



BY DAN COGGINS

I fear loiterers.

I'm afraid when I walk past a group of loud-talking twenty-somethings in Victoria Park.

But there's nothing to fear. Gathering together, smoking, talking, and skateboarding are all legal.

So why am I afraid?

I'm afraid because I've grown up in "car-friendly" cities: lots of big, empty parking lots, everyone moving along from their office to shops to their cocoons in the suburbs. Shopping is as close as I've come to public life.

I've lived the urban blight caused by decades of car-friendly city planning in Dallas/Fort Worth, TX, and Syracuse, NY: large expanses devoid of any foot traffic, and city blocks in barren downtown areas where no one sticks around, except those intent on doing me harm. That's where the fear comes in.

So while I'm rushing through Victoria Park in my little bubble, self-righteously checking things off my to-do list, the twenty-somethings may actually be better citizens as they sit together, joke



**HOW CAN
KNOX-MET
BE A
PEOPLE
MAGNET?**

and laugh, make new friends, and share points of view on the current scene.

A people-friendly city

In recent years there has been a trend to make cities more "people-friendly". These days we want to build public spaces — and the buildings that surround them — in a way that makes it inviting for people to walk, sit down, and click with each other.

With documentaries like *The Human Scale*, and books like Charles Montgomery's *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*, there are new ideas about how to design pleasant, inviting public spaces that let us keep our cocoons but make public connections possible, too.

Situated where we are in the downtown core, and with church renovations in the offing, there's never been a better time for Knox-Metropolitan United Church to entertain the open question of "What building design will support our future ministry?"

See **Magnet** on next page

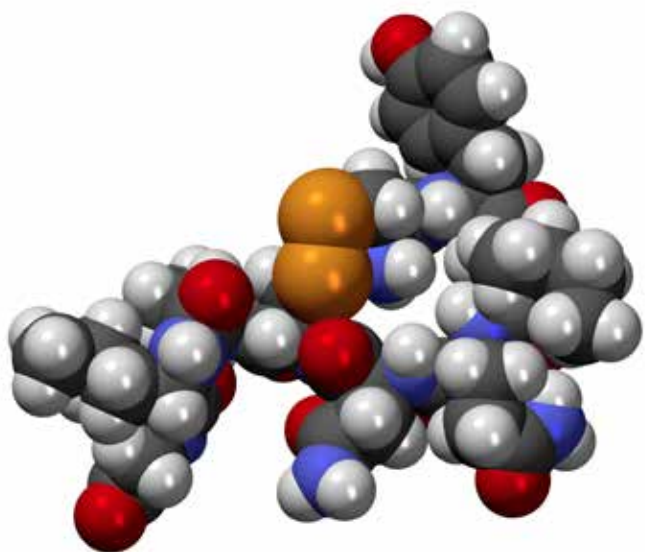
Magnet — continued from front page

Can your surroundings make you happy?

One point of view has it that each person is responsible for his or her own problems. Much of popular Christianity takes that approach. If the person chooses to change, the person will be happier.

Christopher Alexander in *Happy City* counters with another view that “a person is so far formed by his surroundings . . . [that] his state of harmony depends entirely on his harmony with his surroundings.”

So, is happiness up to you alone, or are you happy as a result of your surroundings?



This feels better than tripling your income. You don't have to look any further than your brain to explain why connecting with others feels so good. The hormone oxytocin is released when you shake hands, smile, and enjoy other people. How can Knox-Met create more oxytocin in downtown Regina?

University of British Columbia economics professor John Helliwell doesn't discount the notion that part of your happiness is due to your surroundings. He found that “when it come to life satisfaction, relationships with other people beat income hands

down. . . . Just going from being friendless to having one friend or family member to confide in had the same effect on life satisfaction as a tripling of income.”

And connecting with others in public spaces can make happiness happen.

Designing a church building that builds a community

Just what the Knox-Met church building of the future will be like is still not clear. But recent trends in liveable downtowns tell us what a great city centre looks like, and we can plan with that in mind.

Child-friendly. Downtowns and families with children have not been a good mix, according to Brent Toderian, former chief city planner for the City of Vancouver: “singles, couples and seniors downtown are great, but kids and baby-strollers make communities more real, more human. They also support a broader local economy, and make the community safer.” He sums it all up with an old saying among urban planners: “Kids are the indicator species of a great neighbourhood.” Childcare and nearby schools are the two key elements to making the downtown child-friendly, says Toderian.

Housing options. The Downtown Development Authority in Ann Arbor, MI, has a focus on creating a “24-hour neighborhood” with a variety of housing options for singles, seniors, and families in the downtown.

Schools, grocery stores, bathrooms. In its downtown, Oklahoma City has planned for an elementary school and reintroduced a grocery. Could connecting with our downtown be as simple as installing a bread-and-milk store in our building? In our “prayer walks” we noted that some have to plan their day around public washrooms where the building management is kind to the homeless.

“Just going from being friendless to having one friend or family member to confide in had the same effect on life satisfaction as a tripling of income.”

John Helliwell, Happiness Economist

A people-friendly space

David Sim, in *The Human Scale*, has been working on designing a new, people-friendly downtown for Christchurch, New Zealand after its 2011 earthquake. He remarks that rebuilding a city “. . . to be inclusive . . . has to be everybody's project.”

