

Thinking Ahead



The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

Volume 12, Number 3 Spring 2009

Do Try This at Home: Reach Out to New Canadians

By Sandra Reimer

Since 2001, immigration has accounted for 60% of Canada's population growth. Approximately 260,000 immigrants arrive in Canada each year. Church-planter Shawn is connected to the VMC network and gives us some insight on how to welcome new Canadians with the love of God.

Churches need to prepare to interact with new Canadians. "You need to take it into your budget, the advertising you use, and the language you use," says Shawn. Rather than being afraid of these new immigrants, we need to be proactive and join God where he is already working.

"The people who are just arriving in Canada are the kind of people that Jesus sought out and wanted to be around," he says. It takes 2 to 5 years for a new immigrant to get settled. During this time, they need people to come alongside them and help them learn about the country and our culture. Immigrants face many barriers as they try to find housing, jobs, education for themselves and their children, and as they form new social networks. This time frame presents a real opportunity for Christians.

Shawn and his wife and kids moved into a needy Toronto neighbourhood 2 years ago to "do life" with 30,000 new Canadians living in 35 apartment buildings. Along with 9 other families that follow Jesus, they do church 24/7 as they build friendships with their neighbours, share meals, pray with each other, and respond to God's Spirit.

Canadian culture can be a real shock to immigrants coming from countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan where the culture is highly relational. "They are used to being in each others' houses constantly," says Shawn. Canadians are polite and friendly but they don't often invite "strangers" into their homes—especially not ones from countries they don't understand and may be suspicious of.

Last December, Shawn and his family had a Christmas party and invited their neighbours over. For some, it was the first time they had been in a Canadian home.

According to Shawn, there are many, many opportunities to reach out to new Canadians. "They need help with so many basic things." He is hopeful that across

the country, churches will start stepping up and helping immigrants get settled. As a result, new Canadians will see churches as a safe place to get assistance.

But he is concerned that many Christians are more comfortable inviting immigrants onto their turf through programs and Sunday services, than meeting them in their homes or in the community. He says some immigrants will never come to our churches because they are committed to other religions. But they would be pleased to be invited into our homes for a meal.

Shawn finds that people from non-Western cultures often have a more spiritual worldview which means spiritual discussions come up frequently. He and other group members are always ready to pray for their neighbours and to talk to them about Jesus as they discuss spiritual topics.



Kids in Church-planter Shawn's Toronto neighbourhood

Interacting with newcomers has given Shawn and his family an appreciation for what we have in Canada. "We have running water, we have electricity, we have police that aren't corrupt. Things that are so a part of our normal life we don't realize how special these are until we hear about people who have had to run for their lives."

As Canadians we are privileged to live in a free country where it's possible to meet our physical, social, and emotional needs. As Christians, we have the added privilege of spiritual freedom in Christ. It looks like we have a lot to share with new Canadians. ◀

***More Flourishing
Effective Churches***

In This Issue

Do try this at Home: Reach Out to New Canadians	1
VMC Emerging Leader Initiative: Reaching Out to the Future	2
Getting Out of the Way	3
Being a Jesus-following Neighbour	4
Jack Teign: Former VMC Intern	5
The Joys of Incarnational Living	5
Events, Prayer, Jobs	6
What I missed	7
2nd Thoughts: Finding Our Place...in Canada?	8

VMC Emerging Leader Initiative: Reaching Out to the Future

By Marcy Kennedy

What do you do when you see significant numbers of the next generation of leaders leaving the church? If you're Jeremy Horne, you help found the "Emerging Leader Initiative".

According to Horne, 18- to 35-year-olds aren't stepping away from the church because they lack commitment to Christ. Many sincerely desire to further the kingdom of God and to make the world a better place. But the church often expects these young leaders to participate in existing programs, when they would rather go into new frontiers. "They desire to address such issues as disparity, poverty, justice and the environment and often do not see avenues for doing so," says Horne. VMC hopes to give them that chance through the Emerging Leader Initiative which offers three levels of meetings with varying expectations.

