To become a Christian is to know this God personally, and I would need to acknowledge Jesus is God and submit to His authority and leading in my life.

What is the Gospel?

The Good News is that the Kingdom of God is now revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who invites us to be citizens of the Kingdom. We enter the Kingdom by acknowledging either our indifference towards God or our rebellion against God, and accepting the forgiveness that Christ offers.

Rev. Dr. Charles Harvey – Charlie and his wife Fran are retired missionaries having faithfully served in Africa with Canadian Baptist Ministries (and its previous names) since the late 1950's. Through their trusting faith and genuine love for all that God brings their way, together they have impacted the lives of countless individuals both here in Canada and throughout Africa.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

As I see it the term Christian applies to someone who has asked Jesus to manage his life. Jesus is God's son and has made it possible for us to have a meaningful, life-changing relationship with our Creator. Jesus did everything necessary for us to have a dynamic relationship through his Spirit who can actually manage our lives from within our hearts. When we ask Him in prayer He is able to manage us for our good from within our thought- and decision-making system. This spirit of Jesus infuses us with qualities of love, joy, and peace in a way it is hard to imagine. To initiate this relationship, humbly invite the Spirit of Jesus to begin working in your heart.

What is the gospel?

The word basically means Good News. Good News is only good news for someone with yearning for a richer, more meaningful life. The Good News is that Jesus through His Spirit can bring transforming changes to our deepest being. Jesus loves us deeply He is willing and able to forgive us for living with our backs turned to him for years.

Ms. Katie Jewett, MA – Katie is a faith-rooted community researcher, neighbourhood builder, and parent. She is currently serving as Tidal Impact Neighbouring Coordinator with the CBAC's Youth and Family Department.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

[Katie began her answer with this explanation: Before I answer the question, I would like to reimagine it. I live most of my life locally, and rarely fly—a conscious decision I have made in order to live well with the rest of Creation, both human and otherwise. Instead, I imagine meeting a neighbour at the farmers' market, on the city bus, or on the walking trail by my house. In the 2½ minutes that my toddler is occupied, my neighbour asks me what it means to be a Christian, and how to become one. Acknowledging that God has been working in her life long before my arrival, this is my response.]

To answer, we must start with Jesus. Born to a poor young woman through an unplanned pregnancy, Jesus had brown skin and belonged to a people who were being brutally colonized. He lived a refugee and died a convicted criminal. He was fully human. He was also fully God, and through him we can know God.

God's plan was always for us to live in right relationship—with ourselves; with others, both individually and collectively; with the rest of Creation; and with God. It was this way in the beginning, and it was GOOD.

While the world God created is still good, our relationships are now also broken because of sin. The good news is that God loved the cosmos so much that God came to Earth as Jesus to make everything whole again (Jn. 3:16-17).

Through his teachings and his life, Jesus modelled right relationship as God envisioned it. He proclaimed good news to the poor, he released captives, he made the blind see, and he set free the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-19). Those on the outside, he brought to the centre, giving them honour and dignity. Those in power, he invited to join him in humility and grace. He offered all of Creation, ourselves included, a way to be reconciled. Through his death and resurrection, he made it possible for us to be fully alive. This is God's greatest desire.

Someday, we believe Jesus will return, completing God's dream of restoration complete. Until then, God's Spirit is present with us. Amazingly, God invites all of us to be part of this story by journeying together towards justice, peace and love in all our relationships.

At this point, my toddler gets tired of waiting, so we part ways with a promise to continue the conversation—and the journey—again soon.

[After I had received this wonderful contribution from Katie, I had a follow up email in which she said “Just as a PS, I meant to include a link to a song I've been listening to a lot lately. For me, this expresses very well the kind of radical hospitality that God offers us, and that we can offer to others. Enjoy!” This is the link she included ... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfKVe4-j48w> ... you can probably find it by googling ‘Common Hymnal Unproduced’ ‘Come to the Table’]

Rev. Dr. Greg Jones – In addition to being the writer of this Guide, Greg is an Associate Executive Minister with the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*, and serves as Director for Congregational Renewal.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

A marriage ceremony I've used says this: “Your marriage joins you for life in a relationship so intimate that it will profoundly affect your whole being. It offers a love that is true and mature as you commit yourself to one another freely and without reserve, for the sake of a deeper, wider life together.” That's true for marriage, and even more true for what it means to be a Christian.

Being a Christian affects our entire lives, and starts with understanding that God is not only real but that He loves us profoundly. He doesn't hide from us, but actively pursues us. We cross over to being a Christian, or a Jesus follower, when we stop running from that love and choose to embrace it instead.

This love is not just make-believe. It is concretely experienced in a number of ways, including as we live in ongoing community with other Jesus followers. This is what it means to be a part of a church.

