

Thinking Ahead



The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

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3 Kinds of Leaders

by Nikki Everts-Hammond

Last fall, Thessalon Bible Chapel invited Gord Martin, Executive Director of VMC, to help their church plan for its next five years. Located in Thessalon, ON, population 1400, the church had grown over the previous five to ten years and the leadership team was ready to go to the next level. Charlie Martin, the church's full-time worker, says Gord presented material on determining the three types of leaders that every church needs to move ahead. According to Gord, if all three kinds of leaders are not empowered, then the church's plans are doomed to "stall."

With input from Mark Anderson, life coach and pastor at Marineview Chapel in Vancouver, Gord developed a tool that allows teams to recognize the importance of three different kinds of leaders, and to identify which type each leader on the team is. Directional or Visionary Leaders, exemplified by David and Paul, set the direction that others will follow, motivating people to move towards common goals. Administrative Leaders, like Solomon, organize and plan out how to attain the common goals. Pastoral Leaders, such as Barnabas and Timothy, help people adapt to change, caring for the individuals within the group.

Charlie appreciates the fact that Thessalon's four elders have a "good balance in the leadership mix." Two of them are Pastoral, one is Administrative and the other is Directional. This is typical—Gord has observed that usually, no more than 25% of pastors are Visionary and these individuals can be seen as threats by the other leadership styles. After Gord's teaching, the elders at Thessalon felt encouraged by the reminder that each leadership style is equally important to the health of the church.

The team then determined that their vision was "worshipping God" and developed initiatives to fulfill it: passionate worship, practical discipleship and purposeful evangelism. They chose a leader for each initiative based on which elder's style was most applicable. "It is good to be reminded that no one person can do it all," says Charlie, "A mix among the leadership divides the burden." The team is experiencing renewed joy in leadership and meetings run more

smoothly now that they recognize and appreciate each other's gifts.

Chris Watts has been a leading elder at Colby Drive Bible Chapel in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia since its inception in 1981. In May 2008, Gord presented a seminar to the whole congregation on decision making that included the material about the three kinds of leaders. The group wanted help because their pastor was soon to retire and they had to prepare to look for a new one. After the seminar, the elders met and applied what they had learned to their own leadership team. They found they were split between Administrative and Pastoral Leaders.

The lack of a Directional Leader was having a definite impact on the functioning of the chapel. As Gord notes, a church suffers when any of the leadership styles is missing. Without pastoral leadership, "Things appear to be running smoothly and moving forward, but people feel uncared for and shrink back from commitment and may even leave." In the absence of administrative leadership great ideas may be discussed but are never implemented, communication is lacking and there is probably "unresolved tension between the idealists and the care-givers." Chris could see that while the people at Colby Drive Bible Chapel were well cared for and content, there was a lack of vision, a sure sign that a Directional Leader was not in place. Although they still haven't found a pastor, Chris and his team know what kind of leader the church needs. Recently a new elder joined the team; using the VMC teaching on three kinds of leaders, he identified himself as a Visionary. This is most certainly an answer to prayer! While it is "humbling to realize you cannot do it all yourself," Chris sees the freedom in working from your strength instead of struggling to complete tasks in areas of weakness.

Twenty kilometers down the road from Colby Drive Bible Chapel, Mark Harris and his church, Grace Chapel, face a different set of challenges. Located in suburban Halifax, the church is home

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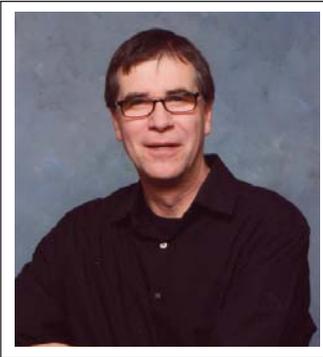
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**MORE FLOURISHING
EFFECTIVE CHURCHES**

NOT WORTH FIGHTING ABOUT

Jay Gurnett • jay@vision-ministries.org



I spoke to a young church planter the other day. He thinks that as new as his little community is, there are already “theological” differences which might lead to division. Of course this isn’t a unique situation. From my experience coming alongside local churches, and also trying to get groups of church leaders to cooperate, it seems that we

Christians are a tiny bit better at disagreeing than we are at agreeing with one another.

