

BERT CRABBE Founding and Lead Pastor, True North Community Church Long Island, NY



Of all the natural wonders of the world, only one is constantly in motion – Niagara Falls. And when I say ‘in motion,’ I don’t mean the water. The rim itself is being eroded to the tune of about one foot per year. Niagara Falls is in perpetual motion, but technically, it’s moving backwards.

That scenario describes the world of church planting as I understood it – at least up until four years ago. Lots of potential energy, constant movement, but any progress at all seemed to be made in the wrong direction.

SURVIVING the GAME

“Surviving the falls is a lot easier when you’ve not doing it alone.”

I had read the books and been to the conferences, but it all started to become a bit predictable. It was always some guy with a gymnast’s build and perfect teeth talking about how he had planted a church ten minutes ago and now six thousand people were coming. Then somebody else would share about how the Gulf of Mexico was the only body of water big enough for their first baptism service.

Whatever.

As a native New Yorker, I found it hard to suppress my instinctual tendency toward skepticism. Most of what I was hearing had to do with success stories from the south or the mid-west, or southern California – places that (to me at least) seemed pretty church friendly. Would any of that work up here? Does anyone know how hard it is to do that stuff on Long Island? Does anybody get it?

Thankfully, someone does. Quite a few people, actually.

In 2004 I ran into an old friend of mine who encouraged me to attend a Church Planters’ Assessment. I had never heard of such a thing, and was again skeptical. After all, I don’t have perfect teeth nor a gymnast’s build. I totally don’t fit the mold. Plus, I didn’t want some Mid-western goober telling me how to plant a church in my home town – a place they’ve never been and don’t understand and wouldn’t last five minutes in without a pit bull and a flame thrower.

Thankfully, my friend was a lot more persuasive than I was skeptical. Assessment was a four-day period that

affected me deeply. My wife as well. It’s unnerving being put under a microscope and having your words and behavior so closely scrutinized, but the outcome was amazing. We learned a lot about ourselves and about the difficult task ahead of us.

Enter the Orchard Group, a church planting network in New York.

Brent Foulke, one of the assessors, approached us right after our exit interview, and told me he had plans to be on Long Island later that week. He wanted to introduce me to the President of the Group, Paul Williams, so we could discuss the possibility of partnering together in the church plant.

48 hours later I was at a diner with Brent and Paul, hearing for the first time about the ‘Independent Christian Church’ movement - the history, the stories and the plan. A proven track record and a workable system that was harnessing all this potential church planting energy and actually getting something done. I left the diner thinking ‘these guys got game.’

There was an invitation on the table to jump on board and join the movement. So, I spent the next few months trying to figure out who these people were and what this whole thing was about. Know what I found?

A simple, focused bunch of regular guys (and gals) doing God’s work for God’s glory. The organization had all of the benefits of denominational fellowship, without all the bureaucracy and red tape. No pretentious presentations. No ‘experts.’ No perfect teeth. Just a bunch of people who had decided to join arms to do something greater than any individual member could accomplish alone - and doing so with honesty, authenticity and transparency.

True North Community Church (an Independent Christian Church) launched in September of ‘05, and we’re still breathing. Surviving the falls is a lot easier when you’ve not doing it alone.

Conference on Church Planting: **\$395 plus travel and lodging**

Books by Guys with Perfect Teeth: **\$29.95 each**

Being a Part of a Movement: **Priceless**



Bert Crabbe serves as Lead Pastor of True North Community Church. Bert spent 10 years as a youth pastor and was actively involved in a ministry from which True North was born. The ministry began as a service for youth in the church and grew into a weekly service with more than 200 in attendance. True North’s launch team was formed from the ministry’s leadership and worship teams. Bert lives in New York with his wife, Jen and their three small children.

