

# FaithToday



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ANNIVERSARY

To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada

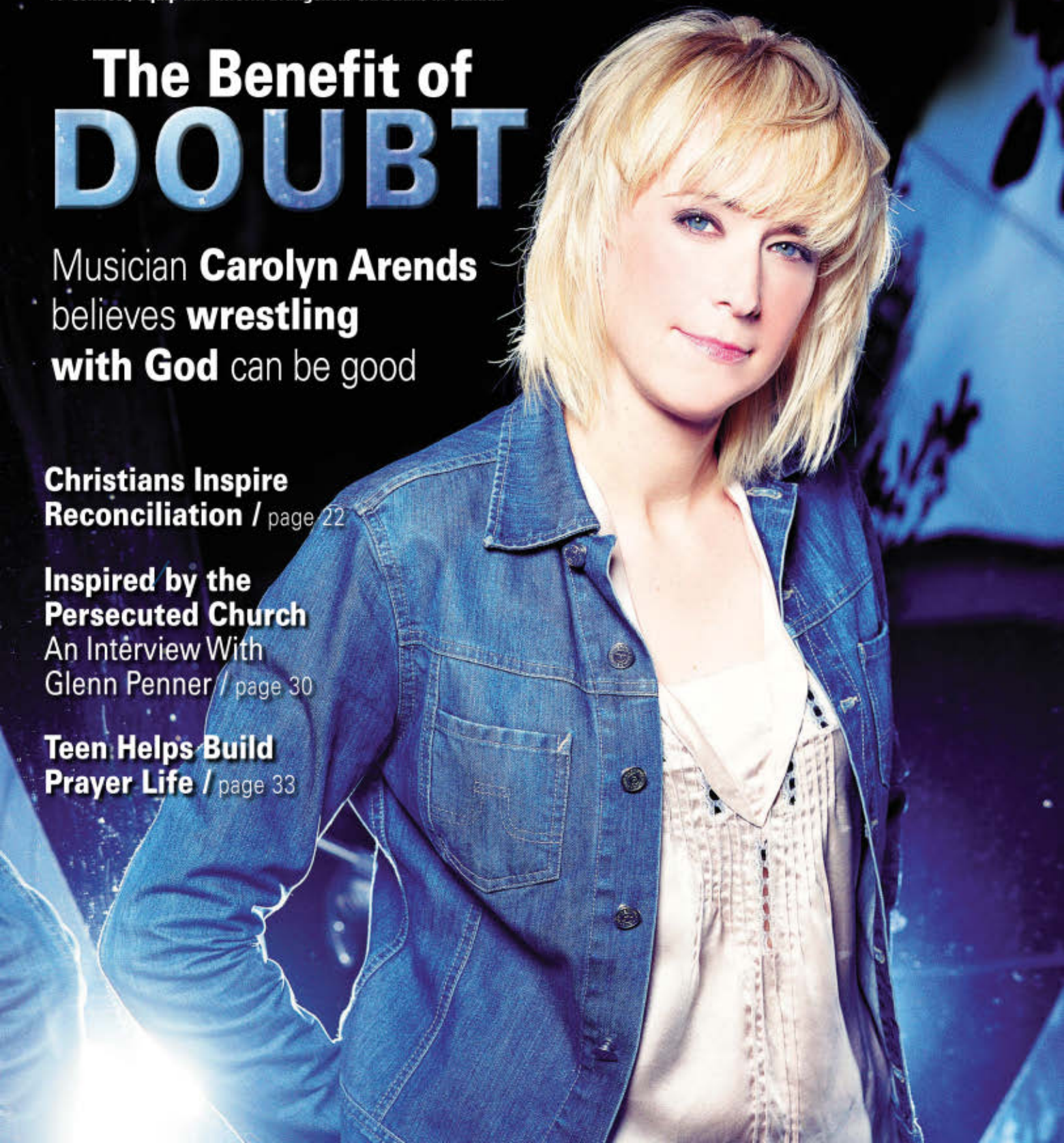
## The Benefit of DOUBT

Musician **Carolyn Arends**  
believes **wrestling**  
**with God** can be good

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Reconciliation** / page 22

**Inspired by the  
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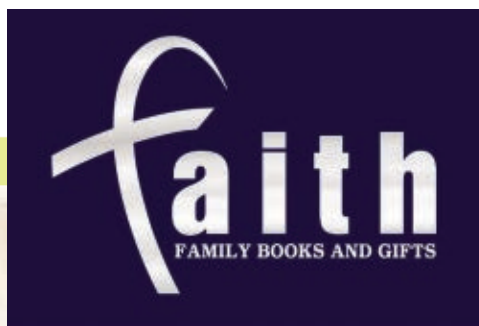
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## Going Deeper

By Gail Reid

### Whether we need stronger faith or reconciliation, there is a cost



**D**id you think it odd that this issue of *Faith Today* has doubt as its cover story? After all, shouldn't we as Evangelicals be confident about our faith in God? Doubt seems more like something you would expect to be of interest to spiritual seekers or non-believers.

In "The Benefit of Doubt," Carolyn Arends challenges such hasty assumptions about doubting. She highlights the importance of walking through our doubts with God to discover His faithfulness and to experience Him in a different, transforming way. She points out that many biblical figures did not hide their doubts but instead brought them to God who intervened, often in unexpected ways.

Glenn Penner, chief executive director of The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, would agree with Arends. In his ministry, Penner has profiled the faith and courage of many people who have been persecuted for their faith. His ministry has demonstrated over and over how God intervenes through His people. Now faced with the personal diagnosis of terminal cancer, Penner shares an unusual perspective. His work with people who face their own mortality daily has led him to believe that "God has not promised us a break from . . . suffering and death." These are "normal things for anyone who is going to work for the purpose of God."

Changing the way we think is also an important factor in this issue's package of stories about reconciliation. In "Evangelicals Contribute to Reconciliation Around the World," writer Alex Newman profiles how Christians are encouraging healing and building bridges

between enemies. Each reconciliation effort has been unique to the situation, but Christians consistently appear to carry the common willingness to risk, share and listen.

"It is a ministry that God has uniquely committed to us, His people," insists Michael Cassidy, founder of African Enterprise. "If you are willing to come to Jesus, you must be serious about coming to the world of relationships." Perhaps that is why Christians have been on the forefront in so many peace initiatives.

And yet, when it is your own country, the process of reconciliation can seem overwhelming. In "Canadian Evangelicals and Reconciliation With First Nations," writer Ron Csillag profiles the emotional and psychological cost of seeking a solution to years of mistakes and hurt in Canada. The most effective measures so far have been based on honest and transparent conversations where participants have been brave enough to share and feel the pain of the harm done to our aboriginal brothers and sisters.

In this reconciliation process, Christians may be uniquely suited – not because of our gifts but rather because of our failures. For each Christian has experienced the pain of facing personal sin before God, knowing that only Christ's death could pay the resulting cost and redeem the eternal consequences. Many of those who have found themselves emptied of their own resources have discovered God's presence and power. ■

*Gail Reid is managing editor of Faith Today and director of communications for The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.*



## Debiting and Tithing

*Re: How to Rise Above the Economic Crisis (Mar/Apr 2009)*

I do not agree with tithing by using automatic debits. I am a grandparent who delights with my wife in giving gifts to our children and grandchildren on special occasions. Since the family does not live nearby, we often send a carefully chosen card together with a monetary gif and, in return, we receive a written thank-you. This exchange represents a loving and a very tangible interaction.

What a blessing we would miss if we were simply to give each one a debit card and tell them to deduct a specific amount from our bank account on those gift-exchanging occasions. What a poor and meaningless substitute that would be! Both we and they would miss out on the real meaning of giving and receiving.

It does not seem right to relegate my love offering to the Lord to the same level as the payment of a routine bill.

ALAN LAMBERT  
Brossard, Que.

I'm concerned that your article, which included some helpful suggestions, may also cause unnecessary feelings of guilt for some readers.

There are some Christians who are in no position to give 10 per cent of their income away without seriously damaging their family. Others can give much more. When the Old Covenant was ended, that included the tithing system. The New Covenant teachings on generosity are even more demanding for most of us and more compassionate for all of us.

GRANT CORRIVEAU  
Nanaimo, B.C.

## Evangelism Is Prevention

*Re: Churches Rethink Their Global Mission (Mar/Apr 2009)*

Millions of people around the world are in desperate need. I have seen it myself

as I have worked several decades in an orphanage in Cuba and in literature production and church planting in Venezuela. Our children and grandchildren have also gone on many short-term missionary work projects.

Often those whom Christians seek to help are so needy because they have engaged in harmful, non-Christian activities such as fighting, drug abuse or illicit sex.

My prayer is that we, as a Bible-believing community, will remember how to prevent as well as trying to cure

their ills. Maybe we should let secular agencies dig most of the wells to provide clean water while we share the good news of salvation as our main thrust.

The Bible still tells us that all men and women are sinners and that we all reap what we sow. I wonder if we are forgetting that, in part, as we spend so much time helping only the physical needs. I don't criticize short-term missions but maybe we should put more spiritual emphasis into them – especially when going to lands that permit evangelism.

GLENN FINCH  
Lacombe, Alta.

## B.C. Mission Boats

*Re: Kingdom Matters (Mar/Apr 2009)*

Your article rang a ship's bell for this Navy veteran.

Nearly a century ago, my father, William Arthur Fuller, pioneered all along the Inward Passage off the British Columbia coast, visiting the shantymen (as lumberjacks in makeshift shanties called themselves) with friendship and the gospel.

My father and mother, with my eldest sister, lived on the Messenger II (Messenger I was shipwrecked). They tied up at Vananda on Texada Island (north of Vancouver Island) while my mother gave birth to their second child.

William Henderson, founder of the

Shantyman's Christian Association, appointed my father as his successor and our family took up residence in Victoria. A more recent retired SCA leader, Arthur Dixon, currently lives in the Toronto area.

So we were blessed to read of ongoing ministries to isolated and spiritually needy settlements along Canada's West Coast. It's a Canadian mission field! Thanks for encouraging prayer on its behalf.

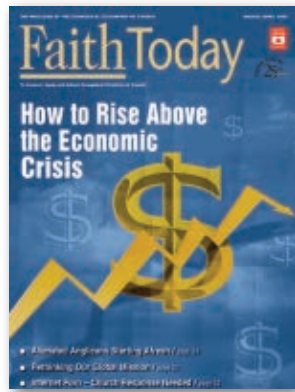
W. HAROLD FULLER  
Stouffville, Ont.

## Ethics Not Complicated

*Re: Ask a Theologian (Mar/Apr 2009)*

I was saddened to read another subjectivist and postmodern interpretation of biblical ethics. Yes, I agree that sometimes a "gap" seems to exist between the commandments we find in the Bible and the complicated world in which we live." But how big is this gap? How often are we faced with a conflict of moral principles where we have "to choose the lesser of two evils?" In fact this occurs rather seldom. Most of the time, maybe even 95 per cent of the time, the Bible gives clear guidance in distinguishing wrong from right, even for today's complex world. Again and again the prophets, Jesus, John, Peter and Paul tell us that fornication, greed, envy, drunkenness and a quarrelling spirit are just plain wrong. And they also declare that actions and character traits such as being humble, kind, generous and self-controlled are just plain right.

To begin an essay on biblical ethics by calling into question our longing for "a black and white set of guidelines" is seriously misleading. To repeatedly remind readers that the Bible is not primarily about giving us "static (or unchanging) formulas" or "mere principles for living" is to distort biblical ethics. It is to give way to the pervasive relativism that exists in our world today, to exaggerate the complexity of the contemporary world. To cite Bonhoeffer as exemplary in struggling to discern God's will in a complex situation is to beg the question. Maybe Bonhoeffer should have listened more carefully to Jesus' plain teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that





killing and even hate are wrong. To suggest that each morning we need “to learn anew what is good” is to fail to do justice to the abiding biblical norms that never change. It is to worship the evangelical idols of newness and relevance.

Paul taught us that love involves keeping God’s law (Romans 13:10). Jesus very explicitly said that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets and that “whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-20). And this Jesus “is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews. 13:8). His creation laws are eternal (Psalm 119).

ELMER J. THIESSEN  
Waterloo, Ont.

## Shack Opens Discussions

Re: *Letters* (Mar/Apr 2009)

I have read *The Shack* and consider its popularity a good thing. It is good in the same way the atheist bus ads should be welcomed by Christians – as an opening to talk with others about God and the good news of Jesus Christ.

I hope evangelical Christian theologians, pastors and church members will carefully highlight the teaching in this book, revealing where it is in tune with biblical revelation and where it is not.

BARBARA RICHARDSON  
Toronto, Ont.

## Practices Versus Doctrine

Re: *Is Emergent Heretical?* (Nov/Dec 2008)

Instead of dealing with the doctrinal issues many Evangelicals have with the emergent movement (doesn’t “heretical” refer to doctrinal error?), James Beverley discusses their practices. The nine practices he lists as a description of the movement could be said of many Evangelicals, even of past generations who have never heard the word “emergent.”

Beverley also claims that emergent is upsetting because it challenges certain practices of traditional evangelicalism.

**Resigned:** George Durance as president of Ambrose University College effective June 2009. In 1997, Durance was appointed president of Alliance University College, which later merged with Nazarene University College to form Ambrose University College. Ambrose now has 600 students and offers undergraduate degrees in arts and science. Last summer it moved across Calgary to a new 40-acre campus in the city’s southwest.

**Appointed:** Paula Curtis as president and CEO of Opportunity International Canada. Previously she worked with The Navigators of Canada. She succeeds Gary Walsh.



Paula Curtis

**Awarded:** Stan Cuthand, an Anglican priest from Little Pine First Nation, Sask., with a lifetime achievement award at the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards. Cuthand, 95, spent more than 20 years translating the New Testament and about half of the Old Testament into Plains Cree. The Canadian

Bible Society has supported the translation work and will publish it after it is reviewed in Cree communities.

**Appointed:** Reg Andrews as director of school operations and ministry at Peoples Christian Academy Inc., an independent Christian school in Toronto. Founded in 1971, it became an independent legal entity in 2007, and it plans to relocate its 470 students (K-12) to Markham, Ont. in Sept. 2010. Andrews has served as a church planter, high school teacher, principal and, most recently, as executive pastor of The Peoples Church and as director of ministry mobilization with Every Home for Christ Canada. Andrews remains involved with EQUIP, the mission arm of John C. Maxwell’s Injoy Ministries.

**Appointed:** David Marshall as executive director of I.N. Network Canada, an organization supporting evangelism and development work in 38 countries. He succeeds John Denbok, who is now international president of I.N. Network. Marshall is from Riverview, N.B., but is moving to Collingwood, Ont., where the organization has offices.

I agree evangelicalism has some adjusting to do in the three areas he mentions. However, it is not these practices that are causing some to ask about heresy.

Beverley alludes to “whatever legitimate concerns” some people have about the emergent movement. But he fails to address those concerns. That is where the heretical teaching is found.

Instead, Beverley quotes Brian McLaren’s basic statement of his identity. That statement tactfully avoids the doctrinal concerns many of us have with some people in the movement, including Brian McLaren.

Wikipedia does a better job of warning Christians of the heretical aspects of the movement. Its article “Emerging Church” quotes Mark Driscoll: “But I eventually had to distance myself from the Emergent stream of the network because friends like Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt began pushing a theological agenda that greatly troubled me. Examples include referring to God as a [woman], questioning God’s sovereignty over and knowledge of the future, denial of

the substitutionary atonement at the Cross, a low view of Scripture, and denial of hell, which is one hell of a mistake.”

Certainly we cannot lump all persons who use the word “emergent” together. But if Brian McLaren is the spokesman for emergent, then almost all Evangelicals would have to agree it is heretical!

For further consideration, I recommend the booklet *The Emergent Church* by Dr William R. Goets, available from Canadian Revival Fellowship in Regina, Sask.

