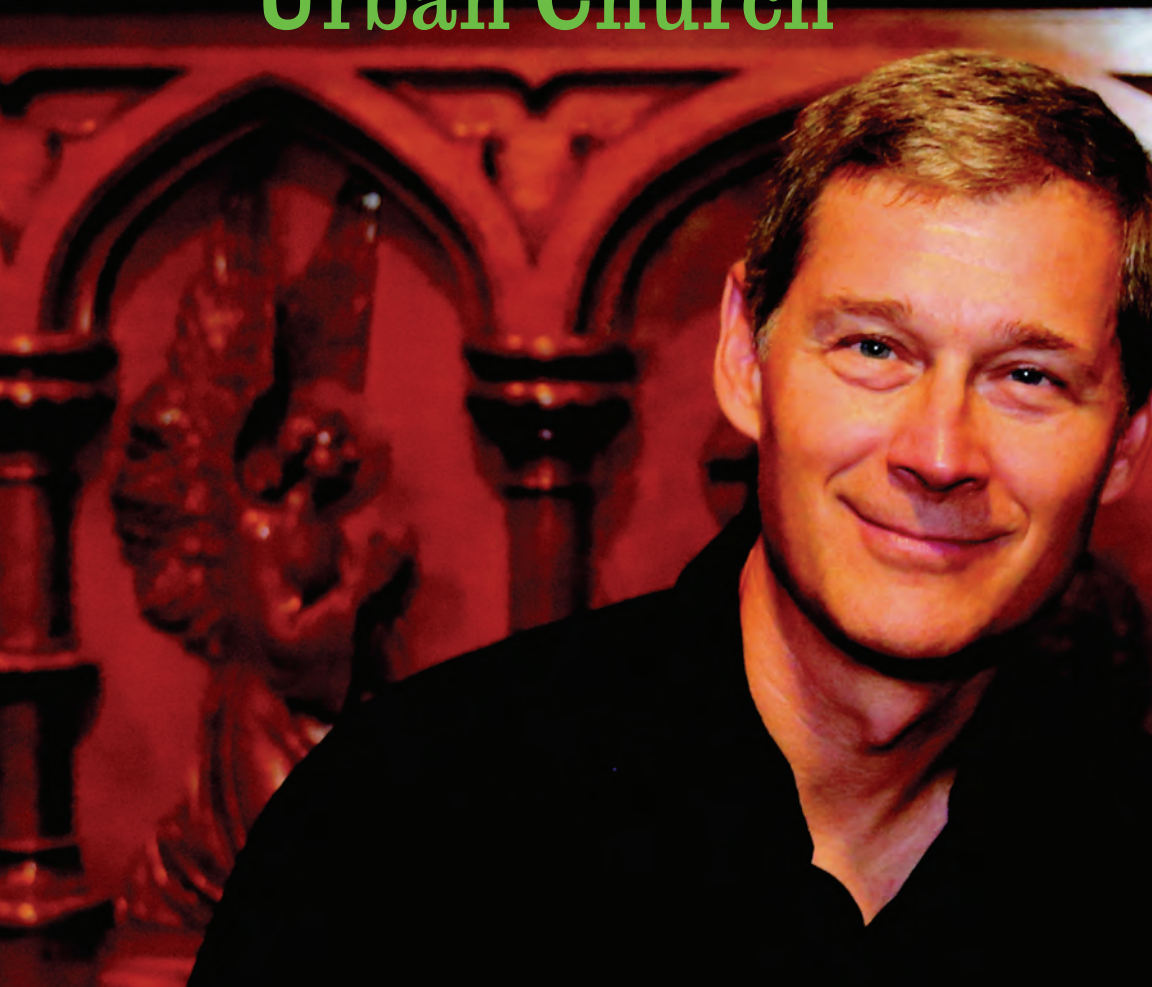
Caution: *may inspire and challenge readers and leaders to "re-think church" and, if necessary, begin again.*

Mark Whittall

ReInvention

Stories from an Urban Church



MARK WHITTALL

ReInvention

STORIES FROM AN URBAN CHURCH

How refreshing to read a story that runs against the familiar tropes of inevitable church decay and decline! Mark Whittall's account of planting a new church in a tough context is the story of creative pastoral sagacity – an ability to reimagine church and to bring a vision to birth.
– Kevin Flynn, Saint Paul University

In these days of declining membership in mainline congregations, a new church plant is a rarity. Even more so, perhaps, when the church plant involves an existing 145-year-old building, and a focus on ministry to college and university students, young adults living in the neighbourhood, and those experiencing homelessness and dealing with poverty.

