

# The Bogo Bunch Update

## August 2016



### **It's Official!!!**

On May 4th we received the official go ahead to plant a new Alliance church in the Buffalo area. We're officially on staff with the Northeastern district for the purpose of planting this new church in Cheektowaga. Yeah, it's great to finally know where the Lord was leading us as He called us to step down from our ministry in Athens more than a year ago. It's been a long journey, and we've experienced a number of unexpected turns along

the way, but we are confident this is the next assignment the Lord has for us in this amazing journey of serving Him! We are very excited about this new phase of life and ministry!

### **Why Plant a New Church?**

This is a question I've fielded often! Sandra and I have gone through a lot of healthy ministry and church planting training—and we have more to go! Sadly, most church health experts say that the majority of churches in America are unhealthy. Most have a lot of work to do to change unhealthy patterns, programs, policies, and traditions that are keeping them from advancing the Kingdom of Christ in a way that makes them relevant to their surrounding community. One of the big reasons that church planting has really taken off is in response to these unhealthy church patterns. Most church health experts say that it's easier to plant a new, healthy church than it is to turn an unhealthy church around. Yeah, there are unhealthy churches that make the change, but they're incredibly rare. Some of the difficulties we've encountered with past ministry assignments have come while trying to bring health to unhealthy areas.

Another reason that we've accepted this assignment is that the results of a number of assessments that PJ has taken over the past few years have identified that he's wired, by God, to be a church planter. Combine this wiring, with years of healthy ministry training, various experiences we've been through over the past 20+ years and we can see that Jesus has been preparing us for this assignment for quite some time.



Scan this code to read an article published in *Alliance Life* on why we need to plant a new church and how you can partner with us!

Or go to:

<http://www.cmalliance.org/alife/why-plant-another-church>

### **About 8 Years Ago...**

About 8 years ago we were approached by leadership in the Northeastern District of the Alliance (all of NY except the New York City area) about the possibility of us becoming a church planter in Cheektowaga. At that point we were interested in "checking out the possibility," but we weren't sure if this was going to be a good assignment for our family at that time. We were sent for some church planter training in Ohio and were prayerfully considering this opportunity. Just when we approached the date the decision had to be made we found that the opportunity was no longer available to us. The district decided to wait to pursue the opportunity and we decided to follow His leading to serve as a lead pastor in Southeastern Ohio.

As it became more and more clear that our time in Athens was coming to a close we began to pursue a few opportunities as He was leading us. He continued to close one door after another in front of us. We've learned not to push open doors that the Lord is closing before us. We were more discerning as we looked for this next position.

At the same time our house in Athens wasn't selling (and still hasn't sold). We began to talk with a friend in Athens who was investigating the possibility of starting a sober-living home and using our house to help young men get their lives in order. Because we can't really live in a house that we're renting to someone else, we decided to move to Buffalo and move in with my mom. She had been struggling on her own since my dad died and was looking forward to having us live with her.

Interestingly, once we moved in with mom, the rental opportunity fell through and we put our house back on the market. The Lord began to bring the opportunity from 8 years ago back to our minds. As I talked with the District Superintendent in the Northeastern district I mentioned my thought that perhaps God was bringing us back to Buffalo so that we can pursue that

church planting opportunity from 8 years ago. That's when we learned that the district was looking to start up a new church plant and was waiting for the Lord to lead someone with a passion and calling to an area within the district. They enthusiastically jumped on board with the proposal and project!



### **Why Cheektowaga?**

Cheektowaga is the second largest town in the Western New York area. Cheektowaga itself has over 40,000 households and within an 8-mile radius of the center of the town live over 240,000 people! It's also the home to many businesses, parks, the Buffalo Airport, and the Walden Galleria Mall. Yet in this area there are no significantly-sized evangelical churches who are doing a good job of reaching their communities for Christ. There is no Alliance church in the town of Cheektowaga. There are currently 5 Alliance churches in the Buffalo area, but all of them are north of the city. Cheektowaga is just east of the city, and well positioned for this new church plant. Plus, it's my home town. I know there is a saying that a prophet is not accepted in his or her home town, but so far we have found a number of people who are glad we're back in town!

### **The Importance of ACTS**

In addition to following the church planting pattern found in the Book of Acts, A-C-T-S is a great reminder of four key elements required to develop healthy church plant projects.

A—assessment  
C—coaching  
T—training  
S—support

We've been sent to training; we have gone through some rigorous assessment; PJ's been meeting with a church planting coach on a regular basis; and now we're working to develop a solid foundation of support. We already have great support from the leadership of the district, as well as the Church Health and Multiplication Team (a district committee), a number of friends in ministry in the state, friends and family members, and a growing network of WNY churches.

### **The Church of WNY**

One of the most interesting things we've found as we've returned to WNY is a group of pastors who meet regularly to pray for and plan for church planting efforts in WNY. The Chapel, as the largest church in WNY, has gathered together like-minded pastors who want to support one another as they strive to advance the Kingdom of God through church planting. We sat in a meeting with more than 40 church planters from a variety of denominations who are willing to invest in church planting and saw people partner together in exciting ways.

