

eConnect June 2020

Small Beginnings

By Ali Laing, Next Generation Development Coordinator

In July 1994 a business man decided to make a radical change. Whilst safe in a well laid and influential job he began to observe the Dotcom boom. Web-based businesses were springing up literally changing the way people lived their lives. He took a relatively modest business start-up loan and started Cadabra, an online bookseller. No fancy offices or distribution centre, Cadabra started operations in his parents' garage!



Fast forward 26 years and this company has changed aspects of life for the vast majority of the world's population. In fact, the majority of us reading this article have purchased something from it or received a gift from it, especially during the past two months of confinement. That business man is the world's richest man, Jeff Bezos and the company is better known now as Amazon.

Now, before you think this is a message about believing that anything is possible and that all small things must grow bigger. Or a message promoting churches developing business-based growth strategies. It's not!



In the prophet Zechariah's 5th vision, he writes of the rebuilding of the temple and within it he sees the completion of the task with Zerubbabel placing the final stone in place. The vision seems to have come just as the temple rebuilding began, but it would seem the reality of completion was some way off. Zechariah writes, "**Who dares despise the day of small things**, since the seven eyes of the LORD that range throughout the earth will rejoice when they see the chosen capstone in the hand of Zerubbabel?"

Zechariah seems to be seeing something of what God wants to be established on earth, and communicates this to presumably encourage those that were at the beginning of a big job of rebuilding. The challenge is not to despise the small starts but see beyond to the finished work, fully reliant on God to complete it.

I do find the Amazon story an interesting one, not because a small thing became a massive thing (although there is lots to learn through that journey). But rather I am interested that in the midst of comfort a person saw something more. A possibility beyond his current

circumstances and stepped out in 'faith' believing that what he was perceiving would lead to a prosperous future.

We are living in unprecedented times, the phrase 'the new normal' is common place and as a global community we are all beginning to emerge into a different way of living life. Recently the church in Scotland could be seen as being concerned about 'small endings' with rapidly shrinking attendance and fellowships regularly closing. Maybe we need to embrace the 'new normal' and see our place in Scotland as small beginnings? Small beginnings that are not to be despised. In connect this month you will read stories of hope that have come from small beginnings.

We need to see beyond our circumstances and see that God is able to do incredible things, if we can take the time to see things as he sees them. Jesus saw beyond his time and spoke powerfully to his disciples, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."



(John 14:12-14) He saw that this small, disorganised and fearful group of followers would do incredible things, even greater than the things Jesus himself did. If they looked to him and were reliant on him for their needs.

So, we will begin to come out into our 'new normal', my hope and prayer is that we firstly see the opportunities that God is calling us too. There are many! That we don't despise the small state we find ourselves in but rather turn to God to see a vision of what is possible in Him and place our prayers, time and energies there.

Disciples making disciples in Dennistoun

By Mark Morris, Minister at Dennistoun Baptist

We started as a church replant at the end of 2015 believing that God had not given up on this wee church in the East End of Glasgow. The church was an elderly congregation of 7 members and in need of much support and guidance. Pauline and I felt the call to leave our Church family at Calderwood Baptist and with their blessing and support we began a journey of replanting what has historically been a prominent church within our Union. By God's grace we experienced growth as we sought to be disciples who make disciples. The starting point to this was opening up our lives to the people in our community.



A baptism from a few months ago!

This has resulted in salvations, baptisms, believers connecting and prodigals reconnecting to the life of Jesus.

We worship in a tiny space and have between 40 and 60 gather on a Sunday morning. There are as many as 18 children in our “extension”; a portacabin at the side of our main building. Our growth pushed us to knock on many different doors in Dennistoun in the hope we could acquire a bigger space for worship. Over the last three years every one of these doors closed and this led us to ask bigger questions about what God was saying to us. We felt led to the community of Riddrie, an area next door to Dennistoun and by His grace we are currently in the process of purchasing an old Episcopal Church building right in the heart of this community.

