



CHURCH PLANTING IN *Vancouver*

In 2008, DBU alumni Jeff and Sara Phillips had been serving for several years at a large church in Mississippi when they began to sense that it was time to move on to a new stage in their ministry. In the midst of their praying, they became involved as volunteers for the Passion World Tour's stop in Vancouver, British Columbia. The two had never been to Vancouver and had never thought about doing ministry in that city, but they decided to go for this special trip.

On an early scouting trip for the conference, Jeff met up with a close friend, Tim Corbin, who was a church planter in nearby Seattle and a fellow DBU alumnus. The time in Vancouver left an impact on Jeff; he had never been to a place with so little Christian presence. While having coffee at a downtown shop one evening, Jeff noticed how many television lights he could see in the windows of the high-rise buildings.

It became apparent to him that there were more people that lived in the downtown buildings than in American cities, where the majority of skyscrapers are office workspaces. He asked Tim about his experience in Seattle, and Tim explained how Vancouver was flooded with people who both worked and lived downtown, more than any other place in North America, and of these some 85,000 people, 98% were unchurched.

When Jeff returned home, he and Sara began to talk more seriously about their new ministry focus, and the two felt more and more convinced that God was calling them to plant a church. Sara suggested Vancouver, but Jeff quickly responded with a "no," reiterating his experience of the spiritual darkness of that city. Sara

quickly asked her husband, "Are you saying you don't want to bring light to the most spiritually dark city you've ever seen?"

Humbled by the question and sensing God's calling, Jeff began praying for the city and how God could use his family to reach the people of Vancouver. The next month, both Jeff and Sara went to Vancouver for the Passion Conference, and they found themselves broken over the lostness of the city and how much they needed Jesus.

After praying, fundraising, and partnering with the North American Mission Board, in March 2010, Jeff, Sara, and their two young children moved to Vancouver and began the process of building relationships in the downtown area with the hopes of sharing the Gospel and building a new church.

Meanwhile, God had also begun working on the hearts of Craig and Shanna Dunn (also DBU alumni) in Dallas, Texas, preparing them for the same work. For several years, Craig wanted to attend classes at Regent College, an evangelical seminary located in Vancouver, and they even made a trip to visit the campus in 2007. At the time, though, nothing seemed to work out for them to leave.

Part of his attraction to the marketplace theology emphasis at Regent came through his classes at DBU, which emphasized the need to bring the Lordship of Christ into every aspect of life. The more Craig and Shanna contemplated their future ministry together, the more they felt called to live intentionally for the good of the same neighborhood in which they would live every day and raise their children. In this way, they believed the light of Christ would shine brightest against the

backdrop of a spiritually dark city such as Vancouver. This view of holistic community engagement continued to compel Craig and Shanna as they sought the Lord for the next step of life and ministry.

In 2009, Craig and Shanna learned of the plans Jeff and Sara were beginning to undertake for church planting in Vancouver. The four had known each other while students at DBU, and within a week of learning about each other's passion, Jeff and Sara invited the Dunns to join their work in Vancouver. The Dunns accepted the invitation, and in July of 2010, they moved their family (including two children) to downtown Vancouver.

Having worked in churches and Christian environments in the South previously, the task of church planting in such a spiritually dark place was daunting for the two families. Although the Phillipses and Dunns were serving in a North American context, they discovered that the experience is far closer to the work of international missionaries serving unreached people groups. While many may suspect that Vancouver residents – like those in the US – have a basic knowledge of Jesus, the opposite has proven to be true.

When they first began their work, the four of them were told to expect 18 months of relationship building before any decisions for Christ were made. With such daunting statistics, they decided the best place to start was their children's school. The combined elementary and middle school their children attend is comprised of 500 students in Kindergarten through 7th grade from 48 different countries, and the Dunns and Phillipses were determined to be a light to the parents, teachers, and children there.

The two families pursued any inroad

into the lives of the children, parents, or administration by filling available service roles at the school. Jeff began, and Craig soon joined, coaching basketball teams at the school. Most of their players come from families experiencing deep brokenness and hardship from divorce, unemployment, absent fathers, and difficulties assimilating to the Vancouver culture as immigrants. Sara and Shanna, because of their growing influence and gained trust with parents, were elected as executive officers on the Parent Advisory Committee (similar to the US version of PTA). Pouring their lives into those they encounter day-to-day has provided numerous opportunities to build relationships. The process of sharing the Gospel has taken a long time, but they are already seeing the first fruits of their labor.

One example of relationship building involves a family from Iran with a traditional Muslim background. The wife lives in Vancouver with their son, while the husband is in Iran working to provide for the family. The Phillipses and Dunns formed a trust relationship with this family. Recently, Craig and Shanna were invited to their home and were able to share the Gospel not only with the wife, but also her visiting husband, the grandfather, and the grandmother. "This family trusted us enough to invite us into their home and drive the conversation to learning more about what we believe about Jesus," Craig shared.