The cross of Jesus is crucial because it is there we see the depths of God's love, and shows that it's not up to us to somehow score enough points to earn God's favour. It expresses an acceptance that knows no limits.

Experiencing God's love is transformational. It changes us from the inside out: making us more – not less – human as it compels us to live His love to others both through what we do and what we say.

A Christian is one who has said yes to God's love and who wants to love Him back, both by loving fellow Jesus followers and joining them in expressing His love to others.

What is the Gospel?

The message that Jesus died for us and is the one who changes us and everything is at the very heart of Christian faith. But the Gospel is more than that. More broadly, the Gospel is about loving God and loving others in the manner modeled by Jesus. It is living a life oriented towards being a conduit or vessel for God's blessings of life to be poured out to those around us. It is about dying to the agenda of self to instead be proactively participating in God's agenda of blessing all of creation around us.

Rev. Dr. Aaron Kenny – Aaron is the Lead Pastor at *Bridgewater Baptist Church* in Bridgewater, NS. Prior to this he and his wife Erica (who also serves as pastoral staff at Bridgewater Baptist) were with *Canadian Baptist Ministries* living in Kenya from which he managed various relief and development programs while also facilitating training amongst denominations in Africa.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

A "Christian" simply means someone who in faith follows the way of Jesus, which means we find our identity and direction in life flowing from our relationship with God through him.

God created all things to be in relationship or harmony with God, and at the heart of God's good world we were to bear God's image (or reflect God into the world).

No person can be fully human apart from God who is the author and sustainer of life. And yet, the freedom to reject our creator, to define good and evil on our own terms, and to shape our lives in opposition to the character and wisdom of God has been given to us all.

We see the consequences of that rebellion and brokenness all around us and feel it within our own lives as we experience brokenness and lack within ourselves.

The story of God reaching out to restore our true humanity and bring us back into abundant life – that is the story of Jesus. The story of Christmas and the story of Easter are really the story of God coming into the world, to identify and experience the suffering and brokenness of this world, and to bring that deep and destructive wound into God's own self, so that we can be healed and made whole.

How does that happen in your or my life?

It begins with a step of faith.

Believing that God loves you and desires for you to live in relationship with God. Jesus tells us that God is not an impersonal force or abstract idea, but that God is a person and we can speak to God as our Father, who sent His son to become a human, to die and be raised to new life, and ultimately restore us all to that fullness of life that never ends.

To trust in God's love and what God has done for us in Jesus begins with a step of faith. You can express that step in many ways, but I think it is most helpful to say a prayer, to talk to God in your own words. You might say something like:

“God I need you. I am broken and disconnected from you. Forgive my rebellious heart. Take my life, my hurt, and my pain, and transform me. Breathe your spirit and life into me. Help me to follow you step by step in faith every day of my life; pick me up when I fall down, and help me to come to know and love you through your son, Jesus.”

We are not meant to follow Jesus alone. Here are my contacts, I want to keep praying for you and I am here if you would like to talk so more.

Rev. Renée MacVicar – Renée is the Associate Pastor for Community Engagement with *Hillside Baptist Church*, Moncton. Prior to this she served as Director for the Young and Family Department of the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada* and Associate Pastor at what is now *RiverCross Church*, Saint John.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

Being a Christian means inviting God to lead your life and be the forgiver of everything you've done against God and other people. We know God can do this because of what Jesus has done. It means rather than saying you can figure out your life, this world and how to make everything better, you're trusting God to lead your life and use you in all the ways God's righting wrongs in our world. If you want to become a Christian you talk to God directly and tell God your heart – how you invite God to be the leader of your life and the forgiver of your sins. Tell God you want to become His child.

What is the gospel?

The Gospel is the Good News that because of what Jesus has done and who Jesus is, we can be saved from sin and a new Kingdom has been ushered in. We can become a part of that new Kingdom here and now, by changing our allegiance

from whoever or whatever we've held as Lord and leader of our life and inviting Jesus to be the Lord of our life.

