



BECOMING THRIVING CHURCHES

BY DON SHOWALTER

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Wonderful worship, good food, delightful fellowship and conversations, catching up with old friends and making new ones, inspiring and challenging messages, stimulating video montages, lots of heart-warming stories—Multiply 2022 is now history! With the focus on *thriving*, there seem to be endless places to explore.

But for this summary, I will share my reflections on two threads. The first is Brad Roth's three sessions on thriving churches in rural communities. I connected with his first session on *Understanding Rural*, since that is where I've lived most of my life. I suspect that most of us in CMC would identify with a rural background and the accompanying cultural and moral aspects of community that he pictured for us. As Christians, we need to learn to "notice and value," to see the beauty of the place Jesus has us, to connect with and love our community.

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Brad's second session focused on *More with Less in God's Country* and the tension which so often exists around what exactly it is that we prioritize in our places of life and ministry. I appreciated the way Brad drew the need for both *more* and *less*. On one hand, we work to make God's name famous, while on the other hand, we surrender to him and "let things be as they are." "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b NASB). And the question, "How many good things can you do without going crazy!?"

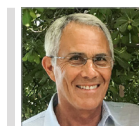
Brad finished in Session Three with *How to Light a Fire*, looking at prayer in the rural church. "Prayer is always a component of thriving churches." He challenged us to be "fire blowers," with the rather disappointing caveat that the wood is always wet! If our churches are to thrive, we must "keep praying that we pray!" Prayer transfigures our vision,

our work, and our relationship with God. From Luke 10, there is really only "one thing needful" (v. 42 KJV).

The other thread that I would like to look at is Wes Furlong's two messages, again looking at thriving churches. The first was *Characteristics of a Thriving Church*. Jesus wants to give you and me a new imagination to see his Kingdom come on earth in the most unimaginable places! When here, Jesus crossed many cultural boundaries, and now he calls us to join him, to cooperate with him, to trust him to give us his vision.

Wes concluded on Sunday morning with a look at *God's Mission for the Church*. There are two ditches that we need to stay between. We tend to either isolate and not get out of the salt shaker, or we assimilate and our message becomes so diluted as to be of no effect. For me, Wes did a superb job of describing Daniel's experience in Babylon. He was committed to learning the culture and the language, but because of God's commands to Israel, he couldn't eat the food. For you and me, like Daniel, it is a matter of discernment and prudence. Daniel never pursued position or influence. He "gave space to the sovereignty of God." It can be easy for me to want to fix things or make problems go away! The reality is that it is not all about me or all up to me—God is still on the throne!

Daniel's Hebrew name means "God is my judge." In Babylon, he was given the name Belteshazzar, meaning "Ba'al's prince," or "Bel will protect." For Daniel, his name was a constant reminder of his identity, his relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For me the question is, as I trust Jesus to help me live in the world but not of it, to not be isolated or assimilated, what is my Babylon that is trying to give me its identity? Can I live so deeply embraced by the Father that I can become like Daniel, a model Babylonian, but keep my identity as a beloved son? 🙏



Don and his wife, Bonnie, are involved in ministry to marriages through their 501(c)(3), Hearts Alive! They share in retreats, conferences, renewal meetings, and week-long "marriage enrichment intensives" with couples.



My Take on Multiply 2022

A COLLECTION OF REFLECTIONS

Darren Peachey – Belleville, Pennsylvania



“We have chosen to make CMC our community. We have chosen to attend a CMC church and to put down roots within this group of congregations. And we hope that our kids can grow up and find role models, and find heroes of faith, within this group of churches.” These confident, yet humble and trust-filled words spoken by Elizabeth Miller from West Jefferson, Ohio, via video at the Friday evening session of the recent Multiply gathering in Maryland, have impacted my thinking these past few weeks.

Will Elizabeth’s children, and all the children within the influence of CMC, find role models and heroes? Will the children find the kind of heroes that are described in Hebrews 10:19-25? Heroes that have a confidence to enter the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. Heroes with sincere, undivided hearts that have only an allegiance to Jesus. Heroes who hold unswervingly to the professed hope of cleansing from sin through Jesus. Heroes who spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Heroes who do not give up on each other but rather encourage one another to hold onto faith in Jesus.

