

## ***The Grandview Story***

*So how did Grandview begin? Let's start, as they say, at the beginning. And beginnings take you right back to God, of course!! Yes, that's right, in the beginning – early in 1969 - God gave Pastor Bob Robinson and the leaders of First Baptist Church, Waterloo, a vision to establish a new church in southeast Kitchener. These leaders had a passion for reaching people for Christ and fervently took hold of the vision. Southeast Kitchener was underserved by churches, and especially by those with an evangelical bent. No doubt they had no idea what they were in for, but in this we're getting ahead of ourselves.*

The Bible wisely tells us not to despise the day of small beginnings. In October 1969, with a “grand” view of what God would do in southeast Kitchener through His people, First Baptist Church sent out 54 members to begin the new work. Our first service was held at Grand River Collegiate, which became home for almost four years. Those were exciting times: we held services in the lecture theatre; all our seats had desks; the teacher made heavy use of the blackboard; and we took notes. Sound like a classroom? Yes, it was God's classroom. We learned a lot about ourselves, about God, what He wanted of us and what He had in store. Each new day unfolded God's dreams for us, and it was exhilarating to be part of creating and building as we reached out to our new community.

The 1970s brought more excitement as God provided 4 ½ acres of land for Grandview, the church-upon-the-farm. That land, which is part of the six acres we now own, was once the Brubacher farm, with an adjoining pond and an old two-storey log farmhouse which remained until we commenced the first phase of construction in 1973. We built like they did in the Bible – what we read in Scripture came alive as we built. The main room served as both sanctuary and gymnasium. We were “out in the country,” in the middle of nowhere it seemed, but we liked the site because we could see that housing was going to flourish in the area around us. If you look now, all you see is a bustling neighbourhood. It's hard to imagine that all this used to be farmland.

In 1984 we expanded our facility to include the current worship centre. After that expansion, we witnessed a rapid growth within our church community and soon realized we could not have the same closeness and connection we had in our infancy. We began to put emphasis on small groups. Through these groups, we met to encourage one another to grow in faith and enhance outreach.

In the 1990s we put a dual emphasis on “Cell and Celebration,” as we recognized that the deeper work happens most often in the more intimate settings, but corporate worship and praise are just as important.

In the mid-late 1990s we also began a women's mentoring ministry we called Heart-to-Heart. Women registered to be mentors or mentees and were paired together following much prayer. This was a very valuable ministry that built relationships between women in the church as more mature believers met with their mentees to study God's Word and enjoy social times together. Spiritual and personal growth were evident as iron sharpened iron.

Because of our rapid growth and larger size we also witnessed a greater variety of gifts, talents and skills as more and more people joined to work alongside us. We were able to undertake some huge endeavours such as the “The Easter Story”, a musical and dramatic portrayal of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. We put on this deeply moving drama seven times, and each time drew approximately 4,000 people to see it. Although production after production was filled to capacity, we offered it not as Christian entertainment, but as a poignant vehicle to tell Jesus’ story to our community. We saw these productions giving our people a good non-threatening way to start conversations about faith with family, friends, neighbours, co-workers and fellow students. This reminds us of another production, “A Long Story Short”, which was put on entirely by students. This drama replaced the Sunday morning service when it was shown, but God’s moving was no less powerful than in a traditional service. Some families shared that their decision to make Grandview their place of worship was a direct outcome of that youth drama. One family said, “Our young ones were so taken by the drama, they literally begged us to look no further.”

In 2008, a group of us formed “Families of Faith”, which sought to strengthen families spiritually. One of our Families of Faith projects was the “Family Faith Book,” a weekly devotional written *by* members of the Grandview family *for* Grandview families with children ages 2-12. This booklet was designed to help each family enjoy faith discussions in all the traffic lanes of life - mealtime, bedtime or cartime. It provided spiritual reflections, games and activities for parents to engage in with their children between Sundays, thus making faith real at home, outside the church walls. The take-home papers ran until 2015. “Take It Home Events,” which we offered periodically, served the same purpose. These sessions focused on very specific topics such as praying with children, blessing children, purity and media. Teens were included, as evidenced by a session on dating, which included both youth and their parents. Despite the squirming and giggling, we know that our teens benefitted from the Christian perspective, and two teen girls in our church produced a YouTube video as a result of attending the session.

God continues to bring us into that old “farmhouse”, shake us up and send us out, and so we have experienced several very significant expansions in our community relationships since those early days.