Our heart is for the East End and North side of Glasgow. There are faithful believers and churches here (which we are so thankful for) but the harvest is still plentiful. Our initial vision



for Riddrie and Dennistoun is to be *One Church, Two Locations*, but it really is so much bigger – if we take seriously the call to be disciples who make disciples then we will organically become churches that plant or replant churches in the East and North of Glasgow. Pray specifically that God would provide us with the workers of the harvest to fulfil this vision for our City.

Small Beginnings at Kelso Baptist Church

By Rob Jones, Minister at Kelso Baptist Church

Lockdown itself has brought about the need to reinvent how to begin with this wonderful wee church of around a dozen believers and a rebirthed mission within the market town of Kelso. Being unable to move from Fife to the Borders at time of writing I have inevitably focussed on the need to quickly get a website up and running, with all the associated social media needed.

However, re-imagining what mission will look like after lockdown in a place like Kelso is the true challenge. There are no roadmaps for this. As both pastor and workplace chaplain I am all-too-aware that during lockdown there is an on-going process of collective trauma occurring within society. People are losing jobs; there is uncertainty, grief, anger, disbelief, but on a more positive note, perhaps a revaluation of life’s priorities.



Therefore, one of the first things on my list is to mailshot all the town businesses, offering chaplaincy support and a listening ear in the midst of the aftermath of this pandemic (Kelso has the largest town square in Scotland hosts over 50 independent trading shops). It is also my hope that our small building in the Knowes car-park (near to the town square) can become a place of refuge

during the week for those who need to retreat to a quiet space. People are friendly in Kelso, but (I've been told) they won't come to church, however, perhaps church can come to them, so we will be searching out new ways to make this possible. Prayer will be freely offered for people in community and prayer will be at the heart of each missional step we take.

It will take time to build trust, but my hope is, as some re-evaluate their life priorities, that our shared experience of this pandemic will open the door of faith: That people will hear the call of Jesus on their lives and join us as followers of the one who saves us from all ills.

If anyone feels called to join us in this type of mission, please do get in touch via our Facebook page.

Our Mission is Mission.

By Thomas Dean, Minister of Stenhouse Baptist Church

One of the advantages of being small is that it *should* mean that you are more flexible and agile than if you were massive. You stick an oar in the ocean and you can change direction just like that, it shouldn't take 24 hours to turn the tanker round! However, how many of us know that it doesn't matter whether there are 6 or 600 of you there are some things that churches are very tied to...



At SBC we've benefited from the ability to stop things that aren't 'producing fruit', as painful as that still is, and try to ruthlessly pour our energy into mission and discipling one another. We don't meet on Sunday evenings any more, but we do have a Messy Church that we run with the local Episcopalian church. We started our youth work in a living room, stopped completely when we outgrew it, and then restarted something entirely different later. In a world uprooted with

widespread change, we are already familiar with how that feels in our church. Our mission is mission. I remember a mentor of mine saying 'what's the point in planting a church if you don't see lives transformed?'. While that could've sounded like unhelpful pressure, for me, that was a reminder of our purpose.

Small churches can feel very exposed, especially in our online arena of constant comparison. What if friends visit and there's only 8 people at 10.59 on a Sunday morning? Is it time to give up? So far, we've tried to stick to what we felt called to do. Move into the neighbourhood, love our neighbours well, see what God is already doing in the community and get stuck in. Success is about faithfulness to Christ and what He has placed on our hearts. Not what other people might prioritise.

As a wee church that is growing, we punch above our weight in terms of activity, I'm so grateful we have a fantastic leadership who constantly call us back to prayer. There have been times where we've had successful events and the building has been full, but I've known we've been prayerless and have approached it all from the wrong direction. In the middle of lockdown, where we all feel powerless, I hope we all take the opportunity to return to intercession and trusting in Jesus alone for fruitfulness.



Callander Baptist Fellowship - the story so far....

By Brian Gooding, Pastor

What's happening? Its Sunday afternoon. I'm the Pastor and so far today I've watched several online services and, later today I'll watch myself and some of our team as our weekly Sundays@Six Online service goes out - strange days and not what I would have thought our fledgling church needed!



