



Looking Forward

Executive Director Matt Hamsher shares his vision for Evana and the Future

We've come a long way in the last four years. In the spring of 2015, what would become the Evana Network was still just an idea that existed largely on paper. We had some core values and a mandate to provide a home for congregations that were leaving Mennonite Church USA because of their commitment to biblical authority, congregational accountability, and faithful discipleship. The fact that we have now grown to forty-six partner congregations in an alive and functioning network is something to celebrate! We all owe a real debt of gratitude to God's work in our midst and the courageous and visionary leadership of our first Executive Director, John Troyer.

I am proud of the resources we have developed to assist congregations in reaching out to make an impact in their communities and invite others to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior: the vital impact assessment, the community mapping process, and other resources our Director of Church Development, Wes Furlong, have helped us launch. And it has been wonderful to see how a network of regional pastors has been forming to offer spiritual leadership and care to pastors and congregations.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that we have finally "arrived" and can go back to "business (or church) as usual." The increasingly post-modern and post-Christian character of North American society and culture poses several challenges to the mission of our congregations. The number of people who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (the nones) as well as those who say they still believe in God but no longer go to church (the dones) is on the rise. Both trends indicate that faith is seen more and more as a personal preference and not as something that is objectively true or that requires a commitment to a faith tradition or community. This increase in relativism and individualism in turn threatens to undermine appeals to biblical authority, commitments to mutual

accountability, and efforts to share our faith with others as we have in the past.



Furthermore, the heightened polarization of the "Left" and "Right" in politics, culture, and religion today tempts many people to compromise biblical teaching in order to make sure the side with which we identify the most comes out on top. These "powers

and authorities" provide a sense of identity for people and provide some measure of security and order. Yet as fallen powers they too often claim the authority and the allegiance that belongs to God alone. Something has gone seriously wrong whenever a church's doctrine and practice comes to mirror that of any one particular secular political party.

The good news is that Evana is well placed to not only weather these cultural storms, but to thrive and grow in the future. Making a priority of building relationships instead of institutions means that our future is not dependent upon support for denominational institutions. We will continue to work together with others whenever and wherever it is consistent with our core values. By keeping structure and bureaucracy to a minimum, we are freer to experiment and shift our resources in order to meet future challenges and opportunities.

Our identity needs to be shaped more by our common convictions and identity in Christ than by ethnic, cultural, or institutional ties that limit our ability to welcome others. Even though there are a limited number of "traditional" Mennonite churches

that might join us in the future, there is an even greater number of pastors and congregations who are weary of both liberalism and fundamentalism and are looking for a more holistic, Jesus-centered faith. Our evangelical Anabaptist faith commitments and desire to be shaped and led by the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit can provide the biblically faithful and theologically robust alternative many are searching for.

Finally, we must also recognize that we can have all of the best tools, resources, and programs in the world available to us, but unless we actually utilize them, they won't make a difference. It is so easy to fall into the rut of minding the business (or "business") of the church and not take sufficient time for vision-casting and goal-setting. That's why we are working to integrate our resourcing and coaching with our regional pastor support to ensure that pastors and congregations have adequate support for identifying goals and then implementing changes in their life and ministry. As we look to the future, I'm excited for how God is going to continue to use Evana and the individual churches that make it up as we all work together to further the cause of Christ.

What are your hopes and fears for the future of the Evana Network? I would love to hear from you at matt@evananetwork.org. ~Matt Hamsher

Former Calvary Hour Headquarters New Evana Office

Many may remember the radio program, "The Calvary Hour" an evangelistic broadcast started by William Detweiler in 1936, and later continued by his sons, Bob and Bill until its last broadcast on December 30, 2007. Detweiler started the program with a vision to reach the lost with the Gospel, but he received much adversity from the Mennonite conference for utilizing radio as his means. Even though he was shunned from several churches, he stayed strong to what he believed God had put in his heart, pioneering a new method of sharing about Jesus. He felt so strongly in this vision, he asked his sons to carry it on after his death. Young men at the time, they agreed, not knowing that their father would pass away suddenly at the age of 52. Still they honored his request and continued the program up until 2007 when Bill finally retired.



Countless people were touched by this family's commitment to spread the good news of Jesus and now Evana is privileged to use a space once utilized by this special ministry. Executive Director Matt Hamsher, will be working out of the office located at 220 North Main Street in Orrville, Ohio. This location was previously used as Calvary Hour headquarters.

After the program ended, the Detweilers sold this building to an accountant, Doyle Steiner, and when his business was bought by one of his partners, ownership passed to Matt Baltic, the current owner. Matt is a CPA and runs his accounting business out of the building, but has generously donated the use of the front room to Evana. A faithful member of the Apostolic Christian Church, Matt did not want to charge a church organization and so is donating the room.

According to Matt Hamsher, "It's a blessing to be able to use this space as an office. It is especially meaningful to be here because of the history of the building. I hope that we can continue to pioneer new ways of reaching people for Christ through the resourcing and witness of the Evana Network." *

Regenal

Ohio Evana churches are gearing up to host **Regenal**, an event open to all with the purpose of connecting with each other and growing closer to Christ. Keynote speakers will be **Gil and Marketo Michel**, pastors of That Church Downtown in South Bend, IN. The event will take place at Kidron Mennonite Church with lodging and other activities available at Camp Luz. The dates are **June 29th and 30th**. **For more information or to register visit campluz.com/regenal2019.**

*Moyer, Forrest. "A Pioneer of Gospel Broadcasting: William G. Detweiler." *Mennonite Heritage Center*, 11 July 2018, mhpc.org/a-pioneer-of-gospel-broadcasting-william-g-detweiler/.