

New C3 leader feels at home spiritually

BY BECKY VARGO

bvargo@grandhaventribune.com

Author, teacher and former leader of a Grand Rapids-area megachurch, Kent Dobson will be spending the next stage of his spiritual journey in Grand Haven.

Mark Smith, a member of the C3 team charged with finding a new leader, said Dobson became the spiritual community's new leader on Sept. 1.

Dobson's first service with the progressive, all-inclusive organization will be at 10 a.m. Sunday at the Grand Haven Community Center, 421 Columbus Ave. A conversation with Dobson will precede the service at 9 a.m. A Talk Back will be held at 11:15 a.m.

Dobson, 41, announced his departure from Mars Hill in Grandville and completed a yearlong soul-searching immersion program at the Animus Valley Institute in Colorado.

The Virginia native said he was beginning to find that he was spiritually homeless at the large church. That and an invitation to be a guest speaker at C3 eventually led him to Grand Haven.

"I think C3 is the kind of place where you can feel a little less (spiritually) homeless," he said.

The three "C's" in C3 stand for creative, compassionate and community.

Dobson said he became intrigued once he learned the community's story.

"I was impressed that it wasn't rooted on doctrine," he said. "I was impressed that it wasn't just a bunch of millennials."

Dobson said that he also really enjoyed the format, which is more conversational.

Giving the sermons at the much larger church in Grandville was more like a performance, he said.

The organizational leader search committee from C3 did not ask Dobson to join them, but rather if he knew of anyone who might be interested in leading the ever-evolving group.

"None of them was interested," Dobson said. "It was a little too 'fringish.'"

Dobson said the more he thought about it, the more interested he became, so he submitted an application.

"It wasn't on my radar," he said. "I wasn't looking for this place."

But so many people, including him, are on the edges of their faith, Dobson said.

"I think West Michigan needs a place like C3," he said. "It's a place that has some depth and a variety of teaching voices."

Dobson said C3 is a community-led organization and he is a participant. Although he will have some traditional pastoral duties, "this isn't the traditional church," he said.



Kent Dobson, right, is the new leader at C3, an inclusive spiritual community that holds Sunday conversations at the Grand Haven Community Center. He is pictured with Mark Smith, who led the organization's search team.

Tribune photo/Becky Vargo



I think C3 is the kind of place where you can feel a little less (spiritually) homeless."

—Kent Dobson

Dobson will be involved in the Sunday teachings, although he will not teach every Sunday. His directives include teaching, being involved with the spiritual needs of the community and being in conversation with other groups that have similar progressive values, he said.

"West Michigan tends to have a conservative reputation," Dobson said. "In truth, all kinds of people experience a shift in faith. We want to be in touch with those people."

Dobson said he didn't have any specific goals in mind for the organization.

"Right now I feel like we're dating," he said. "I have as much to learn as I have to pass on."

Dobson said he is not coming in with a new mission statement.

"I'm coming in as myself," he said.

Dobson is married and has three children. He likes to spend a lot of time outside — with biking, camping, hiking and fishing being some of his favorite activities.

In addition to his time at Mars Hill, Dobson has taught in Grand Rapids Christian Schools, has guided tours in Israel, was contributing producer and

host of a Discovery Channel documentary titled "Jesus: The Missing History," and appeared on the History Channel program "Digging For Truth."

He moved to Michigan from Virginia when he was in junior high school when his father, Ed Dobson, left his work with Jerry Falwell and took leadership of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids.

Kent Dobson graduated from Rockford High School and continued his education at Liberty University (English/drama), Western Michigan University (playwriting and poetry), Hebrew University (religion) and Jerusalem University College (historical geography).

He recently released a book chronicling his journey, "Bitten By A Camel: Leaving Church, Finding God."

Dobson will work full time for C3, teaching at half of the Sunday Gatherings and serving the community in various capacities. The gatherings that he will not be speaking will continue to be filled with guest speakers from diverse backgrounds.

Sunday Gatherings at the Community Center are free and open to the public. The C3 office is located at 950 Taylor Ave., Suite 210, in Grand Haven.