

The Changing Face of Canada

GORD MARTIN

“YOU’RE A MISSIONARY,” Keith Barnard told me after accompanying me on a ten-day speaking tour to pastors and elders for Partnership in the UK. I was initially surprised by his words since I hadn’t thought of myself as belonging to that category for a long time.

When I was a boy my parents prayed for missionaries. Visiting missionaries regularly spoke in our home and our church about their ministries in exotic sounding countries. Eventually I joined their ranks when I worked for four years in Ecuador and Colombia with International Teams. But I had no idea that I would also be a missionary to Canada!

Over the past ten years God has opened doors for me to minister to people from all around the world, right here in Canada. Are there open doors before you as well?

Our country has gone through tremendous changes over the past few hundred years. Consider this: before Europeans “discovered” North America, Aborigines or First Nations people already lived here and had their own cultures and forms of worship. Explorers and missionaries arrived from England and France in the early 1600’s and began building a

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THINKING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

Christian nation like the countries they came from. Most of them were from the Church of England or Roman Catholic churches.

By the time of confederation in 1867, they had done quite well. Canada became a nation that assumed that the God of the Bible was the God of our country. Christian thinking was at the foundation of our political, educational, and judicial systems.

Biblical phrases were included in our national anthem, our national motto, and engraved over the doorways of our institutions. Was it a Christian country? That can be debated, but the influence of Christianity was obvious everywhere.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. —Colossians 4:5,6

All that began to change in the 1960’s and 70’s. The Canadian policy of multiculturalism emerged in 1971. Religion was assumed to be part of culture. Our politicians naïvely believed that religion and culture were more or less equal influences, that acceptance, tolerance, and the courts would eventually iron out any remaining wrinkles and that religion would cease to be a primary factor of discussion in the public square.

Accepting diverse cultures included being accepting of diverse religious beliefs. It was believed then, and I strongly believe now, that being respectful of other people’s cultures and

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Muslims come to Canada with a readiness to debate religion, but find that we are too polite for such discussion.

religions is a good thing. That does not mean that all religions and cultures are the same or equal. Differences should be expected, evaluated, and debated. And we should be involved in that discussion.

In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was established. Freedom of religion was guaranteed as one of the four fundamental liberties. Since then, the courts have adopted a principle of neutrality regarding religion. Christianity is now just one of the faiths guaranteed freedom in Canada.

These changes ushered in a different kind of world for all Canadians. This scares some Christians. They wish we could go back to being a Christian nation, but I believe this new context is opening up incredible possibilities for ministry.

Non-Christian immigrants from China come to Canada with the assumption that it is a Western and Christian country. Many are coming with a keen interest in exploring Christianity and are becoming Christians here.

Believers from Africa are astonished to discover that Canada is not the Christian place they imagined it to be. Many of them came from societies that were and are in many ways more Christian than ours! We have lots to learn from them about prayer, suffering and faith. We should value and empower them to minister in Canada.

Muslims come to our country with a readiness to debate religion with Christians and find that we are too polite for such discussion. We need to overcome our fears, engage them as neighbours and friends, and talk with them also about our faith. I am now about two thirds of the way through the Koran so that I am better prepared for those conversations.

I am very excited about much that is

happening in our country. Yes it has changed. Not all of it is for the better. But as missionaries we are in a wonderful place! People are coming to us from all around the world. New churches are starting everywhere. Many, many churches in our larger cities have two or three different congregations meeting in each facility.

I am also finding that many of us who grew up in Canada are quite timid in responding to newcomers. We are hesitant

about engaging with those whose English is limited. We are queasy about foods we have never seen or smelled before, and we don't understand the cultures and thinking of many who are new to Canada. But there is hope.

More of us should learn how to think and behave like missionaries even though we haven't moved to another country. Are you willing? In this issue you will read about people that are making a difference in the new reality of our country.

How should we think about people from other religions?

