Megachurches in Canada

Michael Wilkinson and Peter Schuurman

1 Introduction

In the Canadian Prairies, a large gathering of approximately 1,500 evangelicals gather for worship on a cold Sunday morning. This is the second of three week-end services which includes Saturday and Sunday evening worship gatherings. A full slate of programmes is in operation throughout the week aimed at the suburban and middle class families who make Prairie Alliance Church home.¹ The range of programmes is quite impressive with age related activities from childbirth through to youth, young adults, parents and seniors. The Church also operates the Alpha programme, a basic introduction to the Christian faith popularised through Holy Trinity Brompton Church in England. Volunteers are coordinated to work with staff offering activities that welcome new immigrants to Canada. Home groups allow members to meet in smaller groups for prayer, support and Bible study. Support groups focus on issues of addiction and recovery for people looking for assistance. Sermons are all available online in video and podcast form for those who want to revisit previous teachings or catch up on something they missed when absent for vacation or work (see Reimer and Wilkinson 2015).

Prairie Alliance Church has a staff of 15 pastors of which only 4 are women. Only one staff person is non-white. The white male dominated staff is not representative of the city they live in but is typical of many suburban conservative evangelical congregations. An Elder Board is responsible for the direction and operation of the church with its annual \$2.2 million budget.² The congregation is highly organised and focused on incorporating newcomers into the life of the church with small gifts in a welcome bag and coffee when they first attend through to a brief welcome class and later a four-week introduction to the church course. The church continues to add to its large facility with more space for family ministries and a general room for a range of activities that can seat about 400 people. Renovations and building projects cost nearly \$10 million and will be financed by traditional banking sources and congregational giving.

¹ The name of the congregation is changed for confidentiality and anonymity.

² 2016–2017 Annual Congregation Report.

The material resources of the congregation are all supported by an evangelical culture that focuses on loving God and loving others as expressed through regular worship activities, benevolent outreach ministries in the city and support of missionaries elsewhere in the world.

Prairie Alliance Church represents one example of the number of congregations in Canada that are considered large churches or megachurches. Furthermore, the small number of large churches in Canada are almost exclusively Protestant and evangelical. There are about 30,000 congregations in Canada with one third of them being evangelical (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015). Of those 11,000 evangelical congregations, there are about 150 Protestant churches with attendances of over 1,000. While the number of large churches is relatively small, the number of large congregations is growing and attracting growing numbers of participants. The megachurch phenomenon is especially of interest to scholars as religion in Canada continues to transform with ongoing immigration, growing numbers of people who say they have 'no religion' and the massive decline among the historic mainline Protestant churches. This chapter is fashioned around four threads that hold it together including an overview of religion in Canada with attention to evangelical congregations and the growth of megachurches, a summary of the Canadian Large Churches Study, a case study of a Canadian megachurch, and some theoretical reflections on megachurches in a changing Canadian society.

2 Religion in Canada and the Vitality of Evangelicalism

Religion in Canada has undergone substantial changes since the 1960s. The main story line roughly follows the following themes. First, Christianity has experienced a substantial decline on a number of measures including identification and attendance. The decline is not consistent among all branches equally. For example, the Roman Catholics have maintained relative stability for the overall number of Canadians who identify as Roman Catholic, around 12 million people or about 40 percent of the population in 2011 (National Household Survey). Attendance figures, however, vary across the country with low levels of participation especially in Quebec which has a long history of Roman Catholic presence in the Province. In the 1950s about 90 percent of Roman Catholics attended Church in Quebec dropping to 14 percent in 2005 (Bibby and Reid 2016; Bibby 2017).

Protestants have experienced the most dramatic decline especially among the historical mainline churches, namely, the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada (Bowen 2004; Clarke and Macdonald 2017).

Overall, Protestants represent about 25 percent of the population with 15 percent identifying with the historic churches and 10 percent with evangelical Protestant churches in 2011 (National Household Survey). The highest levels of participation, however, are among the evangelicals with some denominations like the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada serving slightly higher numbers of United Church of Canada people on a weekly basis (about 175,000 weekly attenders for the United Church and 200,000 for the PAOC). Weekly attendance for evangelicals was reported to be at 53 percent in 2005 and 12 percent for the historic churches.

