**Native New Englander leads Maine church’s explosive growth**

By Jim Burton

AUGUSTA, Maine – When Jeremy Snowman first attended Kennebec Community Church (KCC), he entered the premises with deep apprehension. His boyfriend was already attending and felt comfortable there. Snowman wanted a church and was willing to risk rejection and judgment.

His parents attended church when he was a child, but that ended around age 10. He had begun having feelings about being different from other children who tagged him as gay because of his feminine characteristics. In middle school and high school Snowman was the target of bullying, so he built an emotional shell for protection.

“There was pain in the inside, but I never portrayed it on the outside,” Snowman said.

KCC placed Snowman in a community group with his boyfriend, one of many the church sponsors to build a biblical community and to make disciples. The other church members showed him the utmost hospitality, love and respect as they learned about his homosexual lifestyle.

Snowman explained that in the midst of his gay relationships, he felt great. Yet afterward, he felt shame and feared others judging him.

“I never really understood what that was until I got into this church and I understood that I was living in sin and I needed to get out,” Snowman said.

Snowman bore his soul to Aaron Manning, his community group leader. He wanted help to abandon the homosexual lifestyle. Soon, Snowman learned that God’s love was available to fulfill him. His former boyfriend moved out of town, but Snowman stayed and settled into KCC as he made a profession of faith in Christ.

“I got baptized here at KCC with my parents and some of my family here, and some of my former friends (in attendance), which was nice,” said Snowman, who has become a reliable volunteer in the church’s media ministry.

KCC’s lead pastor, Dan Coleman, says Snowman’s assimilation was a good example of “truth and grace.” Since becoming the lead pastor in 2011, he has seen hundreds of Mainers receive the same.

**A destiny almost missed**

Coleman is a New Englander and a preacher’s kid who grew up on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. While he came to faith in Christ as a child, he didn’t fall in love with the ministry lifestyle. Hardships convinced him that his life would be different after he earned a marketing degree in college and landed a big-paying job.

Scholarships from Boston Baptist College where his father had attended made it an inevitable last-minute decision that he would attend there though he wrestled with the call to ministry. The last thing he wanted to be was a pastor.

Some summer youth ministry internships opened up and he spent a summer living with a roommate’s family in Portland, Maine, and working at their church. He worked with youth, making a strong impression on them and their parents while helping the teens grow in their relationship with Christ.

Coleman returned to Boston feeling guilty that he was pointing people to a God with whom he had no relational depth. Because he was attending a Bible college, the assumption of vocational ministry surrounded him. Coleman’s assumption was that something drastically needed to change.

“I’ve had all the understanding, none of the relationship, and I’m finally ready to be done with just playing this game,” he concluded.

He wandered one night to the school’s soccer field where he played for the school’s team, looked up at the heavens, and decided to live as if God were real.

For reasons he didn’t understand during his sophomore and junior years of college, Coleman kept going back to Maine. He did an internship with a church who sent one of their coeds, Amanda, to the Boston Bible College. Within weeks of her freshman year, they were dating. The next September, they married and lived at first with her parents in Maine.

“I was drawn to Dan because he is very funny,” Amanda said. “He was a follower of Jesus, and that is where he was going to take his life. I really wanted to be a part of that.”

They accepted a ministry opportunity in Winslow, Maine, that didn’t gel for them. They tried to leave Maine, but God kept them there. When they left Winslow, they looked for a church to attend and found KCC, which Alabama native Chris Johnson had started in 2005 with financial support from the North American Mission Board’s (NAMB) Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® (AAEO). KCC was averaging about 70 people in worship most Sundays.

Within a year, Coleman was an associate pastor responsible for helping plant other churches. A year later, Johnson returned to Alabama and handed the keys to Coleman. Five years later, KCC averages more than 900 attendees in its three Sunday services and baptizes more than 100 annually.

“God has given me the ability to connect with anybody, to find common ground,” Coleman said.

**Finding hope in “Disgusta”**

Augusta is the capital to one of America’s least churched states. Most residents aren’t proud to be from there due to the lack of opportunity and diversity, thus the moniker, “Disgusta.”

“It’s Maine,” Coleman said. “It’s snow, cold and dark.”

Yet, he also finds Central Maine to be fertile for the gospel.

“It’s there, it’s just beneath a very hard and stiff layer of soil,” he said. “You have got to work to crack through that first layer.”

Coleman’s vision isn’t just for Augusta. KCC wants to lead in reaching not just central Maine, but also across New England.

Being indigenous to New England, Coleman understands Mainers. They share a fierce independence and are passionate about their sports teams – Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics and Bruins.

“The common ground is we aren’t weak and sissies around here,” said Coleman of a state where winter can be harsh and lasts eight months.

Now that he leads one of the largest churches in the state, he thinks differently.

“Why would God take a New Englander who is successful leading New Englanders and send him somewhere else?” Coleman asks.

Coleman had plenty of fear when he assumed the pastorate six years ago. He wasn’t sure it would work, and he was afraid of preaching every week. He has since developed a personable preaching style that he describes as having a “depth of simplicity,” and that style clearly resonates with attendees. Though not intentionally seeker friendly, Coleman knows that many attendees are hearing Bible stories for the first time.

Another significant ministry role Coleman fills is that of church planting catalyst for NAMB in the region. Coleman assists churches in discovering places to plant churches, and helps recruit church planters. The goal is to foster a network of church planting churches.

KCC is intentional to funnel attendees into community groups where relationships begin to happen as they did with Jeremy Snowman. Most group leaders follow a curriculum based on Coleman’s sermons.

For a time, the church met in small venues while conducting up to three services per Sunday. When a former Catholic church came on the market, NAMB assisted with funds for renovation and the down payment, and now carries the mortgage on the building.

As the church has grown, so has the Coleman family. They have two daughters and an infant son. With more truth and grace to share with Mainers, their family could likely spend their entire ministry in Augusta.

*Dan and Amanda Coleman are AAEO Week of Prayer Missionaries for NAMB. Half of the funding NAMB receives to support, train and resource North American missionaries comes through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Learn more about the Coleman’s and other missionaries at AnnieArmstrong.com.*

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