Options:

- Other religions are false. We have nothing to learn from them. They must be forsaken in their entirety, then one must believe and follow the Gospel to be saved.
- Other religions are the craft of Satan. Any apparent similarities to Christianity are as a result of demonic cunning.
- One should acknowledge and respect the values or truths found in other religions as well as the people who hold them. But only in Christ are all values and truths found in their proper balance and relationship. Other religions contain truth, but partially or inadequately, and serve to prepare its adherents for Christ. The Gospel fulfills them.
- All religions are equally valid to their adherents. Each is an expression of an inner desire to seek truth, goodness and God. All are fellow-seekers on the same path.

The view I advance:

- Since "all of us are God's offspring" (created after the image of God), we are to accord due respect to all people of whatever race, nation or religion they may be (Genesis 9:6; Acts 17:26-29). Most of us believe this, at least in theory.
- Recognize that elements of truth and goodness are to be found on many different paths (Acts 17:28). Christians ought to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect elements of truth and goodness, wherever they may be found. This is something many of us have not been very good at.
- There is no goodness or truth found on other paths that is not also found in Christ. Examples: self-denial is found in Buddhism, submission in Islam, respect for creation in aboriginal religion. These are also found in Christianity but with different emphases.
- In Christ, great and unique truths and goodness are found, including but not limited to:
 - The forgiveness of sins as a free gift through Jesus' "work" on the cross for those who repent and believe the Gospel (Acts 2:38-47).
 - The empowering work of the Holy Spirit who is given as a gift to those who repent and believe the Gospel to enable them to live a life pleasing to God (Acts 2:38).
 - The assurance of eternal life for those who believe (I John 5:13).
- Christians believe that all people will be judged by the One true and living God on the basis of how they have responded to God's diverse and comprehensive revelation of Himself (Acts 17:31; Acts 24:24-26).

Our Job is to Show His Love

HEATHER WEBBER

Three years ago, we began ESL conversational classes for a number of new Canadian families living in two housing complexes close to the church. We also provide other programs that make a difference in their lives.

Offering programs for the neighbours doesn't mean that they come to church on Sundays. A number of the women come to a mid-week program where we teach them how to cook, or they attend ESL or a parenting program, where they hear a "thought for the day" over a cup of coffee. A lot of the people come to our mid-week programs to meet other Canadians and practice their English. Some go to their own churches on Sunday because they are more comfortable listening to a pastor speak in their own language.

I have had some good one-on-one talks with some of our Muslim neighbours. I find they will come to our programs during the week but not to church on Sunday. They are okay with sending their children to our homework club and to our mid-week evening children's program.

Building relationships with them is the key to building trust. Once they get

to know you and find some common ground with values, they are quite open to talk about what they believe and what I believe. We can agree to disagree and still have a good relationship with one another.

When our neighbours do come to church, we try to make them feel as welcome as we can. It takes time and patience to welcome people from other countries, especially if there is a language barrier. Sometimes it is hard to understand them as they are just learning to speak and they feel uncomfortable talking.

Many of our ESL people and neighbours value the church and very much appreciate the help that we give them. Are they all becoming Christians? Some, but not all. That is where we trust God and that in his time he will draw them to himself. Our job is to show his love and in that love we extend the invitation to get to know God through his church.

Heather Webber is the Community Development Pastor at Bethany Chapel in Calgary.

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it was becoming obvious that we were not getting any traction from trying to grow our church through increasing our Sunday morning capacity.

We began to look for other alternatives that would help us increase our ministry influence beyond the walls of our current facilities. Knowing that God was clearly nudging us to start looking for ministry opportunities outside of our church, I created a discussion group called "the Greenhouse Project" that invited people to wrestle with what new church communities could and should look like. Michael Frost's *Exiles* training material helped to guide the conversation and we began to see God cultivate a hunger for seeing the Gospel lived out in the midst of our community.