Evangelicals value organised religion and congregational participation (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015). Not only do they attend weekly at rates higher than other Protestants, they also have many congregations and larger ones. There are about 30,000 congregations in Canada and 11,000 of them belong to evangelicals. The evangelical subculture and its congregational form is institutionally centred on a range of activities that support the vitality or resiliency of evangelicalism in a context of social change and decline in traditional Christianity. Evangelical congregations focus on clear views of who they are and the larger culture which is often in tension. Participants are highly involved and committed to the institutional goals and in turn are supported with a culture that is symbolically and ritually infused with worship, music, drama, dance, and activities which embody an evangelical ethos. Evangelical congregations are also replete with programmes that focus on families especially children and youth that are central for the socialisation of participants. Programmes for children and youth also serve to retain them as active participants in the church. Other organisational factors that account for evangelical vitality include ongoing leadership development and claims of high levels of pastoral well-being. Evangelical congregations are also well-financed which contributes to the ongoing support of programmes (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015).

The second theme revolves around immigration which has a number of implications for religion in Canada (Beaman and Beyer 2008; Beyer and Ramji 2013; Bramadat and Seljak 2005). Not only does it contribute to religious diversity, immigration also accounts for the stability of Roman Catholic numbers and the vitality of evangelicalism (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015: 85–89). In Vancouver, British Columbia, for example, there are a number of Korean large churches including one with over 2,000 weekly participants. One major implication of the migration of Christians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America is the growing de-Europeanisation of Christianity in Canada (Guenther 2008; Wilkinson 2006). New congregations are appearing in the major cities of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, key gateway cities of new immigrants. And much of the growth among evangelicals is due to immigration (Wilkinson 2006).

But immigrants also identify as Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh, which contributes to the overall population of 10 percent of Canadians who are non-Christian in 2011 (National Household Survey).

The third theme is the growing number of Canadians who say they have no religion which is about 25 percent of the population in 2011 (National Household Survey). The 'no religion' category is diverse and includes new immigrants, those who have disaffiliated from Christianity, as well as a growing segment who have never affiliated (Bibby 2017; Thiessen 2015; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017). What is important for understanding megachurches, especially those who are evangelical, is that all these larger themes in Canadian culture represent not only a tension with the evangelical subculture, but for congregations that value activism, evangelism, and outreach, new immigrants and people with no religion are considered possible sources of growth for megachurches (Bibby 2017; Guenther 2008; Reimer et al. 2016). Even if research continues to show that megachurches benefit from transfer growth, the conversion of new immigrants and the non-religious serve as powerful tropes.

3 Canadian Large Churches Study

The Canadian Large Churches Study (CLCS) is the first ever attempt to study large churches in Canada. The study was organised and funded by the US based Leadership Network along with a number of scholars and faith-based organisations in Canada who collaborated with the study. The sample was based on a snowball effect and came from the leaders of specific denominations, websites, those who reported to Revenue Canada a large income, and those who had reputations of being large. A total of 326 churches were contacted to participate in the survey. There were 55 large Protestant congregations that participated in the study in 2015, all with weekly attendances above 1,000 people. A staff person, preferably the lead pastor, was asked to respond to a series of questions for the purpose of understanding the demographics of the congregation, staffing, programmes, and self-understanding of its role and purpose.

The findings of the CLCS show that large churches are growing in number and size. Approximately 300,000 people attend large churches on a weekly basis. Between 2013 and 2014, 76 percent of the respondents indicated they had grown in this period, 5 percent remained the same, and 18 percent experienced a decline. The results were similar for growth patterns when asked about the previous 5-year period. The weekly attendance varies with these congregations with 63 percent serving between 1,000 and 1,999 worshippers, 18 percent in the

2,000–2,999 category, 11 percent between 3,000–3,999, 4 percent between 4,000–4,999, and 4 percent between 5,000–10,000 congregants.

When asked questions about sources of growth, the respondents indicated that 40 percent are transfer growth, 31 percent were from those born or raised in the church, and 29 percent was conversion. Among those who were counted in the conversion category, the group is mixed with just over half of the 29 percent representing new Christians and the remaining those who disaffiliated and then returned to faith. The pattern among the respondents varies from the 'circulation of the saints' research by Bibby that has continued to show a pattern over time of growth to be 70 percent transfer, 20 percent birth, and 10 percent conversion (Bibby 2003). Bibby has argued that evangelical churches are relatively stable largely due to their ability to retain youth and children over time, which is also indicated in the CLCS where growth was reported to be related to active youth and children's ministries.