Will you and I be heroes, heroes of faith?

Merlin W. Miller – Shipshewana, Indiana



I could reflect on quite a number of blessings from Multiply 2022 in Western Maryland—things that I enjoyed and could speak positively about. The setting was beautiful, it’s always great to be challenged through teaching, the host community took great care of us, singing and worshiping with a large group of believers is inspiring, those that provided childcare were awesome, and hearing personal stories had the dual effect of making it feel accessible to me and motivating me.

But, as good as all those things were, my favorite thing about Multiply 2022 was being able to reconnect with all those people that I’ve gotten to know over the years. Rekindling those personal connections is such a joy and brings encouragement to me. That happens via a glance and a smile, a handshake and a casual conversation, a hug and more in-depth vulnerability,

or best of all, praying for and with each other. I’m often amazed at how God has allowed me to meet so many brothers and sisters within our conference—I count many of you as dear friends.

In a similar vein, it is very satisfying to me to see my children also establish friendships with other children who attend churches scattered across the country. I love hearing their stories of connecting with someone else’s child, and figuring out whether I’ve connected with their parents yet! We are built to be relational, and these relationships have joy and meaning when it is the Holy Spirit that binds us together.

Heidi Hertzler – Kalona, Iowa



In a country that is trying to figure out our “new normal,” CMC’s Multiply 2022 was a breath of fresh air. Together we gathered in a large building at the fairgrounds, which was artfully decorated (feeling warm and inviting), and raised our voices together to praise our God. Together we prayed for each other and enjoyed impactful conversations over meals.

As I reflect, a highlight was the testimonies shared about what God is doing in churches and through missions in our conference. The stories held a vulnerability that exposed the challenges, yet were delivered with such integrity that one could understand the powerful ways God is showing up and being made famous in our neighborhoods and around the world.

Sunday morning, Wes Furlong talked about Daniel. Daniel lived in uncertain times and it appeared like his only choice was to assimilate into the Babylonian culture or isolate in his Jewish culture. Many times we think our only options are to assimilate or to isolate. Yet, Daniel shows us a different way. This new approach took wisdom, listening to his God, and

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CMC is an evangelical Anabaptist denomination with headquarters in Irwin, Ohio, and is made up of over 100 churches located in 24 states. CMC’s mission is to mature and multiply churches both locally and globally.



“Mistakes Were Made...” (Part 8)

BY LEON RUCH

Holy Smokes! The Church is on Fire!

I first visited the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris in the spring of 2004 as part of Rosedale Bible College’s European Study Tour, and have returned several times since then. It’s not the oldest (that would be St. Denis), tallest (Amiens) or most monumental (Chartres) of the medieval French Gothic churches, but due in large part to its location it is the most visited and best known. The soaring spires, glowing glass, spidery structure, and grotesque gargoyles identify it as a church in the minds of many.

The May 2004 issue of the *Beacon*, published while I was on that tour, contains several articles about churches from different perspectives:

- a few of my thoughts on the [relationship between theology and church building design](#)
- a feature on my friends [Dan and Lynelle Delagrange and their adventure in church planting in Ecuador](#)
- a profile of [Sunnyside Mennonite Church in Illinois, a church I frequently attended during my university studies](#)

Due to the imprecision of the English language, the word “church” can refer to a building, a group, or an event. When a church can have church in a church, it’s not easy to avoid mistakes about what is being referred to! The relative importance of the things that “church” can mean become confused.

Francis Chan points to a model of church that encompasses devoted worshipers, loving families, equipped disciple-makers, spirit-filled missionaries, and suffering sojourners—no buildings required, though we find them a convenient place to facilitate our activities. Even some of the things that have become a customary part of our gatherings can be secondary to our calling, though we find them comfortable. The people, working together with God to establish his kingdom, should be central.

Sometimes it takes a disruption in the routine to rekindle a focus on the priorities of what a church should be.