Six months later, we understood the

tire change that God was nudging us towards. A group of our young adults came to us with a vision to establish a local church congregation on the Trent University campus. This was the opportunity we had been praying for!

We put a strategy together and recruited a number of families to help pioneer this new congregation, and two years later it has become a thriving extension of Auburn Bible Chapel. God brought the growth he promised but it took a change in our perspective and strategy to recognize his answer to our prayers.

Jay Lehman is the lead pastor at Auburn Bible Chapel in Peterborough, Ontario.



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Faith Bible Church Welcomes Immigrants to PEI

MARK BARRETT

First of all, I want to give all the glory to God for how he is choosing to use us among immigrants in Charlottetown. Most of the time we don't feel like we know what we're doing, but we are learning along the way.

Our ministry to newcomers began about three years ago, when a man walked into my office and said, "Did you know that there are many immigrants moving to PEI? Would you and your church like to help me reach them for Christ?" I had no idea that two immigrants a day are moving to PEI. I said, "Well, I don't really know what to do or how to reach them, but I'm willing and available." I cast the vision to our elders, and then to our church. We were available to God and he began to open doors.

This man had contact with a group of refugees from Burma, so we began befriending them and helping them in any way we could. They really appreciated this, because they had no friends or connections. We began transporting them to church.



Immigrants at a church picnic (top). People from many different ethnic backgrounds attend Faith Bible Church.

Next we started a children's ministry in a downtown facility, which put us in contact with many refugees from Nepal. Their kids came to the children's group and we visited with the parents in their homes. Soon, many of them, who are Hindu, began attending church as well. Now many more people want to come to church than we have vehicles with which to transport them. We are praying for a solution to this challenge.

We started a small group Bible study with the Burmese using simple English. Originally, a man just went back over my Sunday messages in the Bible study to make sure they understood them. Eventually 25 people were attending the study.

Women from Burma, Nepal, Japan and China really enjoy fellowshiping at an ESL-type Bible study we created for them. Many are yet unsaved. We also offer a Bible study during Sunday School for the Burmese using very simple lessons. Another man recently began a study with the Nepalese. He also rounded up a bunch of young Nepalese who play soccer together and he has tried a Bible study with them after the game. We are teaching them English and the Bible at the same time.

We heard about a group of Russians and Chinese who were doing seasonal work at one of our fish processing plants. We took a bus and picked them up to bring them to a special church service and then fed them a meal afterwards. Eight to ten Russians came to know Christ during those meetings.

The most important aspect of our ministry to immigrants is friendship. Immigrants are hungry for relationship. The Nepalese, for example, don't come to church because they want to hear about the Bible, but because we befriended them and they are looking for relationship. People from our church take them to the doctor, help them run errands, help them to learn our customs, take them to the grocery store and just visit with them. Through our kindness and friendship, doors are open to the

MINISTRY TO NEWCOMERS HAS CHALLENGES

I think the biggest challenge in ministering to immigrants is that most of them run on their own clock. They're often either late or won't show up at all. It requires a lot of patience and retraining.

Explaining the Gospel requires so much patience and love. Some of them have only ever known Hinduism, for example. Most don't know anything about Christ or the Bible.

Recently there was a Hindu festival, and none of them showed up for church because they were having some kind of feast. You think to yourself, "Have they heard anything, learned anything at all?" They've heard the claims of Christ, yet continue to worship their gods.

It has required us to adjust to the transportation issues. Some of us have to leave Sunday School early to pick them up for church, because they won't come to Sunday School. Even though this is an inconvenience, it is a small sacrifice.

Gospel.

We found that having immigrants in our church caused us to focus less on ourselves, and realize there is a huge need in our community to love people and bring them to Christ. Our church has accepted and loved these people. We enjoy having them with us and the church feels really empty when they can't be with us. It has changed the atmosphere of our church so much and for the better. We're truly an international church now.

Mark Barrett is the lead pastor at Faith Bible Church in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.