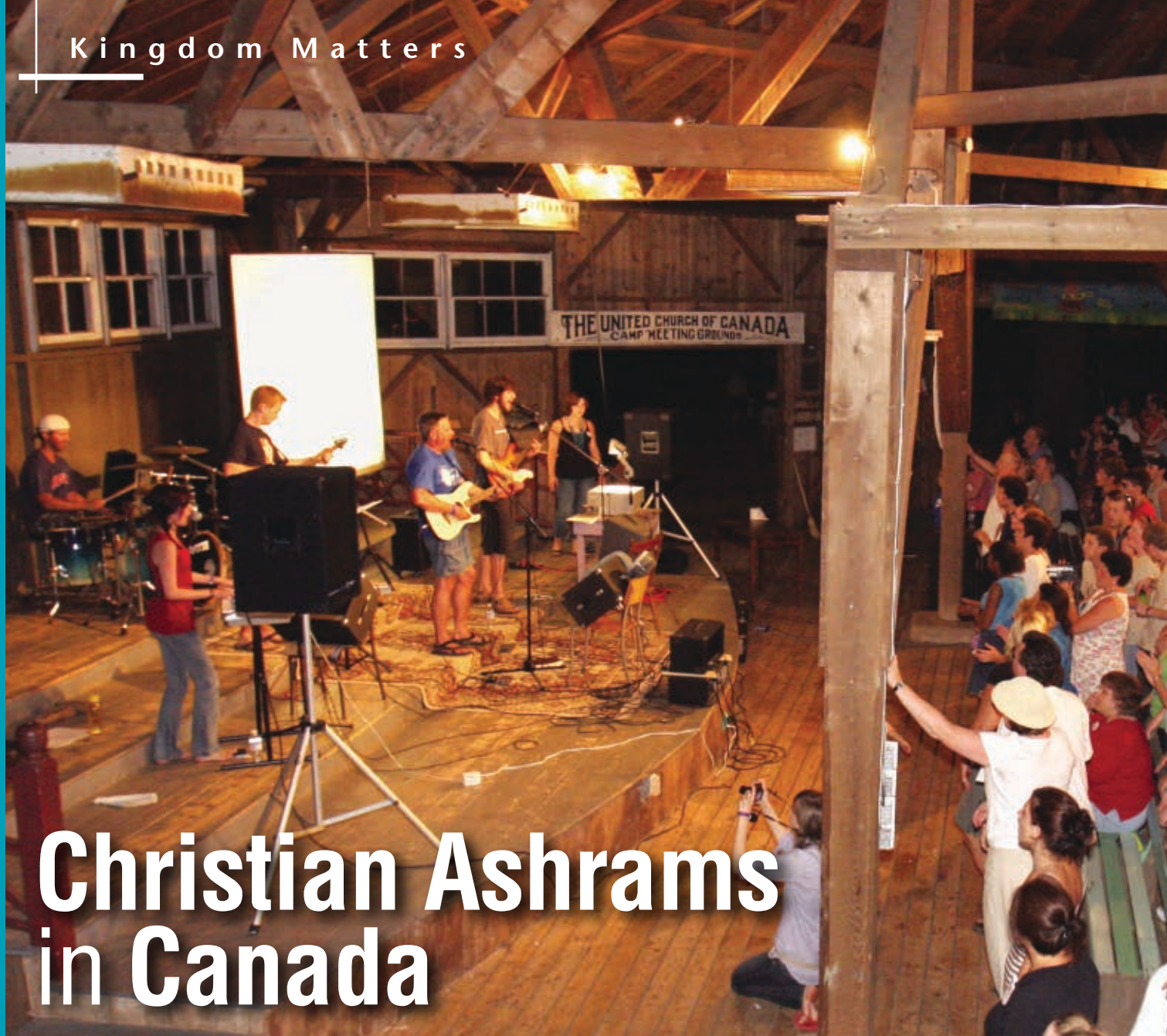
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# Christian Ashrams in Canada

PHOTO: YVON THIBAUT (WWW.ATLANTICCHRISTIANASHRAM.ORG)

**A**n “ashram” in ancient India, where the term originates, was a Hindu hermitage where sages lived in peace and tranquility with na-

ture. Today, a number of Christian retreats use the term to refer to an intentional community formed primarily for the spiritual benefit of its members.

“God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” —2 Cor. 5:18



“I’ve been involved with ashrams since 1975,” says Rev. Ed Hird, director of the B.C. Christian Ashram Movement along with his wife, Janice. Ashrams are “similar to other Christian retreats but have a very interesting structure that looks a lot like the early Methodist meetings.” (Hird is also rector of St. Simon’s Church in North Vancouver – part of the Anglican Network in Canada – and chaplain to Alpha Canada, which promotes a course used to introduce Christianity by a wide variety of denominations.)

In the Sanskrit language, “ah” means “apart from” and “shram” means “work.” Christian ashrams





A time for spiritual instruction, renewal, prayer, healing and quiet times: The Atlantic Christian Ashram, a five-day retreat held each summer in Berwick, N.S.

have taken place in North America since the 1930s. The United Christian Ashram Movement originated with the Methodist missionary evangelist E. Stanley Jones. He adapted the Indian practice of taking seekers apart from work for a time of spiritual instruction and renewal. Ashrams can include prayer vigils, a daily work hour, quiet time, daily share and prayer groups, morning watch, Communion and healing services. Silence is kept from 11 p.m. until 7:30 a.m. morning devotions.

Hird explains that a Christian ash-

ram is a disciplined Christian experience held in a retreat setting for the purpose of deeper spiritual growth that makes God even more real in daily living. This provides a break from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and a move toward the grace and presence of Jesus Christ.

The Christian Ashram Movement extends throughout Canada, the United States and around the world. The largest in the world is the Atlantic Christian Ashram held in Nova Scotia with more than 800 people attending annually. ■ —CHRISTINA CROOK

## Alpha Goes to Prison

The bare feet of the 12 prisoners stung from the hot asphalt as they waited in the exercise yard of the Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre. One by one they climbed into the improvised baptismal tank—a Rubbermaid laundry tub on wheels.

"What would bring you to stand here?" asked Chaplain Carl Wake. "You have officers looking at you. You have your peers looking at you. You're opening yourself up to ridicule and disgrace. Why are you here?"

The Alpha course is part of the answer to that question. Alpha is an introduction to Christianity used worldwide in churches and also other places, including about 40 of Canada's prisons. Of the 12 prisoners who stepped up that day in 2007, 10 were Alpha participants.

All of them declared their faith in Christ in response to the chaplain's challenge. They offered a brief personal testimony and scrunched down for full immersion in the 45 centimetres of water—all the water that prison officials would allow.

Today, Alpha courses have run for more than five years at the detention centre under the direction of Dave and Carol Atkins, Alpha for Prisons advisers, and their team of volunteers. In June 2008 another 12 inmates were baptized.

Similar stories are taking place across the country.

Jerry Kozak, Alpha for Prisons Adviser in Surrey, B.C., just finished his second Alpha course at the Surrey Pre-Trial Service Centre. He tells of a Muslim inmate who, halfway through the Alpha course, became a Christian.

"The guards have noticed his change in attitude. He told me he was very hungry for the Word of God and can't seem to get enough of it," says Kozak.

Another inmate, incarcerated for acts of extreme violence, says: "Alpha is the best thing that ever happened to me. It has changed my life." Several inmates wrote to the deputy warden letting him know how much the Alpha course helped them.

Shirley Barrow volunteers with Kozak. Her women's Alpha course sees about 20 women each week. She reports that she has seen many come to faith in Christ.

The Alpha course continues to be offered in churches, homes, universities, military bases and workplace settings across Canada. ■

—BILL BONIKOWSKY/ALPHA CANADA

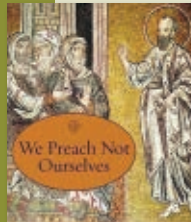


Jerry Kozak



## Recommended Resources

• *A Faith Worth Believing, Living and Commending* by Dennis Ngien (Wipf & Stock, 2008). Reflections on God, preaching,



death, and Spirit-filled life by a professor of theology at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto.

• *We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation* by Michael P. Knowles (Brazos, 2008). McMaster Divinity College professor offers an insightful and practical discussion of preaching based on 2 Corinthians.



• *Ninety-Nine Windows: Reflections of a Reporter From Arabia to Africa and Other Roads Less Travelled* (Epic/Essence, 2008). A compilation of columns by Canadian Christian journalist Thomas Froese. [www.thomasfroese.com](http://www.thomasfroese.com)



• *The Life and Thought of David Craig, Canadian Presbyterian Missionary, 1937-2001* by Jason Zuidema (Clements Academic, 2008). Craig was an Ontario missionary who served in Nigeria and Quebec, especially in French Reformed evangelism and theological education.

## From Online Sermons

One of Greg Gordon's favourite quotes is from preacher Andrew Gee: "God's time for revival is the very darkest hour." It's an apt choice for Gordon. At 16 Gordon ran away from home and became mired in drugs,

alcohol and criminal activity until sinking to his knees one night in a desperate prayer for God's help out of his "hell."

That was 13 years ago. After a prodigal return home, Gordon settled into school and then a job before quitting in

## Author Lives in Babylon

Is a meaningful relationship with Christ still to be found in churches and within the walls of organized religion? Paul Vieira of Winnipeg, author of the self-published book *Jesus Has Left the Building*, thinks not. At least not for him and not for many other younger people who find something is missing from what he calls the institutional church.

Rick Hiemstra at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada says he's seeing more books about people dropping out of church. As director of the EFC Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism, he also knows the statistics about the "weakening of denominational affiliation in Canada. In the 2001 census, a large growth of people described themselves as Christian, as opposed

to naming a denomination. That tells you something."

Vieira may be a typical example. An active churchgoer from an early age, he was a worship leader at the age of 15. In 1988 he created a monthly Saturday night service of worship and healing for youth in Winnipeg. Come to the Cross attracted up to 700 young people a night.

But in 1992 Vieira felt God calling him "to take this stuff and do it outside the walls." Around the same time the innovative service came to an abrupt end. It was bewildering, and Vieira tried other approaches to ministry in a painful search for God's will for his life.

*Jesus Has Left the Building* came out of that search. And ever since its publication in 2006, Vieira has been on a journey that

he likens to the exile of the Israelites. Vieira compares himself and others like him to the exiled Jewish youth Daniel, placed by God within the secular society to be messengers of God's grace and love.

Vieira now works as the co-ordinator of an English program for newcomers to Canada at the University of Winnipeg. He has also joined a band called WHY and has created a series of 45-minute podcasts to provide an orientation to the first five books of the Old Testament.

When asked what he does for church now, Vieira replies, "The truth is, my wife, my four kids and my close guy friends – this is my church."



Paul Vieira

# to Revival

2004 to launch his website sermonindex.net. It offers free downloads of nearly 17,000 sermons from preachers like George Whitfield, A. W. Tozer, Corrie Ten Boom and William Booth.

"It's strong, biblical preaching by Holy Spirit-filled men and women whom people don't always hear week to week," explains Gordon.

Since 2007 his ministry scope has expanded to include organizing revivals – the first in Canton, Ohio, followed by two last year in Greenock, Scotland, and Atlanta, Georgia.

Gordon believes the need and time for true revival comes when society is at its "most bankrupt" – and "right now Christianity is at its most hopeless state, going downhill faster than we can record."

He acknowledges that revival may be a "dirty" word for some. That's partly because of revivals that have ended in scandal, such as the one in Florida last year led by Canadian Todd Bentley. "Yes, we're human, but the message should not be that sin is OK," says Gordon.

A true revival, in fact, involves not only forgiveness but also the preceding repentance and restitution, Gordon says. "It's not only saying sorry but also

Vieira's story is a challenge to the Church, says Hiemstra. "Christ calls us to unity with all Christians, not only the ones we have an affinity with. The Church is always a cultural expression, and we are seeing that a new cultural expression is needed to meet a culture that has changed. The question is how can we incarnate the gospel for a new culture?"

For some like Vieira, who have "disconnected from organized religion but not from Jesus," the answer to that question may be too little and too late.

His focus is reserved for his family (including studying Scripture with his sons in twice weekly sessions he calls "Theology With Dad"), his friends and doing the things he enjoys such as music. And so his life in Babylon continues. ■

—MARY LOU HARRISON

repenting the way of life and choosing to live differently."

When Gordon was planning the nature and tone of his revivals, he asked himself how it would look if Paul the Apostle were in charge. "And God said in my heart, 'Do everything opposite to what you usually see.'"

Each conference is free, sells no books or materials, offers equal podium time to both well-known and unknown speakers (all of whom pay their own

way) and gathers no collection (with the exception of two that were immediately distributed by area churches to people in poverty). Attendees sing only simple, older hymns, which Gordon says even the young people find "worshipful."

Gordon doesn't claim to have a corner on the conference market or to know all the answers. This is only a "small piece of God's plans." His next conference is June 2-4, 2009, in Barnsdall, Oklahoma. ■ —ALEX NEWMAN

## Fireproof Hits Canada

The pro-marriage feature film *Fireproof*, released last September in American theatres, has unleashed a minor firestorm of its own. While most rave about it – with American audiences cheering at screenings and thousands of personal stories of change on the official website – others have been dismissive. Chat board comments range from "finally a movie that empowers people never to give up in their commitments" to "absolutely horrifying" and "lame."

Gene Tempelmeyer, pastor of Toronto's Spring Garden Baptist Church, which screened the film in early April, admits he has low tolerance for "Christian cheese" but found the movie better than expected.

The story follows a young couple who have drifted to the verge of divorce. Firefighter Caleb Holt (Kirk Cameron) is courageous at work but not in marriage, while his wife Catherine (Erin Bethea) openly courts the attentions of a co-worker.

Caleb's father, John (Harris Malcolm), asks him to consider doing the Love Dare – 40 days of increasingly challenging love exercises. Caleb does, eventually understanding what it means to love unconditionally.

Reportedly costing \$500,000 to make – thanks to the volunteer cast and crew – the movie became the fourth bestseller in the United States its first weekend and had the largest box office takes of films released on 1,000 screens or less. In Canada, the movie was released in churches and media outlets. Life 100.3, a radio station in Barrie, Ont., purchased screening rights to show in area churches because the "timing was perfect," says promotions manager Jen Taylor. "We hear more and more about marriages struggling."

The response has been "bigger than expected," Taylor adds. "We only planned on doing a few shows but [with] the demand ... we wanted to make sure as many people as possible were able to see this movie." They ended up with 15 screenings.

Centre St. Church in Calgary had a similar experience. Four viewings in March drew a total audience of 3,244, sold 422 copies of the movie, 700 books and 21 *Love Dare* Bible study guides.

"The movie surprised me. Most of the time you think you've seen it all but this one hit home with its bluntness," says Deb Mitchell, communications director for Centre St.

"It dealt with two issues – relationships that develop in the workplace and Internet pornography – in a meaningful way," says Tempelmeyer. "It was as if this couple were living out things that I keep seeing walk through my office door."

But it's the *Love Dare* study book – non-existent until the demand from the movie drove the producers to write it – that Tempelmeyer credits with improving marriages. "Because I've had couples doing the book for about a month, they have noticed temperature changes in their marriage."

The book pre-sold 600,000 copies and currently sits at number 10 on amazon.com. Both movie and book are being promoted on the Canadian Marriage and Family Network ([www.cfmn.ca](http://www.cfmn.ca)), whose mission is "to inspire and equip churches in Canada to transform marriages and families one congregation at a time." ■ —ALEX NEWMAN





# A Matter of Human Dignity

By Bruce J. Clemenger



A Supreme Court case requires us to consider our commitment to the sanctity of human life. How dedicated are we to uphold its value?

**T**he meaning of human dignity and how it should be recognized and affirmed in Canadian society is back on the public agenda. The Supreme Court is currently considering arguments about how we regulate the creation and treatment of early human life.

Canada adopted legislation governing genetic and reproductive technologies in 2004. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada made persuasive arguments for the protection of the sanctity of human life before parliamentary committees and provided resources for MPs and their staff. A wide array of Canadian voices contributed, and the resulting law provided national standards that are now being challenged.

Quebec, joined by several other provinces, now contends the current national approach is unwarranted and provinces should be free to do what is right in their own eyes.

It has been a while since the Supreme Court has addressed the issue of the sanctity of life head-on. In a 1993, case a majority of the Supreme Court concluded that the argument about whether one can end one's own life "focuses on the generally held and deeply rooted belief in our society that human life is sacred or inviolable." The "sanctity of human life" (they clarified they meant it in a secular sense) was recognized as one of those principles of fundamental justice that give shape to our laws in Canada.

A key question is deciding when the principle applies. Does it extend back to conception or only pertain at some later point in human development? If the latter, then at what stage? Once we move beyond conception, the criterion used to determine when early human life is treated as human – and afforded full dignity and respect – has significant consequences. If it is a level of independence or capacity or belonging that enables one to qualify, what of those who at some point no longer meet the criteria? Are they then no longer deserving of equal treatment?

In Canada we have said no to human cloning and to animal-human hybrids, no to experimentation on human

embryos past 14 days of life and no to buying sperm, eggs and embryos. Our laws are still deficient yet they are better than the laws of most western democracies, and we were right to agree that these standards must apply nationwide.

When the commitment to human dignity at all stages of life is eroded, there are consequences. It is a principle that lies at the core of our understanding of self and other.

The Christian belief that all humans are created in the image of God – and therefore have equal dignity – is a core principle of our world view. It means we are valued apart from our own estimation of our worth or the evaluation of others. It also affirms genuine humility and fosters a lens that defines care: we are all equally valued by God. When we get either wrong, we can cause immense harm over generations.

The articles published in this issue of *Faith Today* on reconciliation show that, when the blood or nationality of one is understood to entail superiority or to grant privileges not afforded others, pain and even atrocities result. Such prejudices thwart a common commitment to human dignity and undermine the related obligation to establish new habits and change the behaviour that caused harm. In Canada, having offered an apology to Aboriginal Peoples, are we committed to changing our attitudes and behaviour toward them?