Notre-Dame caught fire on April 15, 2019. The roof was destroyed, the upper walls damaged, the interior marred by water and smoke, and the site contaminated by molten lead. Work began almost immediately on stabilizing the structure and preparing to rebuild. Architects and photoshop artists

around the world submitted proposals for replacement of the roof with a stained-glass structure, a greenhouse, and even a swimming pool—all of which were wisely rejected in favor of a historically accurate reconstruction, which is expected to cost several billion euros and take up to twenty years to complete. Visitors today can look above the construction wall to see the cranes, the scaffolding, and the wooden forms supporting the flying buttresses. President Macron insists that the building will reopen in 2024, five years after the fire, even though much of the work will remain to be done.

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While there’s plenty of information available about Notre-Dame’s building, the story of the people associated with it is more obscure. The Masses that were performed there have moved to Église Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois, near the Louvre, but one is left to wonder how the congregation is doing.

Sunnyside Mennonite Church caught fire on March 26, 2021. Only a few things—two benches, a Bible, and a bell—could be salvaged; the rest of the building was a total loss and had to be completely removed. Construction of a new facility began almost immediately and they have already begun meeting there for worship. The congregation temporarily met in the gym of a local school, and other churches and local businesses have helped in various ways. Associate Pastor Luke Goss reports that the unity of the members has been strengthened as they work and worship together, and rediscover how much they need each other.

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Leon is a member of Hicksville Mennonite Church, an architect, and a frequent traveler to places related to church history and architectural history.



Take What I Give and Follow Me

BY MADALYN

When David and Emily first entered the Rosedale International Center (RIC) as young REACHers, they didn't know this small step would open the door to a life of service. But God has a way of taking small steps and turning them into invitations to more. Now, the couple lives and works in the Mediterranean Region, using their professions as vehicles for mission work. In the past three years, their businesses have proven to be a strong foundation for earning trust and relationship in their local community—a testament to the ways God opens doors through ordinary means.

David grew up on a farm—and his passion for all things agricultural is evident in even a short conversation. While in REACH, he caught a vision for using this passion overseas. “Food and agriculture is something the whole world does. It can really open doors in a lot of places.” This is evident in the Mediterranean, where he works with a local co-op which provides agricultural opportunities and education to rural villagers.

Doing things together, walking through life together, being there—it builds trust. And that gives us the opportunity to speak into their lives.

Putting his extensive knowledge to use, David works with local farmers, routinely visiting their homes, offering help and advice, and building a foundation with many in the community—including a gentleman who joined the co-op last year. David visited the gentleman's home, sat with him and his family, and got to know them. On another visit soon after, David learned that this man's father had just passed away. “I got to go with them from the mosque after they prepared the body for burial, and went to the graveyard and stood next to him as he buried his dad. The door to get to know him was through agriculture; it gave us the chance to be present and experience life together, so a relationship developed really quickly.”


Emily, who began an exporting business soon after they moved to the Mediterranean, speaks of a similar experience.

A majority of the women in their region are artists who make beautiful domestic goods. “So, we built from there. I came into it with the perspective of, *I can learn from you in this. And hopefully I can help you and give you a sustainable income.* It's been a three-year learning process. Learning and problem-solving together has been really cool.”

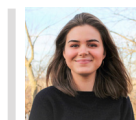
Because the women do most of their work from home, Emily's business has opened the door to their everyday lives. The hours she has spent in community with the village women have allowed for the forging of deep friendships. “Doing things together, walking through life together, being there—it builds trust. And that gives us the opportunity to speak into their lives.”

David and Emily speak with excitement about the many relationships they've built through their businesses. Their connections give them “so much time to spend with people. It's built so many friendships that we're just like—*whoa, how did this happen?*”

As they look toward their future in the region, David and Emily anticipate a season of harvest. They have spent three years building a strong foundation with their neighbors, and now feel God calling them further. “We've been feeling that God is preparing us to go deeper with people. We've been praying for boldness, and expecting that people are going to start coming to us with questions.”

