

Key City Initiative – Executive Board Report to Gathering 2010

Introduction

At Gathering 2008, comments and feedback from the delegation floor strongly encouraged the Executive Board to conduct a formal evaluation of the Key Cities Initiative program. This report is being submitted to the delegates at Gathering 2010 as a result of that request.

The Key Cities Initiative (KCI) included Mission Calgary (1998-2003 – 10 church plants in 5 yrs.); Love Toronto (2000-2005 – 5 reproducing churches in 5 yrs.) & Rendezvous Montréal (2002-2007 - a new vision for church planting). Phase 2 included Ignite Vancouver (2004-2009 – a vision to return to the city); & finally a combined Harvest Saskatchewan/DREAM Manitoba initiative (2006-2011 - reproducing congregations to reach communities).

Survey questions were sent to numerous individuals including Provincial Conference Ministers, Provincial Extension Directors, Provincial Board of Evangelism Chairs, Provincial Moderators, and church planters over the duration of the KCI program. A total of 54 surveys were sent out with 21 responses submitted. Responses were compiled and summarized.

Key City Initiative Vision/Goals

The vision for the Key Cities Initiative was to target various cities in Canada to renew and focus on church planting. Church Planting Canada and other agencies noted in the 1990s that the cities were not being reached, and were lagging behind in the vision to provide a viable evangelical congregation for every 2000 people (DAWN – Disciple A Whole Nation philosophy).

Short term goals: to have specific numbers of churches planted within a defined time period.

Medium term goals: in most provinces the hope was to restart a vision and positive expectation for church planting, because a number of recent past attempts had floundered, leaving a sense of discouragement. In other provinces, it was meant to come alongside already working church planting and encourage targeting the city.

Long term goals: to establish a series of viable congregations within Canada's key cities and thus lay a foundation for further effort in impacting our larger communities with the gospel. A vision to establish reproducing churches was developed within the KCI project.

Program Implementation Strategies and Philosophies

Mission Calgary, Love Toronto, and Ignite Vancouver implemented a conference initiated church planting philosophy. Rendezvous Montreal's main focus was to create a new vision for church planting in Quebec, which ended up being a catalyst for Horizon Quebec. Manitoba and Saskatchewan introduced their strategies as Key Communities with a more provincial and systematic approach to have healthy churches plant daughter churches, with provincial conferences coming alongside to support and encourage these plants.

Key City Initiative Benefits

The Key Cities Initiative was instrumental in stimulating our national, provincial, and local church bodies to have a renewed awareness and desire to reach neighbours and communities for Christ. KCI provided an opportunity to investigate and undertake big risks in church planting in Canada. It offered provincial conferences and leadership the opportunity to think and dream big. Through the faithful donations of local churches and individual donors, funds were made available through the national conference to provide provincial conferences, leaders, church planters the financial resources to implement and deliver these dreams.

A significant benefit to be mentioned is the overall achievement of the program goals. Though there were many learning opportunities, mistakes and oversights, God has again proven faithful to those who endeavour to do His will in sharing the message of salvation. The KCI program has to date resulted in 39 churches being planted with 31 churches continuing. Regional statistics are: Alberta (9 initial plants, 6 continuing with 1 merger); Ontario (7 initial plants, 1 continuing and 3 post KCI plants); Montreal (6 initial plants with 5 continuing); Vancouver (11 initial plants with 11 continuing); Manitoba (3 plants with 3 continuing); and Saskatchewan (1 church revived with a EMC partnership, numerous considering planting). We need to remember that there were church plants that closed. We should rejoice and give God the praise and glory for these new churches. Each new church brings with it new believers, lost souls who have now found everlasting joy and life in Christ Jesus.

KCI has provide us nationally, provincially, and regionally, an opportunity for renewed emphasis and focus towards outreach, leadership development and church health. It has renewed our commitment to reach our communities for Christ. Within some provinces, churches, and individuals, it has resulted in growth in our passion for our larger cities, perhaps forgotten as we continue to move into the suburbs and outlying areas of the larger centers. Also evident is a renewed desire in many regions to reach our inner city and immigrant communities, resulting in many non traditional MB churches being planted and nourished.

Many provincial conferences and individual churches have evaluated and implemented revisions to their church planting philosophies. KCI identified a weakness in our leadership development process, resulting in new efforts to close this gap at National, Provincial, and local church levels. Churches and leaders are being inspired to develop a missional way of thinking, through outreach initiatives, new church plant opportunities, or the evaluation of current initiatives and programs.

Successes and challenges have provided opportunities for growth in an understanding of urban and city church planting. It has identified a strong need for careful evaluation during the planning and assessment phase of a new church plant. It has identified requirements for careful discernment and in some cases patience when searching for church planters and workers. Conscious efforts to mitigate these gaps and risks will result in a more comprehensive implementation plan, better positioned for success in future initiatives.

Lastly, the KCI initiative was a catalyst for improving relationships between National and Provincial leadership teams. Through the efforts of the KCI program, there is a renewed sense of unity, each group realizing the importance of each other, the need to coordinate efforts, and the benefits of determining and using each other's strengths in order to accomplish together what we could not accomplish individually alone.

Key City Initiative Challenges

It is to be expected that with any initiative, there exists opportunities or action items that had they been implemented at an appropriate time, may have contributed more to the overall success of the initiative. The evaluation and learning of these challenges and shortcomings is critical to the success of any future projects and initiatives.