The affirmation of universal human dignity, of the sanctity of human life, has influenced social policy in Canada. If it were truly considered inviolable and fully adhered to, it would prompt changes in how we care for others, particularly those who are marginalized and vulnerable. Any diminishment will have consequences.

In its 1993 decision, the Supreme Court recognized there might come a time when the sanctity of human life would no longer be widely shared and accepted and, thus, would no longer qualify as a principle of fundamental justice. Such a conclusion would be regressive for this principle challenges presumptions of privilege, entitlement and meritocracy. As Christians we must uphold human dignity at all stages of life in all that we do and continue to make appeals to all Canadians that the principle of the sanctity of human life be manifest in our laws and our conduct toward others. ■

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*Bruce J. Clemenger is the president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Read more columns at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/clemenger](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/clemenger).*



## ***Together for influence, impact and identity***

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is the national association of Evangelicals, gathered together for influence, impact and identity in ministry and public witness. Since 1964 the EFC has provided a national forum for Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society. Visit us at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca).

# The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire)

By Karen Stiller

It is the third largest country in Africa, but it probably ranks first in recent struggles, challenges and body count. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly known as Zaire (among other names), is home to one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world today. The resource-rich country is host to what is called by some experts “Africa’s world war.” That is because the death toll is so staggering.

Aid agencies and outside observers estimate that more than five million people have died in the past 10 years in a war that pits government forces, supported by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe against rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda. More than one million people have been displaced because of it.

The United Nations is present in the DRC in record-breaking numbers along with countless aid groups (some of them Christian and Canadian). Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUC) in the eastern part of the country is the largest UN peacekeeping force in the world. There have been glimpses of potential peace in the country, with two rebel groups even declaring an end to the war as re-



cently as January, but it is an elusive and fragile hope in a country with a troubled history.

The DRC was colonized by Belgium in the 19th century and gained its independence in 1960. Its colonial history includes a legacy of brutal civil punishment such as the severing of hands for the smallest infractions. A 2003 BBC documentary called *Congo: White King,*

*etc., Red Rubber, Black Death* (available at [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca)) argues that King Leopold set – and then exceeded – the standard for brutality in colonization. Leopold made a fortune harvesting wild rubber, and his brutal reign is blamed for the deaths of at least 10 million people. The documentary includes this quote from a missionary who served during Leopold’s reign: “I was so moved, Your Excellency, by the people’s stories that I took the liberty of promising them that in future you will only kill them for crimes they commit.”

Observers of the country say that what Leopold started, subsequent rulers have continued. After independence, the DRC almost immediately faced an army mutiny that ended in the death of its prime minister. Army chief Joseph Mobutu seized power, renamed the country Zaire and began his own reign of terror. In 1997 Rwanda invaded Zaire to capture extremist Hutu militias who had fled from their own country. Experts say that in so doing they strengthened anti-Mobutu rebels who then overtook the capital Kinshasa, made Laurent Kabila president and gave the country its current name. A new period of war and terror came along with a new name and a new government, resulting in the ongoing civil war and the death toll that has finally caught the world’s attention. ■

Karen Stiller is associate editor of Faith Today.



## Just the Facts

**Full name:** Democratic Republic of the Congo

**Population:** 64.7 million (UN, 2008)

**Internet Users:** 230,400

**Capital:** Kinshasa

**Area:** 2.34 million sq km (905,354 sq miles)

**Major languages:** French, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba

**Major religions:** Christianity, Islam  
**Life expectancy:** 45 years (men), 48 years (women) (UN)

## On Our Knees

- Pray that the peace that has seemed so elusive to the DRC will have a chance to grow strong.
- Pray that the Church in the DRC will be a voice for reason, for calm, for healing and for hope.
- Pray for the children who are the most vulnerable to war and displacement. An estimated 680,000 have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS. Thousands have been forced to fight. Malnutrition is high.
- Pray for protection for girls and women who suffer under one of the highest rates of rape and sexual abuse in the world. Rape has been called a weapon of war in the DRC. Pray that God’s mercy and light will shine through this terrible darkness.
- If you feel led to act, you can visit [www.amnesty.ca/take\\_action/actions/drc\\_rape\\_women.php](http://www.amnesty.ca/take_action/actions/drc_rape_women.php) for instructions on how to write letters of protest to the DRC government about the systematic rape of women in that country. You can also write Canadian government leaders asking them to continue their development assistance to the DRC.

## Canadian Connections

- Canadians sponsor 21,625 children in the south and west of the DRC through World Vision development programs. WV has also been working in the conflict-plagued eastern region since 1993.
- Canadians Foodgrains Bank has four current projects in the DRC, including delivery of seeds, tools and 2,013 tonnes of emergency food (enough for 15,750 people).

See a more detailed version  
of this article at  
[www.evangelicafellowship.ca/  
globalvillage](http://www.evangelicafellowship.ca/globalvillage)



## Atheist Ads Prompt Faith Discussion

**T**he planned bus advertising campaign addressed by Bruce J. Clemenger, president of the EFC, in last issue's *Faith Today* editorial continued to garner public attention this spring.

The Freethought Association of Canada announced in mid-January it was raising funds to sponsor ads similar to those that appeared recently on the sides of buses in London, England and Washington, D.C. The ads say: "THERE'S PROBABLY NO GOD. NOW STOP WORRYING AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE."

Christian groups that have been advertising on buses and billboards for many years welcomed the possibility.

Bus Stop Bible Studies is a Scarborough, Ont., ministry affiliated with the EFC. It has 600 ads in play, mainly inside public transit buses. Each ad includes a quote from the *Good News Bible*, followed by several thought-provoking questions.

The ministry and its founder, David Harrison, were profiled in *Faith Today* in Jul/Aug 2008.

Alpha Canada, another EFC affiliate, issued a news release welcoming the advertising as a way of encouraging public discussion.

The EFC's Don Hutchinson addressed the issue at length on *Talk Ottawa*. Watch the video at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/issues](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/issues).

### COURTS AND GOVERNMENT Human Cloning at Supreme Court

The EFC contributed a 10-page legal argument to the Supreme Court of Canada in a major reproductive technologies case. The EFC supports the need for federal regulation of assisted human reproduction technologies and related experimentation, contrary to the challenge by the Government of Quebec that each province should set its own rules. The case was set for April 24.

### Trafficking Issue Heats Up

The EFC has publicly endorsed a private member's bill introduced by MP Joy Smith. Bill C-268 proposes mandatory minimum sentences for trafficking children (under age 18). The EFC released a report in April that reviews connections between human trafficking and major international events. It recommends action governments can take to prepare for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games and beyond. It's available at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/issues](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/issues).

### Evangelicals Fit for Government?

A variety of groups made public objections to the recent appointment of Douglas Cryer, the EFC's former director of public policy, to Canada's Immigration Review Board (IRB). In light of Cryer's earlier advocacy work, several pro-homosexual individuals in particular worried aloud whether Cryer would be able to offer fair and reasoned assessment of homosexual applicants.

The EFC's Don Hutchinson addressed the issue recently in a column at [www.christianity.ca](http://www.christianity.ca). "Would an atheist be a better adjudicator of Christian applicants?" asked Hutchinson. "The IRB is composed of people of many cultures and faiths, including Christians who by reason of the basic tenets of the Christian faith are inclined to respect the opinions of others and care for their needs."

Hutchinson's column also pointed out that criticizing politicians because of their religious affiliation, as recently occurred with Gary Goodyear, the federal minister of science and technology, is unhelpful and inappropriate. "There are Christians on all sides of Parliament. Christians have served as cabinet ministers and as prime ministers. Christian service has added, and still adds, important value to public policy debate and development," writes Hutchinson, who is an EFC vice-president and director of the EFC Centre for Faith and Public Life.

### COMING EVENTS

Details at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/events](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/events) or call 1-866-302-3362

- **Celebration 2009.** Plan a local event expressing the love of Jesus in a visible way between May 31 and June 14, 2009, at the same time as many other Christians across Canada. Order the free promo DVD *That They May See Jesus* for outreach ideas and related inspirational teaching at 1-866-302-3362 (local 905-479-5885) ext. 236.
- **Global Day of Prayer, Pentecost, May 31.** This event, one of many ways to celebrate Pentecost, drew millions of participants in 214 nations last year. All Canadian municipalities holding GDOP events are listed at [www.gdopcanada.com](http://www.gdopcanada.com). GDOP, which began in South Africa in 2001, encourages groups to observe 10 days of preparation prayer before Pentecost and 90 "days of blessing," including community service projects, afterwards.
- **A World Vision spring forum, The Face of Poverty in Canada,** is well underway. Church leaders in Hamilton, Vancouver and Calgary have already come together to learn about and discuss critical issues concerning local poverty. Dates for May and June include Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg and Toronto.
- **Canadian National House Church Conference.** Keynote speaker Frank Viola addresses the dream of organic Christianity. Viola is author of *Pagan Christianity*, *Reimagining Church* and other books. June 26-27, Newmarket, Ont. Visit [www.starfishnetworkconference.org](http://www.starfishnetworkconference.org).
- **EFC Christian Leaders Connection.** New season of one-day leadership seminars on current Canadian trends, legislation and events that affect local congregations. Presenters include EFC president Bruce J. Clemenger on the theme "Being Evangelical in a Complex World: Stats, Facts and Trends." Visit the website for fall dates in Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia.

## GLOBAL ISSUES

### Call for Prayer for Sri Lanka

Organizations that watch worldwide religious freedom launched a global campaign calling for prayer for Sri Lanka, an Asian country in the midst of a civil war.

The "Toronto Statement" made by the Religious Liberty Partnership was prepared at a major conference attended by EFC representatives in Toronto in March. The partnership is the world's newest and largest group of religious liberty organizations. Members include Open Doors International (Holland), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (United Kingdom), The Voice of the Martyrs (Canada), HMK (Switzerland) and the Religious Liberty Commission of World Evangelical Alliance (representing 128 countries).

The Toronto Statement notes some positive elements in Sri Lanka, including the role the church is playing, but expresses deep concern about the ways in which humanitarian efforts are currently being handled. It calls on the worldwide Church to pray for the religious rights of all Sri Lankans and to support peace efforts. Details at [persecution.net/weblog.htm](http://persecution.net/weblog.htm) and [www.worldevangelicals.org](http://www.worldevangelicals.org).

### India and Vietnam

The EFC Religious Liberty Commission released two reports this spring, one on India and another on Vietnam. *Faith and Freedom Collide in India: A Report on the Rise of Recent Violence Against Christians in Orissa and Other Indian States* is a 25-page document that looks closely at the recent escalation of ten-

sions between Hindus and Christians. *Religious Freedom in Vietnam: Welcome Progress With Notable Exceptions* is a 10-page update on internal church developments and government policy developments from 2008 and early 2009. Both reports are available at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca).

## EFC AFFILIATE NEWS

### Best Christian Workplaces

The Best Christian Places to Work in Canada program recently announced its finalists for 2009. The program is offered by the Canadian Council of Christian Charities each fall and administered by the Best Christian Workplace Institute.

The program celebrates excellence and helps improve Christian workplaces. Organizations that scored at least 4.0 out of 5.0 on the survey as a whole included: Canadian Conference Mennonite Brethren Churches, B.C.; Centre Street Church, Alta.; Linden Christian School, Man.; Medeba Adventure Learning Centre, Ont.; Partners International Canada, Ont.; Power to Change Ministries (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), B.C.; and Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church, Ont.

The survey covers job satisfaction, organizational commitment, Christian witness, supervisory effectiveness, work satisfaction, personal growth and development, management effectiveness, customer/supporter satisfaction, teamwork, communications, pay and benefits. Details at [www.cccc.org/workplace](http://www.cccc.org/workplace).

The EFC has been a finalist twice but did not enter this year. ■

### EFC Ambassador in Thunder Bay

The EFC is seeking volunteer ambassadors for various regions across Canada, and now it has one in Thunder Bay, Ont. Scott Beange will seek to grow the EFC's affiliate and support base in the greater Thunder Bay area and beyond. He can be reached at [beanges@efc-canada.com](mailto:beanges@efc-canada.com) or 807-629-0701.

Beange is a retired employee of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources who has lived in Toronto, Mindemoya (Manitoulin Island) and Espanola. Over a 15-year period he, his wife, Joanne, and three children have been involved in short-term missions to 15 countries. He has also visited Israel twice.

Beange remembers asking Jesus Christ to forgive his sins and be his Lord and Saviour one hot summer evening in 1969 while a student working in Manitouwadge, Ont. At present, he and Joanne attend Fort William Baptist Church. ■

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**"God wants us to wrestle with Him"**

# The Benefit of

By Carolyn Arends

**S**arah is a deep thinker. She wishes she could just accept things on the surface, but she can't. A theological question about God's sovereignty began to haunt her in her early 20s. She took her question to the spiritual experts available: her pastor and a local "Bible Answer" radio personality. They both told her it was arrogant to question God. But she found it difficult to be dishonest with God. So she stopped talking to God altogether.

Jenny grew up in the church and laughs that she's saving her "rebellious phase" for her upcoming 40s. She's had many faith-building encounters with God and loves to share them. What is harder for Jenny to talk about is the long, dark season after her first pregnancy when she had a colicky baby and a whopping case of postpartum depression.

Worse, she had an agonizing sense of being cut off from God. For several months she begged God to break through the haze of her exhaustion and hormonal desperation with some reassurance of His love. The breakthrough didn't happen. Gradually, she stopped feeling so desperate. But she also felt a little abandoned. Even now, when others testify about the times God met them in an hour of need, Jenny's eyes well up with tears.

Richard was a minister but he's not anymore. When a bridge collapsed unexpectedly in his small maritime town, so did his faith. His teenage son was on that bridge and drowned. After that, Richard couldn't think of anything to preach about.

I've believed in Jesus since I was old enough to believe in anything. I can barely imagine a world or a life without God. And yet, now and then, I find myself sitting in a church service suddenly struck by the thought that perhaps the whole thing – faith in a personal, knowable God and all the creeds and prayers and the relationship that follow – is only a lovely dream, a benign fabrication that gives meaning to an otherwise achingly futile human existence. I refute these ideas as quickly

**Doubt is a much maligned reality of a living faith. If you have it, don't despair – most of the people in the Bible were "a questioning lot" writes Carolyn Arends, an evangelical author and award-winning musician from Coquitlam, B.C.**

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as I can but I'm troubled by the fact that even now, after all these years of discipleship, such thoughts are possible.

I have questions about ... doubt.

My research on doubt is informal. I've simply listened to my own heart and the half-whispered confessions of other pilgrims. But I've become convinced that most Christians experience doubt at least now and then. There are exceptions, beautiful ones, of believers who seem never to falter. I often wonder (as I fight back my envy) if perhaps they have received the particular spiritual gift of "faith" the Apostle Paul says has been given to some (1 Corinthians 12:9).

Whatever the explanation, these unflappable Christians seem to be the exceptions who prove the rule. The rest of

A woman with long dark hair is sitting on a rocky shore, looking out at the ocean. She is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The background is a blurred view of the ocean and a blue sky.

# DOUBT

us eventually (or periodically) run into some set of variables – tragic circumstances, theological quandaries, physical or mental illnesses, or our own reflective temperaments – that leave questions welling up inside us.

We must determine, it seems to me, if doubt is always destructive or if it is potentially helpful. Are doubts the enemy of faith or, as American author Frederick Buechner puts it, “the ants in the pants of faith,” the very things that keep faith “alive and moving”?

The Bible encourages us to move toward faith and away from doubt. And yet, the “Hall of Fame” believers held up as examples in Hebrews 11 were almost unanimously a questioning lot. The point seems less that they never doubted and more

that they came to God with their doubts. Some of them argued with or even hollered at God. But they didn’t walk away.

My favourite example is Jacob. Genesis 32 describes a mysterious encounter with a stranger whom Jacob eventually understands to be God Himself. Jacob wrestles with God all night long and tells Him “I will not let You go until You bless me.”

In the morning Jacob gets his blessing and a new name: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel [‘God-Wrestler’], because you have struggled with God and with human beings and have overcome” (Genesis 32:28).

Imagine that. God names not only Jacob but also His people, His nation, His church: Israel. God-wrestlers. It seems God



wants us to wrestle with Him, to fight for Him, to grapple with the Mystery, to hold on tight and refuse to let go.

The more I read the Bible, the more I am convinced that God has empathy for our situation. I don't think our doubts offend God. But I do think He is concerned when we swallow our doubt, when we pretend He is not beyond our understanding and when we attempt to hide our true feelings from Him (as if we ever could!).

So how do we let doubt be a fire that refines faith rather than consumes it? In my own experience, the following four principles have been extremely helpful.