Among the respondents, 40 percent reported that they are multisite congregations where 22 percent have 3 or more campuses, 18 percent have 2 campuses, and 27 percent have 1 but are considering expanding. When asked questions about reaching out, 83 percent of the respondents reported that the congregation is somewhat or very effective at inviting others to consider faith in Jesus Christ. The most effective means of evangelism according to the respondents includes programmes aimed at families, especially children and youth (68 percent, the Alpha course (55 percent), evangelistic events (36 percent), community groups (32 percent), and classes or services oriented towards immigrants (28 percent)).

When asked questions about a range of denominational connections and identity, 77 percent reported they were evangelical, 37 percent denominational, 35 percent seeker sensitive, 33 percent charismatic or Pentecostal, 28 percent conservative, 18 percent non-denominational, and 12 percent fundamentalist. The majority of the respondents indicated they have a close tie with a denomination (48 percent). 26 percent said they have a tie but it's not close, 14 percent said they have closer ties with other large churches than the denomination, and 12 percent indicated they are non-denominational.

The demographics of those who attend Canadian large churches according to the CLCS indicates that large churches have young attenders with about 19 percent being children up to age 13, 10 percent young teens aged 14–17, 26 percent young adults aged 18–40, 31 percent middle-aged adults, and 14 percent aged 65 and older. The marital status according to the respondents for those who are young adults and older is 16 percent never married, 56 percent married, 11 percent remarried, 11 percent divorced, and 6 percent widowed. Canadian large churches are also ethnically diverse and multi-ethnic with no more

than 80 percent of one ethnic/racial group representing the congregation. 62 percent of the respondents reported that the congregation was ethnically diverse or multicultural.

When asked a series of questions about the church leaders, respondents indicated that the leader of the staff is generally referred to as the senior pastor or lead pastor. These pastors have served in that role for a median of 11 years. The median age is 55 with 76 percent born in Canada. The respondents reported that 93 percent are white, 4 percent Chinese, 2 percent Japanese, and 1 percent Black. Among the staff of Canadian large churches 46 percent were hired from within the congregation. As evangelical pastors age, however, only 57 percent of the respondents indicated that they have a succession plan underway that they believe could be effective.

The respondents of the study indicated that about 46 percent of expenditures are used for staffing costs, 20 percent for facility and operational costs, 15 percent for mission and benevolence, 12 percent for programmes, and 7 percent for other expenditures. These figures are consistent for all other evangelical congregations in Canada (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015). According to the CLCS the spending priorities of these large congregations is reflected in the values of conducting meaningful worship services, children's programmes, mission activities, music, Bible studies, offering a sense of community to members, activities for youth, serving the needy, strengthening the family, and good facilities. This too is consistent with the findings from a national evangelical churches study by Reimer and Wilkinson (2015). While the CLCS offers a small sample of general questions on large churches in Canada, there is a need for further studies on large churches that offer a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of megachurches, comparative studies with megachurches outside Canada, the role of leadership, communication strategies, leadership and management styles.

4 The Meeting House

The Meeting House (TMH) is a member of the Brethren in Christ (BIC – now understood in Canada as 'Be in Christ') denomination and one of Canada's largest megachurches, with approximately 5,500 attendees on a Sunday morning spread across 18 regional sites in southern Ontario, concentrating around the main warehouse site in Oakville, an exurb of Toronto. Most regional sites meet in rented movie theatres and watch a DVD of the teaching that took place in Oakville the previous week. Over 150 small groups called 'Home Churches' meet during the week in members' homes, reviewing the previous Sunday's teaching, sharing food, and praying together (Schuurman 2016).

TMH's celebrated pastor is Bruxy Cavey, who looks more like an overweight hippie rock star than the stereotypical evangelical preacher, complete with long hair, earrings, thumb rings, a T-shirt and jeans. His charismatic authority can be described as *ironically evangelical*, in the spirit of what has been called the Emerging Church movement (see Bielo 2011; and Ganiel 2014; Studebaker and Beach 2012). The TMH slogan is "a church for people not into church" and the tattoo on Cavey's forearm reads "Leviticus 19:28", a Bible verse which reads, "Do not.... put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD". As has been said of the wider Emerging Church movement, "Emergents would much rather be part of a megasubversion than a megachurch, for they are more interested in critiquing the status quo than reflecting it" (Snider and Bowen 2010: 109).