In *ReInvention: Stories from an Urban Church*, Mark Whittall shares the insights and wisdom he and a small-but-dedicated team gained as they worked to establish a new congregation in St. Albans Church, the second oldest Anglican parish in Ottawa.

The challenges the team faced were not small: the renovation of the original building, negative reaction from the community to the placement of a day program for the homeless, creating new liturgies and a new kind of church experience, and learning how best to reach out to and involve people with little or no prior church involvement. The result of all these efforts, however, has been the transformation of St. Albans into a vibrant centre for worship, a beautiful venue for the arts, and place of shelter and safety for many of the city's most vulnerable inhabitants.

The Rev. Mark Whittall is the pastor of St. Albans Church and a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. He is an engineer by training, and obtained graduate degrees in Theoretical Physics and in Development Economics from Oxford University. His first career was as an engineer and executive in the high-tech sector, rising to the position of CEO and earning recognition as Ottawa's Entrepreneur of the Year in 2000. Soon afterwards, he left his business career and turned to the study of theology. He served as professor, History of Science, at Augustine College in Ottawa from 2002 to 2007, and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 2008. After a brief stay in a rural parish, he was tasked with building a new congregation at St. Albans Church in downtown Ottawa in 2011, where he currently serves as pastor.

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WOOD LAKE

REINVENTION

Stories from an Urban Church

Mark is a leader, an entrepreneur, and a scientist with a pastor's heart. He leads us on a journey where the future creates the present – the eschatological hope and vision that shatters the doubt and negativity of the past. Mark does not know the meaning of "it's not possible."
– Rev. Gregor Sneddon, Rector at St. Luke's Ottawa

How refreshing to read a story that runs against the familiar tropes of inevitable church decay and decline! Mark Whittall's account of planting a new church in a tough context is the story of creative pastoral sagacity – an ability to reimagine church and to bring a vision to birth. It is the story of a distinctively Anglican church plant – rooted in place, nourished by the great traditions of liturgy and sacrament, unafraid of the best insights of the human sciences, and committed to justice for all – yet also one that relates those orientations to the realities of the congregation's contemporary urban milieu. We can be grateful that the insights that have arisen from this adventure are made available to a wider public in an engaging, accessible prose.
– Kevin Flynn, Director, Anglican Studies Program, Saint Paul University, Ottawa.

Mark Whittall

ReInvention

Stories from an Urban Church

WOOD LAKE

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PROLOGUE

"Don't Let It Get Weird"

I stood up to go. As I did, Bishop John gave me one last piece of advice: "Just don't let it get weird." With those words ringing in my ears, I took my leave and headed out on my church planting adventure.

It's not like I hadn't seen it coming. The day before there had been an urgent phone call from the Bishop's office.

"The Bishop would like to see you early next week."

"Next week I'll be in Nicaragua. I'm taking my youth group there on a school-building trip. If it's urgent I can come in tomorrow."

"Come in tomorrow."

I turned to my wife, Guylaine: "Looks like I'm getting a new job – it's either St. Thomas or St. Albans and I'm pretty sure it's not St. Thomas."

The phone call was a surprise, but I'd known that *something* was about to happen. As a member of our diocesan council, I'd been briefed regularly about the St. Albans negotiations. I was also part of the communications team that had been hastily thrown together when the plan to move our day program for those experiencing homelessness back to St. Albans had suddenly become front-page news.

The Church of St. Alban the Martyr was, after Christ Church Cathedral, the second Anglican parish to be established in Ottawa in 1865. Construction of the church building began in 1867 to accommodate the influx of labourers, public servants, and soldiers, who flooded the city when Queen Victoria, in an unexpected move, named Ottawa the new capital of the fledgling Dominion of Canada. Before long, a number of prominent citizens, including Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, made St. Albans their church home.

At the insistence of its first rector, the Reverend Thomas Bedford-Jones, St. Albans was a "rent-free" church. The custom in those days was to have pews rented and reserved by the wealthy, with the pews at the front commanding the highest prices. In the new church of St. Alban the Martyr, there would be no rental of pews. People would be able to sit wherever they wanted, rich and poor together. This was a radical innovation in the 19th century, a gospel stand that deprived the parish of an important revenue stream and left it perpetually strapped for cash in its early days.