This is inevitable, I suspect. We are people who believe things strongly, and who are urged to be faithful to what we believe. Combine that with the obligation from our Leader to be one—to be joined together in community—and you’re bound to have a little trouble.

On the other hand, many people around us don’t believe things very strongly. Gord mentions some of the nebulous belief systems in our world, in his article on page 8. As a result, those folks seem to have an easier job getting along; and if they don’t agree easily, they have no compelling reason to keep hanging with other people. However as Christians, we are stuck with important beliefs, *and* we have to stay associated.

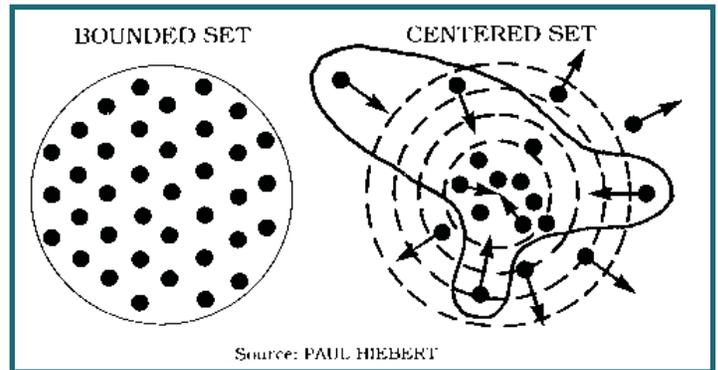
So what do we do?

First of all we should be honest with ourselves. A decade ago, I heard Regent College President Rod Wilson teach about the “biblical” differences that we claim to have. He suggested the roots of many of these beliefs are far from theological. Some folks actually come to their *biblical* beliefs from their **traditions** – they believe whatever it was they grew up with. Of course I had no trouble seeing who those folks were. Wilson also taught that some of us seek out biblical justification for what is really just **personal preference**. I felt the mirror being placed in front of me. Rod wasn’t critiquing tradition or personal preference. He was wanting us to judge our motives a little, and I think he wanted us to admit that often, we hunt out biblical reasons for what we actually believe for other reasons. If we’re a little more humble and honest, some of our disagreements would disappear.

We also need to be honest about Christian belief in general. I’ve included a little diagram I found years ago. It reminds us that almost all contemporary evangelical Christians hold to a “centred set” theology. “Bounded set” theologies suggest that

the only “real” Christians, are those who believe every-single-one-and-not-one-more of the 60 or 80 or 100 core tenants of Christian truth. Of course, it can be quite difficult to agree which 60 or 80 or 100 (or 101?). However, most of us recognize that there are some very central things (thus centred set) that *all* Christians *must* believe. Beyond that, Christians can be Calvinist or Arminian, complementarian or egalitarian, cessationist or charismatic, etc.

This isn’t a bad place to start when trying to work together. Allowing that we don’t have to sweat the small stuff, and that most of it is small stuff, lets us work alongside people who have different views. This is the approach that we find in



Source: PAUL HIEBERT

Peter Meiderlin’s well-known 17th century Peace Saying (ascribed to Augustine, Richard Baxter, Origen, and nearly everyone else – because they probably said something similar):

**In essentials unity,
In doubtful things liberty,
But in all things love.**

Similarly, Anthony Norris Groves as summarized by Keith Price and updated by Glenn Smith in the article “The Basis for Christian Fellowship” (available from Christian Direction, www.direction.ca or from the VMC head office) says:

We do not consider an act of fellowship to be indicative of total agreement; indeed, we sometimes find it a needed expression of love to submit to others in matters where we do not fully agree, rather than to prevent some greater good to be accomplished. Our choice would be to stand with them rather than to separate ourselves from their good.