### Expect Some Turbulence

The other day I grabbed a cup of water from the kitchen table. It turned out it was not my water but my daughter's lemonade. I like lemonade, but the tart flavour was so unexpected I did a classic cartoon "spit-take." Expectations are powerful.

Many Christians expect a doubt-free walk with God. When trouble comes, we must contend with not only the questions themselves but also with the stress and shame at having the questions at all. Our panic will be significantly minimized

if we understand that the majority of believers who have gone before us (from biblical heroes and Early Church Fathers to more recent saints like Henri Nouwen and even Mother Teresa) have encountered seasons of doubt.

I suspect a great number of Christians discover as they journey with God that the more they believe (the more they perceive of God) the more doubt springs up as a natural response to the gap between what is and what is understood.

To have real faith – faith that hopes for things that are not yet seen – we have to be confronted at least occasionally with a keen and painful awareness of just how unseen some of those things are. That awareness often manifests itself as doubt.

The author of Ecclesiastes claims "I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

The Bible is wonderfully candid when it refers to this incredibly good news (that we bear something of the eternal right at the deepest part of who we are) as a burden. The truth is, if we flesh-and-bone, finite creatures really do house something infinite, we can expect to feel at odds with ourselves a good deal of the time. Accepting that tension can go a long way toward helping us do something constructive with our doubt.

### Don't Forget to Remember

Every time I hold a friend's new baby, I'm shocked by how much I've forgotten about my own kids' infancies. When they were tiny, I thought every precious (and not-so-precious) detail would be etched in my mind forever. Now I can barely recall what they looked like back then. If we don't actively remember things – by writing them down, taking pictures, and telling and retelling stories about them – we forget.

You'd think it would be easy to remember our spiritual epiphanies – answered prayers, Holy Spirit insights and touches of God through circumstances or special perceptions of His presence. In reality, spiritual encounters are particularly difficult to recall precisely because they belong to another realm that seems to vaporize when we get bogged down in our material existence.

The Old Testament prophets understood this problem. They had a habit of marking milestone moments with rocks and altars (they called them *ebenezers*) so that later, when it all seemed like a hazy dream, they could go back and touch something tangible and remember what God had done for them.

It is critical that we do the same. Journal. Write a song. Tell a friend. Take a picture. Read the stories of other believers as a way of accessing the collective memory of the Church. Memorize Scripture. Remember.

### Focus on the Who Question

Slowly, I am coming to accept the fact that if God is really God, and I'm really not God, it only makes sense that there are aspects of Him that are beyond me. This awareness allows me to see mysteries that once threatened my faith as actual grounds for belief.

At the same time, there is much that God has chosen to reveal about Himself – through creation, through His

**M**any Christians expect a doubt-free walk with God. When trouble comes, we must contend with not only the questions themselves but also with the stress and shame at having the questions at all

### Reading With Doubt

- ***Disappointment With God*** by Philip Yancey (HarperCollins/Zondervan, 1988)
- ***Reaching for the Invisible God*** by Philip Yancey (HarperCollins/Zondervan, 2000)
- ***The Myth of Certainty*** by Daniel Taylor (InterVarsity, 2006 [1986])
- ***When God Interrupts*** by M. Craig Barnes (InterVarsity, 2006)
- ***God in the Dark*** by Os Guinness (Crossway, 1996)
- ***The Gospel According to Job*** by Mike Mason (Crossway, 2002)
- ***Walking Away From Faith*** by Ruth A. Tucker (InterVarsity, 2006)
- ***Doubting*** by Alister McGrath (InterVarsity, 2007)

Word, through the faith community and, most wonderfully, through Jesus.

We often don't have answers to so many of our questions. Why does God seem to intervene in some situations and not in others? When will there be ultimate justice? How will God bring it about? But we always have the answer to the Who question. If we wonder who God is, if we need to know if God truly is about justice and mercy and a love for us that cannot be exhausted, we only have to look at Jesus to get our answer.

Knowing who Jesus is allows us to trust God's character even when our present emotions or circumstances lead us in other directions.

### Don't Stop the Conversation

Pray. Even when you seem to be talking into the void. Even when you have no words. Pray.

One of my favourite prayers is recorded in the Gospel of Mark. A father brings his very ill son to Jesus for healing. He pours out his heart to the Healer, crying, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

I imagine the father standing there in the middle of the chaos – his epileptic boy twitching on the ground, the voices of others crying out for healing, the crush of hundreds of people jostling for position – and sensing that this is the defining moment of his life. He swallows hard. "I do believe," he says. And then he adds instinctively, "Help me overcome my unbelief!"

The father is too desperate for charades. He comes to Jesus believing just enough to trust that Jesus will help him with his unbelief. And that, it turns out, is enough faith to move the heart of God.

I will not let You go until You bless me.

I do believe; help my unbelief.

These are prayers God blesses – the prayers of honest people who understand that doubt is sometimes normal and that faith is worth fighting for. ■

**P**ray.  
Even when  
you seem  
to be talking  
into the void.  
Even when  
you have  
no words.  
Pray

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*Carolyn Arends is the author of Wrestling With Angels (Harvest House, 2008) and a recording artist whose nine albums (the most recent being Pollyanna's Attic) have earned two Dove awards and three Juno nominations.*

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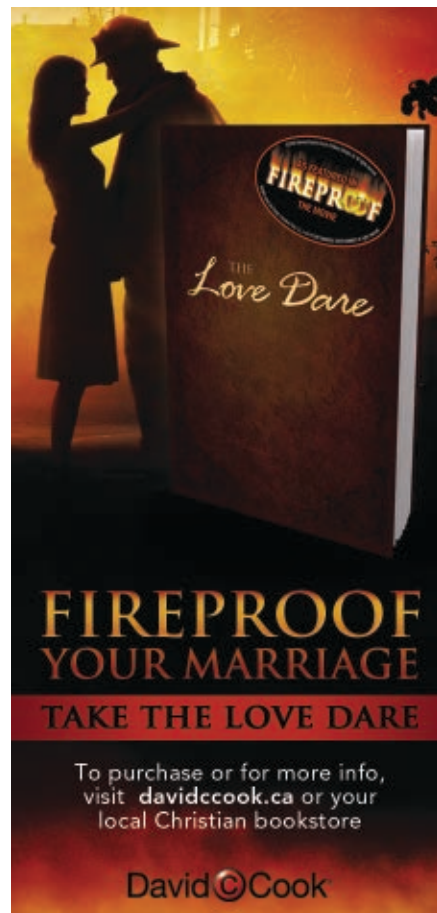
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# Evangelicals Contribute to Rec

**Christians** who have worked in trouble spots around the world – **South Africa, Northern Ireland, Palestine and beyond** – reflect on what it's like to try to **encourage healing** and to build bridges between enemies

■ By Alex Newman

**T**here's not a person alive who hasn't experienced some form of brokenness – from failed marriages to alienated siblings to political chaos. Trying to heal these rifts, especially when long-standing grievances held by sworn enemies get in the way, might seem impossible.

But for Christians, “reconciliation is an obligation within the gospel,” declares Michael Cassidy, founder of African Enterprise ([www.aeinternational.org](http://www.aeinternational.org)). “It’s a ministry that God has uniquely committed to us His people, not to the military, government, academia or any other sector. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul talks about reconciliation – vertically with God and horizontally with each other.”

After the genocide in Rwanda, Cassidy once preached in a Rwandan prison to “people who had killed upwards of 200 to 300.” When asked who wanted to respond to Christ, most said yes. He then invited several of his colleagues to the front – black, white, Chinese, Hutu, Tutsi – and told the crowd, “If you are willing to come to Jesus, you must be serious about coming to the world of relationships.”

It’s this restoring of relationships – and not retribution for past wrongs – that defines reconciliation, says Anne Brandner, a Canadian who directs the operations of Global Peace Initiative ([www.thegpi.com](http://www.thegpi.com)), a foundation that

promotes religious freedom and assists those enduring persecution.

“Judicial processes, unless they have restorative elements, can often amplify divisions by defining individuals as either victims or perpetrators, making it harder for reconciliation to take place,” she says.

The best way forward for rebuilding lives after something like genocide “is to move away from a strict focus on punishment and toward a framework that values community, listening, truth telling and the personhood of everyone involved.”

The resulting openness allows for “expression of pain and anger, and the opportunity for true apology, forgiveness and healing.”

But it’s a slow process and listening to each other is the first step. In the year leading up to South Africa’s historic 1994 elections, Cassidy organized six dialogue weekends, inviting to each one 15 to 20 politicians “ranging from the farthest right to the farthest left – serious political enemies at a time of dreadful political tension.” After sitting them down together for a meal, he asked they do three things: share their autobiographies, share their vision for a new South Africa and share the steps they felt needed to be taken to reach that.

In all, 96 community leaders attended, and the results were startling. “As each person talked about them-

selves, in the eyes of their opponents they suddenly became humanized and understood,” Cassidy recounts. “They began to see each other not as enemies but as people facing a common problem.”

Cassidy still views that event as a miracle despite South Africa’s recent political turmoil. “Yes, there’s inverted racism with a lot of blacks who feel they’re scoring points against whites. But I keep reminding whites we must not throw away that miracle.”

In the Middle East, too, concerted reconciliation efforts are making some inroads. Salim Munayer is director of Musalaha ([www.musalaha.org](http://www.musalaha.org)), a non-profit organization that aims to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians by empowering “community leaders to initiate reconciliation at a grassroots level.”

How that’s achieved is by inviting people from a variety of congregations to the desert for four days of riding camels, driving jeeps and hiking. Faced with challenges of sun, heat, dust, thirst and primitive conditions, the whole group is brought closer together on a level not possible in a hotel or meeting room, Munayer says.

As Munayer explains it, for two different groups living “in such close proximity, co-operation, reconciliation and relationships are essential.” But the political process has failed to bring about the “change of heart” necessary for this, so it has been up to small groups of Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews to lead the way.

**W**hen you attempt to be a bridge between people, you must prepare to get walked on.

– Michael Cassidy





# Reconciliation Around the World



Missionary Laura Ward enjoys playing with children in Rwanda: Africa is not only difficult to understand but also difficult to address.

Though by no means “immune to the conflict” because of their ethnicity, these Christians are committed to reconciliation because of the Cross, Munayer says. The Cross “rejects the dehumanizing and demonizing” at the

heart of breakdown and “forces us to see our own contribution. It also overturns thoughts of revenge because judgment is God’s. Freedom from focusing on hatred is the first step in breaking the cycle of retaliation.”

But the steps getting there are hard and require patience. Meetings start with hesitation and a need for encouragement. Usually Israelis are caught by surprise at the depth of Palestinian grievances, resulting in two reactions:

PHOTO: JULIA SMITH-BRAKE





sometime hopelessness and withdrawal but, in other cases, a willingness to go forward by recognizing their role in the lead-up to the conflict and a desire to search for ways to restore right relationships.

Though Northern Ireland has been out of the media spotlight for many years – and most people never want to go back to the past – the potential for conflict is still there. The

perception that Ireland was a religious struggle is not true, says David Porter, who was active in peace initiatives there in the late 1980s and early 1990. “The conflict has always been more about national identity than religion,” he says. “If you understand history – and the close ties of religion and politics – it’s not hard to see how the real issue of national identity got linked to religion.”

Porter, who is now director of Cov-

entry Cathedral’s Centre for Reconciliation ([www.coventrycathedral.org.uk](http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk)), admits the church in Northern Ireland

**D**uring The Troubles, as the Irish conflict is referred to ... churches were at the heart of every major peace initiative



were at the heart of every major peace initiative and contributed “some of the most innovative dialogue.” Roman Catholic priest Alec Reid, for example, pushed the constitution forward while Presbyterian minister Roy Magee brokered the loyalists’ ceasefire. Magee believed in “direct contact with the bombers and gunmen, believing it would lead to peace,” Porter says.

That faith – particularly Christian –

has some “responsibility for that aspect of history it helped stoke.” But he feels it now has a different, though no less responsible, role to fill: that of speaking in the public square against violence.

During The Troubles, as the Irish conflict is referred to, Porter says the churches

should be at the forefront of reconciliation makes sense to Murray Cornelius, missions director for The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada ([www.paoc.org](http://www.paoc.org)). The problem is sin – “Romans says we exchange the truth for a lie and we are given over to the tendencies of self that will always divide” – so the solution must be salvation.

“Reconciliation apart from the work of Jesus is always going to fail,” Cornelius says, “because reconciliation is primarily the work of God who reconciles all things to himself ... the church brings opportunities to forgive and lament that you don’t find in secular attempts.”

It’s certainly what veteran CBC journalist Brian Stewart saw in 40 years covering conflict zones. Addressing the 2004 graduating class at Knox College, Toronto, he said he was never able to “reach the front lines without finding Christian volunteers already in the thick of it, mobilizing congregations that

## Repairing a Broken Relationship

When hurt **damages a relationship**, a simple “I forgive you” is unlikely to fix everything. Dr. Wanda Malcolm outlines the elements that contribute to **a successful reconciliation** process.

By Wanda Malcolm

**T**he heart of the good news of the gospel is that faith in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection restores us to a right relationship with God. Those who welcome the good news are called to embody that reconciling love and grace to those around them in order that the whole world may be reconciled to Him.

Unfortunately, repairing a relationship damaged by interpersonal hurt usually takes more than simply deciding to forgive and saying the words “I forgive you,” even when both parties want healing.

When we have been hurt by someone we trusted, we have to care enough to work toward a more fully realized forgiveness. This can be represented by the acronym **I CARE: Identify, Cultivate, Accept, Relinquish, Experience.**

Fully realized forgiveness requires that those who have been hurt figure out the core of what they hold against the person who hurt them – that they *identify* and find words to describe what

was hurtful and exactly what needs to be forgiven. How personal this is became clear to me as I worked with a client. She told me: “As hard as it was to forgive my husband for having an affair, it was harder still to forgive him for being impatient about how much time I needed to grieve the loss of trust I had taken for granted before the affair.”

A deeply hurt person will have to *cultivate* compassionate understanding of the offender. Forgiveness also requires that the hurt person *accept* what happened and stop fighting against the unfairness of it.

Paradoxically, achieving greater understanding and acceptance can lead to the realization that safety and trust are impossible in a particular relationship. A man who comes to understand his father’s rage may forgive his father for the abuse he endured as a child but, if the father continues to give in to hurtful rage, the son may have to give up the hope that his father will some day give him the steadfast love and affirmation he longs for.

Understanding and acceptance allow the hurt person to *relinquish* any sense of entitlement to hold a grudge, seek revenge or demand an apology – and instead find the grace to want what is best for the injurer. Often the only way to do this is to *experience* (often more intensely and for much longer than is comfortable) the anger, pain, sadness and possibly shame that comes with being hurt by someone we trusted.



Wanda Malcolm

care and being a faithful witness to truth – the primary light in the darkness and, so often, the only light.”

It was such a common occurrence that Stewart’s veteran cameraman, Mike Sweeny, once “sighed in exasperation: ‘Do you think you could ever get us to a story, somewhere, anywhere where those Christians aren’t there first!’ ”

U.K. writer Matthew Parris, born and raised in what is now Malawi, observes: “Christians, black and white, working in Africa do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write... Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you directly without looking down or away.”

Although an outspoken atheist – lamenting “that salvation is part of the package” – Parris admits that Africa needs God and that removing “Chris-

tian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.”

Cornelius, who also grew up in Africa – Kenya, then Zimbabwe and Zambia – says the Church *had* to provide the social net because “African governments have never been able to.”

Assuming the responsibility of “providing for widows and orphans” not only earned the Church the right to speak but also the expectation it would call governments to the carpet. “The Church in Africa is a very large organization, and the people know that its voice carries weight and is heard.”

But reconciliation work isn’t for the faint of heart. Porter, currently chair of the board of the Evangelical Alliance



Salim Munayer

U.K., remembers “a lot of late night meetings in small rooms in not very comfortable parts of the city. Those who criticized us for reaching out to the paramilitary never realized how hard it was to sit in a room with people you knew had terrorized and killed in your neighbourhood. When Jesus

said love your enemy – and that it’s hard to do – he knew what he was talking about.”

Or as Cassidy puts it, “When you attempt to be a bridge between people, you must prepare to get walked on.”

And the work isn’t over when peace talks are done. Striking at the roots of conflict – deprivation, poverty, lack of housing, high infant mortality rates, fractured communities – is the only long-term solution, says Laura Ward, strategic program officer for The Shar-

Strangely enough, when we have been hurt, the way to pass through to the other side of suffering is to pay attention to and absorb how profoundly wounded we feel. This process can often transform the legitimately distressing negative feelings we feel for the person who hurt us into feelings of compassion and care.

Many descriptions of forgiveness would stop here, but we know from our own experience of salvation that being made right with God depends on our seeking His forgiveness. Similarly, for reconciliation between two people to mirror what happens in the divine transaction, the offender must go through a process that corresponds to and interweaves with the work of the one offering forgiveness.