In 2007, in another seemingly radical innovation, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa took its first tentative step towards the blessing of same-sex civil marriages at its 126th annual synod meeting. This was intended as a pastoral response to the needs of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer) folk, an effort to be welcoming, affirming and inclusive. In response, the congregation and priest of St. Alban the Martyr voted to leave the Diocese of Ottawa and the Anglican Church of Canada at their 2008 annual meeting. As one might expect, there were hard feelings, and disagreements over finances and property. To the credit of people on both sides of the dispute, the disagreements were kept out of the courts, and eventually a team of people from the congregation and the diocese sat down to negotiate a resolution. By early 2011, the resolution, and the return of the church building to the diocese, were within sight. We were getting our building back. But what were we going to do with it?

Around the same time that the St. Albans negotiations were

churning their way towards an eventual agreement, Centre 454 was on the look-out for a new home. The Centre's lease was about to expire and it had outgrown its space on Murray Street, in the Ottawa neighbourhood of Lowertown.

Centre 454 started in 1954 as a ministry of the Anglican Church in Ottawa to help men leaving the prison system integrate back into society. Over the past 60 years, it has grown and evolved into a day program that provides drop-in support, social recreation, and a wide range of services to assist individuals who are experiencing homelessness or living in poverty. As in many North American cities, homelessness is a major problem in Ottawa and the Centre serves up to 200 people each day. Over the course of a year, approximately 7,000 people find themselves homeless in the city. Centre 454 provides these and other vulnerable people with a place to go during the day, somewhere they can check email or use a phone; take a shower; access counselling, mental health, and medical services; get assistance with housing or employment; or simply have a coffee and play some cards. Many of the participants consider the Centre to be their "living room."

But Centre 454 was itself at risk of becoming homeless, and by 2010 the search was on in earnest for a new location. Finding a site for a social service program aimed at people experiencing homelessness is not an easy business. The new location would have to be downtown somewhere, within walking distance of shelters, and with access to bus routes so that those who needed the services would be able to get there. But downtown rents are high, and city zoning bylaws are restrictive, and residents are leery, to say the least, of drawing those who are homeless into their neighbourhoods. One solution, however, kept presenting itself to the search team: why not move back to St. Albans, where the Centre had originally been located?

Centre 454 had been located in the basement of St. Albans church for 24 years, from 1976 until 2000. Even its name had been drawn from the street address of the church: 454 King Edward Avenue. It

would be a homecoming of sorts. Of course, there would be complications. The space would need to be renovated. Some neighbours would be outraged, even though the centre would only be moving a distance of six city blocks, less than a kilometer from its expiring lease on Murray Street. Given the slow pace of the negotiations, no one could say for sure when the church would be available. But it soon became apparent that moving Centre 454 back to St. Albans was the best option. We had a plan for the basement.

Now all we needed was a plan for the upstairs, for the church proper. Surprisingly, this was something of an afterthought, driven as the diocese was by the urgency of Centre 454's expiring lease and by the complications and frustrations of the negotiations, which experienced delay after delay in coming to a resolution in the fall of 2010.

There is, I suppose, a certain irony in having the needs of the church become a secondary issue in all of this. Perhaps though, there was not just irony, but also a bit of divine inspiration at work. Ministry and mission became the drivers, and the vision and shape of the church which would ultimately support that ministry and mission was developed in response. It was a given that a worshipping community would have to be re-established upstairs. Not only would the absence of a congregation in one of the most historic churches in the city be unthinkable, but city bylaws required the existence of a worshipping community in the church building in order to allow its basement to be used for social services.

Many people, myself included, assumed that once we regained access to the church building, the diocese would simply engage a retired priest on a part-time basis to lead worship on Sunday mornings for whoever showed up. Some assumed that a certain remnant from the old congregation, those who wanted to remain in the Anglican Church of Canada and those who had previously scattered as a result of various disagreements, would return and form the nucleus of a renewed and reestablished parish of St. Alban the Martyr. But we were wrong.

* * *

The Anglican Parish of Huntley is a three-point parish located in Carp, on the western fringes of Ottawa. If Carp is famous for anything, it is the annual Carp Fair, a three-day agricultural extravaganza with live animals and live music, with midway rides and fun for the whole family. The Carp Fair has been going strong since 1863. It is annual proof of the strong agricultural heritage that shapes the people whose village is slowly transforming into a bedroom community for those who work in Ottawa. I began serving the parish of Huntley in 2008. It was a wonderful place for a newly-ordained minister to fumble his way through the beginnings of a new career. And it was the church where I met Meredith.

