

# Focus on Leaders & Learning

## Compelling vision propels spiritual entrepreneur

*Kirk Bartha wants to multiply “circles of quiet within the clamour of evil”*

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CANMORE, AB—Kirk Bartha is a sort of holy man, a rare breed in the Western world. Inspired by the character and ministry of Bernard of Clairvaux, a 12<sup>th</sup> century monk, Bartha cuts a swashbuckling figure as he travels throughout Canada and around the world, studying the spiritual geography of places and revealing the vision of his fledgling Clairvaux Ventures Ltd.

Like Bernard, Bartha is all about expanding the realm of the spiritual into the ambit of the ordinary. With medieval intensity he melds a meditative heart with energetic activism, bringing an entrepreneurial flair and immense creativity to the Christian commission to develop apprentices of Jesus Christ.

“Kingdom business is not prayer or work,” he says. “It’s both prayer and work.”

And he is practicing what he preaches. You don’t find too many holy men functioning at the executive levels in the oil and gas industry, but Bartha currently serves as CEO of Woodthorpe Petroleum. “I’m trying to use the energy sector as an investment mechanism,” he explains, a business base to buttress his innovative spiritual vision.

In late June Bartha was convening the very first “point group meeting” of Clairvaux Ventures, bringing together a small group of key people who share his desire to establish “circles of quiet around 10,000 young Kingdom leaders” committed to building “abbeys of prayer and work” throughout the world.

The concept clearly animates him. Words flow from Bartha’s mouth like water from a spring and ideas gush from his pen like a discharging geyser. He is keen to unite public and private companies to collaborate together. He aims to launch a bank and venture capital company. He yearns to develop a “consortium of prayer and work so stable and attractive that financial advisors could offer it as a product.”

The vision is expansive and wholistic. Bartha hopes to “create guilds of professionals, artists and praying saints from various disciplines.” He wants to “make sure these well-designed abbeys employ refugees and the poorest of the poor, who will have their own fresh water wells, power grids, waste management systems....”

He is eager to “plant as many abbeys as possible” and “unite people, leaders, churches, businesses, governments and generous financiers into stronger solidarity” using “every spiritual, physical and technological means available.”



Kirk Bartha draws inspiration from 12<sup>th</sup> century monk Bernard of Clairvaux.

### Evangelistic upstart

Bartha comes to this pivotal point in his career with a long track record in evangelistic and pastoral ministry. He did his undergraduate degree at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto, where he developed a love for philosophy and good teaching. “But I was more of an activist at that time,” he says. “I didn’t appreciate school yet. I was an evangelist and spent a lot of my time and energy with people who needed Christ.”

During that time he became a youth pastor, so it took him five years to finish the last two years of his Bachelor of Religious Education degree. “At Tyndale I didn’t understand yet the importance of the academy,” he recalls. “School was kind of boring. I survived it.”

During that time he also worked with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and was mentored by Leighton Ford. He was in the inaugural Canadian Arrow Leadership class, graduating in 1998. “Leighton taught me a lot, including my love for learning.” And Ford advised Bartha to attend either Regent or Fuller for a graduate degree.

“I chose Regent because it’s Canadian,” he says. “James Houston and all those guys tore me apart and put me back together again. They reaffirmed the calling I’d had since I was a boy. They introduced me to seminal authors.”

Bartha is big booster of learning in relationship. The most helpful kind of Christian training to prepare young leaders for the realities of the workaday world, he says,

is “being in an atmosphere of prayer and work with those who’ve earned a right to be heard, either through suffering or experience, both locally and globally.

“It’s being face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball, prayer-to-prayer with those who’ve gone before us. We need to sit at their feet. We’ve lost that in the West. Being with the elders is where we need to be. That’s never left me. It’s why I spent time with teachers like Leighton Ford or Jim Houston. I want to be those who are on the right path, with those who have followed Christ deeply.”

People like these have earned the right to be heard, he says. “I will surround myself with those kinds of people. Wisdom is known by her advisors.”

### Manifesto

Bartha currently describes himself as a “listener, story teller, counsellor, encourager of hearts, champion of visions, interpreter of dreams, who will take all the time necessary (as far as it depends on his limited abilities, scope and resources) to see that no one falls through the cracks, remains wounded or gets left behind.”

In November 2009 he released the 300-page *Clairvaux Manifesto: A Personal Odyssey Of Spirituality At Work* (Ponder Publishing). This discursive autobiography is an amalgam of impressions, experiences, ideas, prayers and reflections that eventually form into his guiding vision to “provide circles of quiet within the clamour of evil.”

Three quarters of the way through the book he describes a conversation he had with a panhandler in Vancouver, an older man who “was like the chaplain on the street.” The man spoke about the regulars in the neighbourhood and shared his own story. And then, as Bartha tells it, “he went a bit Gandalf on me” with a story about how he died seven years earlier, had a mystical experience and was called to love God and love people.

Reading *Clairvaux Manifesto* will have the same effect on readers. Some will take to Bartha’s thoughts and expression like rednecks to a monster truck rally. Others will think he’s gone Gandalf, put off by the pervasive mysticism and frightened by blasts of spiritual birdshot. But amidst the strange stuff lurks a deep rationality.

“Abbeys of prayer and work must be places of learning and open dialogue, full of goal-setters and problem-solvers from many disciplines willing to address and respond to the critical issues of the day—locally and globally,” he writes.



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