In 2006, we started partnering with local spiritual leaders, teachers and missionaries in Wakisi Village, a remote, little-known Ugandan community (located in Uganda’s southeast corner, just north of Lake Victoria at the source of The Nile). Over seven years we built long-term relationships, actively helping the pastors and elders to meet the physical needs of the people, providing theological education to pastors, and supporting the outreach of the churches in their neighbourhoods. Several teams went from Grandview to Uganda, with the last trip taking place in February 2012. Some members of Grandview continue to be involved with Wakisi, and particularly with the Sunrise Baby Home. As we partnered with our Ugandan brothers and sisters in Christ, we grew in our faith, overcame our ignorance, and broadened our perspectives. Hopefully, we now work better with others who are different right here in Canada, whether they be immigrants, refugees or otherwise.

In Kitchener, the Centreville-Chicopee neighbourhood, one of the more needy areas in our immediate environment, is literally on our doorstep. From 2009-2011 we partnered with the Centreville-Chicopee Community Centre to host “Sharing Days”, an event offered twice a year to meet the very real needs of

these neighbours. Our members, and later some community-based agencies, donated items of food, clothing, toys, books, and furniture, which we then shared. Because of this relationship-building, in the summer of 2016 we were able to run a Vacation Bible School out of the community centre.

For several years in June, we also invited our neighbours to our Annual Neighbourhood Yard Sale and Carnival. This free-of-charge event was a way for us to reach out to, interact, and have fun with our neighbours in a non-threatening setting. For many it may have been their first time on the premises of a church and we wanted to say, "Come right in, you're welcome. Grandview is here for you." In 2015 and 2016 the Centreville Chicopee Community Centre had its own June "Neighbours Day". Rather than compete, we volunteered to help make it a success. According to the mayor, it was the most vibrant of the many Neighbours Day celebrations in the city.

One initiative that didn't just say "come in" but "we are coming to you" was the creative new faith community in downtown Kitchener, which we initiated in 2010 and financially supported for three years. Originally called "The Nexus Centre" but now called "Nexus Church," Nexus is led by Brad Watson and meets weekly in the Conrad Centre for Performing Arts in downtown Kitchener. Far from a traditional "church plant," Nexus is an organic missional movement of passionate individuals committed to developing meaningful relationships with those professionals, students, entrepreneurs, artists and residents who live and work in the downtown core. (The children of Nexus parents have their own gathering at The Museum on Sunday mornings, which is pretty cool). Nexus Christ-followers desire to be authentic and real, discovering and learning while living life in a community about which they care deeply. Nexus staff members *talk* about arts and music, philosophy and culture and knowledge, but also *live* a faith that is relevant for the here and now in today's world.

But you are likely interested in hearing about more recent exciting initiatives. There are three we would love to tell you about in some depth!

Earlier we talked about "Cell and Celebration," a 1990s initiative that recognized the need for more intimate groups within the large group setting. Over the last few years we have been working on establishing "LifeGroups," a Grandview-wide ministry open to all post-high-school adults. These groups are communities of eight to ten people who meet at various times and locations across the KW area. Some have a specific focus, such as: young adults, couples with young children, parents of youth, adults 55+, etc., but most are study-based. The main purpose is for participants to grow in their knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ, to encourage and pray for one another, and to love and serve others. Many follow series available through RightNow Media, an online subscription service we have made available to our congregation over the last couple of years, and which offers access to thousands of Christian faith-themed teaching videos. Some of our LifeGroups follow the pulpit curriculum from our Sunday morning teaching. In addition to learning more about God and engaging in corporate prayer, groups are encouraged to perform some kind of service to better the community around them, and to engage in social times together to build interpersonal relationships within the church body. We currently have over 300 people involved in LifeGroups (approximately 60 percent of the church). Leaders and hosts receive weekly e-mail updates and twice-yearly training. The LifeGroup Leadership team is a member of The Navigators of Canada Small Group Network that connects small group ministry leaders. The

Network seeks to support churches as they effort to establish healthy relational environments in which personal transformation can occur.

We are not only concerned with the spiritual health of the Grandview body, however; we are also very moved by the spiritual condition of the world – not only as far away as Uganda, but as close to home as Quebec. While Quebec was predominantly Catholic at one time, Quebec has become a very secular society, and there is great opportunity for the evangelical church on mission. You may not know that Quebec has one of the lowest percentages of evangelical Christians in the western world, but it is true. As a result of our awareness of this fact, in the spring of 2016, Grandview agreed to enter into a partnership with Église Ecclésia (Ecclesia Church) of Saint-Jérôme QC, led by Pastor Jacob Mathieu. This church has purchased and is renovating an old theatre for their meeting place; they are also heavily involved in church-planting. We have met with Jacob and caught his passion for this ministry and these people. This summer a Grandview youth missions trip is planned to assist with an outreach to Saint-Jérôme, and we look forward to helping each other further in the years ahead.