I heard Meredith before I saw him. There was no choir at St. James Carp when I started there, but, to my astonishment, one Sunday morning the opening hymn was supported by a strong voice singing the bass line. It didn't take long to find the voice, or voices actually, because there was also a beautiful soprano on the melody added to our vocal mix. There on my left was a new couple in church, singing with the voices of angels. Greeting them afterwards, I found out that Meredith and Barbara were indeed experienced musicians and choristers and that they had retired to the Carp area. Not long after, I also found out that they were refugees from St. Albans.

I didn't know it at the time, but that Sunday morning was the first time Meredith had set foot in an Anglican church in years. Later, as I got to know him and Barbara over wonderful meals and the occasional glass of sherry at their home, he told me pieces of his story. He had been the music director at St. Albans for a long time in the '80s and '90s.

"Was it a traditional worship style, a high church type of liturgy?" I asked.

"More than that," he replied. "It was positively Victorian!"

But in the mid-'90s a new priest had been appointed, the one who eventually led the congregation out of the Anglican Church of

Canada in 2008. His was a strong personality, and he and Meredith clashed. Eventually Meredith left in a parting that was unpleasant to say the least.

My conversations with Meredith were happening just about the time that the St. Albans negotiations were drawing to a conclusion – before I got the call from the bishop's office, but just as the conversations about what would happen at St. Albans were heating up. So I asked what was, to me, the obvious question.

"Meredith, when our diocese starts up again at St. Albans later this year, how many people do you think are coming back?"

The answer was a bit of a surprise; at least it would have surprised the folks at our diocesan office: "No one's coming back."

It turned out that the timing was all wrong for a simple re-establishment of St. Albans. Most of the people who had issues with the direction taken by the priest appointed in the mid-'90s had left a long time ago, and they'd had plenty of time to settle into new church homes. For its part, the departing congregation was a cohesive group that had been separate from the diocese for three years and would continue to stick together. There wasn't likely to be anyone coming back. I'm not sure how many people realized it in early 2011, but St. Albans was going to be a new church plant, the creation of a new church community.

Maybe it's a good thing that no one knew. After all, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa hadn't planted a new urban congregation in generations. Most of our experience in starting new congregations was in response to the boom days of suburban sprawl back in the '60s and '70s. But even in a fast-growing suburban area, our most recent attempt at planting a new church had gone nowhere. Church planting isn't really part of the culture of the so-called mainline churches (Anglican/Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United, Methodist, etc.) in the way that it is for many evangelical and non-denominational churches. For us, there wasn't any playbook, and there weren't any obvious models to draw upon. It looked like we were going to have to make things up as we went along.

This is the story of that new church community.

ONE

Getting Ready

Since nobody realized that St. Albans was going to need a new congregation, nobody gave me any advice or resources about church planting. In fact, the term wasn't even really part of our Anglican vocabulary in Ottawa. We knew about something called "Fresh Expressions," a movement coming out of the U.K. that involved new forms of church and church activities. We'd heard about the "missional church," the idea that churches couldn't just sit back anymore and do what they'd always done. Instead, they should get out there and meet the needs of their neighbourhoods, taking on service and social justice initiatives as a way of building community. I'd even been to a conference on the "emerging church," the notion that there is a fundamental change taking place in Christianity in our time, and that out of this a new way of being church is emerging. But church planting – that was something more associated with evangelical and non-denominational churches than with the Anglican church. After all, we had churches just about everywhere, and lots of them were in downtown Ottawa. Many people think that we have too many downtown churches. Why would we want to plant a new one?

St. Albans would be something new, something that went against the grain of our conventional thinking and that appealed to me. I've always loved a challenge. Here was a chance to *do* and *be* church differently, to try something that might appeal to the younger de-

mographic that was missing in many of our parishes, to be the church in a way that wasn't constricted by years of habit, tradition, and the cultural influence of previous generations. This was an exciting opportunity. But they didn't teach us any of this stuff in seminary, so it was time to do a little research.

I *did* know the story of one church plant. About ten years ago, my family and I had taken a holiday to Australia, and I had foolishly arrived at the airport for the 16 hour flight with nothing to read. So I went to the airport book store. As is my habit, I went straight to the bargain bin of discounted books. There in the bin, for the princely sum of six dollars, was a copy of *The Purpose-Driven Church*, by Rick Warren, the story of the beginnings of Saddleback Church in California in the 1980s. Not the sort of book that most people would pick up to read on a flight, which is probably why it was in the discount bin. But for someone about to be ordained and embarking on a new career in church ministry, it would do, and I certainly couldn't complain about the price. By the time I finished the book, somewhere between Fiji and New Zealand, the idea of planting a church was something I thought I might like to do someday. What impressed me most about Rick Warren's account were not the particulars of his understanding of church or his methodology, or Saddleback itself. Rather, it was his commitment, discipline, and ability to execute on his vision and mission. What I recognized in Rick Warren was a fellow entrepreneur at work.