This kind of irony can be found beyond Canadian borders, but it comes with a particular Canadian evangelical strategy, as evangelicalism is not so warmly embraced in Canadian dominant culture and the irony creates a safe distance from the conservative American evangelical stereotype. Canadian evangelical religious studies professor John Stackhouse says evangelicals are viewed in Canada as "fast-talking, money-hustling television preachers. Pushy, simplistic proselytizers. Dogmatic, narrow-minded know-it-alls. Straight-laced, thin-lipped kill-joys" (Stackhouse 1995, n.d.). That is not the worst of it, either; evangelicals are perceived as "ignorant, right-wing, and – perhaps worst of all (in their opinion) – American" (Stackhouse 2005, n.d.). Evangelical convictions regarding public issues such as abortion and homosexuality foster a "chilly climate" for them in Canada (Stackhouse 2011).

This evangelical stigma has been intensified under the Presidency of Donald Trump, and it is important for Canadian evangelicals to distinguish themselves not only from American evangelicals, but to distance themselves from religion altogether (see Gerson 2018; Labberton 2018). One of the central themes of TMH vision is its focus on the 'irreligious' message of the gospel, which is that Jesus Christ's mission was to 'shut down religion' and replace it with himself. Cavey's first book entitled *The End of Religion: Encountering the Subversive Spirituality of Jesus* (2007) shared space on the bestselling non-fiction list in Canada that year with new atheist authors Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. Cavey used the new atheists in his teachings, agreeing that religions, as systems of rules for earning salvation, were often dangerous and violent. Jesus, by contrast, teaches pacifism, simplicity, and a generous grace, values which echo the Anabaptist tradition of TMH. There are many factors at play here to account for the growth of the Meeting House and the 'spiritual but not religious' character of those who say they have no religion is one of them.

The Anabaptist roots of TMH demonstrate two other Canadian megachurch themes. First, like many large churches in Canada, it remains connected to a

denominational network. Second, like many other megachurches in Canada, there is little effort to become visible, audible, or active in national or provincial politics. Cavey is quick to say, “The job of the church is not to run the country” and he has told his congregation that he does not vote come election time. Canadian religion is not generally divided along party lines and to avoid political references in church – and perhaps especially an evangelical church – is one way to challenge the stereotype of the angry, politicised evangelical and reinvent an “evangelicalism for those not into evangelicalism”. In Canada, megachurches represent a quieter ‘moral minority’ rather than a Moral Majority assumed in the United States (see Bean 2016; Reimer 2003).

Attendees are generally white, middle class educated Christians. About 35,000 Canadians have attended TMH sometime in the last 25 years, with about 8,000 Ontarians currently identifying it as their church home, even if they may not attend regularly. The turnover is high with a relatively stable core. About 45 percent of regular attendees in 2014 also attended a Home Church during the week. In-house surveys between 2011–2014 suggest somewhere between 5.2 and 14 percent of attendees have little or no previous Christian identity. Significantly, of those from church backgrounds, about 97 percent did not come from a BIC background. While socialised in church, interviews suggest many have some negative experience with church that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ vision of TMH addressed for them.

When asked about their faith, regular attendees consistently avoided not only the identity of ‘evangelical’ but also ‘Christian’ and most certainly ‘religious’. One young female attendee said she used to call herself an evangelical but then the term “apparently got a bad connotation” so she’s warming to the label ‘Christ follower’. Another young couple suggested the term ‘Jesus follower’ fit them best. A young male Home Church leader skirted the question of labels altogether; he said whenever he is asked about his faith, he asks the inquirer how they understand Jesus and then he would describe himself in relation to their answer.

When asked if they were ‘religious’, an older wealthy couple responded saying they were instead ‘full of grace’. They explained they had lived in the United States for a while and they had since distanced themselves from their evangelical Republican associations. Time with Cavey at TMH had transformed them. “We’re more interested in politicians and governments that take care of the poor”, they explained. “Christ talked far more about the poor than he did about abortions.... and I’m upset with evangelical Christians because they of all people should know better that Christ wants us to take care of the poor”.