Father James Mallon -- Father James is a best-selling author and founder of *Divine Renovation*, currently pastor of *Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish* in Dartmouth, NS, and was just recently the Episcopal Vicar for Parish Renewal and Leadership Support for the *Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth*, Nova Scotia, Canada.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus, but not as one would follow a philosopher or historical teacher. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for us and rose from the dead. This means that he is alive and that I cannot just know about him but that I can know him personally and intimately just as I can know that I am known in the same way. Through Jesus I can know God fully and experience right now the salvation he offers. This salvation is not just about where I will go after I die, but being saved from myself, my own failures, my brokenness and experiencing God's forgiveness for the things that I have thought, said and done that are wrong. To follow Jesus means that he lives in us and calls us to manifest his presence in the world, so that our world can become a bit more heavenly. In the Bible we are even called his ambassadors. If you would like to learn more about becoming a Christian and joining the community of his followers that is called the Church I would love to help you find a church that runs a program called Alpha. It is a wonderful way to learn more about God's love and to answer many of your questions. It will also help you take the next step.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is the Good News that God has not left us to our own devices but has intervened in the world so that we can be free to have a relationship with Him here and now through his Son Jesus Christ. It is the Good News that our past does not have to define us, that our weakness and failures don't define us, that we were created to be part of something greater than ourselves, that life is not meaningless and that we are known and loved. In one word, the Gospel is simply, Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Peter Reid – Since 2008 Peter has served as the Executive Minister of the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*. Prior to this he pastored a number of CBAC congregations in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

To be a Christian is to be a Jesus follower. Jesus came to offer a relationship with God and a whole new way of being in the world. I would say that Jesus came to show us that God is not interested in religion but in relationship. If someone wants to know what God is like, and, if someone wants to know what a “Christ follower” looks like, one should look at the life of Jesus.

In John’s Gospel (a record of the life of Jesus from the Apostle John) we read, “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) It is God’s intention that we find life, (eternal life, not so much a future promise rather, a quality of life we can experience right now). This new kind of life we can experience is all about a relationship with God. Jesus talked about this when he defined “eternal life.” “And this is the way to have eternal life—to **know you**, the only true God...” (John 17:3) To “know God” experientially, is to have a relationship with God.

We simply have to admit our need of God, surrender our wills to God and make a conscious decision to become a “Jesus follower” and, he will give us the free gift of eternal life.

What is the Gospel?

The world is broken, dysfunctional and estranged from God (sinful). The plan of God was to send Jesus into the world to die on the cross to reconcile us (and all things) to right relationship with God. We gain access to this relationship by recognizing and accepting Jesus as Lord, whereby we receive eternal life. By accepting Jesus, we accept “the way” of Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Anna Robbins – Anna is the President of *Acadia Divinity College* and Dean of Theology at *Acadia University*, both of which are located in Wolfville, NS. At ADC she also is the Dr. Millard R. Cherry Professor of Theology, Ethics and Culture, and the Director of the Andrew D. MacRae Centre for Christian Faith and Culture.

What is a Christian?

I would want to tailor the following to what I know of their experience and context (which is crucial for engaging appropriate language and concepts):

A Christian is someone who takes seriously the historical reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as “God with us,” and accepts his invitation to “Follow me.”

Being a Christian means accepting that God desires his Creation to flourish, yet people often hurt the natural world, and one another. Christians believe that through dying on the cross and being raised to life, Jesus showed God’s love to us in the midst of our brokenness, and made a way for all creation to be rightly related to God again. Jesus is working through his Spirit to make all things new; death gives way to life, enemies are friends, communities thrive, the poor know God’s favour, and we can be agents of hope for the world. Being a Christian gives us a new relationship with God and fresh perspective and priorities. We are given a renewed sense of purpose and meaning.

If you want to become a Christian, start by simply talking to Jesus. Tell him you want to follow him. Confess your failures, accept his love. Ask him for the courage to live your life according to his agenda and not your own. This is not easy, but you will be encouraged as you connect with Christians in a local church, and as you read the Bible, starting with the gospel of Luke. Tell others about the great things you are learning and keep talking to God every day.

What is the Gospel?

Jesus Christ walked on this earth to show God’s love and invite us to a transformed life of repentance and new priorities, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he healed our relationships with God and one another, and sends us as agents of healing and hope to the world.

Rev. Dr. Terry Smith – Terry has been the Executive Director of *Canadian Baptist Ministries* since 2016, and prior to that was the Director for International Partnerships for 12 years.

What is a Christian and how do I become one?

I think I would give two answers:

#1 – Do you mind if I buy you a coffee in the terminal of the airport so I can explain my own journey more fully?” And if the person said, “No, I can’t because I am in a hurry”, I would say something like this:

#2 - That’s a good question because you said, “be a Christian” and “become one (a Christian)”. Being a Christian is not unlike what we are doing right now – being a passenger on an airplane. We are passengers because we became ones when we freely chose to board this airplane, and to trust the pilot to get us to our destination.

Being a Christian is about making a choice to entrust our lives into the hands of someone else, who knows the route, has mapped it out and has the ability to be in that position. We trusted our lives to the pilot of this plane.

When I became a Christian, I recognized that I couldn't 'fly the plane', that is, lead my life myself. I couldn't reach the correct destination in spite of all my intentions and willpower which I could muster. The way was been clouded over by something the Bible calls sin.

