

## Joy in the Forest

A Gospel Community Grows in Forrestdale

by Jack De Vries  
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**M**any churches successfully preach the gospel message, but they have very little involvement with the community. Other churches do well ministering to the community, but they water down the truth of the gospel. Is there a way to be both a strong gospel-centered and a strong community centered church? Church planters Ollie and Nadia Heggers would say, "Absolutely, yes!" This is exactly the model they are following in one of the Christian Reformed Churches' (CRCA) newest church plants, a gospel community in Forrestdale, a small but growing suburb 30 km south of Perth in Western Australia(WA).

The Forrestdale church plant is modelled very much along the lines of Crowded House, a church planting movement started in the UK by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. Their strategy is outlined in their excellent book *Total Church, A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Crossway Books, 2008).

Chester and Timmis turn to the Bible to show how church can be a daily experience where believers go deeper in their faith and where nonbelievers connect. *Total Church* looks at shaping the whole of life not merely creating a place where one attends each

week. The focus of Forrestdale is exactly that, on sharing life together as church throughout the week and not just on Sundays.



Nadia and Ollie Heggers with Craig Verdouw  
Craig, a student at Trinity, is part of the team at Forrestdale.



Ollie Heggers will be ordained as a minister in the CRCA after completing a year of study at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong (RTC). He had a prior degree from Trinity in WA. Before heading to Geelong Ollie served as one of the pastors at Willetton CRC in WA. Forrestdale is considered a Willetton church plant. Not only do they provide some financial support but also accountability.

Forrestdale has been meeting as a core group of 13 (including kids) since January 2011. They meet for dinner, fellowship, and prayer Monday and Wednesday nights. They also meet three times a week at 6:00 am for morning prayer. Along with these organized get-togethers they have a lot of informal contact throughout the week. Because the

bulk of the core group live in and around Forrestdale this model works extremely well.

Sundays at Forrestdale are characterized by coffee for an hour at 10:00 am. After that they spend 30-45 minutes in the Word. Currently Ollie has been preaching through the gospel of John. This is followed by prayer and singing and then lunch around 12:30. Most Sundays they end up spending the afternoon together either relaxing and enjoying each other's company or they work together in someone's yard as an act of serving together. The idea is for this to become a ministry to many others in the community.



The Forrestdale neighbourhood

## The Church Planting Model

Chester and Timmis, in their book *Total Church*, describe two models of planting churches in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> One model occurs without an existing local congregation. Paul used this model when he planted a church in a city that did not already have a Christian community. The other model occurs when one church gives birth to another. These apostolic

churches thrived on reproducing churches. From the beginning, they met in homes. Not until much later did churches meet in buildings specifically constructed for the gathering of believers. The churches did not continuously add members to become the “mega” variety. No, they formed other house churches. For example, we see this strategy clearly in Corinth where Paul formed a number of house churches rather than creating one huge congregation.

There is a lot of merit for this apostolic approach to church planting. The pattern of household churches provides the best way to express the biblical principles of community.

In the New Testament, church and household became synonymous. If potential leaders could not manage their families, they were not fit to care for God’s church. If false teachers appeared, the church leaders were not to welcome them into their house.

Chester and Timmis’ point is not to blast the value of large churches with massive buildings. Their point is that the apostolic congregations grew; then they formed other house churches, eventually growing into a network of small communities that had the ability to safeguard the biblical principles of church life.

Books on church planting are filled with practical insights, techniques, and strategies. But Paul simply reminds us of the sufficiency of the gospel message of the crucified Christ. People give their lives to Christ, and God causes the church to grow. The best model for church planting is the one in which the primary concern is gospel-centered communities. These communities become the natural expression and expansion of the gospel. Our task must be to create a culture in which planting new congregations becomes the norm.

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<sup>1</sup>This summary of Chester and Timmis’ church planting model is taken from *Christian Book Summaries*, Vol. 4, Issue 34, [www.ChristianBookSummaries.com](http://www.ChristianBookSummaries.com).



This culture of church planting has been happening in Forrestdale, and as Ollie points out, they've "found this model is so much more conducive to gospel ministry in our



The forests around Lake Forrestdale

current Aussie cultural context." In Psalm 96:12 we read about the trees of the forest singing for joy. Truly joy has come in the midst of the forests of Forrestdale. People are hearing the gospel as the Word is preached and taught. People are experiencing the gospel in the midst of community. In the last month and a half, they have consistently had around 30 people present at both their Wednesday night and Sunday gatherings. About half of those are non-Christians with their kids. They have seen one man come to Christ. He was baptized several weeks ago. One lady has come back to Jesus after a long lapse in her walk. Two other ladies and one man are currently exploring the Christian faith and coming very close to giving their lives to Jesus.

A number of ministries are springing up both from their core group and new members. Nadia has a weekly ministry which reaches out to the women of the community. They gather for Bible study and fellowship, but the focus is on discipleship – enmeshing the gospel with all of life. Others are exploring the possibility of a community

garden. This will not only meet a need in Forrestdale, but also provide many opportunities to connect with people. Overall the new church plant is definitely under way and the Lord is blessing those involved as they get to witness the gospel at work in Forrestdale.

One challenge for Forrestdale is how to handle growth in numbers. Their plan is to not grow more than 100 people in this current plant. As they reach that number they will be seeking to start the next plant. This way they are hoping to maintain the current model of small groups of people living life together as much as possible. As the church continues to grow joy will be multiplied as there will be much rejoicing in heaven (see Luke 15:7).

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#### Four Practices of Missional Communities

*taken from Exiles by Michael Frost*

**SHARE** *life and truth* through stories and Scripture

**PRAY** for one another and the city

**ENGAGE** *people and culture* of your community with the gospel

**LOVE** *one another* by eating and exercising hospitality

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