This still doesn’t tell us how to work with folks we don’t quite see eye to eye with (and I confess I also sometimes agree with Guy Kawasaki who says: *Don’t be afraid to polarize people*). But it reminds me that we fight and separate over things and in situations that we shouldn’t. Personally, I’m not going to do that anymore. As I said to our new London community recently, I’m hardly willing to fight with Christians about anything, because I just don’t want to fight. ◀

Pastorates: A new way of doing church

by Emily Wierenga

For some, it's enough to be part of Sunday morning worship. Others enjoy mid-week Bible studies. But Associate Pastor Joe White of Vancouver's Granville Chapel believes there needs to be more. That's why two years ago, Granville began something they call Pastorates.

"Pastorates can be called 'mid-sized missional communities,'" says White, a graduate of Regent College. While 'pastorate' is a relatively unused term, it's something like a larger version of the more commonly known 'small group'. White longs for every church to foster such a community where "greater worship, deeper ministry, bolder evangelism, authentic fellowship, and radical discipleship" are encouraged.

"Ministry happens at many levels in church life," explains White. "Pastorates exist in between Sunday morning and (Bible) studies. They exist to create fellowship and develop mission."

About one third of the 400 people who attend Granville's weekend services, are also actively involved in a pastorate. Every week, 100-175 people meet in five different locations for a meal, worship, and prayer.

The concept of the 'pastorate' comes from a book by Bob Hopkins and Mike Green entitled *Clusters: Creative Mid-Sized Missional Communities*. The authors talk about the importance of the two "great" texts of Matthew. White expands on this by explaining that the "lifeblood" of a pastorate is in the worship and ministry found in Jesus' Great Commandments, and in the evangelism, fellowship and discipleship revealed by the Great Commission.

Alicia joined a pastorate in February, looking for a place "to belong." Dealing with broken relationships and a damaged heart, she found healing in this small community. "Young in my faith, the pastorate also fostered my spiritual growth," she says.



One of the Granville Chapel pastorates hanging out

The members soon became like a second family, and when her mother was diagnosed with cancer, it was Alicia's pastorate which upheld her in prayer and fellowship. "So many of them wanted to help in whatever way they could," she recalls. "Some sat with me in the hospital as I waited; others brought meals for my Dad and sister."

Then, when the doctors removed all traces of cancer, and the remaining scans proved clean, Alicia was able to celebrate with her newfound brothers and sisters. "I thank God for this miracle, and for blessing me with such a wonderful community."

White—who grew up in California's highest-crime, lowest-income

neighbourhood—hopes the pastorates might reach out to Granville's surrounding region, one of Vancouver's wealthiest districts.

"Through pastorates, I want Vancouver's un-churched population to find community and mission," he says. "I want people to discover the deep love and radical call of Jesus." ◀



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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.

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**Newsletter Editor: Sandra Reimer,
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One Body Many Parts: The 12:12 Network

by Sandra Reimer

Believing the message of 1 Corinthians 12:12 that though the body is made up of many parts it is one unit, in June 2008 two denominations joined with Vision Ministries Canada to form the 12:12 Network. They came together to facilitate new church development in and around needy communities in the Greater Toronto Area of Ontario.

“The work is complex, the costs are high and there don’t tend to be neighbouring churches. It’s quite a task to do something in one of those neighbourhoods where the needs are so pronounced. That’s why we decided to do it jointly,” said Gord Martin, Executive Director of VMC.

The Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, an association of 31 churches across the province, and the Associated Gospel Churches representing 146 churches across Canada, are the other two groups in the network. All three partners have signed the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Statement of Faith and agreed to a set of core values that include belief in: a transformational gospel, incarnational living, cultural redemption, missional leadership, and strategic cooperation.

The network’s first joint project is MoveIn—a new movement that facilitates young Christians moving in to unreached neighbourhoods (see article p 6). Terry Wiseman, Director of the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Board of Church Extension, is the lead partner who provides direct accountability for the project.