In his article "Making Ministry Difficult," which appeared in *The Christian Century*, Will Willimon wrote that the most effective clergy are finding ways to start new communities of faith, but that seminaries are not teaching them how to do it. Today's ministry requires a level of entrepreneurship more easily learned in business school than in a seminary. It also requires quite a few other things that aren't taught in seminary. Digital literacy, for instance – which includes social media, email marketing, and web design – is becoming an essential skill for the newly ordained. If Willimon was right, I was off to a good start. My previous career in the technology industry had given me the entrepreneurial skills I needed. Maybe, with-

out knowing it, I'd been preparing for the adventure of church planting for most of my life.

I'd been born into the Christian faith and the Anglican tradition. My best memories of childhood were Sundays: going to church with my family, singing in the children's choir at Christ Church Beaurepaire in Montreal, and then gathering with every relative within driving distance at my grandmother's house nearby for lunch. By the time I was eight years old, I had the entire service from the old Book of Common Prayer memorized, along with most of the choral settings. I knew our liturgy inside and out. Now, some might think that such familiarity with the "traditional" way of doing things would be a disadvantage for someone about to start a new congregation, and who wants to do things in new and innovative ways. I disagree.

When I was a teenager, I spent some time with classmates learning French in the south of France. During that summer, we visited a small village on the Mediterranean coast, and in that village was an even smaller museum dedicated to the work of Pablo Picasso. It contained none of the canvases or styles that one would normally associate with the famous painter. Instead, it was a collection of paintings and drawings by Picasso as a teenager. I was amazed to see that they were all in various classical styles. The teenaged Picasso painted portraits with the dark colours of Rembrandt, landscapes in the impressionist style of Monet, and still lifes using the pointillism of Seurat. The variety of artistic styles and the quality of the art was amazing, but what I took away from that experience was something else entirely. Before Picasso embarked on one of the most innovative painting careers of the 20th century, he had, as a teenager, mastered the classical styles and techniques. It's those who know a tradition inside and out who can successfully innovate and move beyond it.

My own education and professional career could also be described as eclectic. My first degree was in engineering, my second in theoretical physics, and my third in development economics, with a heavy dose of philosophy courses whenever I could fit them into my sched-

ule. But if there was anything that served as a unifying theme, apart from the love of a good challenge, it was my fascination with models. Models, conceptual frameworks, paradigms, or, if they are comprehensive enough in scope, worldviews, are the lenses through which we understand, interpret, and interact with the world around us. Without models, engineers can't build bridges and economists would have nothing to say about economic behaviour. But the one model that captivated me more than any other and that has stayed with me as a life-long passion is the model of quantum physics.

Until my second year of university, I was immersed in the model of classical physics. Newtonian physics. Matter, motion, and forces. Causality and determinism. Objective reality. The clockwork universe. Atoms as miniature billiard balls bouncing around on a stage of space and time. But, in my second year of university, all that changed when I hit quantum physics, with a few doses of Einstein's relativity thrown in for good measure. Atoms turned out to be mostly empty space. Particles turned into waves. Waves turned into particles. An electron could be in two places at the same time. Causality and determinism both disappeared at the microscopic level. Day by day as I went to class, the common-sense ideas I'd grown up with, ideas like space, time, matter, particle, mass, causality, determinism and objectivity, all of these were chewed up and spit out, to be replaced by strange new conceptions. My brain hurt as it was forced to move from the comfortable world of classical physics to the brave new world of quantum physics, with its curving space-time, wave functions, tunneling electrons, and uncertainty principles. It's one thing to talk about paradigm shifts – it's a very different thing entirely to experience one.