The wrongdoer carries a burden of responsibility. Putting down that burden involves seven elements represented by the acronym **I CARRY: Identify, Confess, Accept, Regret, Respond, Yield.**

The wrongdoer must *identify* and name what he or she has done wrong and then *confess* that to the injured parties. (If a hurt person confronts the wrongdoer, confession usually consists of the offender acknowledging the wrongdoing.) Confession does not require grovelling or humiliation; it means a wrongdoer *accepts* responsibility for his or her actions, even if the actions were not intended to be hurtful. Accepting the consequences of these actions can be a truly painful task if the wrongdoer has caused profound hurt or irreparable harm. When acceptance of responsibility is sincere, people feel intense *regret*, and it is regret that enables them to *respond* with non-defensive compassion – really

hearing and receiving the other person’s words of anger, pain and sadness without offering self-serving explanations, reasons or excuses for their behaviour.

If these steps were all a repentant offender could do, that person would be left in a desperate place – at the mercy of those who were hurt, totally dependent on their willingness to forgive. Fortunately, a person who has caused great hurt can also *yield* himself or herself to God’s grace. A life given into God’s hands is one that God can redeem and remake.

Rebuilding a relationship often depends on the giving and seeking of fully realized forgiveness. It requires that the offender commit to changing his or her offensive behaviour. It requires patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control on the part of both people involved if it is to bring about the love, joy and peace of complete reconciliation.

Thank God, all of these are potential gifts of the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in each of us when we are made right with God through Jesus Christ. We have access to these gifts because it is God’s great desire that His grace and redeeming love be manifest in us – and then through us so the whole world may be reconciled to Him. ■

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*Dr. Wanda Malcolm is a registered psychologist in Toronto and co-editor of Women’s Reflections on the Complexities of Forgiveness (Brunner-Routledge, 2007). She teaches at Wycliffe College and is involved in an ongoing program of research on forgiveness at York University.*





ing Way, a relief and development department of Canadian Baptist Ministries ([www.thesharingway.org](http://www.thesharingway.org)).

“Africa,” she says, “is not only difficult to understand but also difficult to address. Where there is extreme poverty, hurts that haven’t healed, families that aren’t together and a lack of food, people act in desperation. Yes, you pray against it, but you must also actively aim to fix it.”

Cassidy attributes South Africa’s current troubles less to militant nationalism, and more to unemployment – “around 30 per cent to 40 per cent by my calculations and, in some townships, as high as 90 per cent.”

That’s why it’s not enough to “come to Africa and only preach John 3:16. You have to act as well,” he adds.

In her work developing assistance programs for Rwandan orphans – especially those young children who head households – Ward finds that reconciliation isn’t only about peace but also about restoring people to wholeness, especially after something has destroyed them. “The new heavens and new Earth passage in Isaiah [65:17-25] is not some future event but here and now. That means alleviating the conditions by helping people to gain *sustained* access to food and clean water and to build a community’s ability to care for children.”

Hope lies in the children, she finds. “They want to move forward. They work together repairing homes, play soccer together and encourage each other. Although it can be overwhelming and discouraging to see how much more still needs to be done, Rwanda has some amazing stories of reconciliation.”

Cassidy echoes her sentiments: “The work is exhausting and wearying, and the path ahead is daunting, but the gospel challenges remain. It requires people of goodwill not to give up but to carry on.” ■

*Alex Newman is a freelance writer in Toronto.*

# Canadian Evangelicals and Reconciliation With First Nations

Have we made any progress **on encouraging healing with our aboriginal brothers and sisters?** A brief overview

■ By Ron Csillag

**I**n the raw post-apartheid days of the new South Africa, Nelson Mandela saw the need for a healing, recuperative process for all citizens. To the delight of many and surprise of few, he was quick to acknowledge the need for political reconstruction and the need to empower the indigenous black population – and also the need for reconciliation. The result was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The commission’s chair, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, quickly realized that the term “reconciliation” was vague and risked becoming a cliché. So he carefully fine-tuned his definition of the word and of synonyms such as “restorative justice” (in contrast to retributive justice).

“The central concern,” Tutu wrote in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, “is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be re-integrated into the community that he has injured by his offence.”

It is through that wide and deep definition that non-native Canadian Evangelicals may wish to view their own efforts and successes in the reconciliation work of engaging Canada’s First Nations. Emboldened and empowered by many biblical injunctions to heal

broken relationships, Christians may also look to the distillation preferred by aboriginal leader Ray Aldred, chair of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Aboriginal Ministries Council: “Listen to one another, tell the truth, then come up with some plan of how you are going to fix this.”

Seeking to reconcile today’s First Nations with non-native Christians, whose forebears once proudly oppressed aboriginal people and committed acts of untold brutality against them, has been a slow, sometimes painful process for both sides. The Canadian government began to establish an Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission last June, but the original commissioners resigned in October and new ones had not been selected by press time. Throw in violent protests over never-ending land claims and the failure of the Kelowna Accord, a \$5-billion program to improve First Nations health, education and housing, and the potential is high for mutual disaffection if not outright hostility.

Yet non-native, Evangelicals and First Nations have embraced in recent decades in several highly emotional instances of healing and repair. The first major breakthrough in relations was in Winnipeg in 1994. Instigated by Terry LeBlanc, who has a foot planted in both the First Nations and evangelical



PHOTO: THE CANADIAN PRESS/TOM HANSON

Elijah Harper holds up one of two eagle feathers he held when, as an MLA, he stalled Manitoba's endorsement of the Meech Lake Accord. He opposed this revision to the Constitution because First Nations leaders had not been consulted.

camps, the meeting brought together 36 aboriginal Christian leaders with about a dozen heads of key evangelical organizations for three days of what LeBlanc modestly calls “conversations.”

“It was foundational,” he recalls. “People began to listen to one another. It was the first time [Christian leaders] saw aboriginal peoples as human beings with a story to tell.”

He recalls the reaction, on the third day of the gathering, of leader Brian Stiller, then president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). Stiller, after listening to a Cree man recount his heart-rending experiences at a federally run residential school, “was moved to an overwhelming flow of tears, saying this was the first time he heard the story of a native man, a native Christian, a brother and could now understand

what the issues were because of the personal story.” The sentiment quickly spread to other non-aboriginals, LeBlanc noted.

The following year was pivotal. First Nations leader and former Manitoba MLA Elijah Harper (of Meech Lake “No” fame) convened aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples from across Canada to find a spiritual basis for healing and understanding. The “Sacred Assembly” took place in Hull, Que., in December 1995.

From it sprang the landmark Reconciliation Proclamation. In part, it enunciated a “common spiritual foundation: the belief that the Creator, God, reigns supreme over all things.” And it called on churches and faith communities “to continue the process of healing and reconciliation with aboriginal peoples

by providing the forums and supports needed to heal the wounds created in the past; to become stronger advocates for justice and reconciliation in the current and future public affairs, and to hold our governments accountable for their implementation of just policies; to recommit ourselves to a program of education and action on issues relating to land rights, self-government, economic development and racism.”

Immediately after the Sacred Assembly, the EFC founded the Aboriginal Task Force, including LeBlanc (then working for World Vision Canada) and Bruce Clemenger, now EFC president. The name was changed to the Aboriginal Ministries Council around 2002.

By then momentum was building. In 1996 The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (CMA) and





the First Nations Alliance Churches of Canada, one of the CMA's "multi-cultural ministries," came together in Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask., specifically to explore reconciliation.

"It was pretty awesome," recalls Rev. Larry Wilson, the Cree director of the First Nations Alliance Churches. "We sat in a big circle, maybe 100 people. The first question was 'What do we want as

native leaders?' My response was 'Respect as a leadership and as a people. We want a deeper level of relationship with our denominational leadership.' "

The straightforward answer to a simple question "opened up a lot of hearts. By the end of the day, we all stood in the middle of the floor crying, embracing and praying with one another and for one another. We had

a real relational reconciliation" and it led to a healthier dynamic with the CMA. "The healing of that relationship between the denominational leadership and our leadership as aboriginal people really shot us a thousand years ahead in terms of how we function as organizations."

Ray Aldred also remembers that meeting and the compelling questions asked of the attending non-aboriginals. "The question put to them was 'Has society's attitudes about aboriginal people affected how you have treated aboriginal people?' And they said yes. I think for many people in Canada that's the question they have to ask themselves: Have they adopted whatever attitude [about First Nations people] has been popular?"

Two years later, another watershed. Ottawa expressed "profound regret" not only for the establishment of residential schools but also for all "past actions of the federal government" toward aboriginals. A \$350-million "healing fund" was established to help turn the page.

Pushed to the fore was the issue of residential schools, where about 150,000 aboriginal, Inuit and Métis (mixed-race) children were forced to attend after being removed from their communities and essentially stripped of their native culture, language and religion. The schools were run jointly – Ottawa teaming with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United churches, opening Christians to more black eyes. (All the denominations except the Catholics have apologized for their roles in residential schools and contributed directly to a compensation package. At press time, Pope Benedict announced a meeting with Canadian aboriginal leaders in late April.)

The general mood of contrition culminated in last year's apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to survivors of the residential schools. "We believe that good will come out of the apology

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issued by the Canadian people,” Aldred has noted, “if we continue in the theme of the apology of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing.”

And that to Aldred involves more than mere statements. “If the other people are not repentant, if they don’t show some kind of change, it would be nuts for you to give them your whole heart again. If you were abused by someone and they said, ‘Oh yeah, I’m sorry,’ you’d be crazy to go back into that. When it comes to family relationships, I think if it is a real serious enough thing you don’t just talk; you tell the truth.”

And if one is fighting deeply embedded, institutionalized racism, “you can’t change it with only little things. It’s not as if the system was good and it did only a couple of bad things and now we are OK. You have to repent. You need to restore order.” He returns to his three-step program: Tell the truth. Listen. Come up with a shared plan.

Have churches taken heed? Aldred believes that, on other matters, Evangelicals have often followed instead of led and that “a big part of the problem,” at least for Evangelicals, “is we still kind of have a utilitarian look [toward] people. We don’t see how they’re going to benefit us. We don’t necessarily think it’s worth putting much effort into cultivating that relationship.”

But on this issue, “the Church has tried to reverse that. At least some denominations have tried to move toward reconciliation and restitution. Instead of asking ‘What’s the bare minimum we have to do?’ [churches should ask] ‘What do we need to do? How can we resolve this? How can we come away more than merely co-existing. How can we be friends?’ ”

LeBlanc, a member of the Indigenous Christian Alliance, a loose network of aboriginal Christian leaders, and head of the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, sees progress. “I’m regularly in situations where I hear aboriginal believers

talk about their feelings of welcome and [of] belonging in the wider Church now that they would not have felt before. I hear them talk about ownership, in a very positive way, of their involvement in the wider Church and of their ownership of ministry for their own people as well as others.”

The rewards have been hard-won

and have showcased what commitment to biblical ethics can accomplish. But to Aldred, “There’s something bigger than ethics that is needed. That is the gospel, isn’t it? God sacrificed His own Son to heal the relationship. That’s why I’m involved in reconciliation.” ■

*Ron Csillag is a freelance writer in Toronto.*


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# Inspired by the Persecu

## A *Faith Today* Interview With Glenn Penner

**Glenn Penner is chief executive officer of The Voice of the Martyrs Canada,** a ministry to the persecuted church around the world, and the author of *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (VOM Canada, 2007). He was diagnosed with cancer in 2002 and, recently, his doctors told him he has “months, not years” left. Glenn Penner is 47. He agreed to speak with *Faith Today*’s Karen Stiller about living and about dying.

**KS:** Glenn, how are you approaching what appears to be the final home stretch in your battle with cancer? Where is your head at these days?

**GP:** I believe people are remembered for how they end the journey, not necessarily how they start it. When people have left this ministry [VOM] over the years, I have said to them, “Leave well,” because that’s how you’ll be remembered. I’ve had a few years to think about this question of how I can finish well. It has sometimes actually become a bit of a preoccupation. I have to learn to relax about it and realize that we *are* finishing well. When I started with VOM, we were four people and a tiny budget. We’re not huge now but we’re doing quite a bit better. We have a bigger staff and a number of people doing the job I was doing, and doing it better.

**KS:** You work with a ministry that deals with hurting, suffering people around the world. How has that shaped your journey now?

**GP:** One of the things that has helped me through this has been working with a ministry that deals with suffering and death on a daily basis. It’s a rare privilege. I’ve never struggled with anger, which may sound a bit weird or super-

spiritual, but I haven’t gone through a lot of the disappointment with God that many people do when facing their own mortality. I see it on a daily basis and, as I study the Word of God about suffering and persecution, I see that God has not promised us a break from these things. Suffering and death are normal things for anyone who is going to work for the purpose of God.

**KS:** So you have found a kind of inspiration from the persecuted church?

**GP:** When I was first diagnosed, it was a shock of course. And I remember lying in bed and thinking. My mind went back to some young women I had met a few years earlier in

Ethiopia. I had helped start our work there and worked with women kicked out of their homes because of their faith. They were forced to beg on the streets and live in a hovel. And I asked them, “What does Jesus mean to you?”

They said: “He means everything to us. He gives us everything we need. He loves us. He’s our Father.” I looked around at what they had and I was amazed at their faith.

That night, as I was thinking about these things, I said to the Lord: “If

those people can stay faithful to You, so can I. Help me not to dishonour you through this.” I’ve held on to that. One of the great joys for me is having people around the world who are being persecuted praying for me too. I’ve had the honour of meeting them. It’s the fellowship of suffering.

**KS:** Sometimes, people who are suffering actually have to work to help others come to terms with it. Friends or acquaintances might ask: “How could God let this happen to *you*?” Have you faced that?

**GP:** I haven’t had too many people come with that perspective. They know that in my mind, God doesn’t protect us in many cases from the nastier things of life. He doesn’t promise we’ll live in a rose garden all the time. I think what I’ve had to struggle more with is everyone and their dog wanting me to try this diet or that supplement. And occasionally the person who doesn’t know me very well who thinks he or she has a right to intrude and say things that are out of line – like I only need to accept Jesus as Saviour. Thanks, I never thought of that! Thankfully there hasn’t been a lot of that. And I wouldn’t have had the patience to put up with a lot of it.

**KS:** Have you felt supported by your community?

**GP:** I’ve felt tremendous support. And I

**In my mind,  
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in life**

# ted Church



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

think others have been encouraged that I have tried to exemplify trust. I've never had a sense that God is going to heal me. I let people pray for me if they want to. I've been anointed with oil a number of times and I welcomed that. But deep down in my heart, I never had a sense I would be healed. And I don't consider that a lack of faith. I felt it was the path God was calling me to – that I was to continue to glorify Him by living in an unchanging situation.

**KS:** How is your wife coping?

**GP:** She's tired. Sometimes I feel worse for the caregiver. She ends up having to take care of some mundane things for me. If I want a glass of water, I have to ask her to get me one. That can happen a lot during the day. I do worry about her.

**KS:** Do you think about what heaven will be like?

**GP:** I've certainly thought about heaven a whole lot more than I would have ordinarily. There are times I think I'm not ready to go because I still have things to do. There are unfinished paths. One of my great passions in life is working on a theology of persecution. I wrote a book on that and so badly wanted to rework it. I feel I probably won't have the time or energy. There's a disappointment of things that are unfinished. There are times when I say "Lord, do I have to go now?" I'm not dreading heaven. I look forward to it. Some days I *really* do because it's really hard. I've always been a very purpose-driven person. I'm still struggling with the sense that I know heaven is not static – we're not going to be sitting there doing nothing.

**KS:** Are you thinking you might get bored?

**GP:** If heaven were only sitting around singing praise choruses, it wouldn't be my idea of heaven. I'm not the world's greatest singer.

**KS:** I see that you have kept your sense of humour. How important is that?

**GP:** Yes I have. It goes along in this ministry. You'd be surprised at how much humour there is, both with persecuted Christians and those who work alongside them. I always say I miss the old Soviet Union because they had the best jokes about Communists. If you study suffering Christians through history, you will find there is humour there as well. Maybe that is what Paul means when he talks about joy in suffering.

**KS:** What is the one message you would like to give to the Evangelical church in Canada?

**GP:** The fact of the reality of suffering



Christians around the world. That suffering is normal for Christians. I was a pastor before I joined VOM. I don't understand how people can run away from God in the midst of suffering but they often do. When we need God the most, we often run away from Him. I have been so blessed, so honoured to work with our suffering brothers and sisters. They are so thankful when we come and serve them and show them we care. If the Canadian Church could see how impoverished we are because we've robbed ourselves of part of the Body of Christ. . . .

**KS:** We're not very good at suffering, are we?

**GP:** We see suffering as the worst thing that can happen whereas our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church see disobedience as the worst thing. I couldn't have gone through this time without having had my life enriched by them, by their faithfulness and trusting even when things don't get better. One of our problems is we expect God to protect us.