One final example of the shame associated with conservative Christian identity came from a young real estate agent. She explained why it was such a

relief to walk into a movie theatre Sunday morning rather than a church building where people would be speaking ‘Christianese’. “It kinda keeps you normal if there is a kid sweeping up popcorn beside you”, she said. “You aren’t going to say weird stuff you don’t even know the meaning of”. Her husband then spoke of the trappings of “the Christian subculture, especially in the States”, and how it distracts them from more important things. The casual attitude fostered by TMH, the young woman repeated, “keeps you normal”.

TMH reflects all of Bebbington’s (1989) quadrilateral – biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism – for understanding evangelicalism, and yet it reflects a very Canadian “evangelicalism for those not into evangelicalism” when the latter is understood according to a right-wing American stereotype. TMH is only one megachurch in Canada, but it offers a window into some of the themes that characterise the broader evangelical landscape in Canada.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The recent attention given to megachurches among sociologists, scholars of religion, anthropologists, and theologians suggests that large churches are historically new and somehow represent a transformation of congregational life. David Eagle has addressed this question in an important article which historicises large churches, especially among Protestants. Eagle argues that, while megachurches came to dominate the American academy and public media in the 1980s, much of the discussion was historically disconnected. Further, Eagle demonstrates that among Protestants there is a longer history dating back to the eighteenth century of large churches that accommodated more than 5,000 worshippers (Eagle 2015: 592–593). Revivalism among Protestants also contributed to the construction of large buildings for worship. The revivalist Charles Haddon Spurgeon, for example, preached from the Metropolitan Tabernacle beginning in the 1860s where 6,000 people could listen to him speak. Eagle discusses other 19 nineteenth and early twentieth century precedents of the contemporary megachurch. Often the buildings were constructed with some model of the Jewish Temple in mind and reflected a modern notion of the Tabernacle, the place of God’s presence. While Eagle’s historical argument contextualises the contemporary fascination with large churches, there is still the need to offer an explanation for the proliferation of megachurches not only in America but across Canada and throughout the world.

There are a number of explanations for the current prevalence of megachurches. This does not mean the explanations are exclusive of one another and some of them overlap with one another. These explanations include the

economic, the cultural, the geographic, the technological and the strategic. One explanation from religious economy theory argues that megachurches provide the most attractive and compelling form of religion. Lee and Sinitiere (2009) take this approach, building on the work of Stark and Finke (2005). There are a number of criticisms of a religious market analysis including the view that it is tautological: people are attracted to the churches that are most attractive, and we know which are most attractive by the vast numbers of people they attract. This does not explain why megachurches became a growing trend on the religious landscape since the 1970s in particular, except to say that they were responding to consumer demand with a compelling supply of religious goods and services. It could be argued that a consumer explanation can be supplemented with a cultural history interpretation where mass production leads to a surplus of goods that need to be marketed in order to be sold with the consumption of goods and services as the primary cultural emphasis. Canadian megachurches, therefore, are shaped by the spread of consumer culture, and more specifically, a 'big box store' consumer culture whereby they mimic a consumer way of life (see Thumma and Travis 2007).

Urban planning perspectives suggest that demographic shifts and infrastructure design are key causal forces in the development of megachurches. As middle class populations shift from the inner city to the suburbs, and as major highways shuttle commuters around the city, megachurches take advantage of the traffic flow becoming the quintessential automobile church, servicing not just a neighbourhood, but an entire geographic region (see Eiesland 1999; Wilford 2012). Somewhat related is a technological explanation where changes in architecture, sound, and lighting have enabled the development of large buildings that can accommodate thousands of people who can comfortably watch and listen to choirs, videos, and speakers with professional quality equipment (Loveland and Wheeler 2003). While these views discuss the conditions necessary for the development of megachurches, they are not sufficient to explain their proliferation.