At the first meeting of the Church of WNY that Sandra and I attended we "happened to" meet a church planting pastor named Michael Nieves. He is the pastor of Centerpointe Community Church, a 14-year old church in Depew—just across the border from Cheektowaga. We struck up an instant friendship and continue to be an encouragement to each other. We are both striving to see the Kingdom advanced in WNY and welcome the partnership that such a friendship affords.

### **A Summer at Centerpointe Community Church**

The Lord led Michael and his family to go on an 8-week mission trip to the Dominican Republic this summer. I was asked to step in for him and speak for 7 weeks in a row. This was a great opportunity for me to teach the key principles behind my book, *Mission: Possible—Living the Great Commission*. The people of Centerpointe have been a great blessing to our family as we've been with them this summer. They have welcomed us and have shared many testimonies of how the Lord has used our time with them to teach them, encourage them, challenge them, and equip them to live their lives in a missional way—striving to help complete the Great Commission. Pastor Michael and I seek to explore a further partnership after he returns from the Dominican Republic.

### **Thanks!!!**

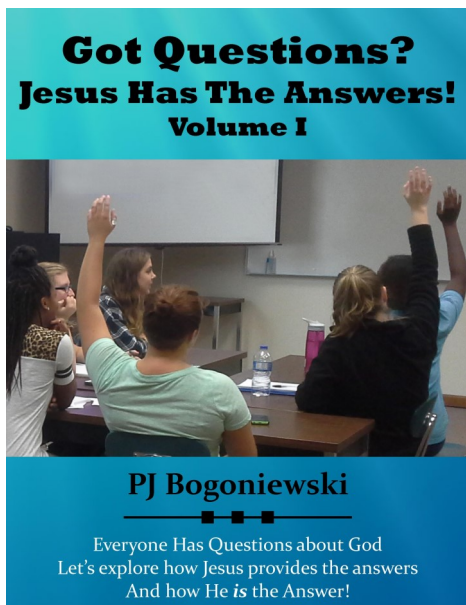
We are so grateful for those who have helped us and supported us over the past year. You have encouraged us, given gifts to us, helped us with chores and tasks that had to be done, and have prayed for us many, many times. The Lord has provided for

us through you in so many miraculous ways. I could write a document twice this size telling the stories of the times Sandra and I have turned to prayer to ask the Lord to miraculously provide for a bill we had, or a need we had before us, and JUST THE RIGHT amount came in the mail. Not only that, but the note that you wrote to us was just what we needed to hear that day! The Lord moved on your heart days—or weeks—before He knew we were going to ask Him to meet our need and you responded in obedience to His leading. That's just the way it works in the Kingdom of God. He uses us to love, encourage, and provide for each other. This reminds me of the early church as outlined in the book of Acts. They sacrificially gave to one another any time they heard that there was a need. Thank you for doing that for us.

This past year was one of the hardest of my life. It's the longest I've ever gone without a full-time job. As we look back on the time we can see how His hand was upon us the whole time and how He was leading us each step of the way. We knew the Lord was leading us to step down from our position in Athens even though we didn't have our next position secured yet. Most pastors secure their next position before announcing their resignation. We were pursuing a number of possibilities and thought that we would find another position quickly, but that is not what the Lord had planned for us. We decided to be prayerfully more discerning regarding the potential opportunities that we were presented with and much more frank in the interviewing process than we had been in the past. The Lord has wired me to desire to see His church be as healthy as possible. I knew I was going to strive to bring any church I led into a more healthy place. Many churches don't want this kind of leadership and I wasn't going to put myself into another tough position again.

### **I've Been Writing A Lot!**

As we were searching for our next position I continued to seek a "gap job" - something I could do to fill the time between our position in Athens and the next position. I applied for over 30 jobs! Everything from delivering pizzas to teaching creative writing. I didn't get a single call back on any of them. Through that time the Lord kept telling me that He wanted me to write. I had begun a number of writing projects but had never had the time to finish them. During this time I worked on a number of the writing projects I had begun and I self-published two of them. I made my first two books available on Kindle and Audible—and now in printed hard copies as well. My third book should be released before Labor Day. Recently I've been working to complete the desktop publishing process to make all three available in printed format as well. I'm quite pleased with the books and am honored to hear that many people have been reading them and are blessed and challenged by them.



*Got Questions? Jesus Has the Answers! Volume I* is the first book I published. It's the first of a series of books that I'm working on to answer the hundreds of questions that people have asked me about God, the Bible, faith, and how to apply biblical principles to our everyday lives. In this first volume I tackle some tough questions such as "How can I know God's will for my life?" "How can I hear the voice of God's in my life?" "Can there be a loving God when there is so much pain and suffering in the world?" and "How can I know the Bible contains the truth?" among others.

I'm sure that some of the questions I address are questions that you have as well.