**KS:** And God's not going to do that?

**GP:** He has greater priorities in our life than keeping us from harm. His priority is to make us into the image of His Son. We serve a suffering God.

**KS:** Glenn, what do you wish you had done more of during your life?

**GP:** I wish I'd spent more time with my kids. I spent a lot of time on the road. But I'm not sure how it could have been done differently. I wish I could have touched base with my kids a little more. I wish I hadn't gotten caught up in things that actually weren't so important. I spent a lot of time on things that, in the grand scheme, probably didn't matter. There are not a lot of regrets. There are some. I've had some failures in my life and when I look back it saddens me. If anything I've learned to love God's grace. It's all there is. And this is grace, when people are able to suffer persecution and remain faithful.



Glenn Penner listens to the testimony of an evangelist in northern Nigeria who has experienced both joy and persecution for winning Muslims to Christ.

**KS:** What gives you comfort and pleasure right now?

**GP:** Pleasure is something I'm struggling with right now. I'm struggling for breath a lot of the time. I'm not comfortable. I love to read when my eyes allow me to, but my eyes get very dry. Occasionally I listen to music. My iPod is my good buddy. There is some music that really does touch me.

**KS:** You have seen a lot of the world. You have written on your blog about being thankful for a Sudanese sunset. Are you glad you lived the life you lived?

**GP:** I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had to visit the places I've seen. It saddens me that I probably won't get back there. My favourite country on the planet is Sri Lanka. I love these places.

**KS:** It's been an extraordinary life.

**GP:** It hasn't been boring. I think my wife would have enjoyed a slightly more boring life sometimes. I'm feeling a little bit torn between here and there. Wanting to stay here but know-

ing that things will be better there.

**KS:** Are you afraid?

**GP:** The biggest fear I have – and that's not a bad thing to say – is not being able to breathe. That is troubling to me. Things will get worse here. I don't really know the path or how it's going to show itself. It takes a very different attitude to know that you've turned a corner you're probably not going to come back from. I'm getting to the point where I can't breathe. But we shall face that.

**KS:** What is the one message you want to leave your children?

**GP:** Live a life that matters. Live such a life that at the end of it someone will glorify God that you've been alive. That is something that has come to me so many times – that somebody somewhere is thanking God I'm alive and I've been willing to be used by Him. I think that is how we glorify God so people will say "Thank God this person was."

**KS:** It has been my privilege to talk to you. Thank you. ■

# Teen Helps Build Prayer Life

By Craig Macartney



How do we move beyond talking about prayer to actually doing it regularly?

It happened several years ago at summer camp during a counsellor Bible study. About 10 of us were sitting around a fire talking about a crisis in Africa for a good 20 minutes when one of the leaders started cussing. He was really worked up about us being “all talk, no action.” He dropped the “F-bomb” several times and at the end said: “You know what? Tomorrow when we come to the Bible study not one of you will have done *anything* about Africa. Most of you won’t remember any of the details. But every single one of you will remember that I cussed you all out.”

Our prayer life is another area that can easily be all talk, no action. We read how-to books about prayer and attend seminars. We feel good about having read the book or gone to the seminar. But does our prayer life change much afterward? We might know more about prayer but, unless this leads us to actually talking more to the Father, we have, in fact, done nothing.

Don’t get me wrong. It’s good to read a book teaching us how to pray. It’s inspirational. But such books usually describe the other person’s experience praying and moving forward in his relationship with God – not ours. Unless we take this knowledge and talk to God, it’s actually giving us an illusion of having acted to resolve our lack of prayer. In the end, the inspiration might get us praying for a week but often it has little lasting impact.

How can we begin to build an exciting prayer life that doesn’t quickly run down? Perhaps more vision is the key.

## Later ... I’m Talking to the Lord

If I call several teenage friends of mine on the phone, their parents may say “Sorry but he [or she] is praying right now.” These are Mennonite, Pentecostal and Missionary Alliance teens. Other friends will tell their parents: “Just take a message. I’m not coming to the phone right now. I’m praying.”

What would make youth turn down a phone call from a friend? For these friends, it’s their understanding and vision for prayer.

If given a choice to speak to Jesus or with the highest ranking world leader today or the most popular celebrity, my friends wouldn’t hesitate. They’d pick Jesus. The more we know God, the more we will want to talk to Him. In a way it’s a barometer

Jesus talked about praying in a closet for a good reason: there aren’t many things going on in a closet – not a TV in sight

of our relationship with God. If we are pursuing intimacy with God, we’ll have a prayer life that’s on fire – really exciting! We’ll be watching the clock at work or school, waiting to get home for some focused prayer time with the Lord.

So how do you start to get to know God through prayer?

## Race to God in Prayer

There are many types of prayer and ways to start. But let’s look at the importance of beginning slowly, building in variety, using Scripture and seeking to have fun in God’s presence.

*Begin slowly.* Start by putting aside 10 minutes a day for prayer, then add five or 10 minutes each week until you reach the goal you choose. In your initial enthusiasm, don’t decide to pray for an hour every day for the rest of your life. That’s

not realistic. Set realistic goals that stretch you, but goals that leave you craving more of God’s presence. It takes discipline, and that takes practice.

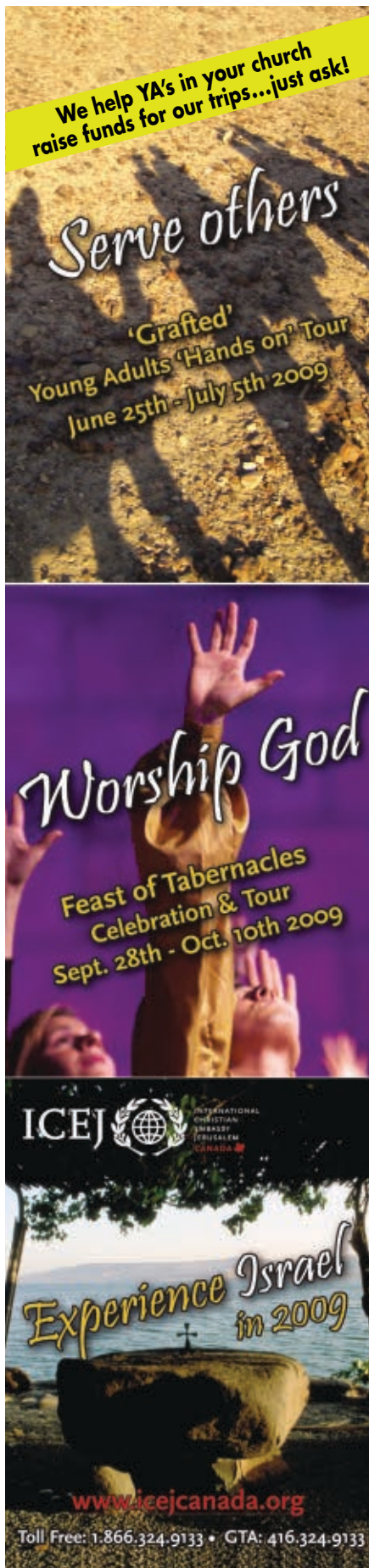
*Variety makes prayer time more interesting.* It’s the same with all our relationships. If our prayer involves only a “shopping list” (“Please help Ryan find a job. Mom needs healing. I need a mentor.”), then prayer quickly becomes dull. When you’re asking God’s help for others, don’t merely name the problem. Ask God for input about the issue or ask Him to point out the most important concern.

*Pray the psalms.* This is an easy way to pray! Begin with Psalm 23, 91 or 100. Start by reading the first verse aloud. If it stirs any thought in you, pray that to God. For example, Psalm 23 starts “The Lord is my shepherd.” You might pray: “Lord, lead me today and keep me in your will. Make me willing to follow you, like a sheep.” Pray for a short period or for a long time – whatever God puts on your heart. Then move on to the next verse.

If you aren’t stirred by anything in a verse, that’s OK. Move on to the next. It helps if you read slowly so the words can sink in. You can pray for hours this way – praying the Scripture back to the Lord. And it’s fun!

In my ideal day I start by worshipping and praising God for who He is, then reading the Bible, followed by listening for His voice in complete silence – for a few minutes or up to half an hour. Then I go through my Christian shopping list.





Try this and you may find you'll love talking to God and completely opening up to Him.

### How to Keep Focused

If you find your mind drifting off, here are some tips to keep focused.

*Pray out loud*, even if only very quietly.

*Don't get too comfortable* for obvious reasons. Some people pace back and forth slowly as they pray. In Jewish tradition, those who pray often rock back and forth from their waist with their hands out at their sides. I like this image a lot and often pray swaying gently and holding my hands upward at waist level as if receiving a gift. It helps me focus on the Lord and keeps me awake even if I'm tired.

*Find a private, quiet place* to pray. Avoid a busy kitchen or a place where others are walking around. Jesus talked about praying in a closet for good reason: there aren't many things going on in a closet – not a TV in sight. If you have a phone in the room, unplug it. Get rid of as many distractions as possible. Put away any interesting magazines – their pictures will sidetrack you fast.

### But It's Just Too Hard!

OK, so you're still having problems getting down to pray? Ask a close friend to hold you accountable and call you each day to ask: "Have you spent time with God today? How long? Did you crowd Him into grocery shopping or did you spend real time with Him?"

Or here's something else I've done. A friend of mine had a key to our church and several of us met there at 6:30 a.m. almost every day to pray until 8 o'clock when we had to leave for school. There were three to 12 of us teens and young adults holding each other accountable.

Here's how we organized it. When we arrived, someone would put on a CD of soft worship music – but not necessarily too mellow. As individuals we would

seek God's presence alone. We weren't gathered together but scattered all over the sanctuary and church building for personal prayer time.

It's like going to the gym: if you have a friend to go with, it's easy. But if he stops going because of vacation or whatever, you generally stop too because it's a lot more difficult to maintain the discipline.

### Getting Ready for "Amen"

Christian prayer has the power to rearrange what will happen today or govern circumstances that will happen tomorrow. We need to start believing this not only with our heads but also with our hearts.

On the night of September 10, 2001, a group of Christians living in New York City were meeting to pray. One worked in the World Trade Center. They started praying and felt God wanted them to do a prayer walk. He brought them to the Twin Towers – the last night the buildings were standing, but they didn't know it. The group prayed there for a long time, then went home thinking nothing more of it. Next morning, the one who worked there felt God was telling her not to go in that day. But she had an important meeting so started arguing with the Lord. However, she knew His voice and decided to stay home. She's alive today because she recognized God's voice and obeyed it. We too could be so much more alive if we learned to recognize God's voice more, and obeyed it.

Remember the campfire and my counsellor friends sitting around it? Three years have passed since we shared all those words about Africa. I still remember *word for word* my friend cussing us out for talking too much and doing little. It's time we stopped talking so much with each other and started talking more to God.

Let God's love restore our souls. ☒

*Craig Macartney is 19 and lives in Ottawa. He worships at Dominion Outreach Centre.*

# Religious Freedom Challenged

By James Beverley

Religious freedom is mainstream news again this spring, thanks to a Human Rights Council resolution at the United Nations



How many things can you think of that can unite more than 200 organizations from 46 nations? Well, a resolution from the United Nations Human Rights Council did just that recently – although the unity was the result of anger and deep concern. And, frankly, when the Human Rights Council passed “Combating Defamation of Religion” in Geneva on March 27, freedom took a major hit not only in terms of freedom of expression but also in terms of freedom of religion.

How can a resolution fighting defamation of religion actually hurt freedom of religion? Why are religious groups, including the Muslim Canadian Congress, upset? The answer has to do with dangers implicit in the resolution and with its checkered history and context. The whole story is proof that appearance is not always reality, even at – and sometimes especially at – the United Nations.

The 1,600-word resolution warns that “defamation of religions is a serious affront to human dignity” and expresses alarm “at the inaction of some States to combat this burgeoning trend.” The resolution says there is “need to effectively combat defamation of all religions and incitement to religious hatred in general and against Islam and Muslims in particular.” There should be “deep concern” that “Islam is frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations and terrorism.” The resolution asks for more reporting on “all manifestations of defamation of religions, and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia.”

The only religion specifically mentioned is Islam. This is not surprising since the resolution is the brainchild of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The OIC has pushed similar resolutions at the Human Rights Council over the past few years. The source explains a lot of the controversy. The OIC comprises 57 Islamic states and is the second largest inter-governmental organization in the world next to the UN. The OIC track record on freedom is depressing. The resolution is a shining example of hypocrisy and denial of the obvious.

Take the resolution’s concern that some people link Islam with human rights violations and terrorism. Many Muslim leaders say that true Islam has nothing to do with either. We

are still left with the fact that Pakistan has offered sanctuary for years to both the Taliban and members of al-Qaida. This has been documented in detail in Ahmed Rashid’s recent book *Descent into Chaos* (Viking, 2008). The OIC should turn its gaze on Pakistan if it really wants to destroy perceptions about “Islam” and terrorism.

Likewise, most of the OIC countries fail on matters of human rights. Freedom House is an organization that rates every country of the world on a scale of 1-7. In its 2008 report, only six of the 57 OIC countries are rated as “free,” while 26 are “partly free” and the remaining 25 are “not free.” This last category includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan. You can find more complete details at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org). Or

ask your search engine for reports on child brides, female genital circumcision and persecution of non-Muslims in various OIC states.

None of this is meant to suggest that western countries or other faith traditions, including Christian, are innocent of abusing freedom. Think of the recent use of torture by the United States against Muslim militants. Historically, think of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the burning of witches. Think of modern Hindu persecution of Christian missionaries. Think of current Buddhist persecution of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Freedom is necessary so that bad faith (and bad politics) receives proper critique. If this is defamation, so be it.

Thankfully, the resolution is not legally binding in international law. As well, it is encouraging to see the incredible range in the 200 or so groups protesting the resolution’s dangers. This includes, among others, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (U.K.), Dalit Humanist group (India), the Atheist Foundation of Australia, World Jewish Congress, Nigerian Humanist Movement, Syria Reform Party, Muslims Against Sharia, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

The arguments will continue at the Human Rights Council.

Nonetheless, we can sleep better tonight because groups like these are standing up for freedom. ■

*James A. Beverley is professor of Christian thought and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.*

None of this is meant to suggest that western countries or other faith traditions, including Christian, are innocent of abusing freedom



# What's So Christian About Reconciliation?

By David Guretzki



In recent years Canadians have heard much in the media and elsewhere about the need for reconciliation between Aboriginal Peoples and non-aboriginals, anglophones and francophones, and between families, spouses and communities. Given the variety of ideas people have about reconciliation, what aspects of reconciliation fit with a specifically Christian approach?

Christians have always emphasized the need for reconciliation between God and humans. But we have not always been clear about how this biblical concept of “vertical reconciliation” relates to “horizontal reconciliation” between humans. The overlap may seem obvious, but let’s think carefully, starting with the undisputed champion of biblical texts on reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:15-21. We need to note at least three things from this text as we seek a biblical understanding of reconciliation.

First, Paul insists that reconciliation is *a completed and ongoing work of God*. Paul speaks of it as having been already accomplished (“reconciled” in verse 18) and yet of God continuing to accomplish it right up to the present (“reconciling” in verse 19). Not only that, but God’s reconciliatory work is directed to both “us” humans and “the world.”

Second, reconciliation is accomplished *in and through Jesus Christ*. Reconciliation to God is possible “*through Christ*” (verse 18), the one mediator between God and humanity. It’s also possible only “*in Christ*” (verse 19), in the Lord of Creation and Head of His Body, the Church. Consequently, Christians must always point to Jesus. We dare not try to take His place as “mediators” but must fulfil God’s work as His “ambassadors” (verse 20).

Third, reconciliation is *to God the Father*. Thus the Bible teaches it is only as “the world” is brought back into proper relationship to God the Father that reconciliation is ultimately fulfilled. So while our “ministry of reconciliation” (verse 18) necessarily includes working toward mending human relationships, such relationships can only be fully healed by God the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual ministry of helping human enemies become friends (which is the core meaning of “reconciliation” and “peacemaking”) is important, but it is not the final end. Rather, it is a means to the *ultimate* end of God befriending humans through Christ’s death for sin on our behalf (verses 14-15, 21).

This framework can remind us that any talk about human reconciliation, while always having the potential to be used by God for His purposes, can never quite capture the fullness of biblical reconciliation. For the Bible speaks of God’s coming kingdom of peace not only as the absence of all human conflict but also as new and transformed heavens and Earth. There, redeemed humans will dwell together in communion with God by the merits of the Lamb (Revelation 13:8)!

In this light we thank God wherever humans reconcile but we also acknowledge that human reconciliation is a *secondary* “sign” of God’s *primary* work of reconciling all things to Himself (Colossians 1:20). In faith, we acknowledge that God’s kingdom is coming whenever we see reconciliation take place, however imperfectly accomplished.

