

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2023

Article, Story, and Resource contributed by VP of Missional Initiatives, Cam Roxburgh

Marking the Road Ahead

For the past 12 years, I have had the privilege of helping us as a conference to pay attention to where God was and is at work in our midst. What a thrill it is for us all to be invited into this journey with God as he is redeeming all things! The stories of transformation in our leaders and our people, our churches and the neighbourhoods they are in, are so encouraging. As we start a new season (school year), it is time once again for us as a conference to consider some of the options we have for being equipped to join with what God is doing. This month, let the Missional Initiatives Team alert you to some wonderful opportunities to grow in your leadership and to have your church engage in mission with the Lord.

Engage

There are several ways to engage or get involved in the missional movement. Consider these:

1. **UPDATES, WEBSITE AND NEWSLETTERS** – Updates are sent every Thursday from our International Office, regular updates are made on the NAB website, and our Missional Initiative Newsletters come out every month.
2. **WEBINARS** – From time to time we host webinars that are open to all NAB leaders. We have two webinars coming up this fall. The first one will be on October 5 @ 12:00 p.m. Pacific / 3:00 p.m. Eastern around the topic of **Neighbourhood Life**. [Register now](#) for this 90-minute online interactive workshop in which you will have the opportunity to 'come and see' what this initiative is all about. At the end of October, join us for an hour webinar with Andrew Root (**When Church Stops Working**) as he speaks with us around how we may have leaned our ladder against the wrong wall. [Register here](#) for the webinar on October 26 at 12:00 p.m. Pacific / 3:00 p.m. Eastern. (See book review below).
3. **BOOK STUDIES** – We plan to host another book club this fall. The book will be announced soon.

Evoke

As well, there are several ways to be challenged (or evoked) into living in a different direction.

1. **BLUE OCEAN** – A three-part cohort held throughout the year, aimed at helping people understand the missionary nature of God, how we are formed in the likeness of Christ, and

how we as God's people are sent into our neighbourhoods as local missionaries.

(See attached Promotion.)

2. **DISCOVERY** – A weekend workshop where two members of our team come to your church and help the congregation to have an imagination around how they might participate with God on mission.
3. **THE LEADERS TABLE** – This four-session, online workshop invites us to reflect on the story we live in, biblical examples of how God has worked in times of disruption, and the kind of leadership we need to invite our people into mission in these disruptive times.
4. **ONLINE OR WEEKEND WORKSHOPS** – The Missional Initiatives Team is available to host various workshops in the area of Neighbourhood Life, Formation, and now in Evangelism. Check [the website](#) for the next offerings.

Equip

Our desire is to continue to equip churches in the NAB Conference to engage in their neighbourhoods.

1. **ETHOS** – A two-year experience to help local churches move from maintenance to joining with God on mission. Ethos gets at the fact that we often inadvertently fall into the rut of creating consumers instead of local missionaries.
2. **NEIGHBOURHOOD EXPERIMENT** – This one-year cohort aims to help the church create teams that will discern where God is at work in their neighbourhoods and then experiment around what it means to join him.

Encourage

We are excited about Bonfire and how it is bringing encouragement to our churches.

BONFIRE – An event for those who have been evoked or equipped in and through the NAB missional movement. This next year, Bonfire will be held prior to Triennial (St. Paul, Minnesota) in July 2024. Jeff Christopherson (author of **Once You See**) will lead our discussions around issues the church faces today. Come and tell your stories of how you have seen God at work in your life and neighbourhood!

NEIGHBOURHOOD STORY

Now Why Didn't I Think of That?

It has been close to 20 years that I have been involved in "neighbouring" in one form or another. I am pleased to have learned from so many wonderful mentors and teachers about the theology of place, the practice of being a good neighbour, and the importance of paying attention to what the Spirit of God is doing in the lives of those we live in proximity with.