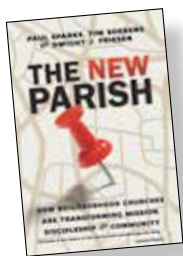


Christchurch, New Zealand used outdoor boards for community input as it planned its public space. Why not bring downtowners to our planning process by getting their input?

Robert Doyle, the mayor of Melbourne, Australia, notes in the same documentary that a space conducive to human connection leads to a healthier population. Our challenge now is to design our church and its grounds as a people-friendly space, not only for a healthy public, but a healthier Knox-Met, too.

This is part three of a series about evolving our building to support future ministry. Part two appeared in the June 2014 issue of Star. The Human Scale is available on Netflix.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES THIS FALL THROUGH KNOX-MET



Join a movement of love and compassion. How can we embrace our location in Regina as the basis for our church identity — individuals, a community, and an organization? Called an “inspiring read” and “a big dose of hope”, join a group to learn of a movement of love and compassion springing up all over North America. For more information, contact Cam Fraser.



Understand how we got here. *A History of Christianity* reveals surprising truths about early Christian missions, the beliefs of the founding fathers of the United States, and the bumpy ride as “this small Jewish sect that preached humility became the biggest religion in the world.” The 12-part video series starts September 9/10. Register at 306-525-9128.



Get away and get in touch. This retreat for the entire Knox-Metropolitan United Church family is planned to both refresh and energize our community of faith. We are on the threshold of new beginnings, and this spiritual retreat is intended to encourage and strengthen us. Pre-registration required by Sunday September 14.



Focus on the next step in your walk with Christ. Knox-Met now has a labyrinth, but this maze doesn't want you to get lost! All you have to do is get on the path, stay in the moment, and let yourself be taken to the centre. There's an added dimension when you walk it while others are walking it, too. The labyrinth debuts at Knox-Met, Friday, September 19, 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. in the gym.



Reduce the hold of things on your life. Our giant annual flea market is October 18. Today, drop off your donation of gently used clothing, jewelry, toys and games, household items (please no large furniture, books, electronics, or microwaves). Declutter your closet forever with this guide: 1. Do you love it? 2. Do you wear it? 3. Does it project the image you want?

★ STAR
September 2014

Star is published monthly by Knox-Metropolitan United Church, 2340 Victoria Avenue, Regina, SK, S4P 0S6. One summer edition is printed for July and August.

Leads and material suggested for the next newsletter are due the 10th of the month before publication to star@knoxmetregina.org. Items will be edited. We accept no advertising.

We welcome you to join us for worship Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

www.knoxmetregina.org

www.facebook.com/KnoxMet

Created by Pitchgreen Communications Limited
www.pitchgreen.com

ISSN 2292-3055 (Print)

ISSN 2292-3063 (Online)

Photo: Yahoo/Wikimedia Commons

Knox-Met could grow by getting small

Two hundred new worshipers in five years, bit by bit!



Our new minister, Cam Fraser, is floating the idea of developing “micro-churches” through Knox-Metropolitan United Church. These are small groups who gather for worship, discipleship, and mission — outside of our existing Sunday morning service.

This fall, our Dinner Church experiment, inspired by St. Lydia’s in Brooklyn, NY, will be our first trial of this sort. Worshipers will gather on Sunday evening to cook and eat together — songs, prayers, scripture, sermon, bread and cup are all shared within the context of a sit-down meal.

Cam hopes that the next year will see Knox-Met try two or three such projects. (Street Church and Messy Church are other strong possibilities.) They won’t all last. We will plant seeds and see what takes root.



Our Sunday morning service is an excellent example of one way of doing church — we should get the word out about what goes on Sunday mornings in our sanctuary. But we should also think about how we might connect with, and share our stories of faith with

people for whom Sunday morning, within a church building, in this particular style, does not resonate. If we began 10 unique micro-church projects over five years, with an average participation of 20 people — that would add 200 to our life together.



Cam would initially lead the micro-church projects, with the hopes that laypeople would offer significant leadership: taking over some projects, and developing new ones, too. This kind of ministry can’t rely on professional staff only — this works when it belongs to the whole church. Each participant would invite friends, neighbours, co-workers, and family members to experience the new community.

A micro-church might take many forms:

- Pub church (Theology on Tap);
- Walking church;
- Yoga church;
- A faith and arts collective;
- A meditative prayer group;
- A group for non-English speakers;
- University students;
- Parents with children; or a
- Movie and discussion club.

For some of us, this will require a re-orientation of just what it means to be a congregation as we affirm that being in a micro-church is a valid way to be a Knox-Met member.



Micro-churches are not new. The Fresh Expressions Movement, Messy Church (Anglican); and the 1001 Project (Presbyterian) are examples, with United Church moderator Gary Paterson recently mentioning 1001 in his blog.

Cam says, “Just like a micro-brewery whips up small batches with unique tastes, so too this micro-church project will produce some small batches that won’t feel like church for everyone — but may feel like church for you.”

This fall, Cam is leading a study of the book *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*. He hopes that some of the ideas, energy, and potential leaders for future micro-church projects might spring up through the discussions. For more information about the study group, contact Cam Fraser.