When God moves His people, He usually begins with hearts. Our hearts went out to the Syrian people in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis and before long we formed a Refugee Team to sponsor a family (we have sponsored families twice before). On October 5, 2016 the Rahmouni family, from Syria but coming to us from a refugee camp in Turkey, landed in Toronto and were met at the airport by a team from the church. The family includes Ammar (father), Amna (mother) and four children ages 1 to 6. Arabic speakers, the parents are taking ESL and their two oldest children are learning English at school. Ammar is already working full-time in his field (carpentry). Our Refugee Team is working hard to help the family become independent and part of our Canadian family and the Team is being blessed through getting to know them. The Rahmounis are very thankful for the chance to start a new life here in Canada. They came to Grandview on their own initiative on November 17<sup>th</sup> to tell their story and express thanks to the congregation.

As you can see, it's been quite a journey from the 1969 vision! Grandview has grown exponentially beyond that original small group of 54. Many thousands have walked through or made their home here, and in that time we have had six lead pastors as under-shepherds of God's flock:

- Stanley Walker, along with his wife Barbara, came to us in September 1970 and continued until February 1979
- Donald Fitchett with his wife Carol, became our pastor in June 1980, finishing his ministry with us in 1988
- Bud and Beulah Penner came to us in 1989 and stayed until 1995
- Don Howard and his wife Dawn accepted our call to serve at Grandview in July 1996 until January 2006
- Ian and AnnaBeth Campbell came to us from Brampton and began their ministry in July 2007 through the fall of 2010

. Steve and Pamela Baxter came to us from Burlington in January 2012 and continued until Steve's death in September 2016. Steve died of complications from a spontaneous subdural hematoma after just ten days in hospital. He was loved by all of us and sadly missed.

During our span of 48 years, several Associate Pastors, Interim Pastors and Youth Pastors have also touched lives in our church community. It was Pastor Steve's desire and is the church's on-going commitment to train the next generation of pastors and leaders. As such, we have a strong internship program here as well as a healthy partnership with Heritage College & Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario.

### *Where are we now?*

The ministries of Grandview are coordinated and guided by staff and interns. With our focus on God, we come together for corporate worship and thanksgiving every Sunday with two identical services. On average, 700 people, including youth and children gather weekly to sing, learn, pray, and grow. Our children's ministry, Grandview Kids, is very active and runs concurrently with our services. Both children and youth experience a dynamic mix of worship, drama, large group teaching, and small group connecting.

We have a new mid-week children's program called "Imagine." Our youth meet Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Young people are encouraged to get involved in ministry, using the gifts and talents God has given them. Our goal is to keep our youth active, interested, connected, and thriving in their walk with Jesus.

As our young people move from senior high to college, university and the workforce, our NEXT group helps these 18-24-year-olds stay connected with each other through regular coffeehouse events. These events provide their own time of corporate worship, often with a special speaker, as well as social time.

For adults, our women meet Wednesday mornings to engage in Bible study and to connect. We have a very active 55+ ministry called "Joy Fellowship" that gathers monthly to enjoy worship, a special speaker and a good meal. Members and adherents of our church participate seasonally in in-house sports and inter-church leagues. We have four rotating worship teams, an orchestra, and—on special occasions—a church choir. Tuesday evenings those who are curious about Christianity are invited to participate in Christianity Explored, a multi-week program that presents the gospel and gives opportunity for attendees to ask those challenging and troubling questions about God, Jesus and faith. Wednesday mornings (twice a month, after Women in the Word) and on the first Wednesday evening of each month, people come together for corporate prayer, bringing praise and petition to God.

All churches face challenges from time to time. We are pained to lose people we love through death or departure even as we rejoice as new people arrive and become active members of the church body. Though we have recently been through a difficult period, we find our people are strong and know their God. In a February 2011 survey of the congregation we asked an open-ended question about Grandview's future ministry. The answers turned out to be better than the question, showing that many have a deep desire to follow Christ, to learn, and to serve both in the church and beyond its doors. We

may not know why certain things have happened in the life of our church, but we are assured that God continues to be at work in His people, and that He is control as we move forward. Praise His name!

As you can hopefully see, we desire to be a community of Christ-followers who equip and encourage one another to grow in relationship with God. We want to love Him completely and love others sacrificially, and reach out to our world. We have certainly made a good start, but there is a long way to go. Things have changed a lot since 1969 – in population, culture, technology, etc. – and we recognize that we do not reflect the diversity in our nation or in the environment around us. Our structural building may be fine, but we know we will need to do some “interior” renovation on ourselves as we grow individually in obedience to our Lord, and we will need to do some collective “rewiring” as we develop effective ways to improve. We want to be a church that is deliberately intentional about reaching out to the broad population around us, and to become welcoming and foot-washers.

As we catch God’s vision for Grandview for the coming years, we want to stand out for our firm commitment to our Lord and His Word. We want to grow primarily by bringing people to Christ. As we grow, we want to plant new churches in Waterloo Region.