"**Gathering Dialogues**" are being held two to three times a year in key cities. They're an informal setting for people to ask questions, express their concerns about the problems they see in their churches and communities, and brainstorm solutions. The only requirement is to show up and share a meal.

Meeting about 8 times a year, "**Local Cohorts**" have the three-fold purpose of theological exploration, character growth, and development of competency for service and leadership. Members will discuss books and articles, but also take an interest in each others' lives, holding one other accountable. And they'll move out into the community for hands-on participation in local ministries, churches and social service groups.

The final level is the "**Forge Missional Training Network.**" Intensive bi-weekly meetings bring seminary-level classes to people where they live rather than moving them outside their current spheres. Unlike the other two levels, Forge requires an application, a two-year commitment, tuition payments and 15 hours/week working in a paid or volunteer capacity at a local church. Participants are matched with a mentor.

Horne became involved with the Emerging Leader Initiative because of the potential he sees in the upcoming generation of leaders. Using Jesus' highly relational and transformational approach to his disciples as a model, the Emerging Leader Initiative "intends to come alongside; and empower, coach and allow them to dream crazy dreams." According to Horne, "Life is best transferred life to life, not in a class, not in a book. Those are important, but they're adjunct to relationships."

Horne emphasizes Vision Ministries' commitment to developing leaders and their willingness to take risks for the kingdom as irreplaceable in making a program like the Emerging Leader Initiative possible. "The future of the kingdom of God depends on how we believe and invest in this next generation."

Are you between 18 and 35 and interested in being part of the Emerging Leader Initiative? Or do you know a young leader and want to support them?

The first step in joining the Emerging Leader Initiative is easy. Contact Jeremy Horne to find out where and when the next Gathering will be held. He can be reached at (877) 509-5060 ext 328 (toll free), or by email at jeremy@vision-ministries.org.

If you know someone in your church who displays the signs of commitment to following Jesus and changing their world, you can support him or her in four ways: pray for the person, take an interest in his or her life and be a mentor or coach, refer the person to the Emerging Leader Initiative, and provide the finances they'll need to join.

"Each church and its leadership team can look out for men and women who are showing signs that they want to make a difference. If they feel the support and encouragement of their faith family, many will take courageous initiatives and step out into the world-changing adventure of discipleship."

How VMC Churches Can Help with the Emerging Leader Initiative:

Prayer

The needs and opportunities for service outnumber those willing to fill them. Pray that the Lord sends workers to further his kingdom and make the world a better place (Matt. 9:36-38).

Pray that mature Christians will volunteer to serve as coaches to the next generation.

Pray for wisdom for existing church leaders as they make room for and empower young leaders.

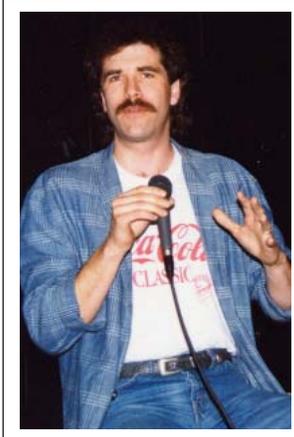
Pray that the program finds ways to sustain itself financially.

Practical Assistance

Consider making a financial investment in this undertaking. Two foundations are willing to give about 40% of what we need to fund this program. Some of that is on a matching basis. We'd love to have your help, because we believe that there is no more critical task facing our churches today than developing and unleashing the next generation!

Getting Out of the Way

Jay Gurnett, jay@vision-ministries.org



It was twenty years ago today... Not that Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play. Or that I began working at Vision Ministries. No, it was twenty years ago pretty-well today, that the picture at the top of this column was taken. I was a young leader (see pages 7 and 8 for surreal pictures of young Dave and young Gord)—still shy of 35 (*just* shy).

As we planned this issue, including a key article about our Emerging Leaders Initiative and thoughts from some young leaders in our network, we remembered that once upon a time *we were* young leaders. Gord talks about returning from Ecuador to help grow Lakeshore Bible Chapel in Waterloo, ON as a “27 year old retired missionary.”

Because there weren't many others to choose, I was a 27 year old elder of the newly planted Spirit River, AB Christian Community Church.

