

The Bridge Classis Report May 2021

Greetings from The Bridge, your experiment of joining God in mission to and with the people of Centre Wellington. For over five years, this small group of disciples (there can be up to 29 of us on Sunday mornings) has been, to borrow a phrase from Robert Kysar, “stumbling in the light” (or perhaps you prefer John Mark MacMillan’s “fumbling in the light”) as we learn the **improvisational work of being disciples on mission to and with our neighbours**. Part of our bringing these reports to you is to be accountable to you as our supporters in prayer about what we are attending to in the unfolding of God’s Kingdom here in Centre Wellington. As I write this report to you, I am aware of the ways in which we hold much in common in our faith in Jesus but also about how we practically experience ministry in ways that may seem foreign maybe even disappointing to you from your frames of reference. Know this summary then at the outset: a) In ways that matter, the Bridge is thriving; b) I am very glad for the life we have been called to here in Centre Wellington and anticipate being here through “retirement” and into old age; c) This past year under pandemic restriction and bivocational busyness has both strained me and shown me our dependence of God.

As you may know, for about two years now, The Bridge has been a registered charity and has been governed by a board of directors who also function as the Administrative Team (they are Jack Tacoma, Gary Mohle, Mark Kabbes and John Kalverda). Their role is not to give direction to the Bridge but rather to support the Bridge administratively as it relates to charitable status, financial accountability, and assuring there is periodic review and external engagement of the work of the Bridge. This team meets 3-4 times per year and our last meeting was April 26th, 2020. Financially, God is meeting our needs as we shape our ministry around a growing church with a shrinking budget.

Like for many of you, this past year has been filled with loss and limits. For over 13 months, all of our gatherings -- for worship, for discipleship groups, for Generous Space, for teaching -- have been held on Zoom. The loss of doing ministry this way is obvious but still worth naming. We miss the many side conversations that happen in social groups and the myriad connections that happen in fellowship. We feel the very fabric of our community being stretched and deeply miss the very simple things of our life together -- food, music, and sacrament in person. Though we are thankful for the crutch of zoom, we long, really long, to walk and even dance without it.

Having said that, gathering on zoom has had three significant benefits for us as a community: a) Geographically distant folks have joined us from Georgetown and Orangeville; b) the regularity of attendance at all aspects of ministry has climbed dramatically as the ease for going on-line and the absence of other distractions has

given us focus; and c) most importantly, somehow, being on zoom with each other and being in touch with our limits due to Covid's disempowering effects, we have felt safe in a whole new way to be real with one another. It has been beautiful to watch those in the Bridge community be vulnerable with each other and express areas of struggle and pain, availing their limits to the renewing and redeeming work of Jesus. Having said that, zoom works better for adults than for children and we long to gather in person if for no other reason than to be community to the children and youth among us.

Our worship experiences with each other each Sunday morning over zoom are an example of letting God lead. To prepare for a service, I prayerfully spend time in the passages we will reflect on and do the kind of exegetical study one might do in a sermon, but I do not prepare a sermon. Instead, we read the passage(s) multiple times in different translations, inviting each other to listen to what God might be saying to any of us through them. Hearing those who are part of the Bridge reflect on how Scripture is shaping their life in current and concrete ways is an enriching experience. Sometimes, as people have questions of the text, I provide guidance from my exegetical preparation, but mostly we have a true engagement with the Spirit of God leading and all of us encountering God in this way. While we miss corporate singing, many are reporting that this form of worship is very real to them. Of course, nearly every time we gather for worship we include communion and use a variety of form and wording to celebrate and remember what Christ has done. Every service includes prayer and sharing current prayer requests. Offerings (financial) are done by PAR but otherwise we do look for ways to encourage each other in the ways we are and can offer ourselves in mission and ministry to God.

Our DNA (discipleship) ministry is via zoom as well. While the real curriculum of our discipleship is our lives and the ways that God is shaping us, our guide is Gravity Leadership Academy's "Finding Your Centre." This tool is immensely practical and grounded in Scripture and bent toward mission. That Carol and I have both been trained by Gravity Leadership with funding support from Resonate Global Mission has been helpful, but truly those we are leading now could, with support, turn around and lead others. One of our prayers for developing leaders, is to see what God is inviting us into as The Bridge might replicate itself through some of those we lead in other towns.

Over this past year I have been turning down opportunities to preach in other congregations in order to focus on leading the Bridge. Thank you to all of you who have taken offerings for the Bridge and especially for those of you who pray for us. We are heading into a season of "Neighbourhood Listening" as we again turn our attention to the mission of God and what God is already up to all around us. We encourage you to do the same. He is always present and at work and eager for us to join him on mission.