Mark Chaves (2006) has raised a number of questions about megachurches including why some churches grow to become very large, what kinds of people are attracted to them, how they operate, how comparable megachurches are with each other, and how influential they are on American culture, socially, culturally, and politically. For example, Chaves combined the technological and the economic to discuss questions about competition with other organisations including rewards and technology. Generally, his argument is that in modern societies, technology caused productivity to increase along with an increase in efficiency where wages also increased simultaneously. Other sectors of society, where efficiency cannot be increased and wages do not follow

suit (like art galleries, churches, universities, theatre companies) lost prospective talent to those organisations that offered better salaries unless they responded with more competitive salaries. The way for churches to compete, argued Chaves, was to concentrate and centralise religious and artistic organisations, and thereby increase the ability to offer higher quality products and services along with competitive salaries. This is a rather complex argument that assumed megachurch pastor salaries are the reward that attracted the talent. However, this does not apply to tmh where the pastor's salary is comparable to other pastors' salaries in Canada.

Chaves focused on the question about size distribution of megachurches and the proliferation of large churches. Chaves attempted to address the question about why more people have moved from smaller congregations to larger ones. Following a detailed analysis of various denominations and large churches in the United States, Chaves concluded that the increasing concentration of people into a single large church form occurred at the expense of smaller churches. Chaves argued that the rising costs of operating a small church since the 1970s became onerous and that regardless of denomination or theological system, this made it very difficult for small churches to operate and facilitated the push of people into larger facilities. In other words, there may not be something unique about megachurches that is culturally different from smaller churches for attracting people to them. Rather, there is something economically problematic about smaller churches that pushes people out of them and into concentrated large forms.

The 'push and pull' debate raised by Chaves is an interesting discussion. However, what it also implicitly assumes is that the culture of small churches is similar to the culture of large churches. This is especially accurate for the evangelical Protestant churches and accounts for why the transition from smaller churches to larger churches may be relatively seamless. Evangelical churches, small and large, share a subculture that is based on a common theological framework that is expressed through beliefs, practices and sentiments (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015). Evangelicals are also committed to an institutional form of religion as evidenced in Canada by the sheer number of congregations relative to the number of evangelicals. Evangelical Protestants are committed to offering programmes for families, especially children and youth. They value music and worship in its contemporary form. As a consequence, people who attend evangelical churches financially support the organisation that meets their needs and represents the ethos of its participants. This generic evangelical subculture, however does not assume that all evangelical churches are identical. There is some variation as we see between Prairie Alliance Church and The Meeting House. And yet, we also see in Canada an evangelical

subculture that shares some characteristics with evangelicals south of the Canadian border. However, when it comes to political and social views, there are some differences between evangelicals in Canada and the United States.

The internal culture of evangelical congregations, however, can also be supplemented with further observations from related cultural analyses. For example, David Lyon (2000) used the metaphor of Disneyland to offer an explanation for understanding religion in postmodern society. Lyon argued that religion is Disneyised when it employs theming/branding practices, consumer norms, merchandising, and emotional labour from staff to maintain a particular atmosphere. However, Lyon also problematises Disneyland precisely because it functions as a cultural symbol, a trope for the democratisation and commercialisation of religious culture. With the commercialisation of Christianity there is also the blurring of the sacred and the secular, the market and religion. However, one observation we make is not whether megachurches simply reflect Disney through specific marketing practices but more interestingly how they appropriate them and contextualise them either through their embrace or even rejection. Furthermore, we question how megachurches employ playfulness as something more than simply consumer behaviour and whether or not it may be a constituent form of religion (see Bellah 2011; Durkheim 1995; Schuurman 2016). For example, Gerardo Marti's study of a Los Angeles megachurch explored this theme of playfulness building on Durkheim's observations about the ability of religious ritual to transport people through imagination, play, and fun (2008: 117). Althouse and Wilkinson (2011) have made similar observations about another Canadian megachurch, *Catch the Fire*, and the role of Pentecostalism as an example of religious imagination with eschatological dimensions that not only link participants through ritual to the sacred in playful ways but also transform them into social actors in everyday life.

The megachurch movement in Canada is mostly a phenomenon among evangelical Protestantism. Megachurches, in relation to the number of congregations across Canada, are something of a minor occurrence with most congregations in Canada remaining primarily small in the number of participants. While immigration and the growth of 'religious nones' is an important source of the changing narrative around religion in Canada, megachurches utilise these cultural shifts in the way they talk about new sources of growth. Megachurches share a similar evangelical culture that is uniquely Canadian. And while there is an array of explanations for understanding megachurches, we focus on the internal culture of megachurches along with the contextualisation of practices with contemporary culture that demonstrate the role of religious imagination and playfulness.

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