



MAPLE CITY CHAPEL Goshen, Indiana

BY JAY SHETLER

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Reflections on God's Work — Part 5

God is at work. In 2023, the *Beacon* feature articles will seek to capture a snapshot of the ways God is working in churches across our conference. We pray that these articles encourage your faith and spur you on to join God in the work He is doing in your local congregation.

~Kelsey Jurkovich, Publication & Literature Committee

A couple of years ago, Maple City Chapel adopted the tagline “belong, believe, become” to describe our mission as a church. We want the world to believe in Jesus and to become more like Jesus, but it’s difficult, if not impossible, for someone to experience spiritual transformation if they don’t first feel authentically loved and accepted. This reality has forced us to thoughtfully evaluate what we do to help people, especially the unchurched, experience belonging. While we sometimes get it wrong, it’s breathtaking to see how the Holy Spirit moves when we lead with love.

A few months ago, a man named Mike visited for the first time. He shared that seven years ago, he had a serious heart problem. Just before undergoing heart surgery, his surgeon encouraged him to consider faith in Jesus. For seven years he thought about that conversation as he drove by our church, saying to himself, “I should go to church one of these days.” Then, one day, he showed up. He used a feature on our website to plan his visit, so we knew he was coming. We were able to meet him at the door, welcome him, and make him feel like he belonged. A few weeks later, he met with one of our pastors and accepted Christ!

About eight years ago, Steve showed up at our church. He was trying to get sober after decades of alcoholism. He was unemployed and asked if he could do odd jobs at the church throughout the week so he wouldn’t be tempted to drink. He was covered in tattoos, cussed every other word, and was extremely racist. Once when our African American youth pastor preached, Steve walked out muttering racial slurs. He often lost his temper and sometimes cussed out staff members. But he remained sober, and it was obvious that the Holy Spirit was working on his heart. Day after day and year after year, the staff loved on him while speaking truth into his life. To make a

really long story short, a couple of months ago Steve accepted Christ, and we had the opportunity to baptize him. To make the journey even sweeter, we learned that as a teenager in the early 70’s, Steve used to hang out at Teen Haven, the youth center that eventually led to the start of our church. So, it was more than 50 years after first investing in Steve that he finally said yes to Jesus!

We recently baptized Cheyenne (16) and J.J. (12), as well as their father, Jeremiah. Cheyenne shared through tears how her father attended a men’s retreat at Maple City Chapel. She said, “We thought he would come back the same person, but we were wrong.” At the retreat, Jeremiah accepted Jesus. He started bringing his family to church every Sunday and then told Cheyenne that she was going to start attending youth group. Her response: “Absolutely not!” She said in her testimony, “I thought I was going to be judged, but I was wrong again. My small group made me feel so welcomed and special, and that’s when I knew I wanted my relationship with Christ to grow.” In the coming months we will be baptizing Jeremiah’s wife, his other daughter, a brother-in-law, and a friend.

In our largest attended Easter Sunday, nearly 1,400 people heard stories from Ken, Wayne, and Pedro. They all had difficulty feeling accepted in church before experiencing belonging at Maple City Chapel. When we create a culture of belonging, it opens a person’s heart to believe truth and become more like Jesus. Jesus is risen and on the move! 🙌



Jay is a pastor, licensed clinical psychologist, and life coach. He has served as lead pastor at Maple City Chapel in Goshen, IN, for the past 12 years. Jay and Beth have been married for 27 years and have two adult children.



A Christian Gentleman

BY ROB FISHER



Carl J. Wesselhoeft, 1929-2023

God blessed Carl Wesselhoeft with a long life which he lived in patience, grace, and joy. From a farm in Germany, through stays in Canada and Somalia, and ultimately to his much-loved Turkey Run Mennonite Church, Carl walked a course at times difficult, but with joy in the goal. As I reflect on sixty years of knowing Carl, thirty of those years as co-pastors of the congregation at Turkey Run, I see four guiding values in his life.

First, he might say, "I will see all of life through the lens of the coming kingdom of God." From the Gospel of Mark we read, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and "Come follow me." Carl chose to link the present with the eternal Kingdom. When a new baptismal class formed, he would ask me, "Are you sure they are converted?" In other words, have they understood their need and placed their faith in Jesus? He saw the Kingdom as something to be lived out in the context of the faith community, which for him was Turkey Run, CMC (now Rosedale Network of Churches), and the broader circles of faith. He often said that we are not here to promote ourselves, but to be faithful, generous, forgiving, loving of our enemies, and hospitable to all. Put simply, follow Jesus!

He recently shared part of this quote, "The Kingdom of God is the most radical proposal ever proposed to the mind and allegiance of man...." (E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and The Unchanging Person*), and in his final sermon series he preached through the Gospel of Matthew. If Carl had an obsession, it was the kingdom of God.