And as they reflect on their past term, the couple speaks of learning deep trust in God. “God has been saying, *just take what I give you and follow me. I'll continue to lead you—just take what I give you and follow me.*” 

Pray for David, Emily, and their daughters as they conclude their home assignment in the States and return for another term in the Mediterranean. Ask for joy, perseverance in their work, and good soil in the hearts of their friends and neighbors.



Madalyn serves as Media Coordinator for Rosedale International. She lives in Rosedale, Ohio, and attends Shiloh Mennonite Church.

My Take on Multiply 2022 *continued from page 2*

being obedient. The end result was Daniel becoming a model citizen in both the Jewish and Babylonian cultures. When we find ourselves in places where we feel our only choice is to assimilate or to isolate, may we be people who learn from Daniel to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to find a way to effectively share Jesus and glorify our God in the culture where he has placed us.

Emy Yoder – Dayton, Virginia



As humans we worry, and we worry a lot. We worry about relationships, possessions, feelings. But the only thing we should really be worrying about is our relationship with the Father. This past year has brought a lot of decisions to light

as I prepare for a life without parental support, and I worry if I am making the right choices. However, there is only so much we know, or so much of the puzzle we can see. One thing that the CMC conference taught me, through the numerous missionary testimonies, was that we do not have to know the answer. We just need to know God. Knowing God means having a relationship with him; wanting what he wants. As long as I know God, he will show me what he wants for me and guide me through life.

We also must want God's leadership. If we are leaning on our own power to make decisions, we are not desiring or even considering the best option. It is like reading a multiple-choice question without reading the instructions or all of the options. In all my life, I have never correctly guessed how a situation could play out and that is a very good thing. Because if I got what I wanted all the time, if we all got what we wanted all the time, the world would be in ruins. I mean, look at where the world is right now. Submitting to God is the greatest decision of anyone's life. But, in order to completely submit, we must completely trust in his correct answer to the multiple-choice question that is life.

Elizabeth Miller – West Jefferson, Ohio



At the recent annual CMC Multiply conference, my husband and I took full advantage of the provided childcare to attend the sessions, catch up with old friends, and make new friends. Highlights for our children included a bouncy

house rented for multiple days (!) and playing some of their first real games of tag with friends both old (as a percentage of their life) and new. Their smiles and moods when we picked them up made it clear that they had enjoyed their times in each childcare session.

As our children grow, so will the relationships that they have formed while spending time together in childcare. I still remember my early impressions of other CMC children who are still part of the greater CMC community today. This shared bank of memories serves as a shared experience that, while certainly not necessary for a community to thrive, does make it more natural for thriving to occur. This connection will help our

kids understand that they are a part of the community, too, and that an annual trip to Multiply will involve their own renewal of connections, and not just tagging along with Andrew and me. This is all in addition to the solid teaching on biblical topics. In a world where children are given little independence in the name of safety, the CMC childcare offers a unique opportunity for children to gain a small measure of independence in an environment that any parent would feel great about.

We plan to continue to make Multiply a yearly event for our family. The conference leaves us feeling spiritually enriched and challenged, and connected to a part of the body of Christ that feels like a true theological and cultural home. The childcare not only makes it possible for us to be edified by the sessions without constant interruption, but is something that the children love and grow from. 🙏

“Mistakes Were Made” Part 8 *continued from page 3*

The Delagranges completed their term of service in Ecuador several years ago, and Comunidad de Fe has matured into a member of Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Ecuatoriana, a CMC international affiliate conference. The church has demonstrated practical nonresistance by paying for their property several times over as a result of fraud and subterfuge. As I've visited several times over the years, I've been impressed by their enthusiastic worship services and creative approaches to evangelism. They remain faithful despite recent challenges from the pandemic and economic uncertainty. Although their attempts at a next generation church plant have not yet ignited, the vision for doing so survives.

Fire is used in Scripture to describe trials of faith, but also to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. Is your church building on fire? Call the fire department! Is your church on fire? Fan the flames! 🙏

To view the articles mentioned in the bullet points at the beginning, view our blog version of this article at blog.cmcrosedale.org and click on the links in the bullet points.