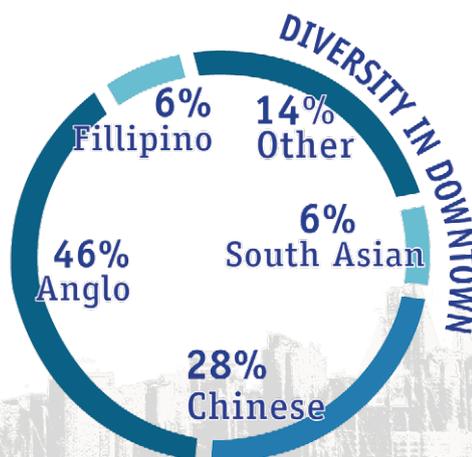
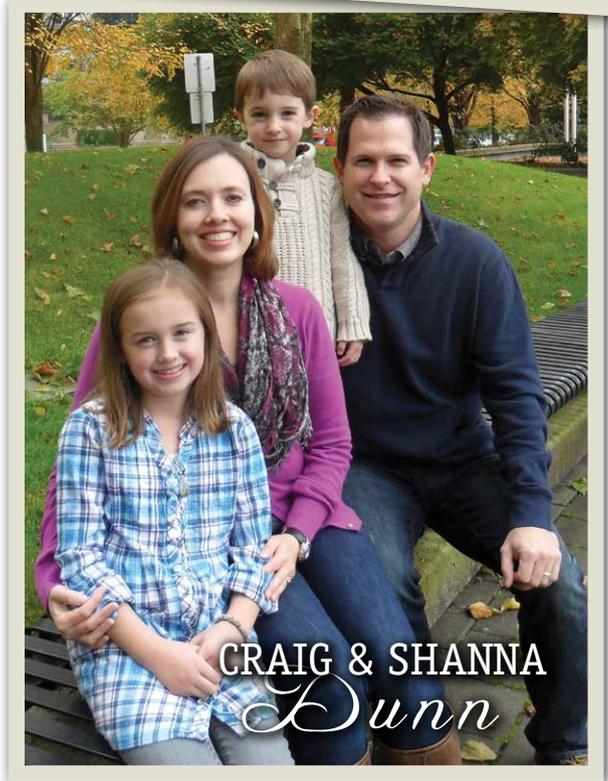
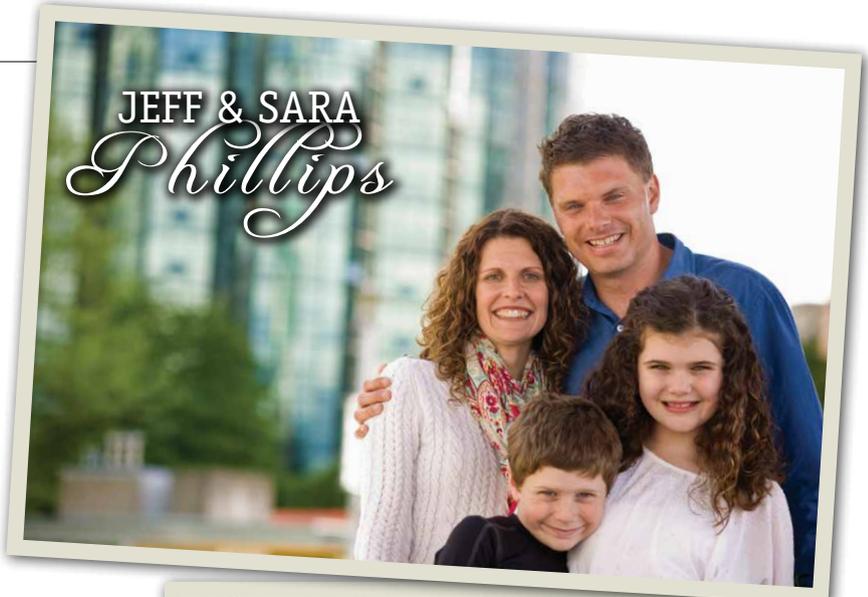
The new church, The Crossings, began in the hearts and lives of the Phillipses and Dunns three and a half years ago. During this time, they have been developing relationships with families in the community, and the church has an average of 30 people a week that gather together for worship on Sunday mornings. They also host a small group each Wednesday night to discuss the content of Sunday's message in depth with those who are seeking to learn about having a relationship with Jesus. This summer, the church transitioned into a space of their own, and on October 20, they officially "launched" citywide The Crossings Church (www.thecrossingschurch.ca).

"This isn't a city where you can go in and say 'Hey, here we are as a church, and we have good programs, good music and good preaching,' and then people are going to come. It doesn't hap-

pen in this city," Jeff explained. "What happens in this city is the Holy Spirit going to work through us as Christ-followers and building intentional relationships with people, and God drawing in people to Himself."

The prayer of the Phillipses and the Dunns is that God would give people the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and the hearts to understand the Good News of Jesus in Vancouver. As they have prayer walked around the city, they have repeated the words from Matthew 13 over and over again. By God's grace, these are the same words that they have heard people share as they have accepted Christ in their lives.

One woman named Sue shared in her testimony after recently becoming a Christian, saying that "it was like my eyes opened up and my ears... I couldn't sleep. It seemed like everything was about the Bible and about God." The Lord has heard the prayers of Christians in the city and answered them, while the Phillipses and the Dunns continue to ask that the harvest would be plentiful.



2,300,000
People in
Vancouver

47%
Claim no
Religion

3%
Evangelical
Christian