Curiously enough, at the same time as I was being both disrupted and fascinated by these shifting paradigms, I discovered that Bob Brow, the priest at the Anglican church on the corner of the campus, was also a big fan of models and paradigm shifts. He would regularly incorporate these ideas into his preaching. "But what if we were to look at this with a new model," was one of his favourite

ways of bringing fresh insight to a familiar passage of scripture. We would often talk at the Wednesday morning breakfasts at the church. He offered to read a paper I'd written on the wider influence of scientific models. My thesis, which I still maintain, is that the conceptual frameworks developed by scientists to explain and understand nature have a profound impact on the worldviews of society at large, and consequently effect our understanding in fields as diverse as politics, philosophy, and theology. Bob read my paper and promptly handed me a book to read: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn. This was the classic text in which Kuhn introduced the world to the idea of a "paradigm shift" using examples from the history of science. Progress and change don't happen as a result of the incremental accumulation of more and more facts. Real, substantive, ground-breaking change results from paradigm shifts: conceptual revolutions that ask new questions, fundamentally change the rules of the game, and re-write all the textbooks.

Is the church in North America in the early 21st century in the midst of a paradigm shift? Or, to turn the question around, does the 21st-century church *need* a paradigm shift? Many would say yes. A quick survey of books and blogs inundates us with the emerging church, the converging church, the disappearing church, the post-Christendom church, the missional church, and much more. Something's happening in church-land, and there are parallels with Kuhn's analysis of the history of science. One of the parallels is surely this: paradigm shifts are generally difficult, disruptive, and divisive.

If there is a paradigm shift happening, I want to be right in the middle of it. That's what drew me to quantum physics. My thesis, among other things, explored the transition from the classical to the quantum way of understanding a particular molecular rotation. Years later, when I was lecturing on the history of science at a local college, I used to teach my students the importance of paradigm shifts. First, I would walk my students through the Copernican revolution. Since none of these 21st-century students were seriously attached to the notion that the earth must be the centre of the uni-

verse, we were able to note the dynamics of that scientific revolution in a relatively detached manner, with nothing personal at stake. Then I told them, "Now that you understand what a paradigm shift is, it's time to experience one." With that warning, we would plunge into special and general relativity and quantum physics, and over the course of about a month, we did some serious mind-blowing, much like I experienced in my university days, but without having to learn the math. My students discovered firsthand that it's one thing to learn about paradigm shifts, but it's another thing entirely to experience one. The negative side-effects include headaches and confusion, but the positive effects include a profound sense of wonder, an openness to new ideas, and a useful humility about the limits of human understanding.

A colleague doing campus ministry at the University of Ottawa once asked me the single most important thing that quantum physics had taught me as far as my faith is concerned. I think it took me about a month to answer the question, but finally I told him that quantum physics had taught me to hold my ideas lightly, knowing that the concepts and words that I use actually contain more mystery, meaning, and majesty than I could ever imagine. The same applies, perhaps even more so, to our theology and ecclesiology.

I believe that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift in the church in our time and place, and that's one of the reasons that I jumped at the opportunity to plant a church in downtown Ottawa. There is room for new ways to do and be church that will change the rule book and shift our expectations. Many church leaders, in response to the challenges of our time, are burning themselves out trying to do more and to do it better, when what we *really* need are new models.

But while having a passion for shifting paradigms is a good start for a church planter, ideas alone won't get a church plant off the ground. I once had a conversation with a colleague from another denomination that was intentionally planting a lot of churches.

"How's that working?" I asked.

"Not so well," was her response. "We have a lot of good pastors out there doing good work, but most of them have no experience as entrepreneurs."

Entrepreneurs are people who make things happen. They identify and initiate new ventures, source and organize the required resources, take on risks and deal with uncertainty. We usually associate entrepreneurship with the world of business, but the same concept can apply to any new venture, and a church plant certainly falls into that category.

A couple of weeks after I got the call from the bishop about St. Albans, an email showed up in my in-box. It was from a big church in town that operated a conference centre and they were upgrading their furniture. As a result, they had plenty of used chairs to sell, and they sent out an email blast to other churches in the area to see who might be interested. I had yet to set foot in the St. Albans church building, but I had an inkling that we would want to make our space more flexible, and for that we would need chairs. Chairs at the usual price would be beyond our financial means, at least for a while. These used chairs, however, were cheap, and I knew they were in good condition, having sat on one myself at a recent synod meeting. I had no idea if the colours would match. In fact, there was a real risk that we'd never even use them. But it was too good an opportunity to pass up, so I rushed over to the church conference centre and arranged to buy 100. I managed to scrape together the $700 price I'd negotiated, and booked a cube van to take them over to a temporary storage facility. It was a risk, and I just about put my back out hauling chairs around that day. But St. Albans had its chairs, and they did indeed turn out to be a great asset, allowing us to re-configure the church space.

