

# Andrew Bloomquist – On The Move For Jesus

by Dan Trygg

The dynamics of the Christian movement radically changed in the fourth century. *The early church had infiltrated society like “leaven”*. It was largely a hidden, unofficial influence that spread through a hostile, pagan world by means of the lives of those who were transformed by a relationship with Jesus Christ. These believers bore witness to the gospel story, telling of Jesus’ coming, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, ...and **they testified of their experiences of knowing God personally in their own lives.**

They met with other believers in informal home groups. In those meetings, they taught the scriptures, answered questions, shared their struggles and joys together over a meal, encouraged one another in their faith and sought God in prayer together (Acts 2:42-47). *These gatherings were regarded with mockery, suspicion and even persecution for the first three centuries of Christianity.* In 312, however, the Roman emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity. In 313, Constantine and Licinius, the two Roman emperors representing the western and eastern halves of the empire, met in Milan, Italy, and issued a decree that stopped the persecution of Christians, granted recognition to the movement as a tolerated faith, and returned property that had been seized to their rightful owners. By 380, the Edict of Thessalonica adopted Christianity as the *only* legal religion within the Roman empire. This began a process of the repression of pagan religions in the empire, and open promotion of Christianity.

Along with these incredible steps forward in legal recognition, however, came a loss of vitality in personal discipleship. Meetings were changed from informal home groups to large gatherings in lecture halls (basilicas). *The interactive nature of the small group was gutted, transformed overnight into gatherings of spectators.* Although there were efforts to instruct attendees through brief messages, the use of memorized liturgical responses and songs, *the loss of personal mentoring and interactive training meant that most people remained only engaged at a surface level. Church became more formal, and less relational.*

The rate of church growth in the early centuries was amazing. They went from 3,000 in the beginning to as many as 34 million by 350 AD. *They grew by multiplication. There was excitement and zeal among Christians. They saw God at work in their lives, and they freely shared their faith with others, as they had opportunity. Believers did radical things.* They took the message far and wide, and started these interactive home meetings wherever they went. *Their lives were truly transformed, and it was demonstrated in their compassion for the poor and outcast.* Rome was a brutal place for anyone who was weak or unprotected. Life was cheap. The sick and poor were often shunned and cast out. Unwanted babies were routinely abandoned for animals to eat, or even sacrificed to pagan gods. *Those who came to Christ stepped in to help the poor, and care for the sick and powerless.* They rescued the abandoned children, and raised them as their own. *The unbelieving world could not help but notice. People found uncommon hope in this Jesus, and those who chose to follow Him began to be changed for the better. They became honest, morally upright, and eager to help others.* Their love for Jesus made them vibrant witnesses for Him.

When churches shifted from interactive small home groups, ...where everyone was expected to grow and also to help others grow..., to large spectator assemblies, the effectiveness of the movement began to stall out. Growth went down precipitously. *The focus on rites and rituals, instead of personal experience with God and life transformation, created a religious culture that had the forms of religion, but had lost its power.* Most people grew up under such a system. *They assumed they were Christians, and expected little beyond the norms they saw around them.*

There were revival movements throughout history, the most dramatic being the Protestant Reformation (1517). *For all the positive insights of Martin Luther, most of the traditional practices of the Roman Catholic church were carried over into Lutheranism.* Although Lutheranism spread through northern Europe and into the Scandinavian countries, it too became formalistic and ineffective. In the late 1600’s, there was a revival movement in Europe called Pietism. It emphasized personal transformation through spiritual rebirth, individual devotion, and encouraged believers to meet together in small groups for the purpose of deepening their walk with God. Through tracts, and books, they published and disseminated their message and distinctives. *They also started schools, orphanages, and helping the poor. These visible expressions of care gave new credibility to the message of God’s love.*

The Pietist movement was regarded with suspicion, jealousy, or even fear by many officials in the state churches of northern Europe. *Often, these home meetings were opposed by the state churches.* Partly this was because those who were studying the Bible began to question some of the practices of the state churches. They wanted to return to a more Biblical way of “doing church”. *Laws were passed to outlaw Bible studies and home meetings, unless an official Lutheran pastor was present.* Dissenters could be fined, imprisoned, or even banished.

In the mid 1800’s many people began to leave their countries to come to America, so they could live out their beliefs in freedom. This exodus of Dissenters coincided with a much larger movement of immigrants from Europe, who were looking to find a more prosperous future here in this country. Along with the multitudes coming to “seek their fortune” was a young twenty-year old Swedish man, named Andrew Bloomquist.