Gord Martin says that the network partners have a “very open-handed and open-hearted attitude” as they decide on a lead partner for each project. And even though one group takes more

direct responsibility for a project, Martin emphasizes, “We will all own them, are committed to them and fund them.”

The partners govern the network and set direction together as they seek to accomplish kingdom projects that they could not



12:12 Network Partners L to R: Terry Wiseman (Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches), Trevor Seath (Associated Gospel Churches) and Gord Martin (VMC)

effectively do alone. The 12:12 Network is open to including other like-minded denominations that can sign the EFC Statement of Faith, agree to the network’s core values; and are willing to raise awareness about projects within their denominations, and commit human resources and funds to network projects.

See the 12:12 Network partnership agreement at www.vision-ministries.org/1212agreement ◀

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3 Kinds of Leaders

to between 250 and 300 people. Grateful for their Brethren roots, Mark says the leadership team “is ready to seek out other approaches to more effectively fulfill our mission.” Grace Chapel focuses on worshipping God by calling “people into relationship with Christ through evangelism, spiritual formation, and commitment to the poor both within their city and around the world.”

Grace Chapel’s encounter with VMC’s teaching on types of leaders has supported the implementation of this focus. Although all three styles are represented, before the team had worked through the materials, their one Directional Leader felt isolated at times. Once the team understood the necessity of all three leadership styles, they resolved to give the visionary more room to pursue his sometimes “edgy” and future-focused ideas.

Over the last three years, Grace Chapel has been working through the issue of women in leadership. “In large part a transition has been made,” says Mark, adding that “it was vital to have all three kinds of leaders operating within the congregation.” The Directional Leader looked to the future and motivated people,

while the Administrative Leaders worked on processes that could implement the transition. Pastoral Leaders helped individuals to adapt to the changes, and were sensitive to the “emotional temperature of the congregation.”

Although the “Three Kinds of Leaders” exercise only takes about 25 minutes to complete, the results are both revelatory and transforming. Without understanding the value of different leadership styles, mistrust and fear can impede the effectiveness of even the most dedicated team of elders to the detriment of the churches they serve.

Pastoral Leaders may be fearful that the changes Directional Leaders envision will harm the flock, while the organizational work that Administrative Leaders provide is often taken for granted. Charlie, Chris and Mark found that the VMC exercise helped their leadership team members identify their dominant styles, recognize the styles of other team members and appreciate the gift that each type of leader brings to their churches. As these leaders released each other to work in their areas of strength, they found renewed joy and freedom in their service allowing them to more effectively guide their congregations as they help advance God’s kingdom in their communities. ◀

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MOVED INTO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

WWW.MOVEIN.TO

On Friday, May 8th, from 7-10 pm approximately 600 people—mostly young adults between 18 and 29 years old—gathered for worship, prayer, and to hear stories of how needy Canadian neighbourhoods are being transformed as ordinary Christians live in them. The event was hosted by a new initiative called MoveIn, which is associated with the 12:12 Network that VMC is part of. Participants were challenged to consider moving in to one of 36 unreached neighbourhoods in Ottawa and Toronto. Those serious about moving in returned to People's Church on Saturday for more prayer, worship, and an opportunity to discern God's direction. As a result, 36 people, who believe that God is calling them to move in to 9 needy neighbourhoods, were commissioned.



Two of the 140 people who considered moving into unreached neighbourhoods in Toronto and Ottawa.

The most impressive thing about the conference and the whole MoveIn movement is the amount of intercessory prayer that goes into all their efforts. 7 days of 24/7 prayer preceded the conference, prayer continued during the 2 day event and for three days after the gathering. Clearly the young organizers know where the power comes from! See www.movein.to for more info. ◀

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Religious Freedom in Canada

An approach to consider

1. Do as Jesus did. As much as you can, announce the kingdom of God and go about doing good. But emphasize the doing good part because of the anti-conversion mood in our country.
2. Learn to answer the common questions of non-believers with patience and as much thoroughness as you can or as much as they want to hear.
3. Be honest and open about your own doubts and questions. Both great faith and great honesty are compelling.
4. Nudge people to explain *their* beliefs and why *they* hold them. Lots of people hold to semi-Christian values for which they have no real underlying reason. For example, many believe in human rights, women's rights, children's rights and the rights of the impoverished....where do those beliefs come from? Why are those beliefs so broadly held? What do you think of people who reject these kinds of rights? Where does this sense of right and wrong come from? Is God closer than you think?
5. Honour people who manage these kinds of dialogues well and learn from them.

