

# LIVING *Life2Life*

Re-imagining church through the power of relationships. Volume 1 | Issue 5

May 15 is a starting gun for gardeners in Columbus, Ohio.

This date usually represents the last time for a possible frost. The planting season can now begin! Amateur landscapers like myself begin packing greenhouses and nurseries. Flooded with eager gardeners, our local nursery hires police to direct traffic.

While standing in line with a cart filled with annuals and perennials, I realized that this nursery was providing plants to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of homes in Central Ohio. Nurseries have a simple vision, populate a community with living plants and then watch them multiply.

My mind drifted to another place of plants that my family had recently visited, the local conservatory. In a tightly controlled environment, we experienced a tropical rain forest, marveled at the ages of the bonsai trees, and crept up close to savor the orchids. Plants were not for sale in the conservatory. We could only look and smell.

I came away thinking that the church should be more like a nursery than a conservatory. Christ's Body was conceived to be a "hothouse," growing believers to plant in neighborhoods, workplaces, and in family networks. Unfortunately, it's easy to become a conservatory, locking ourselves in a building with an artificially controlled environment, calling it "church."

Like the orchid, we enjoy the nurturing shelter of this artificial environment but struggle to live outside in the "world." Jesus has something more in mind for us.

Jesus is the nursery owner who sends us into the harvest, working among the hopeless and hurting (Matthew 9:36-38), sheltered by His Holy Spirit (John 17:15-17), living as insiders on a mission. Our Lord wants to sow in the soil of communities the "good seed" of people's lives, seeds which yield an eternal harvest (Matthew 13:23).

What is your church like? Is it like a greenhouse, planting men and women in every corner of the community to bear fruit? Or is it like the conservatory, conserving the lush vegetation in artificial settings? The heart of a missional church is to coach and release believers to live as insiders, advancing the gospel where they live, work, or play. This means building a greenhouse rather than maintaining a conservatory.

For a church to function as a greenhouse is hard work. We love to keep our healthy plants. It's difficult to release them to the cold world outside the walls of the nursery. Our master gardener (John 15:1-5) calls us to a different standard. "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world," is His vision (John 17:18). May our churches be like greenhouses, coaching and releasing people into neighborhoods, workplaces, and family networks. Let the planting season begin!

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