Secondly, "I will live as long as I am alive." Psalm 92 reads, "The righteous will flourish as a palm tree.... They will still bear fruit in old age" (v.12a, 14a NIV). Carl stayed the course; he did not shuffle to the sidelines, become a spectator, or worse, a critical bystander. Once after sharing with him some news of a family serving in a foreign country, he paused and then said, "O to be young again."

Even as his body weakened, his spirit remained strong. He continued to live in step with the Spirit by being firmly connected and committed to a faith community and maintaining an active prayer life. When I mentioned the stack of prayer cards that he prayed through daily, he reminded me that my family and I were in there. A number of you reading this were also.

Thirdly, "I will not become a grouchy, old man." "In everything give thanks" (I Thess. 5:18a NKJV). Carl was full of gratitude. When remembering his blessings, he included God's leading to a Christian family where as a young man he responded to the gospel. He often expressed thanks for his wife, Leota, his family and their care of him, the church family, harmony in the church, successful building projects at the church, and the many young families attending Turkey Run. Even after experiencing unrealized dreams, wounds, and losses he would exclaim, "I am so blessed!"

Lastly, "I will always be a student." Titus 2 says, "In everything, set an example by doing...good. In your teaching, show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech" (v. 7-8a NIV). In his lifetime as a teacher, he remained a serious student, always reading, listening, and thinking. Sometimes, his thoughts on a particular text or word would include the Scripture's meaning in German. When I was a young pastor, he often asked me what I thought on theological issues, sometimes in order to continue seeking and learning himself and sometimes to teach. At times he would wonder if we were losing or drifting from important doctrine. For Carl, the truth was always seen and understood in the light of Jesus and His resurrection.

I am so thankful that Carl included me in his life. He shared with me a wide range of emotions. We sometimes struggled with decisions in the work of the church together, but I always found in him a safe place to be myself. This gift was one of the greatest privileges of my life.

Over the years, Carl gave me a number of books which he saw as worthwhile. About a month before he passed away, he gave me what would be the last. Part of what he wrote in the front of the book read, "Please accept this gift...I am about ready to say goodbye to this life. Turkey Run has been such a blessing. To God be all the glory! Carl J. Wesselhoeft"

Carl did not become weary. He saw the Kingdom afar off and with a teachable and generous spirit, he brought it near. 🙏



Rob and his wife, Bethany, live in Bremen, Ohio, where Rob has served in leadership at Turkey Run Mennonite Church for over four decades as associate pastor, pastor, and now as overseer.



The Place of Children in Worship Services

BY RBC

This or That? Part 5

RBC's series of Beacon articles this year showcases a wide variety of differing practices encountered among Rosedale Network congregations. We hope these articles promote thoughtful discussions and spark new ideas about the differing ways our churches are faithfully seeking to honor Christ as His Body.

North Street Community Church: Why Children's Church is important to us

—Keegan Wright

What is a child's place in the church? Children ask themselves this question whether they realize it or not, and they will find an answer through our practices and attitudes more so than our words.

What do our practices teach our children about their role in the church family?

At North Street, we see *maturing and multiplying churches locally and globally* as something that begins at an early age. Children are not just potential, they have value, worth, and perspectives to offer at every age, and we want to instill that through the programs and attitudes we adopt. This is why providing Children's Church during our weekly worship services is a key part of our discipleship.

By providing a separate Children's Church, we give the children a place where they can hear about Jesus on their own level on a weekly basis. We have seen several children profess faith in Jesus, and Children's Church plays a part in that. Children's Church also gives space "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12 NJKV). If children really are a part of the church at their current ages, then we want to set them up for success in learning and using their gifts for the kingdom of God. When we do that, we show through our practice that they are valuable, and have a place in this family called the church.

But what does Children's Church say about our attitude towards children in church?

Rather than telling children to sit and be quiet, basically asking them to be mini-adults, we provide a space for them to be kids, and to learn about Jesus and life in His family in an energetic and noisy way. Again, this further instills to the children that they have value *now*, and are not just potential that gets in the way until they mature.

Today, many young people are leaving the church. What if we could instill at a young age that each individual belongs

in Jesus' family, has value, and has a part to play in God's kingdom? We could see a generation rise up to shine a light of hope, belonging, and purpose in Jesus to a world desperately searching for these things in all the wrong places. At North Street, Children's Church plays a part in realizing that vision.

Naumburg Mennonite Church: Why including children in our worship services is important to us

—Myron Roggie

Our typical Sunday morning service has always included children of all ages. Over the years, we've taken a look at possibly changing that, but our practice continues including children in our services.

We see children as a vital part of today's church, as opposed to seeing them as "the future church." To us this means that our typical Sunday morning service must acknowledge and involve children, and share Jesus in ways that children can understand and connect.

