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Ottawa *Watch* 182: A landmark day

By Lloyd Mackey

The Met continues to be a strong and stable evangelical presence in Ottawa. As of 2021, the senior pastor is Jonathan Griffiths, a Toronto-reared, Cambridge-educated expository preacher who could be regarded as a contemporary reiteration of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

It was a landmark day, this past Sunday, for two churches in Ottawa.

One, the Metropolitan Bible Church, held its final services in its 72-year home on downtown Bank Street. Next Sunday, August 3, the congregation of close to 2,000 will occupy its new \$15 million facility a few kilometres south, near Ottawa's Macdonald-Cartier International Airport.

The other, City Church, a congregation of 300 which meets in a former Roman Catholic edifice in historic Vanier, a dozen or so blocks east of Parliament Hill, bade farewell to their lead pastor and spouse. Eric and Angela Deschamps, who founded the church 15 years ago, are moving into something called Marketplace Ministry.

Both churches are quite unique. And each has its own way of communicating on a level that is relevant to at least a few hundred of the politicians, diplomats and public servants that populate the capital.

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Metropolitan Bible Church, or The Met, as it is affectionately known around Ottawa, began as Metropolitan Tabernacle. It took its name from the famous home of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Baptist pastor and orator who preached to thousands each Sunday in London, during the second half of the 19th century.

The "tabernacle" nomenclature is still etched into the cornice atop the old brick church, whose façade will be preserved as the front for an atrium joining two condo towers to be built soon, on the site.

The Met has always been strong on biblical preaching, missional outreach that extends around the globe and a keen interest in helping Ottawa people to relate a straightforward personal Christian gospel to their own walks of life.

During the past decade, under the pastorate of Rick Reed, the church has grown steadily to its present level. To accommodate the crowds, two services have been held each Sunday morning in the old church and two more in an auditorium at Carleton University.

The services and the weekday activities taxed the facilities to the limit and required the logistics of a space ship to keep things running smoothly.

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The Deschamps were just 20, when City Church received its start. Their little group had just 30 people, but they had a spiritual vision that had grown out of several Christian charismatic emphases, including the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, which helped reshape a fair segment of evangelicalism in the early 90s.

In the early days, its name was the Downtown Church, and it met Saturday nights at St. Paul's-Eastern United church, close to the University of Ottawa. Attendance often ran to 600, many of them students.

As the church solidified and matured, its leaders began to look for a permanent home. It was found in a tall-spired by-then-closed Catholic church, with beautiful stain-glassed windows depicting the life of Christ in impressionistic, free-flowing forms.

The congregation is mainly under 40. The services are about twice the length of those over at The Met, and they have a cadence to them that often builds to an emotive crescendo. The Deschamps have built a strong team and, in their mid-30s, with three growing children, they seem both apprehensive and enthusiastic about their new work.

Marketplace Ministry are buzzwords in many evangelical and charismatic circles, these days. Christian leaders often sense that churches, in themselves, are not structurally-equipped to penetrate corporate and political structures with the gospel.

There is the belief that congregants – even the regulars – attend church much less frequently, but they are willing to engage in worship, service and study in and around the places where they work.

In the capital, that includes the places where political, diplomatic and public service action takes place.

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From time to time, I will try to take a few paragraphs to write about how The Met and the Deschamps are doing in their new spheres of action, and how their circles of influences are being shaped by their particular approaches to ministry.

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