It's necessary for old guys to stop and reflect like this from time to time, not because young is good and old is bad. People our age, and as much older as old can go, still have the responsibility to “bloom where they are planted; to actively engage in loving relational Christian communities, and to keep growing and becoming more like Jesus as they help fulfill the Great Commission. They still have gifts to use, dreams to dream and work to bring to reality. Old people dream dreams, but like the young people who see visions, both are responsible, in the words of Lawrence of Arabia to be “dreamers of the day” who are “dangerous men.”

The reason older folks sometimes have to remember that they were once young emerging leaders, is because it is so easy to forget that the future belongs to the next generation (and the one after that, and the one ...). And if we forget that and don't do what it takes to help them get at what God has for them or even block them from what he has, we're making a terrible mistake.

A few years ago when asked why churches in the network of my youth weren't thriving, a wise American preacher from that movement, well-known for his teaching about leadership in the church said, “The old guys wouldn't get out of the way.”

Now don't forget:

- the sermon J.I. Packer introduces *Knowing God* with was preached by C.H. Spurgeon when he was just 20 years old (my son-in-law reminded me of this yesterday)
- in 1827, at the time of the Dublin meetings that were key roots of the Brethren movement, B.W. Newton (of Plymouth) was just 20 years old, George Mueller and Henry Craik were 22, J.N. Darby was 27, Anthony Norris Groves was the old guy at 32
- far as we can tell, the people Jesus called to begin the *whole thing* were generally in their twenties – at least one could have been a teenager
- And there's a pile of church history that proves that God gets new things done, by using “youngish” people.

Our 2008 Annual Report (centre of the issue) mentions a whole batch of Emerging Incarnational Communities. All kinds of young men and women across the country are talking to me about how they can impact the kingdom of God, start small effective churches or just “somethings” that will change the world. These are very fun conversations. Contact me if you want to join in. And we'll tell everyone more about this in the “Mayish” *Thinking Ahead*. ◀



More Flourishing Effective Churches

Boards of Directors

Dave Campbell, Calgary
Jim Doherty, Toronto
Bruce Fournier, Waterloo, Chair
David Kay, Ajax
Dave Ralph, Guelph
Mike Stone, Burlington

Staff

Gord Martin, Jay Gurnett, Dave McClurkin,
Henrietta Koenig, Jeremy Horne, Michele Lewis,
Paul Fletcher, John Riley, Indiana Salai Cungein

Thinking Ahead/Vision Ministries Canada

145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8

Phone: 519-725-1212

Toll-Free: 1-877-509-5060

Fax: 519-725-9421

Western Canadian Office:

1-877-710-5799

e-mail: info@vision-ministries.org

www.vision-ministries.org

Thinking Ahead is published 4 times/year in an effort to connect like-minded Christians and their local churches and encourage them to work cooperatively, especially in evangelism through church planting and church extension. Subscriptions are free, but VMC encourages supporters to send \$15/year to help cover costs (no tax receipt given for subscriptions).

Spending of funds received by VMC is confined to board approved programs and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved program will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where needed most. Gifts of \$20 or more are acknowledged with an official tax receipt.

VMC is committed to financial accountability; all accounts are audited by an independent auditing firm; financial statements available on request.



We appreciate notification of double mailings, names for our mailing list, or if a name should be deleted. Articles may be copied for limited circulation without permission. Please include the credit line: “Reprinted from *Thinking Ahead* 1-877-509-5060/www.vision-ministries.org.”

**Newsletter Editor: Sandra Reimer,
Reimer Reason Communications**

Meet Some Emerging Leaders

Being a Jesus-following Neighbour

By Sandra Reimer

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:9

Nigel, a 27-year old web-business guy who could be living in a middle-class community has taken the plunge to live incarnationally in less desirable surroundings among new Canadians in Toronto – as part of a team in Flemingdon Park. Nigel has a passion to see his neighbourhood infused with Christ and to help other Christians find communities that need them to be “salt and light in the darkness.”

According to Nigel, many Christians live “prudence-driven” lives that motivate them to move out of high-risk, high-crime, high-poverty neighbourhoods. “So what we’re seeing are the highest-need communities with the lowest percentage of Christians. This is a tragedy,” says Nigel.