The Lighthouse met outside for the summer so they could redirect their rental funds to the local food bank



The Lighthouse Newcastle

HUNGRY FOR JESUS' ALTERNATE REALITY

Dave Leung

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. —Luke 4:18-19

When we started to talk about the idea of church with a few of our neighbours, no one identified themselves as “Christian” or expressed any more than curiosity in our conversations. Eventually, there was enough interest to warrant getting together to talk explicitly about faith on Sunday morning. Most of the newcomers to our Sunday gatherings over the first year were curious neighbours.

But now, we have seen some transformation in individual lives and definite signs of spiritual life. A beginning curiosity has drawn many people into more deliberate faith conversations and Bible studies. The gospel is having the most traction with people through tangible opportunities to live out Jesus’ “Kingdom of God” message.

We spent the summer meeting outdoors on Sunday mornings talking about Jesus’ Kingdom of God message, found in Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 58 and 61. This was an important time for us to be able to integrate the message of the gospel with experience of the gospel. We met outside so that we could redirect our rental funds to the local food bank—responding to one of the primary themes of Jesus’ Kingdom of God message, “good news for the poor.”

Our family decided to have fun with this so we parked our car for a month and gave



the gas money to a medical clinic in Africa. I’m sure some people thought we were nuts strolling around the neighbourhood with our four kids.

By the end of summer, we realized that Isaiah 58 was a passage that really needs to shape our church community. A lot of our formal existence as a community of faith has centred around Sunday morning (one day a week). Isaiah 58 calls us to be the people of God every day of the week and to join him in his work of justice and overturning poverty.

We ended the summer with some “Kingdom of God” goals for our church (our kids as participating partners to the food bank, families sponsoring kids through World Vision or Compassion Canada, and partnerships with Habitat for Humanity). This was just a small taste of something bigger that God was drawing us into.

There seems to be growing restlessness within our church community. Our people

don’t want to poke their finger at the Kingdom of God or just “get their feet wet.” Many of them want to dive in over their head. They’re hungry for a deeper experience of Jesus’ alternate reality.

In the same way, our neighbours aren’t particularly interested in hearing the message of the gospel (sermons). But many of them would be thrilled to engage in some of the activities that Jesus is passionate about. We need to invite our neighbours to see how God’s Kingdom is penetrating their world in tangible ways.

So the other day, I went to look at space for rent—a place that we could use as a connecting point for the needs of our community; not a church space, but a portal to some obvious Kingdom of God activities, for our church and our neighbourhood to look through and walk through. I’d love it if we had a multi-purpose space to serve the community (before and after school care for parents who can’t afford it, cooking classes and lunches for foodbank clients, free space for the foodbank to use, a youth drop in centre, counselling and support for teen parents, etc).

I think our community as well as our neighbours are hungry for something more, something worth an “abandoning life.” Not the lottery, but maybe a treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44).

Pray for space for the Lighthouse in Newcastle and the funds to rent or buy the property. Ask God to bless the good work started through Dave and Laurie Leung in 2009. Currently 60 people—half of them kids—are connected to the Lighthouse.

VMC Network News

MoveIn Continues to Grow

Leaders from MoveIn recently took a trip to South Asia on their way to the Third Lausanne Congress in South Africa. They visited eight cities in three countries, including Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata,



and Hyderabad (India). They met with national and expatriate leaders, listening and learning, and also sharing the MoveIn vision.

“While the idea of moving into very poor areas was new to most of the leaders we met

with, the response was, for the most part, overwhelmingly positive. We received countless welcomes to come and ‘move in’ in South Asia,” said MoveIn Director Nigel Paul B.

The group has one MoveIn team in Indonesia and hopes to start other teams in the poorest unreached neighbourhoods of the world.

Closer to home, four new teams were started this year, bringing the total number of teams in Canada to 18.