The relationship of vertical and horizontal kinds of reconciliation can be visually illustrated by paying attention to the cross-shaped nature of the gospel. We can picture Jesus Christ at the very centre of the cross, where vertical and horizontal beams intersect. For it is through Jesus that God the Father reaches vertically down to redeem the world, yet it is also through Christ that God enables us to reach out horizontally as “co-workers” (2 Corinthians 6:1) in fulfilling God’s purposes in the world. Thus we need to keep our eyes fixed on Him who endured the cross, both for the sake of God’s glory and for our salvation (see Hebrews 12:1-2).

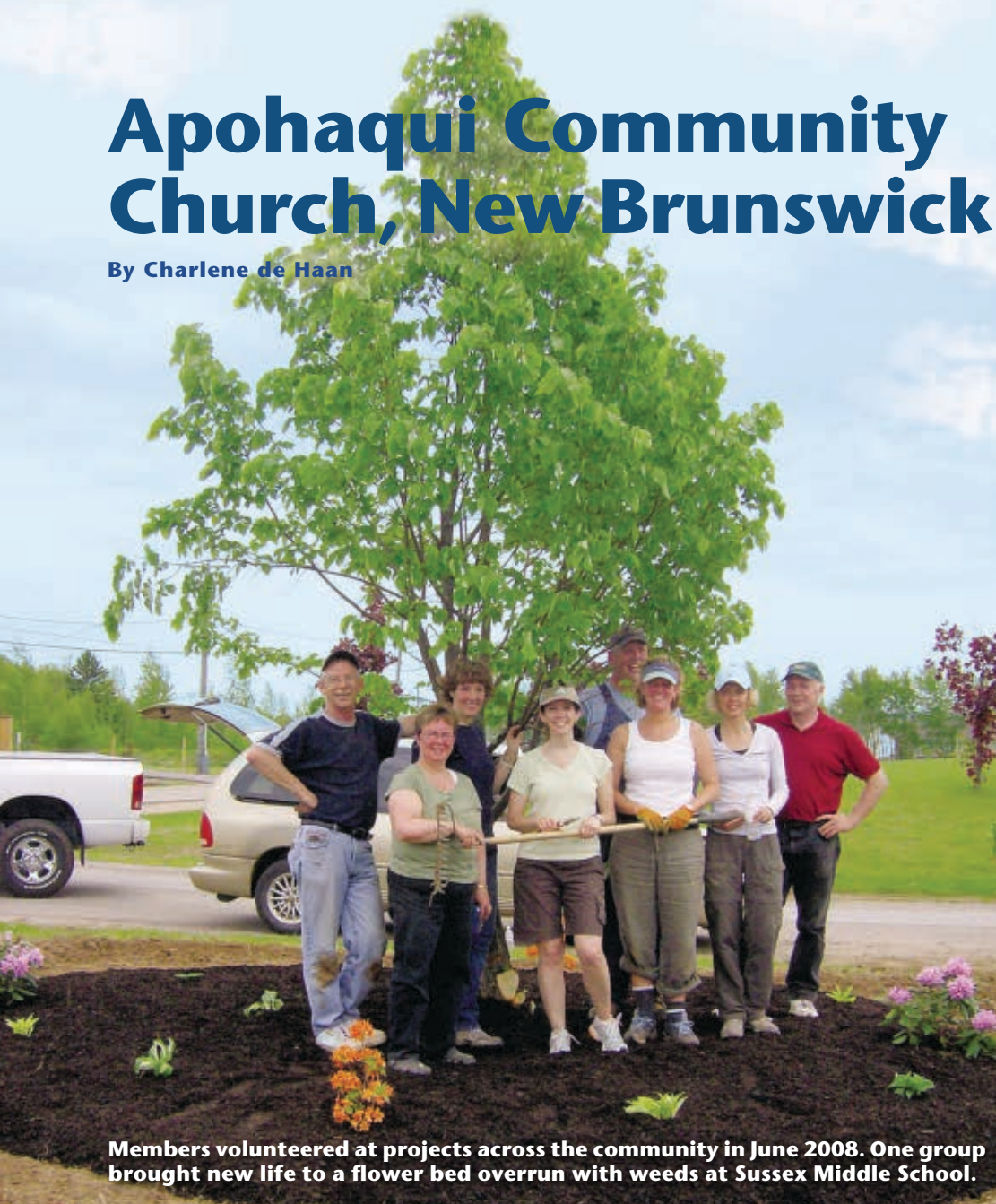
A visual image of the cross can also remind us that the vertical beam is the one upon which the horizontal beam is hung. Consequently, as much as Christians should be the first to applaud efforts to reconcile alienated human parties, we must remember that human efforts at reconciliation are ultimately for naught if we fail to implore people, as Paul demands, to be reconciled to God (verse 20).

In other words, reconciliation among neighbours is an integral part of a “cross-shaped” gospel; but there is no cross and no true reconciliation if the vertical beam of reconciliation is somehow ignored or forgotten. The horizontal beam cannot hang in mid-air, unsupported by the vertical! ■

*David Guretzki is associate professor of theology at Briercrest College & Seminary, Carleton Place, Ont. Representatives of 11 seminaries affiliated with The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada take turns writing this column. Please send your questions to: editor@faithtoday.ca or Faith Today, Ask a Theologian, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, ON L3R 0Y4.*

# Apohaqui Community Church, New Brunswick

By Charlene de Haan



**Members volunteered at projects across the community in June 2008. One group brought new life to a flower bed overrun with weeds at Sussex Middle School.**

**A**pohaqui Community Church (ACC) was dying in 1996. It had been the local Baptist church since 1873 in a rural community about 60 kilometres east of Saint John, N.B. Apohaqui – the town’s name means “where two rivers meet” – has a population of 250. It’s also the hometown of a former premier of New Brunswick, Frank McKenna.

But in 1996, a remaining core of six church members invited pastor Kevin Vincent to pack up his family and return to the neighbourhood where he grew up and to a small 13-metre by 20 metre church with no running water.

When Vincent agreed, the congregation had an opportunity for a fresh start, and it made the most of it by inviting in other people from the surrounding community. Their ranks swelled to a couple dozen by the time they started meeting in an elementary school. Today they draw 550 wor-

shippers each weekend, meeting in two locations.

## *The Grover Mission*

ACC explains its mission using the simple concepts of “near and far” – concepts that, Vincent points out, even young children already know from listening to Grover the Muppet on children’s television. “ACC exists to help people who are *far* from God come *near* to God and become passionate Christ-followers.”

This simple strategy, patterned after the first-century church, encompasses five priorities: core habits of the faith, radical generosity, authentic friendships, vital communities and extreme living.

Members are encouraged to ask, “Am I living with extreme imagination of how I can impact my circle of influence for the kingdom of God?”

## *The Sticky Factor*

An obvious example of impact is through community service – and service actually grows the church as well. “When you serve, you stick,” declares Vincent. “You feel connected, and you make a lasting impact with

your life. Getting people serving has a far greater ‘sticky factor.’ People come to serve more easily than to join a small group.”

The majority of weekly Life Groups “get out of their living rooms,” Vincent reports, as they respond to the question “What would the kingdom of God look like if it were truly manifest in our community?”

Would the kingdom look something like this? Imagine a caller from the Red Cross phoning to ask “Are you the church that does extreme makeovers for local community groups?” In Apohaqui the Red Cross needed a new welcome area and office makeover, with doors and windows replaced. A contractor in the congregation examined the need and estimated a volunteer work crew might do the work over three or four days. Hearing this, the Red Cross agreed to pay for supplies if the church could provide the labour.





Dave McIntyre fixing up a picnic table at a special care home.

But when the contractor shared the need with the local hardware store, all the supplies were donated!

This community serving arm of ACC has been institutionalized as Life Builders Inc., a non-profit organization that exists to watch, listen and step up to help people in the community whenever and wherever possible – whether a neighbour, a stranger or a local community group.

### *The Church in the Community*

In 1996 ACC hired a summer student to conduct a community survey. A clipboard scared people away so the student learned to chat informally, inserting questions like “Do you go to church? Why not? What do you need from a church? If a church were able to meet those needs, would you come?” People’s top priorities were a family-friendly church with programs for children. Out of that beginning emerged a warm, friendly environment that values children. The growing edge of the church is young families.

ACC started a project of watching for needs in the neighbourhood in May 2008, including asking local schools and the town council about their needs. As projects were devised, congregants signed up for specific ones. By the culminating Sunday in June, enthusiasm had grown high. Everyone gathered at the church with their equipment, from trucks to shovels to worship in the community. Then 250 volunteers dispersed for about six hours of service, getting their hands dirty and building relationships with neighbours.

Some served by delivering sandwiches and coffee to 60 site crews. Others painted school benches, installed a clothesline, raked “pea rocks” off a play area and tore down an old barn. While three parishioners stained a deck for a senior resident, a next-door neighbour came to admire their work – and so the team returned the following weekend to stain that neighbour’s deck!

Celebration Sunday the following week was incredible.

**“Are you the church that does extreme makeovers?”**

People shared stories – not about work accomplished but about relationships developed. People began to imagine: “What if ACC could have such an impact that, whenever people within 30 minutes had a need, they would think of asking the church first – as the Red Cross director had?”

### *Global Collaboration*

Mission, whether near or far, “is all one,” states Vincent. “God impassions different people in unique ways.” ACC’s “afar” ministry evolved gradually. It took a year to identify core global values and another year to check various mission agencies to find a match. Food for the Hungry Canada aligns with ACC’s values for long-term relationships and sustainability. Four members took 10 days to explore high-risk communities in Guatemala, selecting one remote village for partnership. The church now participates in child sponsorships, sends teams for hands-on projects while building relationships and consistently prays for the people in this village. ACC now aims “to see every young person grow through an experience in the Third World (preferably working on a project with their parents) by the time they graduate.”

### *Challenges Past and Present*

The “original six” who refused to give up the dying congregation are the real heroes of this story! They imagined God was up to something and got on board. They worked hard to listen to their community. And they imagined a house of faith that would embrace their community. Now ACC is known as “the church for kids” – 200 of them! (Another 200 adults also gather regularly in small groups.) ACC dedicated a children’s centre in 2004.

In 2008 the congregation also learned what it means to “do church” in multiple locations with a single focus: it spilled over onto a second site at Hampton, about 25 minutes away. Together, the two sites draw about 550 congregants from a 30-minute radius.

ACC’s goal is “to be a church *in community* (around faith and fellowship) as well as *in the community* (multi-site).” Rather than become a “come-to” church, ACC assigned a site pastor, Tony Reicker, in September 2008 to invite neighbours around Hampton to join a core group of 45 commissioned from ACC. Four months later, 100 neighbours were participating at Hampton. The question ACC is now asking, “Lord, are there other communities we can be influencing by commissioning another contingent from the ACC home base?” ■

*Charlene de Haan is a freelance writer in Toronto. She also coordinates the EFC’s Educational Services. Apohaqui Community Church is an affiliate of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Read all the profiles in this ongoing series at [www.faithtoday.ca](http://www.faithtoday.ca).*

# From Renewal to Mission

By Gary Best



The head of the Vineyard Churches Canada reflects on changing denominational identity and the challenges all Evangelicals face

In denominational terms, the Vineyard family of churches is a relative newcomer. We have been in existence for just under 25 years, born out of the Jesus People revival of the 1970s. Like adolescents in any family, we've had a wonderful opportunity to explore and experiment. Without the restraint of a long and established set of traditions, we've been able to venture outside the box for both good and ill. We have been privileged to see God use our journey to bring refreshing renewal to many within the larger Church in Canada; we've also experienced the pain and sense of regret in witnessing the damage some of our well-intentioned adventures brought to that same group.

Our history, of course, is not particularly unique. Many other denominations in Canada have begun as renewal movements with similar charismatic beginnings. Understandably, we have had to face what all these others encountered long before us: that revival and renewal (like all "re" words) describe an action of returning to a place rather than the place itself. We have had to learn what every married couple understands – that the key to marital love is not living continually in a honeymoon but rather bringing the essence of that passion into the ongoing context and challenge of life.

It is not that our identity or sense of purpose failed to recognize the call of the Great Commission. In fact, our core message has always simply been a reminder to the evangelical movement to which we belong that this commission is an empowered one and that it must include all Jesus did, including His works of power. The renewing and (in many cases) life-changing experiences that occurred in our church meetings and conferences were always seen as secondary and as an empowering for service. Nevertheless, it is clear that over time our identity was formed more as a renewal organization and less as a community of cross-cultural missionaries to our own nation. The good (our experience of God) actually began to become the enemy of the best (taking this experience to others who do not know Jesus). Over the past decade we have come to the conviction that this must change and it must change with us.

To actually put into practice what we theoretically teach has not been easy or quick. Quite frankly, it is much easier to hold a power evangelism conference than it is to do power evangelism. It seems noble to talk of ministry to those who are poor; it challenges all our insecurities to develop community

with them. It seems much harder to be "successful" in the task of mission than in the business of renewal.

Recently we conducted an anonymous online survey of all our adults across the country to see where we are in this transition. Some things were very encouraging. Fifty per cent of our people have come within the past five years (10 per cent in this past year alone). We are increasingly getting younger (a strong majority of our people are under 40) and that is being reflected in our leadership demographics. Contrary to a disturbing trend in the North American Church, we are not only holding on to our 15- to 29-year-olds but we are gathering others as well. For 20 per cent of our members, the Vineyard is their first-ever church home (not a percentage to be proud of but certainly far beyond where we were).

**We've been able to venture outside the box**

Our people are engaged with their neighbourhoods and surrounding culture, having numbers of significant friendships with those who don't have a relationship with Jesus. We're not very good at connecting Jesus' grand story with the life stories of people yet, but at least we are incarnationally present and we care that the stories connect. Almost three-quarters of our members report they are more outward focused than two years ago.

Yet this transition has been costly: many have found the journey too challenging and frustrating to continue with us. Church growth through evangelism is a considerably slower process than growth through renewal and it demands entirely new skills and gifts. In many ways it feels as if we are starting over again.

Of course, the Vineyard is not the only family of churches going through this transition. Most denominations are trying to rise to the challenge of fully living out God's invitation within the emerging post-Christian culture. The Church does not occupy the central place in society we once enjoyed but the Church has always been most effective from the margins – particularly when it has been unified. And I don't believe there has ever been a time when denominations have been as united as they are today. This gives me great hope! ■

*Gary Best of St. Stephen, N.B., is national team leader of Vineyard Churches Canada, which has 63 congregations in Canada. This column continues a series by affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. For a list, see [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/affiliates](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/affiliates).*





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# Preparing Students For Life and Ministry

## ACTS Seminars

### ACTS Seminars Launches Marriage and Family Therapy Program

ACTS Seminars has received official approval from the Ministry of Education for a new Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy (MA MFT) program to commence in the fall of 2009.

The program developer, Ian Verseveldt, PhD., has been shaping the program over the past several years. Emphasizing the importance of this new program, Verseveldt states, "Our society is made up of families in many different forms, and Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) training is uniquely specialized to work with relationships in their unique context. Once the mental health community understands what MFTs can do, they often specifically ask for MFTs."

ACTS is a collaborative consortium of

five seminaries. It is the Graduate School of Theological Studies of Trinity Western University. ACTS Seminars offers eight master's programs in a variety of disciplines, including theology, counselling and linguistics, as well as a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Trinity Western University, in Langley, B.C. is an independent Christian liberal arts and sciences university enrolling approximately 4,000 students. TWU offers undergraduate degrees in 40 major areas of study. TWU holds Canada Research Chairs in biblical studies; biology; and interpretation, religion and culture.

Website: [www.twu.ca](http://www.twu.ca)

### Canadian Mennonite University CMU Launches Graduate Program in Christian Ministry

WINNIPEG, Man. – A new graduate-level program that will enable people to explore

or strengthen their capacity for various types of church-related ministry will begin at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) this fall.

Called the Masters of Arts in Christian Ministry, the program is designed to "give students both the intellectual and theological framework and the practical competencies they need to become involved in the ministry of the gospel," said Karl Koop, who directs the biblical and theological studies graduate studies program at CMU.

"The goal of the program is to offer training for people already involved in ministry, as well as for those who want to test their call to ministry," he added, noting that "it will give them a profoundly biblical and theological literacy, so they can draw wisely on Scripture and on Christian tradition as the basis for Christian life, thought and ministry."

The new program aims to create a centre for Anabaptist and evangelical graduate education in Winnipeg.

The Christian ministry degree will be offered in cooperation with Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and Steinbach Bible College.

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offered by CMU; the first, the Masters of Arts in Theological Studies, began a year ago. Visit [www.cmu.ca](http://www.cmu.ca).

### Capernwray Harbour Bible Centre A Unique Learning Environment

Situated on Thetis Island on BC's beautiful west coast, Capernwray Harbour Bible Centre offers a one-year, practical, in-depth Bible training program.

Knowing Jesus Christ as our risen and indwelling Saviour, life and Lord is the common goal. Students of all ages, denominational backgrounds and nationalities who are serious in wanting to know Christ are welcomed.

