

NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

An Enhancement of the M. Div. Program at The Presbyterian College, Montreal

The Need

No one knows what the future church in Canada will look like, but we do know that new models of church will be required in a new age of mission. While Biblical and theological study will continue to be essential for ministry, new skills and new ways of thinking about the church will also be required. One of those much-needed skills will be how to start new faith communities.

Canadian Presbyterians are not particularly strong in developing new churches. We close far more congregations than we open. So the Presbyterian College is asking: “What will it take for us to become excellent at new church development in the next five years? Is it possible to become known as a denomination that starts more congregations than it closes?”

The Program to Meet the Need

The Presbyterian College is redesigning its Master of Divinity program with a focus on new church development. Two factors will help to equip new ministers to lead in these contexts: (1) strong theological education which provides a solid foundation for ministry, and (2) practical apprenticeships which provide coaching and hands-on experience in new church development.

Students who enrol in the New Church Development program gain an extra eight months of experience, study, and reflection which enhance their gifts in new church development. Some new faith communities will look similar to traditional congregations; others will explore innovative ways of being the Church. In both cases, the Presbyterian College will provide funding for the apprenticeships.

The College provides summer bursaries of \$6,000 (equivalent to summer stipends, as recommended by the General Assembly) for any student enrolled in our program to work within a new church development project. Students will do an initial study of the gifts required for new church development ministry, and will be assisted in doing an assessment of their own gifts for such ministry. During the summer apprenticeships, students are provided with an experienced coach while learning firsthand what is involved in starting a new faith community, and will work with other agencies which are doing extensive work in this area. After graduation, alumni will be matched with mentors to provide ongoing encouragement and support during the early years of ministry.

How You Can Help

We believe this program is critical to the future of our church, and invite you to partner with us as we equip leaders and congregations to share the gospel in ever-changing ways, for an ever-changing world.

Your gift of \$6,000 will support one student for one summer placement. A gift of \$12,000 will cover the cost of a student for the full program (two summer placements). Your gift can be pledged over a period of up to five years.

Our goal is to provide seven summer bursaries each year, for a period of five years, by raising \$210,000 for New Church Development.





One Story - Reverend Chris Clarke

Chris Clarke was the first student to be engaged in a fully-funded internship in a new church plant. This is his story.

I've always been a hands-on learner and have often wondered what kind of leadership would be required to start a new faith community. So when the opportunity presented itself to join the team of people seeking to start a new church plant in Barrhaven, Ontario, I jumped at it. It was an amazing experience. I got to preach regularly, lead meetings, deal with difficult managerial relationships, and practice pastoral care. Behind all of my work was one central question: How can we reach out to new people in a way that makes the good news of Jesus Christ welcoming and meaningful in peoples' lives?

I discovered two very important things. First, it taught me the need to pray and rely on God. I am young(ish), and proud(ish), and I was over-confident in my abilities. Struggling with a new church reminded me that the world is a big one and the church's predicament is a big one as well. These things made it clear that no minister could go it alone; no minister will ever have enough training. The future of the church isn't in my (or anyone else's) hands, but in God's.

Second, I needed all the training I could get. I learned that lesson by making mistakes and encountering grace in the form of forgiveness from those with whom I was working. I wanted to do better and require less forgiveness and patience from those walking with me along the journey, so I learned a lot. I was able to hone my skills in a way that a more traditional placement would not have permitted.

The experience gained in being part of growing a new faith community helped to shape the kind of ministry skills and thinking I needed in order to reach out to new people in new ways. It encouraged me to experiment and to take risks and to try to imagine new ways of being the church. It helped me realize that one of the most important questions we can ask is: "What does it mean to be engaged in the mission of God in a changing world?" For me, this was an opportunity to begin the exploration of that question through practical work, collaboration with others, workshops, readings and reflections. It is an opportunity that I highly valued and would wholeheartedly endorse.

The Broader Impact

Graduates of the M. Div. New Church Development program join more than 300 alumni of the Presbyterian College who, today, lead congregations in communities across Canada and around the world. Together, they have a profound impact on our society, providing spiritual growth, pastoral counselling, food and shelter, preschool and elder care, among many other services and supports for people in need.



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