He feels this isn’t right. “It’s time to get real, stop making excuses, and to move where we move because of need, on purpose.” He quotes the words of Christian Hip Hop artist Lecrae, “I ain’t sayin’ you wrong if you live in the ‘burbs; I’m sayin’ turn your attention to the hood ‘cause we hurtin’.”

To Nigel, living incarnationally means, “No longer visiting or ‘serving’—but being ‘part’ of the mix.” It involves being a neighbour

and sharing in the neighbourhood’s difficulties and joys. Building relationships with his neighbours takes lots of time. Many of them come from cultures that have known nothing of Christ for 1,500 years. “So we’re seeing fruit, but it takes 100’s of hours of doin’ it to see fruit sometimes. No quick sinner’s prayers in this neighbourhood (and if there were we’d be suspicious...)” he says.

Recently Nigel had an opportunity to support a neighbour in crisis. “I was getting to know one of my neighbours...and praying that God would give me more opportunity to hang out with him.” The opportunity came when his neighbour was arrested and went to Jail. Nigel was present for his hearing and later visited him in jail.

After his neighbour was released, they visited for hours as Nigel ate the delicious Afghan food his neighbour prepared for him. “I was reminded that God had answered and was still answering my prayer to have the opportunity to share Christ’s love with him. No super-human stuff; just being a Jesus-following neighbour—looking for opportunities to lend a hand and share the good news in God’s time,” says Nigel. ◀



Nigel

Helping Others “Move In”

Nigel and friends are praying for teams of Christians to move into more of Canada’s neediest neighbourhoods. They set up a website at www.Movein.TO where you can see more about their vision and watch a video about moving into Rexdale or Lowertown, Ottawa.

We’re helping to organize the praying teams that move in. As well as whatever transformational surprises God births out of these incarnational praying teams, we’re praying for dozens of new church plants, and also labourers to be raised up and equipped for neighbourhoods on the other side of the world that are even more broken—neighbourhoods that have never heard the word ‘Jesus’ and where the town dump is home....We don’t want our vision to end at the borders of our province or nation.

Nigel

Church planting partners in this initiative include: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Vision Ministries Canada, Associated Gospel Churches of Canada, and some from among the Christian Brethren. Mission partners include: Frontiers Christian Ministries, and Operation Mobilization. They are also in dialogue with many Christian leaders including Charles Price of Peoples Church; Gerry Organ of One Way Ministries; people from Intersity, and Power to Change Ministries .

Some Needy Ontario Neighbourhoods

1. Crescent Town: 10,000 Bengali Muslims in a 250 x 250 meter slab of concrete. Just east of downtown Toronto.
2. Rexdale: There are two high-needs apartment clusters in this 2 x 3 km area, and we’re praying for praying teams for both of them. There is a church plant in this neighbourhood.
3. Dixon Park: 20,000 Somali Muslims in one square kilometer. West Toronto.
4. Ritchie, Ottawa: Two-thirds of the population in this neighbourhood are kids, most come from single-parent families, 90% or more of the families in this area live at or below the poverty line, most are on welfare.
5. Flemingdon Park: a very poorly planned, sprawling, “low self esteem” community of about two square kilometres. A wide variety of peoples including South Asians and aboriginal Canadians live here. There are many single-parent families. We’re praying for more praying Christians to intentionally move in before Flemingdon Park falls victim to deep-rooted, neighbourhood-wide generational poverty.

If you can’t move in, you can give to some of these initiatives through Vision Ministries Canada. Donate online at www.vision-ministries.org, under the home page drop down menu, go to “Fund a Ministry.” These initiatives can be funded through #4: Incarnational Living Project.

Paul Fletcher in Rwanda & Burundi

VMC staff member, Paul Fletcher, was in Rwanda for three weeks in January and February 2009. He has been going to Rwanda for three years with a team from International Teams. The group trains pastors and engages in medical work and aid to street kids, AIDS victims etc.