Tim McKellar's book, *The Reason for God*, helpfully addresses the current crop of questions non-Christians ask. Michael Coren (broadcaster and columnist) is an assertive and controversial Christian advocate. Learn from him, identify with

him and support him, even if you don't always agree with him!

Be political

Be an advocate for the values of the kingdom of God. But don't do it in a way that implies the use of force, coercion or some new form of Christian state. God doesn't do it, neither should we.

There are two broad streams of thought on freedom of conscience and religion.

- ❖ The first anticipates and tries to shoe-horn everyone toward a common consensus on values. Many humanists, secularists, and religious pluralists seem to be on this track.
- ❖ The second urges a true tolerance that welcomes diverse peoples and groups to practice and promote their values and way of life within reasonable limitations.

We should resist the first tendency and support the second.

Perhaps some of us should find a way to help our government come up with reasonable limitations on the freedom of religion. It would better for believers to come up with this than wait for a maverick legal case that produces an undesirable straight-jacket for all.

As Canadians, it's important for us to welcome new immigrants and refugees to our country in the Spirit of Jesus. We should be ready to learn from other cultures. And we should learn to challenge the beliefs of non-Christ followers of every stripe, while advancing the beauty of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. ◀



Plan to Attend the 2009 Church Planting Congress

Church Planting Canada, a national network of Christian leaders who seek to facilitate the multiplication of churches across our nation, is hosting their bi-annual conference November 17-20, 2009 at Centre Street Church in Calgary, Alberta. The theme of this year's interdenominational church planting congress is *Renov8: Transforming Neighbourhoods*. Speakers include Michael Frost, Stuart Murray, and Wagdi Iskander.

On Tuesday, November 17th the first plenary session, led by Michael Frost, a best-selling author and Director of the Centre for Evangelism and Global Mission at Morling Baptist Seminary in Australia, is open to the public at no charge.

The line-up on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday includes daily plenary sessions, workshops, collaborative learning opportunities, Q&A forums, church planting stories, and breakout sessions that facilitate cooperation among groups working in the same regions or denominations/networks.

Since 2001 VMC has facilitated the attendance of 20-30 people at each of these biannual congresses. We believe this is the best conference of its kind in Canada.

Early Bird Rate: \$199 After August 31st: \$239.00.

Student/Group Rate: \$169

More than 20 from a network: VMC needs to book the group. Contact us if you want to go.

These prices are very reasonable considering the number of sessions offered. Box lunches are included on Wednesday and Thursday. Accommodation is extra.

So what are you waiting for? Register online at www.thecongress.ca. or talk more with us at Vision Ministries at 1-877-509-5060.

Vision Ministries Canada's own Paul Fletcher, along with his wife Dorothy, are taking one final tour to The Holy Land and Jordan on Oct. 15th to 29th, 2009. For more details contact them at: pfletcher@kwic.com or 519-669-4569.



Brian Larmour, Pastor of Assiniboia-Charleswood Community Church in Winnipeg believes that church planting is "an essential element of the New Testament church." About his time at the church planting congress in 2007, Larmour said "I was exposed to a lot of new ideas and to the writings of some authors I hadn't come across before. The time spent with others in the [Vision Ministries] network was outstanding."

