

The Scouting Report

BY MARK DRISCOLL

The Scouting Report identifies emerging pastors of innovative churches that haven't yet gained much national attention. This month I interviewed a good friend named Russ DeVos who pastors Oasis Christian Fellowship (www.oasisbend.com) in Bend, Oregon.

SUBJECT: Russ DeVos

AGE: 38

AGE OF THE CHURCH: 2 1/2 years

What growth has transpired in this time?

We've grown from 20 to between 700 and 800. We were privileged to minister to over 1,100 on Easter this year (to God be *all* the glory . . . we're a bunch of knot heads!).

Why do you think so many younger pastors are planting churches?

They're fed up with the corporate, religious, traditional, put-on-a-show-for-us, spoon-feed-me, make-me-feel-good church as usual. We want something that's simple, real, nonflashy, Jesus-centered—where truth is taught boldly and straightforwardly. We can't seem to find this kind of church anywhere in our towns so we start it ourselves.

What three things have been most difficult for you?

1) Mobilizing the church to think and live missionally, to be missionaries to our culture. So many come to the church and want to do church as usual (make me comfortable, feed me, pastor me, lead my friends to Jesus), rather than embracing the fact that *they are the church*—they have a part to play in the great mission that God has given our church.

2) Building systems to keep up with our growth. We've grown so fast that I'm struggling to adjust and keep up in my own personal growth as a leader and driver of the vision of the church. We're working desperately to create systems to absorb the growth, connect and shepherd the people, and minister to the many needs. My family tends to take the brunt of this frenzy, as church stuff can completely dominate my time and bury me.

3) On a very practical level, children's ministry and music ministry have continually been a battle, though we're making progress in both of these areas.

What things have been most helpful?

1) Continually coming back to the realization that this is Jesus' church, not mine, and that he's the One ultimately responsible for building it, not me!

2) An amazingly supportive and capable elder team that's in the trenches with me.

3) Keeping everything very simple. If it gets too complicated, I quit!

Who do you look to for help?

I have several mentors who are older believers and successful, seasoned pastors who've made themselves available whenever I need them. Brothers from the Acts 29 Network have also been a great source of help and encouragement. I read a lot of leadership books and anything that I can get my hands on that pertains to church planting and growing/leading a healthy church. Finally, and I don't mean to sound super spiritual, my times with Jesus—when I feel that I am going to drown in ministry and cave in under the pressures—are life to me and provide the needed strength to make it through another day.

What resources have been most significant to you?

Being coached by a personal life/ministry coach has been a huge help and encouragement in numerous vital areas. Its main focus is on balancing life and ministry—making it to the end without bombing out. Currently, Jack Welch's book, *Winning*, has been an incredible education on managing a team and leading effectively. The forums on the Acts 29 Web site have also provided much helpful insight and information on many issues that I struggle with or have questions about.

What things will you need to do to take your church to the next level?

First, as we grow we have to make sure that our key leaders are the right people to take us on from this point. Also, we're reorganizing our leadership team to more effectively place them in their areas of passion and expertise.

Second, we're clarifying our church mission and setting some very challenging and tangible goals, realizing that at our size, people will attach themselves to our fellowship, not for relationship, but for mission. If the mission is compelling and clearly articulated, and the vision for accomplishing it is clearly spelled out,

it will be a big key to moving to the next level. We must help our people to embrace the missional nature of the church.

Third, we're working diligently to create simple pathways for people to connect with the body, to plug in to what God is doing at Oasis.

What one piece of advice would you give emerging pastors?

Don't be a Lone Ranger planter or pastor. If you're all alone, *God help you!* Find a network (I'd recommend the Acts 29 Network www.acts29.org), or find a fellowship of other planters or pastors who'll encourage and support you. This work is too hard and too exacting to go it alone! We truly need one another to survive and to thrive!

Mark Driscoll *is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle (www.marshillchurch.org), one of the fastest growing churches in America, with more than 4,500 attendees each week in one of America's least churched cities. He's also president of the Acts 29 Church Planting Network. He's the author of The Radical Reformation (Zondervan), Confessions of a Reformation Rev. (Zondervan), and Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches (due out in 2007).*