In the grand scheme of things, chairs are no big deal. But their purchase illustrates what entrepreneurs do. They spot opportunities, make decisions, take risks, find resources, and make things happen.

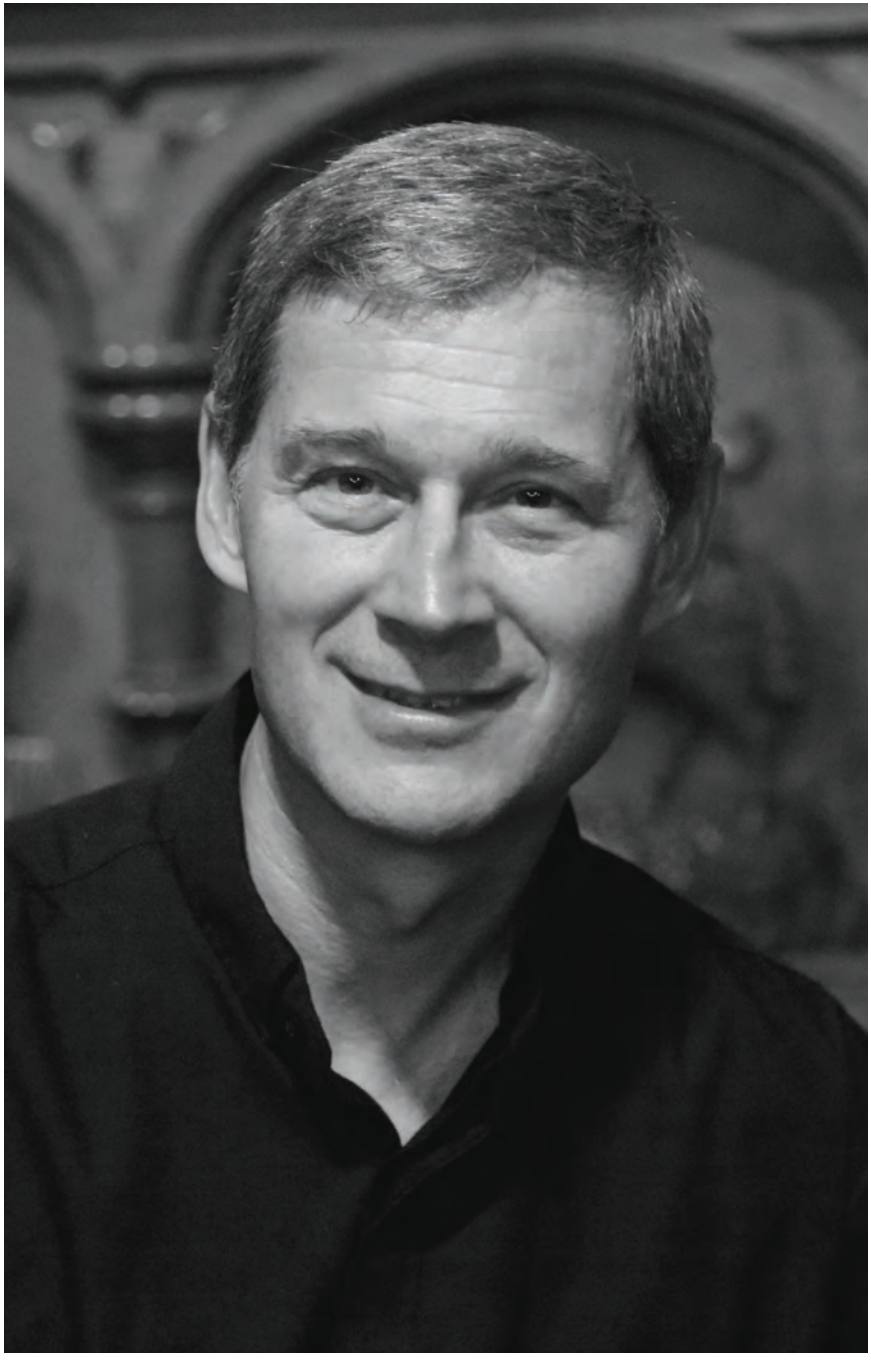
That entrepreneurial instinct was one of the reasons that midway through my graduate studies in physics at Oxford I decided

that I didn't want to pursue academia. I decided, instead, to put my engineering background to use in international development, with the goal of adapting technologies for use in developing countries. I started working for a technology company based in Ottawa doing projects around the world in solar energy and rural telecommunications. It was the perfect place to learn how to be an entrepreneur. When I started, we had ten employees. By the time I resigned as CEO, we had over 100 employees, we'd spun out a start-up Internet company, and we'd made a major strategic shift from rural telecom to air traffic management as our core business. We enjoyed huge successes, including recognition as one of Canada's fastest-growing businesses. *And* we had some huge flops, including the failure of our Internet start-up after the dot-com bubble burst in 2001.