**Andrew Bloomquist was born on April 9, 1866, in Munsala, Finland.** His family, however, was Swedish. Finland was part of Sweden's kingdom, at that time, and there was much interaction between the two groups. **He learned to speak both Swedish and Finnish as a child. Andrew came to the United States in May of 1886 to Ford River, MI.** In 1890, he was married to Emma Torrkulla at Escanaba, MI. **In 1896, the Bloomquist's moved to Ely, MN, where Andrew worked in the iron mines. He was a drinker and carouser. He was a rough, vulgar ruffian, as was typical of many of those who worked the mines.** He had a brother who was a Baptist back home, so he had been exposed to gospel preaching, but he was not interested. It was not for him. **To his mind, he was already a Christian, having been baptized Lutheran as an infant.** He thought his brother was going too far.

**One night, he had been out drinking again with the other men. On his way home, he had walked down the railroad tracks, and evidently laid down to sleep.** He was awakened later, by scratching his face. Something seemed to be tickling him. As he roused, he could sense that there was an oncoming train! He quickly scrambled off the tracks, just moments before the heavy ore train went over the very spot he had been laying! He would have been crushed, had he not moved! **He immediately realized that God had wakened him! He also recognized that his soul was NOT right with God. Had he perished, he would have been lost forever! With tears streaming down his face, he gave his life to Jesus Christ.** He also realized that it was in answer to his brother's prayers that God had intervened. He made sure to write to him the very next day, and to tell him that he, too, was now saved!

**One of the other miners was a member of the Swedish Baptist Church in Soudan, MN, about 20 miles to the west.** Through his efforts, he was able to gather some other people together to start a Sunday School in Ely. **The pastor and several other ministers visited to preach the word. In 1902, they put on some gospel meetings, and Andrew was the first one to come forward at the invitation, along with several others.** It was said that "he walked the sawdust trail" at a revival meeting. In early June, he asked to be baptized and join the new Baptist church. **The news spread of Andrew's conversion, and the upcoming baptisms, and there was great interest among the people of Ely.** They had never had a baptism by immersion in their community. One of the captains of the mine, expressed a desire to witness this. Many of the other miners were immigrants from Lutheran, Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox backgrounds, and were also very curious about what had happened to Andrew, and what was involved in a "believer's baptism". **There was so much interest, that the pastors decided to hold a service on a Wednesday afternoon, at a nearby lake. The mining company actually closed down the mines so that the workers and townspeople could come watch!**

Afterwards, **Andrew felt that God was calling him into ministry.** In 1903, the family moved to Gladstone, MI, where he served a new Baptist church there. In 1904, they moved to Chisholm, MN, where he worked in the mines, and also preached on the weekends there, or in nearby Virginia, Hibbing, or Buhl to the Scandinavian people. His fluency in both Swedish and Finnish enabled him to reach into these people groups of immigrants. **In 1907, he was employed to be a full-time traveling missionary to serve Northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan to preach to the Scandinavian peoples.** In 1910, he joined a group of pioneers who homesteaded in East Little Fork, just east and south of Cook, MN. He was often seen hiking back and forth from his farm to the train station in Cook, with his valise on a stick over his shoulder. He traveled all of the area roads on foot, when they were little more than blazed trails. **In 1911, he was ordained by the American Baptist Publication Society.**

He continued his traveling missionary work. He had impact and was well known in Gladstone, Negaunee, Felch and Escanaba, Michigan, as well as Ashland, Rhinelander, Grantsburg and Wentworth, Wisconsin. **He was able to reach people who were not being served by any other evangelist or pastor.** He served in the Baptist church in Chisholm, and helped start a church in East Little Fork. He did interim work at Ebenezer Baptist Church of Wentworth, WI. He also helped to organize Lakeside Baptist Church in Superior, WI, and one in Duluth, MN.

**Andrew was retired from his active service with his focus on Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan with the American Baptist Publication Society in 1937, when he was 71. He discovered that he could ride the train westward for free, on a "Clergy Pass". So, he continued to travel into North Dakota, Montana, and Washington until 1948, when he was 82.** He served as a temporary pastor in Anaconda and Butte, Montana, as well as in Tacoma and Seattle, Washington. He shared his faith with many along the way, and helped to start small groups or "Sunday schools". After that, he retired to his farm, and passed away at 88 years of age into the arms of His Lord.

If you reflect back on church history, and Andrew's life, **the effectiveness of ministry comes down to transformation and activation. God's people are not meant to be spectators. We are to be participants.** Whenever the church is healthy and growing, people are actively engaged in deepening their walk with Christ, and choosing to serve. From the time he was born, Andrew was prepared for his life work, speaking among Swedish and Finnish people. **Once God awakened him, he lived for Christ.** He got other people involved, giving them responsibility. **He was on the move for Jesus, and he got others moving, too!** Think of the dramatic difference Jesus made in his life, and how his life went on to touch so many others. What a waste it would have been, had he continued along his own path! **What about you? Are you engaged? Are you pressing in to discover your life purpose? Are you on the move for Jesus?**