



Church Plant Vision Update



Pray for the Vitarelli Family



Church Planters in Fenton, Michigan



Dear friends, church families and other faithful supporters,

It has been almost a year and a half since we left to begin this church planting adventure. Your prayers and financial support have been instrumental in getting us to where we are now in the process. Our faithful Father God has been with us every step of the way confirming his direction in our lives. We felt that after 18 months it was time to give you more than simply a monthly update. We want to remind you of our calling and how God has been at work among the people of Fenton in the last year.

As you read through this we hope you'll be inspired and encouraged not only by what has happened so far but also the possibilities that lie before us. We hope you'll also consider visiting us sometime soon to see firsthand what God is doing.

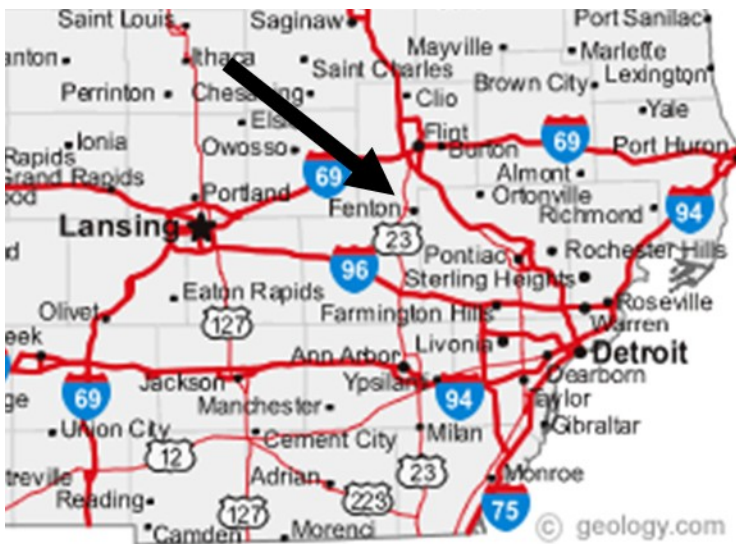
With gratitude,

Chris & Jody Vitarelli
(and our church planting team: Gabriel, Angelina, Landon and Sofia)

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Fenton overview:

Fenton represents both great opportunity and great need. Overall, the church in Michigan is declining. Fenton is no different. In the last decade **no county in the state has seen an increase in the number of people attending church.** The economy is a major factor in this decline as people have been leaving the state by the thousands in search of jobs. But these departures have left more than



empty houses. In conversation after conversation **we have learned that people are living in constant uncertainty and need something they can hold onto.** If there was ever a time to introduce people to a Savior it is now.

Fenton is located south of Flint in the southeast corner of Genesee County. It is a small city that has been affected by the recent recession but it retains its charm and is trying to retain its vitality. Fenton itself is only 6.5 square miles but its zip code encompasses 82 square miles. Its location in the region is what makes it so strategic.

Fenton is a hub for several other smaller communities such as Linden, Holly, Argentine, Gaines and the Hartland/Highland area. Fenton has many stores and restaurants that can only be found in a more populated area making it a center

for shopping and dining. It is centrally located between Flint, Detroit and Lansing and many Fenton residents commute to one of these cities to work. It is also positioned where three counties meet, one of which is the least churched in Southeast Michigan (Oakland).

Within a 20 mile radius there are 200,000+ people. According to the American Church Research Project by David Olson only 1 in 10 people in Michigan are attending an Evangelical Church on any given Sunday. This means that of the **35,000 residents** in the Fenton zip code roughly 30,000 fit this description.

Fenton has two sides to it. There is the side that includes massive lakefront showpiece homes and the other which includes a rougher group of homes, trailer parks and low income apartments. While the perception is that Fenton is a town of rich people, the reality is that for years, residents have not looked for the needs in their own community.



What's our strategy?

Our strategy has been three-fold:

1. Pastor our neighbors first. Pastor simply means to shepherd. Of the 19 occupied homes on our streets only four profess any kind of relationship with God. 15 of my neighbors need Jesus. We have sought to let them know we care for them, will listen to them and are willing to help. **If we plant a church in our community but our own neighbors don't know we care, we have failed.**
2. Build relationships. We chose to plant a church in a way that was time intensive. That's what it takes to build relationships. We have found that **people are more likely to come to a church where they know someone.** These acquaintances (and eventually friends) open doors in the community with area businesses, organizations and city leaders and they help us become aware of needs that we can meet so we can serve and bless our community. We have become involved in the school, the community theater, the chamber of commerce and other areas for the sole purpose of developing these kinds of friendships.
3. Serve the community – We are in Fenton to show the love of Christ. Ultimately our goal is not to build the biggest church in town. Our goal is to love as many people as we can and introduce them to Jesus Christ. **A growing church is a byproduct of loving others** so we choose to focus on that first. While lots of people and organizations are “serving the community” what sets us apart is our motivation. Good organizations want to make this a better community – so that we have a better community. We want to make this a better community because the presence of Christ resides in it to the glory of God.

Though things are taking longer than we planned, we are taking the scenic route and giving God time to work through the relationships we are building for his glory. We move ahead one step at a time, gaining ground by inches, but always moving forward. **Success is found in obedience and faithfulness**, not what the world defines as success.