God is moving through these mostly young adults as they form significant relationships with their neighbours through activities such as leading ESL Bible studies, sharing meals and helping youth with homework.

Pray that this growing ministry will be firmly established and that God’s Kingdom will be advanced.

Jesus Network Extends its Reach

In September 2010, the Jesus Network extended its reach, from a 614 church plant in one of the densest neighbourhoods in Toronto, to embrace several other ministries: St. Jamestown, another Toronto church plant in a dense, immigrant hood (see a video at www.facebook.com/jesusnetwork), a church plant in a poor section of Ottawa, and an amazing couple that are starting a ministry in Brampton.

The primary unifying factor for this ministry is a focus on sharing the gospel with those who have never heard it, particularly those with Islamic backgrounds.

As new Canadians embrace Christ they are released to share the good news with their friends and family members. Those involved with the Jesus Network follow the Lord’s leading and natural connections as each relationship becomes the doorway to many others. As friendships develop, the gospel is shared along the “Jesus network.” JNetwork leader Shawn says, “The newest person leads us to the next person or people. The network connects us to people who are seeking.”



one-thru-twelve is a series of 66 half-hour talks by addiction counsellor and former pastor Tim Fletcher. The recently-completed, 12-DVD set, put together by Finding Freedom Ministries, comes with outlines and focus questions to reach out to addicts and their families. The material has also benefitted adults of dysfunctional families and people who deal with other types of brokenness.



This program is unique because it goes deeper than many other Christian ministries to help people work on issues that underlie addictions. And unlike secular services that do go deep, the program is Biblically based.

Finding Freedom was started in 2007 out of Assiniboia-Charles Wood Community Church in Winnipeg. The Friday night service geared toward addicts usually attracted between 50 and 60 people per night. In May 2010, the program was moved to a more central location in downtown Winnipeg. Now 100 to 150 people with addictions and others who are struggling come each Friday night. About one third of them are not Christian.

“It’s a safe place where people can explore a higher power [as referred to in AA’s 12-step program]. We refer to Jesus as our higher power without apology. But I make it clear that there is no arm twisting,” said Fletcher.

See www.findingfreedom.ca for more information.

Watch for VMC workshops for church leaders, “Moving Your Church’s Mission Forward,” coming to a city near you.

The anticipated dates for these full-day, interactive sessions are: K-W/Guelph (March 26), Montreal (April 2), London (April 3) Toronto (April 30), Peterborough (May 7), Halifax (May 28). Workshops will also be held in four or five cities in the West in March and April. Check www.vision-ministries.org for details in the new year.



VMC staff member Dave McClurkin (left) spoke at the Persian conference for Farsi-speaking believers which was organized by Pastor Siamak Keramat (right). About 50 people per day attended the three-day conference, held October 1-3 in Toronto. On the last day of the conference, 11 people became Christians.

My Summer Sabbatical

DAVE RALPH

I spent almost 21 days in solitude. I gave God permission to do surgery on my heart and soul.



Last fall, the leadership team at Lakeside presented me with a gift of a three-month sabbatical—I almost didn't accept it. I thought I was too busy and maybe too indispensable to take that much time off. But with strong encouragement from the leadership team and my wife, I decided to take a break from ministry. So in early June, after sharing my last sermon and putting plans in place, I began this journey.

I started with ten days of travel with my wife in France and England. After our vacation we both took a fascinating and encouraging course at Wycliffe College on English Revivals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

At the end of my sabbatical, I travelled with a team from Lakeside to the Celebrate Recovery Conference where I had a chance to speak to the 3,500 attendees. It was a little intimidating, to say the least, especially when Pastor Rick Warren spoke immediately prior to me. I was the first

Canadian to ever speak at this conference. Pretty cool, eh?

The most important part of my sabbatical, however, was not the travel at the beginning or the conference at the end, but the month in the middle. I spent that time in Florida, enjoying a fabulous waterfront property. Of that month, I spent almost 21 days in solitude. I had never done that before. These were incredible but very lonely days. I think I understood a little of what it must feel like to be single.