It's over six years since our group started praying together and three years since we started our Sunday service at 6pm in a local church hall. With a regular attendance between 25/40, and a part-time pastor, the group was developing skills and a great team has been formed. The future looked bright.

There have been frustrations - especially our continuing difficulties acquiring suitable premises for worship and outreach. We were initially also concerned that we were a middle aged/elderly group, but progress has been made in the last year when God blessed us with young families attending our services. We had started Sunday Morning Family Worship with a small group attending with a class for children every week. The Youth pastor from Stirling Baptist came out to Callander every Thursday afternoon to lead our Youth Group immediately after McLaren High School. Both these new activities took place in our home.

Covid-19 caught us without warning and we had to quickly adjust. Our aims had to be the maintenance of our small Christian community which could easily dissipate if we did nothing and to reach beyond our existing group with the gospel. Callander has a strong community

spirit and immediately groups sprang to action to meet local physical and social needs during lockdown and, whilst some in our fellowship are involved in these groups, the main role of our group has been spiritual.

Our Sundays@Six Online service has reached many more people than our usual Sunday attendance, our profile within the town is much higher, on Mondays and Thursdays we meet to pray and on Wednesdays are doing the Prayer course on Zoom together. More people are attending these than used to be at our groups and those attending cross existing church congregations.

Like everyone else we are trying to discern the future shape of church but being young and without a building or years of tradition we feel well placed to adapt to the new normal!

Spring 2020 Council Digest

Held in Perth only three weeks before the UK Coronavirus lockdown, this Council was a very well attended event which facilitated wide ranging discussion over many topics currently before our Union. It was also the first occasion on which our Council was fully operating as the Council of the Baptist Union of Scotland Ltd., a charitable company limited by guarantee.



Our General Director, Martin Hodson, spoke on his three priority framework of 'Transformations, Generations and Innovations', as he encouraged our Union to play our part as the largest family of Evangelical Churches in Scotland today.

The National Team reported on a number of matters: the completion of the Communications' Review which was started last year; the young people in the current Invest Training Year; and an update on both the number of our churches currently seeking a stipendiary minister and the type of candidates seeking accreditation now coming before the Board of Ministry.

Our in-house lawyer, Alan Holloway, reported on the completion of the incorporation process.

Martin set out plans for our Assembly in the future, emphasising that the National Team are aiming to continue to create an inspirational space for churches, whilst broadening the age range of attendees through encouraging younger people to participate in the event.

Council heard and/or received a number of other reports about such areas as the Continuing Ministry Development Programme for our ministers; the Peaceful Transformation Team; Scottish Baptist College; BMS World Mission; the Mission Initiative Group; and the Board of Ministry. We also heard news from the Baptist Union of Great

Britain through Graham Ensor, who is now their representative on our Council and who was with us for the first time.

Peter Dick, our Finance Director, presented his report on the financial position of the Union and decisions were made to increase the Reference Stipend by 2.5%, whilst holding the *per capita* amount for 2020/21 at £42. The proposed budget for the coming year was approved and Peter provided up-to-date information on the current status of both the BUS pension liability and our grant funding.

All that said, what stood out for many at this Council was the level of participative engagement which occurred on two very significant questions posed by Martin. The first question was 'What do churches hope for from our Union?'. The second question came out of a desire to 'test the water' regarding a possible re-envisioning of our Union's involvement in public issues and social action. The second question was therefore 'What is our posture in the public debate?'. These questions provided much fruitful small group discussion, the nature of which was carefully noted down. The overall results were then collated in order to enable the National Team to chart the way ahead, as BUS seeks to continue to serve our family of churches.

Our chaplain for this Council was Nick Cox and I am grateful to both Nick and the others who assisted him during our time together through leading worship, sharing 'God stories' and assisting in the preparation of the Lord's Table.

This was indeed a very full Council meeting and I want to thank all who gave their time to attend and take part in what I am sure will prove to have been a very significant time of discussion and decision-taking for our Union as we go forward.

With every blessing in Christ,
Frances J. Bloomfield
Convenor