By then I was ready for a change. Too much business travel was taking its toll, both on me and on my growing family. It was time to consider other options. I took a sabbatical from work and started thinking about a second career. I also seized the opportunity to do a lot of things that I had never found time for during the previous decade – piano lessons, cycling, coaching children's hockey and soccer, writing, working with the teens at church. People often ask me how it came about that I shifted from business and engineering to ordained ministry. It wasn't part of any grand plan, at least on my part. I'm afraid I have no story of blinding insight or dramatic change to tell them. I just started trying different things during my sabbatical, and when something resonated, I kept on doing it. One of the things that resonated during that year was theology. I took a theology course at the local university, and something clicked, so I took another.

At the time, I wasn't sure what would come next, but perhaps God would find a use for a slightly-burned-out, 40-year-old quantum physicist turned entrepreneur with a passion for shifting paradigms.

Like I said, without realizing it, I had been getting ready for the St. Albans church plant for years.



MARK WHITTALL

The Rev. Mark Whittall is the pastor of St. Albans Church and a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. He is an engineer by training, and obtained graduate degrees in Theoretical Physics and in Development Economics from Oxford University. His first career was as an engineer and executive in the high-tech sector, rising to the position of CEO and earning recognition as Ottawa's Entrepreneur of the Year in 2000. Soon afterwards he left his business career and turned to the study of theology. He served as Professor, History of Science at Augustine College in Ottawa from 2002 to 2007 and was ordained as an Anglican Priest in 2008. After a brief stay in a rural parish, he was tasked with building a new congregation at St. Albans Church in downtown Ottawa in 2011, where he currently serves as pastor.

A preacher and gifted storyteller, Mark is uniquely qualified to write this book not just by virtue of his personal experience in launching and building this new congregation, but also because of his unique ability to bring insights from the worlds of academia, science, business and theology to bear on the stories which he narrates.

From the St. Alban's website

Mark became the Incumbent of St. Albans on July 1st, 2011. Mark was born in Montreal but grew up in Manotick, Ontario. His studies took him to Queen's in Kingston and Oxford in the UK, where he completed degrees in engineering, physics and development economics.

He returned to Ottawa to begin his career in technology and international development in 1987. His work with Intelcan took him to more than forty countries around the world, from the jungles of Africa to the tundra of the Arctic. But in 2005 he returned to school, this time to St. Paul University in Ottawa where he completed his Masters in Pastoral Theology in 2008. Mark was ordained in 2008 and served as Incumbent of the Parish of Huntley in Carp until 2011. Mark is enthusiastic about his return to downtown Ottawa to be the Pastor at St. Albans Church. Now he can bike to work! Ministry at St. Albans provides Mark with and exciting and unique opportunity to engage with a diverse group of people of all ages and backgrounds, including the folks at Centre 454 and students at the University of Ottawa. Mark brings a particular passion for working with children and youth to his ministry, a passion which is evident in his puppet collection!

At home, Mark shares his life with Guylaine, his wife of 20 years, and his two children, Jonathan, 17 and Michelle, 15. In his leisure time he enjoys sports, music and even a bit of quantum physics, and he tries to get away on a canoe camping trip with family and friends every summer.

From Bloomberg.com

Mr. Mark Whittall was the Founder and served as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sybridge Technologies, Inc. Mr. Whittall served as Chief Executive Officer of Intelcan Technosystems Inc. since 1998 and also served as its President, a global provider of Air Traffic Management and Wireless Telecom Solutions, which was recognized as one of Canada's fastest growing high technology companies by the Financial Post magazine. He served as Chairman and Director of Intelcan Technosystems Inc. Mr. Whittall is a Professional Engineer. He holds an engineering degree from Queen's University and a Masters Degrees in both Physics and Economics from Oxford University.

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- The story of Jesus and the churches that carry his message.

Wood Lake has been telling stories for more than 30 years. During that time, it has given form and substance to the words, songs, pictures and ideas of hundreds of storytellers.

Those stories have taken a multitude of forms – parables, poems, drawings, prayers, epiphanies, songs, books, paintings, hymns, curricula – all driven by a common mission of serving those on the faith journey.