During this time, I gave God permission to do surgery on my heart and soul. Through reading, prayer, and journaling, I learned so many things about myself, my emotional health, some areas of character improvement, and about my priorities. I also reflected on the successes and failures of the ministry of Lakeside, where I have spent the last 11 years. It was a chance to look forward, allowing God to renew my calling to ministry and to Lakeside. I was able to dream again and pray some very

faith-stretching prayers. I can't emphasize enough the importance of these days of solitude. I would do it again in a heart beat.

The biggest thing I learned in those days was how close I was to an emotional burnout. If I had not taken this time, I'm not sure I would still have all that I need to lead a thriving but complex church community. Prior to this I thought I was fine and didn't need a sabbatical. As I returned in September, numerous people mentioned that they could see the renewed passion in my eyes and in my teaching.

I believe every senior church leader needs to put a plan in place with their governing body to take this kind of time away on a regular basis. It will be good for you and for your church. Make sure there are many days in a row of solitude. It is hard, but worth it.

Dave Ralph is the Lead Pastor at Lakeside Church in Guelph, Ontario.

Time to Change Your Leadership 'Tires'?

JAY LEHMAN

If someone asked you to drive a vehicle up a steep dirt path, you would first evaluate the vehicle's capabilities.

You would quickly determine whether the vehicle had enough power, enough ground clearance to avoid getting hung up on obstacles, and whether the tires would provide enough of the right kind of traction to transform the engine power into forward motion.

That's why every fall many people invest hundreds of dollars in winter tires for their cars—they recognize that certain tires are better equipped to get them efficiently and safely through certain seasons. In some provinces, this is so important that it is illegal to not equip your car with winter tires in the winter.

Traction is a crucial concept that any leader trying to be an agent of change must learn how to gauge. Dr. Sid Buzzell of Colorado Christian University reminds us that "if you are a leader and no one is following, then you are just going for a walk!" Realizing that no one is following is recognizing that your "tires are spinning"—you have lost traction. The Gospel inspires all of us as leaders with powerful God-given dreams and visions for how things could be, yet if we do not pay attention to our

personal leadership styles and strategies we can easily find ourselves just "out for a walk."

Learning when to change our "tires" is a lesson that leaders have had to learn throughout history. Perhaps the most classic tire change came when Moses' father-in-law Jethro visited the new Hebrew community camped out in the wilderness

Realizing that no one is following is recognizing that your "tires are spinning"—you have lost traction.

in Exodus 18. He observed Moses judging disputes from sun-up to sun-down and finally confronted him: "What you are doing is not good... the work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."

Jethro noticed that Moses was on the edge of losing leadership traction so he suggested a tire change which would require him to *act* like and *be* a different leader. He suggested appointing officials to deal with the minor issues so that Moses would only have to rule on the most difficult cases.

In the New Testament, we see examples of leaders changing tires. In Acts 6, the

twelve apostles came to the conclusion that they couldn't maintain their strategic priorities of spiritual leadership (prayer and teaching of the Word) because of the increasing demands of food distribution to those in need. The solution? They empowered a new level of "servant leaders" (*diakonoi*) with a front-line ministry mandate that freed the apostles to keep their strategic focus.

As I look back on my own leadership in the last few years, I see how God nudged our church towards some significant tire changes.

For the last ten years, our team of elders had been wrestling with what we should do to ensure continued future growth. A few years ago another church in the area offered to buy our building at a fantastic price. We started discussing the idea of building or finding a bigger and better church facility. We had to decline the offer after discussions helped us realize that relocating would divide our congregation. Instead of relocating we began to pursue plans for a major renovation/expansion until we realized that the adjacent land we needed was not for sale.

With all of our expansion doors closing, we were spinning our wheels. By this time

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THINKING AHEAD



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