We have vibrant Sunday School, AWANA, VBS, Junior Youth, and Youth programs. All of these programs are essential components of our overall teaching ministry to children. But in each of these age-segregated groups, families are not worshipping together. Our Sunday morning service is the only worship/teaching that happens weekly in which entire families sit and worship together. We want children of all ages to feel they are just as welcome and important in our intergenerational worship services as any of the adults. Our parents strongly desire this for their children as well.

We purposely involve children in several ways in our Sunday morning worship service. Occasionally, the worship team will

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RBC is the educational arm of Rosedale Network of Churches, helping students lay the groundwork for their future by providing two years of mentorship, community, and biblical education in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition.



What in the World Is God Doing?!

BY JOE

Did you know that 200 years ago, Norway was the poorest country in Europe? Did you know that today it is among the wealthiest in the world, per capita? How in the world did this happen?

In *The Book That Transforms Nations*, co-founder of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Loren Cunningham recounts meeting the king of Norway. He asked the king if he knew how his country had experienced such phenomenal change; the king replied that he didn't know. Mr. Cunningham proceeded to tell him how it had happened.

In 1771, Hans Nielsen Hauge was born to a Norwegian farm family. Although his family honored the Bible, young Hauge never felt he was good enough to be saved. Instead, he pursued his creative and entrepreneurial interests, which brought relative prosperity in the midst of great poverty.

"They began to disciple society. And little by little, Norway changed."

— L. Cunningham

When he was twenty-five years old, Hauge had a life-changing encounter with Jesus and committed himself to spreading God's word. In spite of government restrictions, he journeyed across Norway, calling people into relationship with God beyond the traditions of the lethargic Norwegian church.

Within a decade, Hauge had distributed Bibles across the entire country. Two decades later, in a nation of only 800,000, over 1,000 groups of believers were meeting in homes. The threatened wealthy class, clergy, and government officials often imprisoned Hauge and other lay leaders; Hauge himself was arrested eleven times in seven years.

But Hauge did more than distribute Bibles and teach about Jesus. He wrote books about theology, parenting, starting businesses, living with honesty and integrity, and how to be a person of influence. Norwegian peasants learned to read so they could follow more of what he taught. Hauge started multiple businesses and helped many others do the same.

Mr. Cunningham concluded, "Norwegian believers reflected Christ's character, influencing their own spheres of the culture:

home, work, and social circles. They began to disciple society. And little by little, Norway changed."

Did you know that God is transforming nations in the same way today? It doesn't happen overnight of course, and even one lifetime isn't always enough time to see the results of a change of trajectory. But transformation of *nations* happens as the life of Jesus transforms *individuals*, who in turn share the life of Jesus with those around them.

I've recently been encouraged by the ways these kingdom movements are growing around the world. Twenty years ago, missiological researchers were aware of a dozen or so multiplying movements—where missionaries had gone with careful strategies to allow the gospel to take root and eventually flourish under local leadership. These were not "skin deep" movements; they were characterized by "obedience-based discipleship." These radical followers of Jesus sound much like the early Anabaptists, who "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev. 12:11b, NIV).

Today, this handful of kingdom movements has multiplied to nearly 2,000. Few of these new movements are the result of traditional mission workers sowing the seed; instead, the overwhelming majority have been initiated by local believers who have a passion to take Jesus anywhere and everywhere. Movements themselves are birthing new movements.

Rosedale International has recently adopted the vision tagline "Jesus to the World. The World to Jesus." This is not a change of direction at all; it's simply a clear, Jesus-centered statement about why we exist. All our energy and resources are poured into taking Jesus to the world. The prayer we breathe all day, every day, is that the nations will come to Him for life.

Just as we saw in Norway, the life of Jesus can transform nations. Today, in a world where bad news screams at us from our phones every day, God is on the move. The gospel of the Kingdom will always be good news! 📖



Joe, president of Rosedale International, has been a Rosedale Network of Churches minister since 1989. He lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife, Janice, and together they lead the Columbus Network of Microchurches.

include one or two children as part of the team. Each month we have times of “special singing” with a group or family sharing a song or two as part of the worship service. Children are usually part of these “special singing” groups. Every Sunday, as part of the morning service, we have Bible Trivia questions for the children. The children who guess the correct answers get to come up to the platform and receive their prize of a \$2 bill to the applause of the entire congregation. Also, once each month, the Sunday School children (preschool through Grade 8) have a special time of singing in front of the congregation. On these Sundays, any children who have memorized Scripture passages as part of our memory program are recognized as well.

We as pastors also keep in mind when we prepare and share the Sunday morning message that children are present. I have found this to be a blessing. All three of us on the pastoral team at Naumburg can share stories of children as young as 5- and 6-years-old making comments to us after a Sunday morning message about something they heard us say, or that God said to them. Parents value this aspect of having their children with them during the service—the questions that arise and the opportunities they have as parents to answer them.

We think having children as part of our Sunday morning service is beneficial for them, their parents, and families as a whole. We see healthy children and strong families as a result of this practice. 🙏