

## COMMUNITY CONFERENCE - IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Pastor Corey Randell really enjoyed his youth ministry in Edmonton. But he knew they would be moving. Seven months went by before he knew where.

Chauvin, Alberta was a big change; population 350, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. When the call came in 2007, he wondered if it was a mistake.

The day they moved, the phrase 'middle of nowhere conference' came to mind. Corey had no idea what it meant and wondered at this odd distraction. But the thought kept coming back to him. It just wouldn't go away. So he started to pray about it.

A vision began to emerge as time went by. It was for a conference in Chauvin. "But God, that's impossible," thought Corey. "This town has no hotels and almost no resources for such a thing." Yet he could see a conference being held in a field. There were people in tents, and RVs, generators and a big stage, young people everywhere, bands and speakers. People would be changed and won for Christ!

One day, en route to the office, he felt God prompting him to drive by the town's old ball diamonds. The conference idea became clearer as he heard, "you're going to hold it in the ball diamonds. It's for the youth and young adults; Here's Section A; Over there is section B and Section C..."

The following month Corey met with two other youth pastors from the district to discuss the needs for youth ministry and outreach in the region. They met in a restaurant and everyone shared from their hearts, exchanging ideas. But nothing came together. Then Corey felt the 'nudge' to tell about the vision. He silently argued, "Lord, I don't want to share this now!" But the gentle urging persisted so he told what God had been showing him. After he finished, the guys said, "That's it!" Then the ideas started coming – they recorded everything on napkins, closed in prayer and left the meeting knowing that God had started something good.

### The Board Meeting

In April 2008, Corey went to his church board meeting. He hadn't told anyone except his wife and the youth leaders about the conference. But he had been praying. If the truth be told, he was reluctant to put the conference on the agenda because he thought they would think he was a bit 'nuts'. So after losing another argument with God, he compromised, putting 'middle of nowhere conference' at the bottom of the list, secretly hoping that they would run out of time and not get to it. But the meeting was fast and his time came. He told about the conference giving the details about a portable stage, bands, speakers, kids coming from everywhere, the power of God moving. When he finished, one board member was half laughing, half crying. She said, "You need to hear the rest of the story." Perplexed Corey said, "Go ahead." "Six years ago," she continued, "one of our young adults came to our women's group. She had had a vision or dream, which she couldn't explain, and she didn't know what to do with

it. When she told us about it, we didn't know what to think either." From there, the board member re-told the young woman's story and to Corey's and the board's amazement it was exactly the same as what God had shown him! Everyone seemed to be in total awe at what had just happened.

The church had some money in the bank and a decision was made to 'sow it into the kingdom' by putting it towards the conference. Plans and prayers began for the first Middle of Nowhere Conference, to be held in July 2009, in Chauvin, Alberta.

## Chauvin Gets Involved

When the town heard about the conference, people started to get involved. Money began showing up in the mail. Neighbouring churches took up offerings. A businessman called and wrote a cheque for \$15,000 to help pay for the bands! The community donated the use of the ball diamonds. Another man donated rental generators and portable construction light standards; during the event he sent his employees to keep things fuelled and running – all at no cost. They also donated construction trailers for first aid, registration and security teams to work out of. Another businessman brought tractors and loaders and a crane to take a photographer up in a man-basket to take aerial photos. Still another business put up a snow fence to coordinate areas for camping, a stage site, etc – all free of cost. Others came alongside and renovated an old on-site kitchen that was falling apart. The fire department, the Elks Lodge and a recreation group found and organized volunteers to run the kitchen, create menus and cook food! God was up to something!

Two hundred people showed up in July 2009. The original vision was for youth and young adults, but many brought their young families. People came from as far away as Calgary, Edmonton, Cold Lake and Kindersley. On a practical level, it was wonderfully successful - well organized and well resourced. And it was a truly an amazing time of ministry. "In the beginning," said Corey, "the conference was a bit like a poker game – the church was 'all in' so to speak. The money was sown, but no one could predict the outcome. However within a month of the conference, every bill was paid."

"I would say we got to do life with these people. There's been a change in our community. The Spirit of God broke down barriers, new relationships formed, and they are still forming. Our community told us how pleased they were with the positive effect the Middle of Nowhere Conference had on the community, the kids, and the area.

"People became engaged through the Lord's vision and because of that, we've been given favour in the community. Now, if something is taking place we will often get a call to let us know. When the community organizes a pancake breakfast, they ask us to help advertise. The Mayor invited me to play golf; he came and picked me up; there we were, hanging out, talking about God and the conference. God is so faithful!"

After the conference, the question became, "do we do it again?" The church leadership took time to pray about it, and then reconvened. Everyone felt they should go ahead. There was no cushion of money this time, so like Gideon, they laid the fleece before God, asking for \$20,000 upfront, to be received by the next meeting date. One week before their deadline the man who had donated the band-

funds called, wondering if there would be another Middle of Nowhere Conference. If so, they would like to be involved only this time in a greater way. Corey explained that they were waiting on God to see if they were to go ahead.

The deadline came, but nothing – until they got to the meeting. There, the fire chief showed up and on behalf of the department, donated its portion of the money from food sales, some \$1200, plus dollars back to the church. It was amazing, but still nothing close to the \$20,000. Corey went home resolved that the Middle of Nowhere Conference would not be going ahead. Shortly after arriving at the house the phone rang. A lady wanted to give some funds towards the next conference. Over the phone she donated \$15,000. Not long after, the businessman who had donated the band funds the first year, gave double what he donated the first time! They had more than what they needed to get started! How could they not go ahead?

At the time of this writing, the ball diamonds and the generators and trailers have been donated again. And the fire department has volunteered to organize the kitchen. Hot water for showers will be provided by the community and others are bringing vacuum trucks to haul the gray water. Plans are in full swing once again, for a second community conference in Chauvin – the Middle of Nowhere Conference, 2010.

To learn more about the Middle of Nowhere Conference – 3 Days, 2 Nights, 1 Field, In ‘Tents’, visit <http://www.middleofnowhere.ca> or <http://chauvingc.ca/events/middle-of-nowhere/>

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