*Mission: Possible—Living the Great Commission* is the second book that I finished. This book outlines what it means to live our lives missionally. Did you know that Jesus said that He was going to return after we completed the Great Commission? In the Great Commission Jesus sent His disciples (and now us today) to make disciples and baptize them into His church. Matthew 24:14 says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

*Mission: Possible* teaches us how to live our lives missionally so that we can actively be

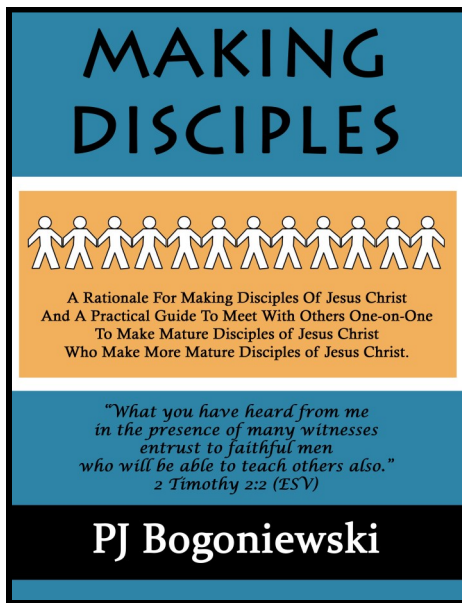
part of completing the Great Commission. It teaches us how to leverage relationships we already have so that we can seek God's open doors to engage people in spiritual conversations to help them grow spiritually. This writing includes a simple to follow six-step plan to live your life missionally.

*Making Disciples* is my favorite book of the three. It provides a rationale for making disciples of Jesus Christ who are mature in their faith and living their lives missionally, who are then going to make more disciples of Jesus Christ, who will mature in their faith and live missionally as well. One of the issues I've had with the traditional church model is that we're not doing a good job making disciples. We're doing an okay job of making "church attenders," although most churches report plateauing or declining attendance, but we're not doing a good job of making **disciples of Jesus Christ**.

This book also gives you an easy to follow system by which you can meet with others one-on-one to disciple them. This is a system that I have incorporated in my life and







ministry that has resulted in the development of significant spiritual formation in the lives of those who have been willing to meet with me one-on-one. Others have incorporated this same system and found it to be a useful tool in their disciple-making process as well.

All three of these books will be available on Kindle, in printed format, and on Audible. If you haven't heard of Audible, it's a way for you to listen to books on your smart phone, computer, or tablet. I narrate each of the books (they take about 6 hours to listen to) and you can listen as you drive, walk, or just hang out around the house. Audible gives me a significant bonus if you sign up for their service, purchase my book first, and then listen to my three books in three subsequent months. The service is \$15 a month and there are thousands of other books you can enjoy. Scan this code to find out more about each of my writings or you can search by my last name at Amazon.com.



### **Our Next Steps**

This fall is going to be a busy one. We'll be developing a prayer team, visiting 10 churches who wish to partner with us to glean a **CORE LEADERSHIP TEAM** from their congregations. Then we'll be meeting with that core leadership team weekly for

spiritual formation, prayer, and leadership development. After Easter we'll go back to those 10 churches and ask for a **LAUNCH TEAM**. This team will be about 100 people who are willing to "sit in the pews" for a year. This way, when new people come to the church it will be about 150 people and be fully functioning; with an operational men's ministry, women's ministry, children's ministry, and youth ministry, rather than just a few people in a living room. Then, over the next year, most of the launch team will probably return to their original congregations as they are replaced with new people coming into the church. This is an adaptation of the model the Alliance has embraced and we're excited about seeing how the Lord works through it. It's been tough to embrace a model that takes over a year before we meet on Sunday mornings, but I'm seeing the wisdom in developing a solid foundation and working with the leadership before we begin to reach the lost and invite people to join us on Sunday mornings.

### **Will You Join Us?**

One of the truths in Kingdom work is that we must do different things if we want to see different results. This always involves change. The last Alliance Core Value reflects this truth. So, are you willing to change so that you can be part of this new work in Cheektowaga?

Will you pray about being part of our **PRAYER TEAM**? Get in touch with me (Facebook, email, phone call, text) to let me know you want to be part of the prayer team.

Will you pray about being part of our **CORE LEADERSHIP TEAM**? I don't want to talk anyone into being part of this new church plant! I want everyone to be involved because of a clear leading from the Lord! I know that will mean moving to Cheektowaga for most of you. I know that moving is hard, but it's worth it when you're responding to God's leading on your life. I think back more than 15 years ago when Sandra and I responded to God's calling on our lives and moved our family from a house we loved in West Valley to Rome NY to serve there as a youth pastor. Then we moved to Athens in response to His leading. Now we're moving to Cheektowaga as a clear response to His calling on our lives. Each of these moves took a lot of faith—but as we look back on all of the amazing things that God did in us and through us during that time we are so glad that we were obedient to follow His leading. If He's calling you to join us I know that He will meet every one of your needs and you will experience a level of God's blessing on your life that you've never experienced before.



Will you pray about **purchasing, reading, and recommending my books**? Your recommendation could lead to another recommendation, and another, and another, and another... This is a great way for you to support our family, and this new church plant, as well as give me the opportunity to bless you.

### **Good Things Ahead!**

We trust that He has really good things ahead of us. We praise Him for the way He has been working and look forward to being able to report on even more great things that He's doing in us and through us in Cheektowaga. Thanks for the part you're going to play in this as well!