Ministry Update: Perspective from a Big Step Back

By: John Bulten

Periodically in life and ministry, it’s healthy to take a giant step back. Zoom out. See the big picture. Most of the time we live day-to-day, present in what is now, and I think this is a healthy thing; it grounds us and connects us in deep ways to our relationships, jobs, and ministry. But we also need to look at the big picture, and as the founder and director of an 18-year-old organization, I need to do this consistently to continue to provide vision and leadership for an ever growing and changing ministry. It also helps us see God’s presence and leading. The day-to-day at ECM continues well: the youth programs are bustling for the summer, the food co-ops and clinics continue meeting needs and building community, and the farm is wrapping up the best year so far. This summer, I want to share with you a bit about where ECM is from the big picture perspective.

The last year has brought some significant changes and healthy growth in the leadership at ECM. After walking the Camino del Inmigrante and the CCDA conference last year, I felt a strong pull towards starting a leadership team at ECM—a group from within our staff who share the vision and mission of ECM with me on a deep level, and can share responsibility and offer support and insight in making decisions for the ministry. It has become clear to me and those around me that ECM is growing beyond my administrative abilities. Earlier this year, we shared about Jesse Harden coming on to serve as co-director with me. With our blessing, Jesse decided to resign from ECM in order to focus his full efforts on the new church plant in our neighborhood. Jesse leaving solidified the internal leadership team’s role at ECM. As ECM primarily serves alongside our Spanish speaking community, and Spanish has never been a gift of mine, it is a necessary and strategic decision that most of the leadership team are bi-lingual and bi-cultural Spanish speakers.

Another significant change in the ministry is that for the first time in 18 years, I will be taking a six-month sabbatical that our board of directors has approved! I love the ministry and the work God has called me to, but personally I am in need of some rest and rejuvenation in order to continue living and working in this community. Some of you know I went through a divorce a couple of years ago, and I am grateful for so many who have supported me over the years through those difficult personal times. I have found much healing in the years since. And I am also happy to share that I will be getting married on June 23rd to Morgan Attema. We are excited to start our lives together on the road! We will spend six months resting, hiking, exploring, and praying. In October, we intend to walk the Camino de Santiago— the ancient 500 mile pilgrimage across northern Spain. We will keep learning to walk in radical trust in God and to enjoy God’s beautiful creation.

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I also believe this is an important part of the growth of ECM. As I step away for six months, Blanca Pedigo, who has been with ECM for over five years, will fill in as interim director, with the help and support of the leadership team and board of directors. I have been preparing for this transition and meeting with the leadership team consistently this spring, and am excited to see how God will work in the ministry during my absence! For the longevity of ECM, this is an exciting and necessary step: as the founder, I am stepping aside for new, capable leadership to blossom. ECM is in good hands. During my sabbatical, I will be discerning how I will come back to ECM and our community in a way that supports this new growth and shift in leadership in the day-to-day at ECM. I ask for your prayers during my sabbatical and as ECM continues to mature and grow with new vision and leadership. I am incredibly humbled and honored by what God has done and continues to do in my life and in the lives of those around me. Thank you for your continued partnership with us at ECM.

A group of men from Heritage CRC in Michigan came down for a week to rebuild a little house on ECM’s newest property. Thanks guys, we appreciate you all!

Every year we donate many plants to community gardens and other grass roots gardening groups.

Many thanks to Ashlee— who volunteered in our Health Clinic for the last 4 years as a dental assistant!

We love our “new” truck!

We are so grateful for the generosity of donors who provided ECM with the means to purchase a wonderfully reliable used box truck (a former 10’ U-Haul truck). Every week ECM has multiple volunteers picking up about 3000 lbs. of donated food that serves hundreds of community residents. This transportation is essential in our food cooperative ministry. Our old van served us well, but on top of its many quirks, it was getting to be downright dangerous to drive. In addition to the improved mechanics of the “new” vehicle, we are really loving the heat and air-conditioning, radio, functioning doors, and ability to keep up with the speed of traffic! This box truck has also already been used to pick up furniture for our Common Good Thrift Store and deliver vegetable seedlings to events and nurseries. We are incredibly thankful and grateful!

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