"The Church Planting Congress was amazing. I found it very encouraging," said **Coleen Taylor** who together with her husband Ross and a small team, began Agricola Community Church, a rural church plant in Ardrossan, Alberta. After the 2007 congress, Taylor sent out weekly e-mail synopses of different sessions to all the people in their church group. "For four months we benefited from the practical wisdom of the conference speakers, who clearly relied heavily on the Bible to underpin their teaching and who knew the power of prayer in their lives." Now that's what you call getting your money's worth! ◀



Thinking Shrewdly IV

with Michael Frost

April 29 to May 1, 2010

at VMC, 145 Lincoln Road, Waterloo, ON

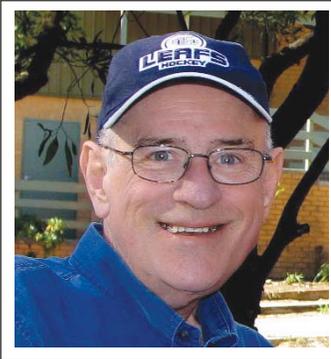
A special 3-day event you don't want to miss! Michael Frost is the Director of the Centre for Evangelism and Global Mission at Morling Baptist Seminary in Sydney, Australia, and is the author of numerous books including *Seeing God in the Ordinary* (Hendrickson, 2000) and *The Shaping of Things to Come* with Alan Hirsch (Hendrickson, 2003), both best sellers. He travels and speaks in the U.S., Canada, and the UK, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

More information as we get closer to the date. Call us if you have questions 877.509.5060.

*Oh Lord, please keep me fresh in my relationship with You.
Walk with me today as a friend walks with a friend.*

LORD, PLEASE KEEP ME FRESH!

Dave McClurkin • dave@vision-ministries.org



As I get older, I keep asking questions like these: How can I keep my soul nourished so there is freshness in my walk with God? How do I become alive to God in my journey of faith? How do I keep my faith from becoming dull and predictable and stagnant? What will it take for me to be “wowed” by God every day? How can I be like Moses who

talked with God like a friend talks with a friend? (Exodus 33:11)

We have all longed for this kind of relationship with God. When we read the stories of people like Abraham, Moses, Joseph and David who lived with their hearts calibrated to the heart of God, we wonder, “How did they do that?”

Through reading Biblical narratives and observation, I see that people who know God are not perfect people, but somehow they have decided that following God is worth the effort. I agree with them.

I recently borrowed a system that was explained by Wayne Cordeiro who wrote the book *Doing Church as a Team*. I have adapted it to my own style and use the computer to organize my thoughts. Since my soul needs constant cleansing the acronym S-O-A-P is appropriate. The letters stand for four steps:

- S for Scripture
- O for Observation
- A for Application
- P for Prayer

This process involves recording all four steps in my journal. Over the years I have discovered that if it’s not “write downable” it’s not memorable. This forces me to think through a passage of Scripture. I write down my observations, and when it comes to application, I try and work through questions like:

- Is there instruction to help in my spiritual formation?
- Is there a promise from God to claim that stabilizes my walk with Him?

Is there a statement about God that shapes my understanding of Him?

Is there hope that I can hang on to?

Are there insights that can bring vibrancy to my walk with God?

Even the prayer for the day is thought through and written down. Every day my prayers include telling God: that I love Him and love being loved by Him, that I love being in His family, and am thankful for the incredible privilege of serving Him. I do not deserve what God has given me by His grace.

At the beginning of each year, everyone at our church is encouraged to choose a verse as an anchor for the year. I have done that every year since 1999. This year I am enjoying Zephaniah 3:17:

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty Saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.

Somehow my days go better, even bad days, with that verse in my hip pocket.

I am surrounded by friends who love God. They have given me stability in my faith journey that I would not be able to have alone. They pray with me, answer my questions and accept my doubts and finiteness. Having people who love God in your corner is a great blessing. I thank God for these friends who journey with me on feet of clay, and who thirst after God as I do.

There is one more thing I have discovered. When I embrace this journey with God as an adventure and allow the sheer joy of His companionship to shape my identity, every part of my life comes alive. But when what I do or don’t do becomes my identity, life becomes dull and listless, lacking in adventure, void of joy.