There is a requirement for a more comprehensive church planter evaluation process. We need to evaluate the applicant's skills, educational and work background, their history, motivation, and desire to support the conferences, and adherence to MB theology, during the interview process. We need to recognize the pressures arising from a shortage of church planters, but temper the pressure of putting someone in place with the requirements of having a solid person in position. The freedom to say NO when a potential candidate's assessment or evaluation fails is paramount to a successful church planting process.

There were some instances where church plants were rushed into without adequate investigation of the target area. More diligent research is required when assessing target areas for any church plant. Survey feedback also strongly suggested that the research involve a larger presence of local and provincial leaders. Critical to the success of any church plant, or major initiative for that matter, is an established, confirmed support and buy-in from the local churches and provincial conferences.

A consistent long term supervision methodology, unapologetically holding teams/planters accountable for their methods, self care, as well as results and connection to the denomination is needed. There is a requirement to hold people accountable. It would also follow that the accountability requirements are clearly recorded and consistently communicated.

With any church planting initiative, there will be successful church plants and also church closures. Provincial and National leaders need to prepare for these closures, with focused intention in areas of coaching, mentoring and caring for both church planters and members of these churches. There are strong feelings of stress, guilt, and even anger when a plant does not succeed. Family pressures and stress levels are high. We need to ensure that there are well thought out processes and support mechanisms in place to provide the physical, emotional, and spiritual care for these hurting brothers and sisters who have given so much.

Regarding a church planting philosophy, the Key City Initiative primarily focused on Conferences planting churches. In the later stage (Manitoba/Saskatchewan), churches planting churches was encouraged. Survey feedback recommends that we be less focused on specific delivery philosophies and more on an overall successful program. If we truly want to be successful in our regional areas to dream big and take huge risks, our programs need to accommodate the creative and sensitive matching of a church planting delivery method to the specific needs of the community workers.

One insight submitted around various church planting philosophies or delivery methods warrants identification and consideration. *"We like to see the results of aggressive church planting, yet it results in churches depending on the conference to do the church planting. Some regions philosophically prefer the systemic approach of churches planting churches, yet don't see immediate results. Will we be patient in this? Will we get distracted along the way and fail to forge ahead? Will we be able to manage them both and achieve a healthy movement forward?"*

Will our church and donor support for church planting initiatives be accepting and/or influenced by the change in philosophies, or are donations tied directly to tangible and timely results.”

Executive Board Review Summary

The Key Cities/Communities initiative is currently in the final 2 years of an 11 year program. It seems fitting that by way of a summary, we reflect and again draw attention to a few key items that have been noted by the survey respondents. We should celebrate the accomplishments of past efforts, and continue to seek the Lord’s wisdom in current and future endeavours by way of remembering and mitigating risks that we have encountered. When stories are shared of what is occurring in different provinces, we should be thankful and acknowledge to God that He is working in Canada and around the world. The Spirit of God continues to move amongst us. Our churches are experiencing growth spiritually and in numbers as they continue to embrace the missional mindset that Christ called us to have. Churches are continually seeking new and creative ways to reach into communities to show Christ’s love.

The Key Cities Initiative was and continues to be a visionary catalyst to draw us as Mennonite Brethren to the call to reach our neighbours, our neighbourhoods, and our cities for Christ. The goals of KCI, while they may have been aggressive, prompted us to dream and activate those dreams with a driven purpose that may not have developed without the KCI vision. We should praise God for the faithfulness He has shown us by way of new churches, new members, and new leaders. We have experienced growth in leadership and in leadership skills, we have grown as a denomination, and we have grown as individuals. As we reflect on the benefits and challenges of KCI we should never lose sight of the mission that Christ has called us to – that of being Fishers of Men and Women.

By way of encouragement, we offer the following recommendations:

- We need to continue to improve communication between National and Provincial conferences. This should extend to the congregations of all provincial bodies. Buy-in and ownership is critical to the success of any program or initiative. Subsequently, it is incumbent for all of us, whether leaders, pastors, or parishioners, to understand, support, and seek involvement in evangelistic initiatives.
- We need to continue to actively support our church planters and members who hear and respond to the call to leave the comfort of an established church for the stress and uncertainty of a new church plant. As leaders, we need to set up in advance, accountability and support mechanisms that are resources in times of need.
- Our programs should have as complete as possible, structure and processes developed prior to the implementation of programs. Our structure and processes should be defined, yet flexible to allow for and to recognize the diverse nature of our target areas, our provincial regions and their needs.
- We encourage the ongoing evaluation and reporting of initiatives and programs in a timely manner. There should be more communication and evaluation done during the programs rather than when the program is nearing the completion.

Lastly, we want to continue to encourage the many men, women and children who have been and continue with Key City/Community Initiatives. May God continue to provide and bless you

as you serve Him. We recognize and give thanks to the many National and Provincial staff and leaders that have worked so tirelessly on the KCI program. We recognize the vision and creativity of Board of Evangelism members who conceived and initiated KCI. We also wish to recognize and thank Ewald Unruh for his heart for evangelism and his passion for new vibrant churches being formed in Canada. It is through these people's vision and passion, that we all become inspired to renew our evangelistic walk with Christ.

Respectfully submitted by the KCI Evaluation Team
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