This year he also visited a group of church leaders in Burundi that Gord Martin met while attending a conference in Germany in 2008. Fletcher spent time with Remy Nsengiyumva, the General Secretary of Community of Emmanuel Churches (CEEM), which is a vibrant network of more than 100 Brethren churches. During this time of exploration, they discussed how VMC and CEEM can work together to extend God’s Kingdom. He also told them about VMC’s literature and leadership training resources to see if they could benefit from our experience.

Jack Teigen, Former VMC Intern

by Nikki Everts-Hammond

Jack Teigen admits that he used to think church planters were “a bunch of weirdoes.” That is until God “tricked” him into attending the 2005 Church Planting Congress. The Congress, a requirement for the VMC Internship Program*, was transformative. By the end of it Jack had caught the church-planting bug.

Jack and his wife Lisa along with their two children, Rory and Jonas, are now actively involved in a new church plant in Edmonton—Millcreek Christian Fellowship. Jack has been the pastoral leader since its start in the fall of 2007.

Nudged into the VMC internship program by his friend and mentor, Jay Gurnett, Jack still relies on dialogue with those he met during the program to help him with the challenges of leadership. During his internship, coaching and support from men like Jeremy Horne, Gord Martin, Mike Stone, Rob Abbott, and Shawn Cuthill helped Jack trust his ability to discern God’s guidance for the church he was assigned to.

Trained as an Emergency Medical Technician, his lack of theological education had made Jack hesitant about being a pastoral leader. Clearly VMC believed his 12 years coordinating and leading youth ministry trips for Mt. Carmel Bible School and the eight years he spent leading Sherwood Park’s youth drop-in centre qualified him for both eldership and the internship program.

VMC’s confidence in Jack was justified. He has taken the inspiration, instruction, practice, and relationship provided by the internship program and developed his own unique leadership style: “Jesus just lived in people’s messes with them,” he says. He leads his congregation to do likewise (www.cometothetable.ca).

Jack has come full circle as he “shamelessly promotes” the Renov8 Church Planting Congress 2009 “Transforming Neighbourhoods” (www.thecongress.ca) hoping that others will catch the bug.

* The VMC Internship Program has become The Emerging Leader Initiative



Jack Teigen and his family

The Joys of Incarnational Living

By Sandra Reimer

It’s a life that’s hard to measure and that’s full of “interruptions.” There aren’t any tidy programs, and spiritual activity happens all week not just for a few hours on a Sunday. “We like order in the West,” says Pastor Shawn. He and his wife have chosen to live incarnationally among new Canadians in Toronto along with 9 other Christians. “We don’t just come in and do a ministry and leave,” he says.

He feels that the way they have chosen to live is “super Biblical.” He brings up the time that Jesus was preaching in a home when four guys, who weren’t invited to the standing-room-only party, cut a hole in the roof and lowered their sick friend in front of Jesus because they were desperate to see him healed. Holy interruption Batman! But Jesus stopped what he was doing and healed the man.

This type of relational ministry is very time consuming. “Maybe we will only connect with a few people in our ministry and they may be scattered around the world,” says Shawn. But he reminds us, “Jesus invested his whole ministry in a few people.”

He says that “People have crazy needs that we don’t know how to meet.” He mentions neighbours trying to cope with 5 or 10 people living in a one bedroom apartment. These overwhelming needs force the group to depend on God and to pray a lot.

He recognizes that living among people in need would be a major shift for many people who attend churches “We love the feeling of being altogether as Christians,” he says. “It can even become an addiction. We like our neat, programmed, scheduled lives—relationships are messy.”

Shawn admits that “The commitment level is way higher” for this kind of ministry but says, “but the payoff is also way higher in deeper relationships and more meaningful ministry”. He concludes “It’s not something we do but its something we are.” ◀

The VMC Resource Centre is downsizing.

Contact Henrietta at info@visionministries.org or 1 877-509-5060 or 519-725-1212 to order.