Jesus Christ said that he came so that we could live full and meaningful lives. A sceptical person (Thomas) who was wondering about the way ahead asked "How can we know the way?" Jesus replied "No one knows the way (to the Father, ie, God) except me." And he added, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me."

In the most basic sense, becoming a Christian is putting our confidence in Jesus-Christ, who can lead us through our clouded path, to the Father. And being a Christian is choosing every day to live out that decision by continuously trusting him to lead our lives.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is a gift. God wants us to live full and meaningful lives. He gave his son, Jesus Christ, to pay a debt in order for us to experience that wholeness. Jesus lived and died, and was raised again, in order to lead us to the Father. The Good News, or Gospel, is just that: God gives us true life if we trust in Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops – Robin is Executive Minister/Region Missionary with the American Baptist Churches of Nebraska.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

From the beginning of time God created us to be with him, but our sins, (selfishness) have created a separation between us and God we could never overcome. We cannot be or live good enough in our own strength to make up for our sin. He sent Jesus, his son, to the world to live, teach and ultimately die for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus being fully God and also fully human was able to break through the separation by overcoming death and rising alive victorious. When we believe that Jesus died for our sins and trust in Him alone we receive eternal life, we are passed out of death into life and are guaranteed to be in God's presence forever. Our belief is evidenced by our living as Jesus described in the New Testament, see the Sermon on the Mount. This new life in God's Kingdom as one of His followers begins

when we believe, and that belief changes how we live, love, and think. We are called to gather in community with other followers to worship, encourage one another and work together for all who God has created until His return.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is God's redemptive story of creation, a fallen world, restoration, and completion unveiled throughout the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is God's son, crucified, buried and risen from the dead, saving us from sin and death, calling us to follow Him, in the new Kingdom he has ushered in, the Holy Spirit fills us, transforms us, empowering us to live today as we look forward to the fulfillment of God's Kingdom.

The Rev. Canon Lisa Vaughn – Lisa is the Parish Vitality Coordinator for the (Anglican) *Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island*.

What is a Christian, and how do I become one?

For me, I consider myself an apprentice. Someone who draws close to Christ to embrace, learn, practice and share a life of extravagant Grace. This Jesus, whom we call Christ (God's anointed), brings a freedom or liberation, and a satisfaction to life like nothing else. When I gave myself fully to God I experienced a sense of what Jesus called "abundant life" that made all the difference. Not that life is perfect or without its hardships. It's just that I have an inner joy now. I know who I am as a precious, loveable Child of God. And I'm learning to love others in that radical way too, just like Jesus lived and taught. I find my heart is changing to be more like that of Christ, the more I lean into my faith and it's exciting!

If you were interested in exploring becoming a Christian, it might be helpful to find someone or a couple of active Christians to talk with about that. Maybe a regular conversation over coffee at Tim's and talk about your questions and consider the basics of this faith. Being a Christian is more than just saying 'yes' to a question. It's more of a growing into this apprentice role, individually and with others who are also apprenticing. So being a Christian or an apprentice of Christ also requires we're part of a faith community in worship, service, prayer, study, giving, etc. We can't do it alone.

Let me share this illustration about coals in a hot, burning fire. Take the coal out and set it aside and it goes cold. Put it back in the fire and it's alive again! Just like being a Christian. We need the faith community.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is the ultimate loving transformation of our whole beings – heart, mind, body and soul – through the extravagant Grace of God in Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

What is “in your Hand?” (see Week 3)

Examples of Personal Skills: (see Questions 1 & 2)

Arts and Crafts; Automotive maintenance/repair; Basic Carpentry; Boating/Sailing; Computers; Cooking and Baking; Dental care; First Aid Training; Financial Expertise; Fishing (Stream/River); Gardening; Grocery Shopping on a Budget; Household Budgeting; Hunting and Field Dressing; Interior Design and Decorating; Knot-tying; Legal expertise; Medical care; Painting a room (or a house or a barn); Photography; Playing an Instrument; Putting up Preserves (making jam or pickles); Quilting; Raising small animals (e.g. chickens); Sewing; Tutoring

Examples of Resources that Your Church may have: (see Question 3)

Building and its amenities (such as Chairs; Eating area; Electricity; Heat; Kitchen; Parking Lot); Financial Resources; God’s presence; Musical Instruments/equipment; Relationships within your community; Skills (various - list); Vehicles; Volunteers

Other Resources

Life In Christ: A New Relationship (Studies for Membership Classes or Small Groups) by John W. Bartol. Published by the Atlantic Baptist Mission Board of the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*.

Ministry & LGBTQ. published by Youth and Family Department of *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*, c. 2017.

Neighbourhood Assessment Workbook, by Rev. Renée Embree. Published by the Youth and Family Department and the *Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada*.