My wife Shelley and I have lived in the same house for 27 years. We have seen neighbours come and go, but there are a number of people who have almost as much longevity in this place as we do. I am trying to put into practice the things I have learned but I realize I have so far to go.

For a number of years, Shelley had been developing a relationship with a wonderful neighbour – Jean. This woman was always so cheerful and kind, generous and intentional. Shelley would tell me often of the conversations they would have over the back fence or on the telephone. I reached out to her husband, and we too began to develop a friendship. We began to share meals in our homes every few months, and it didn't hurt that they had a pool.

But there was one problem. They lived directly behind us. In order to get to their home, we had to walk all the way around the block to get there. It is a big block! Not that it was too far – it just took too long.

One day as I was doing some gardening, Jean greeted me through the back fence. It just seemed as if there was something missing in the way we were doing this “being good neighbours” stuff.

Jean had an idea. She talked to Shelley, who ran it by me. Fantastic. Why didn't I think of that? Within two days, a carpenter came by, and within the day, we had a gate installed in the fence and we can walk back and forth ever so easily now. If we need anything – it is a simple exercise of going through the gate. If they need anything, they are at our back door in seconds. In fact, Jean is over all the time bringing us things she has made or out of her garden. And the pool is far more accessible.

Why didn't I think of that? A gate. Wonderful for neighbouring.

RESOURCES

What if the Ladder is Against the Wrong Wall?

Many leaders love to read. Or should I rephrase by saying that many leaders love to buy books... and read some of them.

One of the joys of my role is that from time to time I get to recommend books that will both challenge and encourage us as leaders in the NAB towards joining God on mission. Here are two books that I think are well worth the money.

When Church Stops Working by Andrew Root

This is easily one of the best reads of the past several years. In this summary of his six-volume series around life in the secular age (from Charles Taylor's work), Root outlines the problem that we as God's people face and some of the ways in which we might learn to deal with it.

He states that the problem is seen as the fact that we, the church, have dwindling numbers, dwindling influence, and a loss of biblical literacy. These indeed are concerning, but then he

states that we have put our eggs in the basket of solving these problems through greater innovation. We have suggested that in order to combat the cultural dislocation and captivity, we must be more creative and have fallen into the trap of believing that if we work harder, we can solve these issues.

To Root, that is the problem. The others are only the symptoms.

The problem, according to Root, is that we have tried to be innovative. The solution is to stop doing things through a paradigm that is dependent on our own strength and instead learn what it means to discern and to join with what God is already doing. Root does an excellent job of assessing the problem and making some wonderful suggestions, but perhaps falls back into the same trap that he is accusing others of being in. I am curious on your take.

This is an accessible read.

Leadership, God's Agency, and Disruptions: Confronting Modernity's Wager by Alan Roxburgh and Mark Lau Branson

Down at the other end of the spectrum comes a book that should not be engaged in without some serious intention. This book by Roxburgh and Branson is no lightweight, but rather a theological and philosophical challenge to us all.

This book too pushes back against a form of leadership within the church over the past 75 years that has believed that if we do the right things, in the right way, at the right time, we can get the right results. Bigger is better and more is preferable, according to much of the leadership movement. But the authors push back and suggest a completely different approach to leadership that we as God's people must be confronted with.

Throughout history, God has been at work, and perhaps there is no greater time to see this than within the disruption we are currently in. Through using Scripture (Jeremiah 29, Luke/Acts, Ephesians, and more), Roxburgh and Branson show us that God is always at work, and in times of disruption, we may have an opportunity to see this most clearly. After suggesting that we are living into a technological story instead of the Story of God, they point out how God's people have paid attention to God's presence in the past and then how leadership must be lived out in order to help God's people to discern where he is present and how we might join him.

I strongly encourage those who have some time to wrestle with the text and with our place in God's story to engage with this book.

Between these two books, there is so much encouragement for us in our journey on mission, but there is also such challenge that we look more deeply than allowing missional to just become another strategy.