1. THE ABOLITION OF MAN; by C.S. Lewis, paperback, 3 copies in stock @ \$5 each
2. THE ASCENT OF A LEADER: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character and Influence; Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol & Ken McElrath, hard cover, 6 copies in stock @ \$10 each
3. BECOMING A COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN; Bill Hybels & Mark Mittelberg, Paperback, 5 copies in stock @ \$10 each
4. BEYOND YOUR BEST; Develop Your Relationships, Fulfill Your Destiny; Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol & Ken McElrath, paperback, 3 copies in stock @ \$10 each
5. A LIFE WORTH LIVING; Nicky Gumbel Course Manual, 27 copies in stock @ \$4 Book

More than 50 different titles available. View complete list on the VMC website www.vision-ministries.org in the Index of Resources in the drop down menu on the Home Page.

EVENTS, PRAYER & JOBS

Leaders of Chin Congregations Meet to Grow

On December 5th and 6th, 2008 approximately 35 leaders from nine Chin congregations that form the Chin Christian Fellowship of Canada met at Pinegrove Bible Church in Ottawa to learn and grow together. The theme of this event, which was sponsored by Vision Ministries and coordinated by VMC staff member Indy Salai Cungcin, was "Relationships Matter." The group worshipped together, attended workshops, and had business meetings to talk about how to guide their network.

To help establish the group more fully theologically, VMC staff member Paul Fletcher taught on God as Father and Redeemer., Siam Siam of Vancouver Chin Baptist Church taught a workshop on relationships and the fear of conflict between leaders. He had the group in stitches! Gord Martin taught practical sessions on leadership and Paul Racine made a presentation about Canadian youth culture to help the leaders know what to expect as their children quickly adapt to Canadian culture.

In the midst of their joy at being together, there was sadness as the leaders shared their deep concern for friends and family members that are suffering either in the militarized Chin State in Burma or in refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, India and other places. Their friends and family members are experiencing religious persecution as well as starvation and other difficulties as they wait for settlement in a safe place.

Don Hutchinson and Jocelyn Durst from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) spoke to the group about how EFC might be able to help Chin people in Canada.

While in Ottawa, Cungcin along with four other Chin leaders, Martin along with Hutchinson and Durst from EFC met with the Canadian Director of Multicultural Affairs, Tenzin D. Khangsar, to present their deep concerns regarding religious persecution, famine and the plight of those still living in refugee camps. The group also met briefly with Jason Kenney the Minister of Immigration.



While in Ottawa, Indy Cungcin (third from left) along with four other Chin leaders, Gord Martin (2nd from right) and two representatives from EFC met with the Canadian Director of Multi-cultural Affairs, Tenzin D. Khangsar (centre) to present their deep concerns regarding religious persecution, famine and the plight of those still living in refugee camps. The group also met briefly with Jason Kenney the Minister of Immigration.

How you can pray:

- pray that God will provide for the suffering Burmese Christians in Burma and elsewhere
- thank God for the development and growth of the Chin Christian Fellowship of Canada, continue to ask God's blessing on their work ◀

READER COMMENT:

Hi Dave,

Just a quick word of encouragement for your wonderfully transparent and provocative article on Core Values in the recent [December 2008] edition of *Thinking Ahead*. As I read yours, I felt a deep conviction to revisit my defining values ... and I have now done so, with some wonderful surprises which reflect how God is growing and stretching me. As you know, core values are powerful tools in the world of coaching and life change ... if we can connect a future action to an existing core value, that action is very likely to occur, in spite of deep fears. I feel you have done the many pastors and leaders who read this journal a great service ... in an area close to my heart.

Thanks,

Mark (Mark C Anderson Pastoral Team Leader, Marineview Chapel)

Upcoming Events

Church Planting Canada's Congress 2009

RENOV8 - TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOODS

November 17 - 20, 2009

Centre St. Church, Main Campus, Calgary, AB
with: Michael Frost, Stuart Murray, Wagdi Iskander, and others.
www.churchplantingcanada.ca

THINKING SHREWDLY IV

April 29 to May 1, 2010

VMC headquarters, 145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON

A special 3-day event you don't want to miss! More information as we get closer to the date. How about including the cost of your church's leadership to attend this event as part of your church's 2010 budget? Call us at 519-725-1212 or 1-877-509-5060 if you have questions.