Horizon Church - Milestones & Obstacles (Sept 2010—August 2011)

We arrived in Fenton in September of 2010 full of anticipation and expecting a quick run up to our goal of 40 adults by the end of Spring. After numerous contacts and one to one meetings we began a Bible study in our home at the end of November. In almost 6 months of meeting we never grew past 17 people.

By December 2010 we finally added a family to our launch team making a total of eight adults. By February we hoped to add 6 more for a total of 14 adults and 11 kids. Over the next 6 weeks, one by one people either backed out or said “no” to the launch team for various reasons and by the end of March we had actually dropped down to just four adults. None of the families we expected to join us made a commitment.

5 of us continued meeting on Sunday nights and finally made a decision in May to take a risk by leasing some space in a strip mall for an office and meeting place. We held two open houses/informational meetings, each attended by 25-40 people. At these events we announced the start of Sunday night meetings at our new space and a new bible study on Thursday nights. The Bible study, geared toward completely unchurched people is attended by 4 and the Sunday night meeting started with 11.

Since leasing the building we started a food ministry to kids who eat two meals a day at the school. We realized someone needed to feed these kids during the summer. We’ve also hosted an Art Camp with great success averaging 21 kids.

Over the course of the last year we have witnessed the Body of Christ come together as several area churches have blessed us with their time, energy and resources. These churches are from differing doctrinal backgrounds but they’ve come together for the purpose of helping a new church get started.

Our original launch date was September 25. Our new launch date is early 2012. Things have definitely not gone according to our plan but we see evidence that not only is this church plant going to be different than we imagined, it has all the earmarks of Someone who has an entirely different plan.



So what is our ultimate goal?

That a church be birthed to:

- ➔ Love God and others
- ➔ Learn who God is
- ➔ Live out its faith daily

Financial Picture

Income source	Monthly Revenue
Individuals and churches	\$3,200
Launch Team and attendees	\$1,200
Interim pastor (The Faith Journey)	\$1,200
Total:	\$5,600

Currently our giving as a launch team covers our lease and a few ministry initiatives. We still need individuals and churches to partner with us financially and prayerfully. Our monthly goal is \$8,000 which means we need \$2,400 per month from churches or individuals to meet our ministry goals.

Upcoming initiatives

- ✓ New Movers Evangelism
- ✓ Preview services
- ✓ Rental of a larger space for preview and launch services
- ✓ “Come-back” events
- ✓ New video projector
- ✓ Meet salary needs on a consistent basis
- ✓ Development of a “launch fund”
- ✓ Adding teammates



What's ahead?

- We are taking a bolder approach with people just entering the community. New movers evangelism provides us with names and phone numbers of people who have just moved to Fenton. We want to be a welcoming team for them.
- We are planning our first preview service for sometime in September.
- As we plan our first preview we see the need to upgrade our technology, from a free, but out-of-date projector to a new, brighter and more functional one.
- Hosting several “come-back” gatherings after our preview services or community events.
- Involvement in the community theater, local elementary school and Chamber of Commerce have all led to good friendships in Fenton. We will look for more opportunities like this.
- Hiring a person who can serve as a teammate/fellow pastor to share some of the responsibilities

Sunday, July 17, 2011

MICHIGAN'S LARGEST SEMI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

Horizon Church reaches out to Fenton

By Sally Rummel

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Horizon Church in Fenton doesn't have a worship space with four walls, but is building its body of believers through its connection with the community of Fenton.

That's the goal of Pastor Chris Vitarelli and his wife, Jody, who moved here with their four children in September 2010 to plant a church in Fenton through Converge Worldwide — an international movement of churches working together to strengthen and start more churches. "We want people to connect with us and understand our heart for this community," said Vitarelli, a graduate of Cedarville University in Ohio and a youth pastor for more than 11 years.

Horizon Church has recently opened a church office and small gathering space at 1440 Torrey Rd., near Fratz Consignment in Fenton. The church will begin a Bible Study on "Christianity Explored" on Thursday, July 21, from 7 to 8 p.m. Sunday evening gatherings will begin on



TRI-COUNTY TIMES | SALLY RUMMEL

Pastor Chris Vitarelli and his wife, Jody, are standing in front of the new offices of Horizon Church in Fenton. Their children are (from left) Gabriel, Angelina, Landon and Sofia.

Sunday, July 24, at 6:30 p.m.

The Vitarelli family is working to connect with the community through an active pursuit of the arts. They will hold an Art Camp for area children in first through fifth grades on Monday, July 25, to Friday, July 29,

from 9:45 a.m. to 12 p.m. at their new location.

In addition to Vitarelli's pastoral duties, he is also active in the theater, having starred in Fenton Village Players' recent production of "Over the River and Through the Woods." Jody is also

active in theater and is a voice teacher, instructing students from her own home studio.

For more information about Horizon Church, call the church office at (810) 922-2088 or visit their website at www.horizonchurch.us.

A final word . . .

Our hearts are for the city of Fenton. Even with some good churches in the area there are so many people unaware that they are living under the wrath of a holy and loving but justice-demanding God. So many claim membership to churches they never attend and know nothing about. So many live day-to-day never thinking about their eternal destiny, believing their income, family or occupation is all they need. Would you pray with us that the Holy Spirit would descend on this city and shake it from its self-righteous moorings and awaken it to the reality of sin and the need for repentance? We are one voice among the thousands here in Fenton but we believe the power of God and our desire to relate to people wherever they are in life will overcome the walls of resistance and make our voices heard.