Oh Lord, please keep me fresh in my relationship with You.
Walk with me today as a friend walks with a friend. ◀

Hi Jay. I was just reading through the latest VMC newsletter and thought I’d send you a quick note to say how much I have appreciated getting the newsletter.

I really enjoy reading your perspectives on things and I find it fascinating how some of the things that I’ve been thinking through are reflected in the newsletter. Most recently, the article by Dave about what he missed sounds so familiar! I have been doing a lot of thinking about how my formative years in Christianity were largely spent thinking about what I couldn’t do or what I was supposed to do – and feeling generally guilty about both. Rather than thinking about relationship with God first and foremost, and considering that He is more interested in me as a person than in whether I’m being a “good” boy. It’s interesting getting old – the things that I thought would be important to me are becoming less so, almost every day. So it’s comforting to read things like the newsletter and find that I’m not alone and also to hear about how God is moving in this country through the efforts of young guys that are eager to serve Him.

Anyway, that’s it. I just wanted to let you know that at least one person read your article and appreciated the picture of you from way back when!

– Don King, Calgary

2nd Thoughts Religious Freedom in Canada

Gord Martin • gord@vision-ministries.org



The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that **everyone has the fundamental “freedom of conscience and religion,”** a freedom that it appears even God does not violate.

Though this isn't a quote from the Bible, doesn't it sound like the

teaching of Scripture? To me it reflects the freedom of choice God gives to human beings.

It's a freedom we all activate, day after day. Yet we sometimes have difficulty granting this privilege to those who make choices we disapprove of. It seems that God gives people more freedom than we do.

We live in a country where about 70% of the population think and live in ways that ignore Jesus. Some of the 70% are followers of well-known, non-Christian religious groups including Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists and others. But many have no well-defined religious or philosophic beliefs. I like to divide this large latter group as follows:

1. People with somewhat Christian beliefs but with little commitment to them.
2. People with somewhat Christian values without underlying Christian beliefs.
3. People with “whatever seems right to them” values, lots of ideas and few overarching beliefs.
4. People with a more highly developed philosophy of life along with what they would consider to be “universal values”.

As we connect with people, God will give us opportunities for dialogue. But *how should we communicate with people who already have a faith or way of thinking that guides their lives?*

We mostly learn the answers to this question from Jesus, the book of Acts and from other believers who are fruitful in ministry to non-Christians.

Jesus spoke compellingly about the Kingdom of God, a very different sounding arrangement from the kingdoms of earth, both then and now. And he went about doing good, healing and releasing those in bondage to evil.

The apostles and others like them spoke the word of God boldly, powerfully and persuasively. Paul's longing was that, “if only I may...complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.” In those places to where the Spirit directed them, many responded. In environments of resistance, few believed.

It's still like that! Presently, God is drawing people in trouble and distress to himself. He is drawing large numbers of Chinese and perhaps now Iranians/Persians to himself. And there are people today like the apostles who speak persuasively and powerfully. We should value them and learn from them.

Freedom to Practice and Promote

In Canada we have this fundamental freedom of conscience and religion. I take that to mean that we have the freedom to practice and promote our way of life and convictions as Jesus followers.

Our faith is not only a matter of private spiritual life. Telling others the good news is an inherent part of the Christian faith. Because it's “good news from God”, because the Holy Spirit within prompts us to do so, and because it's good for people, both now and for eternity.

But the idea of promoting our faith raises fears and objections. Many Canadians believe that faith or religion is a private matter that should not be discussed in polite company. This is partly because some of us have propagated our faith in obnoxious and coercive ways. I recently read a secular book on pre-marital preparation which states that; *Proselytizing, of any stripe, whether spiritually informed or not, is one of the most offensive behaviours that exists.* Quite a statement! But one that many Canadians seem to agree with.

We should consider this; we are believers in a God who intentionally and constantly communicates his character, eternal nature, love and justice to humanity. But he does not compel people to believe. He respects their right to “*freedom of conscience and religion*”. We should too.

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