SAANICHTON BIBLE FELLOWSHIP SEEKS PASTOR

Our interdenominational VMC church 15 kms north of Victoria, BC seeks a team player and pastor/teacher to join our elder-led team in a growing church of 150. Contact Don Crawford at SBFSearch@shawbiz.ca or 250 652-6311 to receive a search package or visit our website at www.saanichtonbiblefellowship.org.

What I Missed

Dave McClurkin, dave@vision-ministries.org



This year I celebrate my 70th birthday. I feel somewhat like Mark Twain who said when he reached 70, “I am now on the threshold of age.” The benefit is that as I look back over 7 decades of life on planet earth, I can see some things that I missed in my early years. Sadly I was 40 years old before I discovered a relationship with God that was adventurous and exciting. I blame no one but myself for having taken so long. Thanks to the spiritual input of people like Gord Martin and others, my horizons broadened. During these last 30 years I can say with Michael Yaconelli, “What a ride!”

Though I was given opportunities to develop my spiritual gifts and I learned some valuable lessons like how to esteem the Bible as the Word of God worthy of study, there were other things I missed in my early years. I include this list to encourage emerging leaders to stay focused and keep their hearts beating with God’s heart.

- 1. I missed the grandeur of the larger Christian Church.** I failed to see that Jesus’ church is grander in design than the narrow view that was espoused in my early years. It was emphasized that only our small group had the truth and all others were wrong. Now I see the value of embracing the larger church. I have learned to think beyond any local church and learn from all of God’s people.
- 2. I missed experiencing the church as a dynamic community where God was really at work.** It has been a delight for me to be the teaching pastor at a local church committed to reaching its community for Jesus. Every week we see God working. There is nothing quite like seeing life-change happen right before your eyes. I have discovered the value of connecting with and gleaned ideas from people whose ministry is obviously blessed by God.
- 3. I missed the freedom of Christ’s redemptive work in my life.** I was ushered into a world where what I did, or did not do, defined who I was in Christ. Little did I know that when Jesus found me His desire was to bring me into freedom where I could skip with Him in joyful abandon. I have learned to avoid legalistic thinking. Instinctively I think freedom—not bondage.
- 4. I missed the joy of discovering a God who loves me and delights when I love Him in return.** This did not come easily for me. Verses like “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” echoed from my childhood. It never dawned on me that I could relate to a God who generated fear. It was a watershed experience when I discovered that God was truly a God of love. Now I delight in walking with God as a friend walks with a friend. What I don’t understand, I can turn over to Him knowing that God’s love governs everything He does, past, present and future.
- 5. I missed the importance of separating preferences from essential theology.** I have realized the importance of distinguishing between “foundational theology” and secondary issues. Some things were never designed to be “faith anchors.” Everything that is not “foundational” I place in the “preferences” category and I am careful not to let the preferences control my Christian life and relationships.
- 6. I missed learning how to make the Bible come alive in personal spiritual formation.** I always studied with a view to developing sermons that were tidy, alliterated and neat. I never really studied the Bible as a mirror and cleanser of my soul. Now I read it with the view to personal life change. I ask questions like: Is there a promise to claim? A sin to avoid? An attitude to adjust? A truth to embrace? Or a command to obey? These life-changing questions facilitate personal spiritual formation.

I want my final years to be devoted to empowering younger leaders in their walk with God. I love the words of Psalm 71:18 “Now that I am old and gray ... let me proclaim your power to this new generation, Your mighty miracles to those who come after me.” ◀

Finding Our Place...in Canada?

Continued from page 8

Approaching Governments

How should Christians approach governments with our concerns without creating the impression that we want to return to the pre-Trudeau era Christian benefits or that we are desirous of some form of Christian state government?

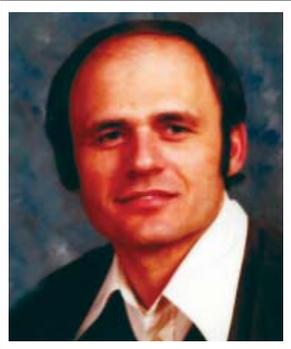
1. We should *not* approach government bodies as if they still operated under Christian assumptions.
2. We should *not* approach them with assumptions that governments should be Christian, and that we should have the benefits inherent within a kind of state church.
3. We should approach governments as Christian groupings that have a right to be heard and have a right to know and debate the criteria by which religious movements are governed.

By the way, what would the ideal government look like if people like us succeeded beyond our wildest dreams? What would freedom of religion look like in our country? We do believe in freedom of religion don’t we? We would grant that freedom to others wouldn’t we? Do we sound like that’s what we believe when we talk to government leaders?

We need to think well about these issues. Interested in this conversation? Let’s talk! In our next edition we’ll come back to this subject and bring forward some of the best ways to challenge religious pluralism on its own assumptions. In the meantime, feel free to email me with your thoughts at gord@vision-ministries.org. ◀

2nd Thoughts Finding Our Place ...in Canada?

Gord Martin, gord@vision-ministries.org



Last fall I finally got around to reading *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin. Although it was published in 1989, I

sense that we have not yet come to terms with its implications in our churches.

Cultural Pluralism

In his book, Newbigin explains that “Cultural pluralism is the attitude which welcomes the variety of different cultures and life-styles to live within one society and believes that this is an enrichment of human life.” He says “there are good and bad elements in culture; we would not wish to see cannibalism or infanticide introduced into Toronto, and would not wish to see sexual promiscuity and abortion on demand introduced into Zambia.”

Those of us living in larger Canadian population centres have grown accustomed to interacting with people from around the world. Their names, which seemed so unusual and difficult to pronounce years ago, have become familiar. Their foods have become mainstream and many of our churches, now have from ten to as many as thirty nationalities represented in their numbers. This has been an enriching experience. New Canadians appreciate things that we take for granted about our nation and culture.

And we learn things about their countries and customs that are not only different, but note-worthy and noble. In a good way, we have become the kind of multi-cultural society Canadian politicians of the 70’s dreamed of. This is the easiest and most engaging element of pluralism.

Religious pluralism

Newbigin goes on to say that, “Religious pluralism, is the belief that the differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible. Religious belief is a private matter.”

As Christians, we struggle with this kind of religious pluralism for several reasons:

1. It comes to us under the banner of cultural pluralism. If you accept people, races, languages and cultures, then there is an expectation that you should accept their religion as part of their culture.
2. Those who advance religious pluralism strongly believe that pluralism’s inherent tolerance of diversity will bring more peace among different religious groups. For Christians, this feels like a call to deep compromise.
3. While the great religions of the world have some common features, they are quite different at their centre. We believe that there are uniquenesses in Christ and in the Christian message.
4. We believe that faith is not only a private matter but is something important to share with others.
5. When Christians advance the idea that the revelation from God described in Scripture is good news for all and that all are called to account to the God of the universe, well...all hell breaks loose!

Too often Christians have addressed these matters in ways that cause them to be seen as ignorant, narrow-minded, and dangerous. Newbigin says that we must learn to challenge religious pluralism on its own assumptions. We have not learned to do this well. It’s a subject I would like to address in the next edition of *Thinking Ahead*.

Political pluralism

Until the Trudeau era, the governments of Canada operated on Christian assumptions. The Roman Catholic church held sway in Quebec and other French-speaking sectors of the country while Anglican or Church of England was the dominant religious force in English Canada during the country’s formative years. A phrase from Psalm 72 was put on our national motto, the national anthem referred to the Christian God without embarrassment, and the Judeo-Christian ethic was assumed in our political, judicial, and educational streams of life.

Things changed as Roman Catholic and main-line protestant churches began to lose influence and cultural relevance in the ‘60s. Evangelicals were mostly outside of the mainstream of political life. In 1971, multiculturalism became official Canadian policy, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms became our set of guiding ideals in 1982, and the peoples of the world became our friends and neighbours.

Today, most government bodies in Canada function under the assumptions of religious pluralism and they attempt to govern religious bodies according to these ideals. But the underlying assumptions of those ideals are often unacknowledged and they are vague as to application even though they may be proclaimed with a kind of high sounding religious zeal.

Continued on page 7.



Publications Agreement
Number: 40016262

145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON N2J 2N8

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses To Above Address