The Bible school curriculum covers a majority of the Old and New Testament books in classroom studies. Unique learning tools such as discussion seminars, personal study projects and journal summaries are incorporated to help students work through the deeper significance of God's revelation of Christ as life in His written Word.

The student body, of approximately 135, joins with the Capernwray Harbour Staff Team to create a community intent on knowing and serving Christ and fellowshiping together

within that context.

Many outreach opportunities, both local and international, are available to students throughout the year.

Capernwray Harbour trains men and women relationally for "full-time Christian service regardless of occupation."

To learn more or to apply online, call 250-246-9440 or visit [www.capernwray.ca](http://www.capernwray.ca).

### Carey Theological College New MDiv Program

Carey Theological College is now offering a sharp and focused 72-credit-hour Master of Divinity program (considerably shorter than the 90-credit-hour program that many seminaries currently offer). This adds up to 24 courses, which pastors and laypeople who choose to study part time should be able to finish in about four years.

A majority of the course work is available online, allowing students to continue to grow roots in their primary community (where they live, work and worship) as they engage in life-long learning that deepens their ministry. Students will also have plenty of access to professors and colleagues in

face-to-face course formats. Additionally, from their home base they will be able to engage in dialogue with instructors, using voice technologies and computer conferencing.

Carey recognizes that the days are gone when seminary students move to an unfamiliar city near an established school and accumulate debt – all before entering ministry. The graduate education that Carey offers to pastoral leaders is formatted to fit this changing context.

Carey is currently taking applications for the new MDiv degree program, as well as its classic Doctor of Ministry degree program.

For more information visit [www.careycentre.com](http://www.careycentre.com) or call 604-224-4308.

### Christian Studies International Teaching Opportunities

Christian Studies International (CSI) provides opportunities for Christian academics to teach overseas in public universities and colleges. CSI is the Canadian affiliate of the International Institute for Christian Studies (IICS), based in Overland Park, Kansas. Together, these two organizations have placed dozens of Christian faculty members at post-secondary institutions in developing and former communist coun-

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tries, where they are able to provide students with an education that is rooted in a Christian worldview. Currently, openings exist in many countries, and in a variety of disciplines.

CSI professors make a tremendous difference in the lives of hundreds of students overseas. Professors teaching with CSI must raise some of their own support for travel and partial salary. Often, the host university provides some salary, housing and other amenities. CSI will assist professors in raising the necessary funds from churches, friends and supporters. Donations for this purpose are channelled through CSI, which provides tax-deduction receipts.

People with the appropriate academic qualifications who are interested in making use of this opportunity to bring the good news of the gospel in places where this may seldom be heard should consult the CSI website at [www.christianstudiesinternational.ca](http://www.christianstudiesinternational.ca) or contact CSI at [csidesk@telus.net](mailto:csidesk@telus.net).

### Columbia Bible College Learning to Live Well

Are you looking for adventure? Do you want to grow in your faith, prepare for a career and meet life-long friends? Columbia Bible College is an accredited college in beautiful Abbotsford, B.C., dedicated to preparing people for a life of discipleship, service and ministry. The classroom sizes are small, and the faculty and staff are personable and dedicated to the students.

Hands-on learning, semesters abroad, internships and missions trips are all part of the education at Columbia. Practical learning meets academic learning in our seven majors. Columbia offers four-year Bachelor of Arts degrees, two-year diplomas and one-year certificates. Check out opportunities in biblical studies, caregiving and counselling, early childhood education, intercultural studies, outdoor leadership, worship arts and youth work. Or come for one year to grow in discipleship and academics, and experience the adventures in the outdoors, missions, ministry and classroom through our Quest adventure discipleship program.

Come visit our campus, check out our web site at [www.columbiabc.edu](http://www.columbiabc.edu), or call us at 800-283-0881. Columbia is preparing people for a life of discipleship, service and ministry.

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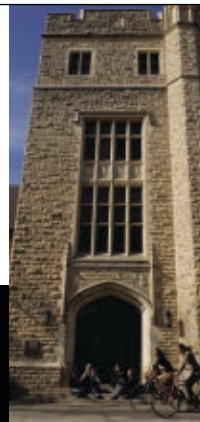
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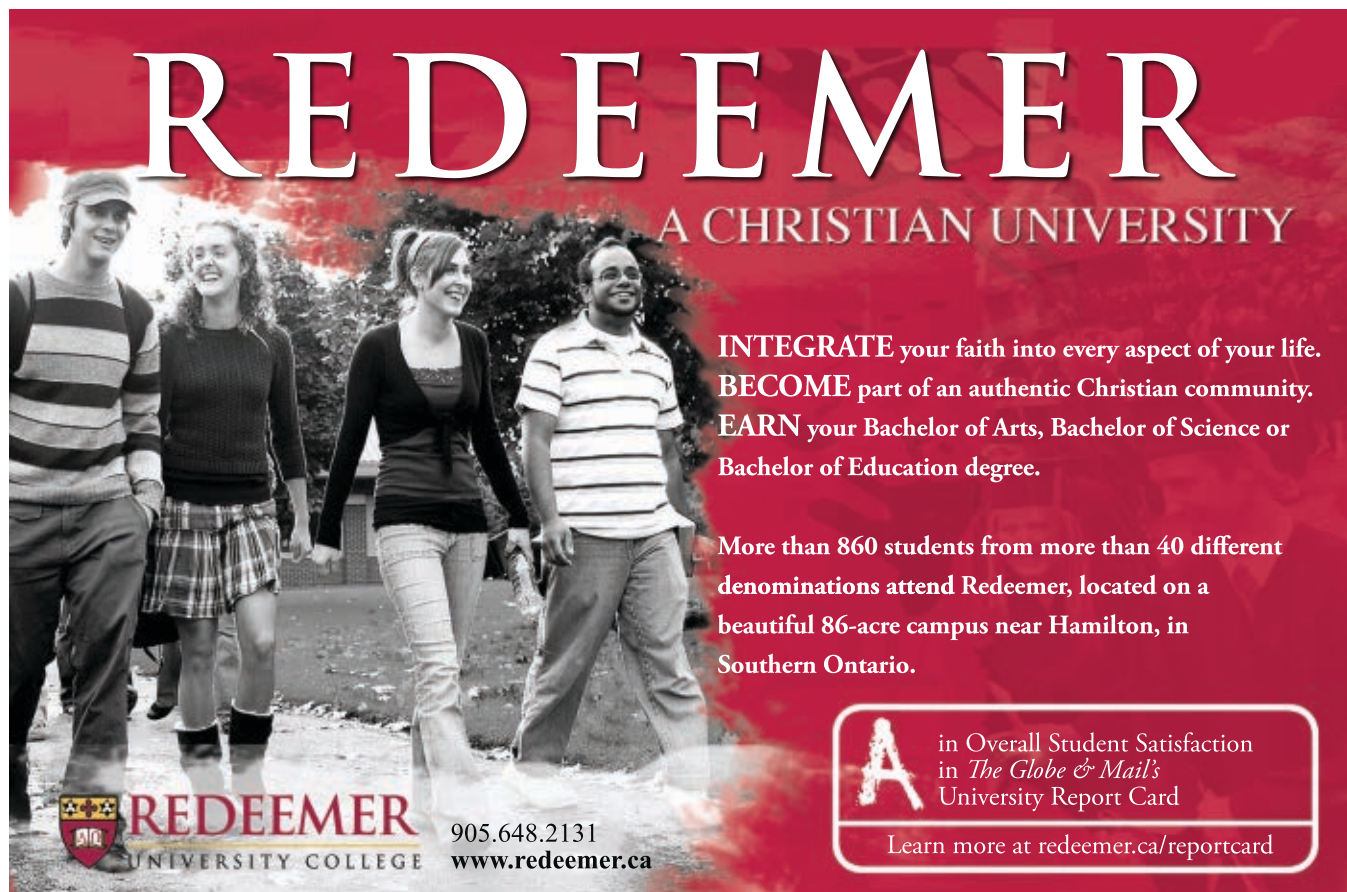
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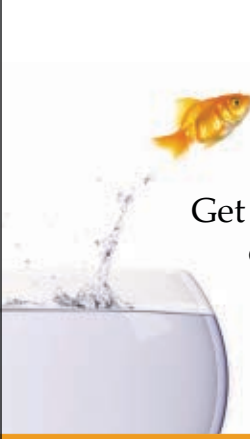
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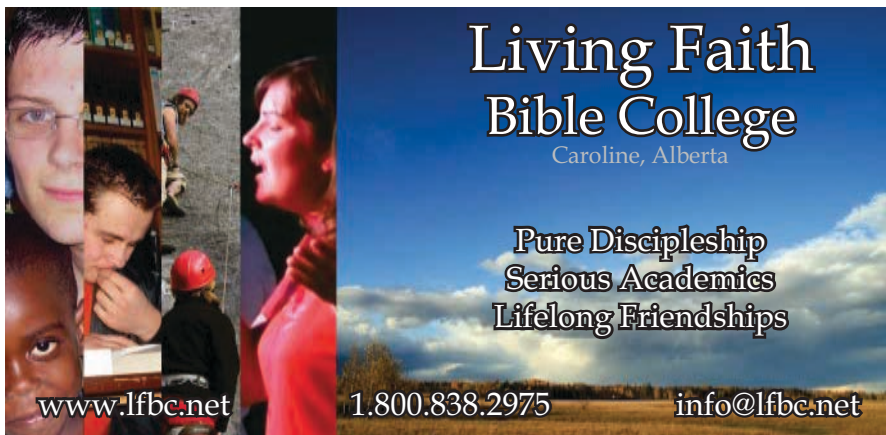
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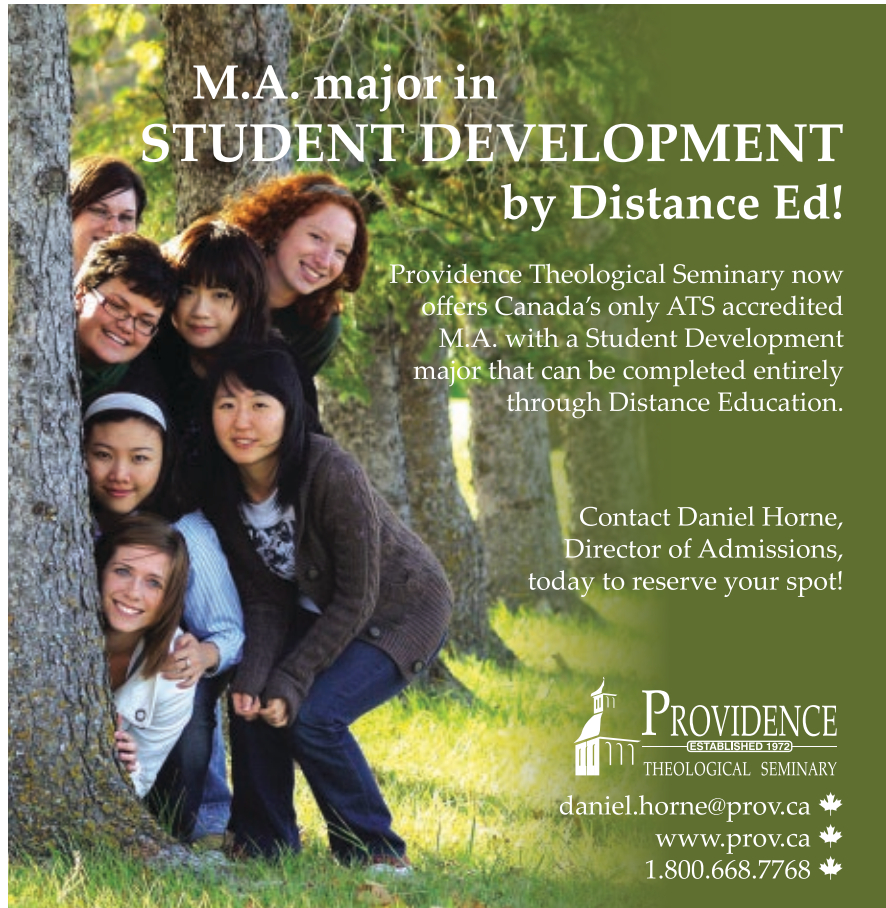
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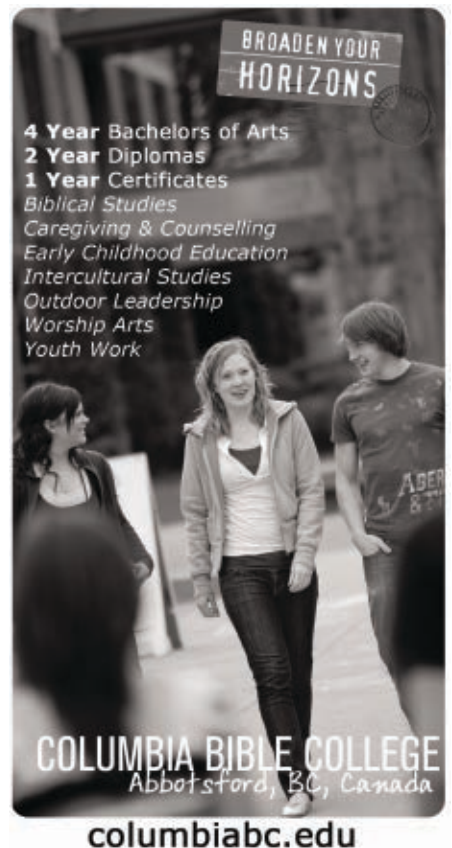
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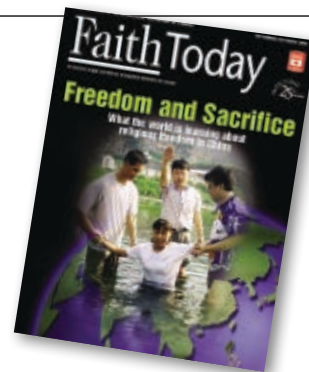
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*Continued on page 52*

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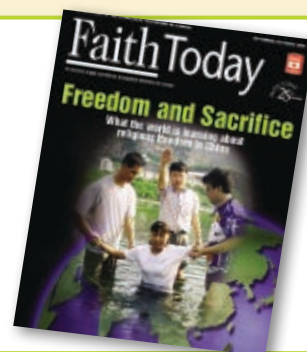
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# Our Own Worst Media Enemies

By John G. Stackhouse Jr.



Christians should not complain about bad news coverage if our church leaders aren't willing to make themselves available to local media

Religious people in Canada complain about how the mass media treat religion. It doesn't matter if you're Sikh or Buddhist, Muslim or Christian – we're all unhappy about stories that stereotype our traditions and focus on the wildest and least representative members of our communities.

Evangelicals in particular often complain – and we have good reason to do so, according to Wilfrid Laurier University scholar David Haskell. In his new book *Through a Lens Darkly: How the News Media Perceive and Portray Evangelicals* (Clements, 2009), Haskell shows that, when the values of Evangelicals clash with the values reporters believe are “mainstream Canadian,” journalistic integrity is often sacrificed to make sure the “moral of the story” comes out “right.”

I've had enough experience with Canadian journalists to nod my head sympathetically. It is often very difficult to get Canadian journalists even to understand, let alone sympathize with, an evangelical point of view on controversial matters.

I will leave Haskell to make his case, however, since he makes it very well. Today I want to offer a complementary point: we Evangelicals, we Christians, we religious people are often our own worst media enemies.

Here is a lightly edited version of an email I received from an oft-honoured Canadian religion reporter on the Tuesday before Easter:

*A couple of evangelical pastors I wanted to speak to have not come through by my deadline, and I am down to the wire.*

*Would you like to respond to a few questions about what Christians, and particularly Evangelicals, are doing to engage, retain and bring in new members in this day and age?*

*I know some evangelical churches are doing really well but, in general, what are your thoughts on how evangelicals in Canada are engaging the wider “secular” culture, bringing in new people, making their viewpoints attractive to non-Christians – that kind of thing?*

*Even a few paragraphs from you would be helpful. Or,*

*if you prefer, we could talk briefly on the phone tonight or early tomorrow. This large feature has to be completely finished by noon tomorrow.*

*Sorry to burden you at this last minute. Thanks.*

**Journalists are glad for us to suggest ideas but they mainly come to us when they think they have a story already**

I helped with the story, which was published in due course. But I followed up with the reporter later and asked more about the problems trying to contact those pastors in big evangelical churches. Here's the reply:

*Sometimes I wonder if the problem is the receptionists – or maybe church policies. I didn't get any sense they were really helping me to contact the senior pastors. Everyone was in “meetings” that couldn't be interrupted. So I'm left to leave voice messages that may or may not get picked up.*

*Seemed like avoidance of the secular media was going on. And you know the consequences of that – even when I emphasized it was pretty well a “good news story.”*

Well, we do know the consequences of that. We complain about it all the time. But while Haskell's evidence shows that some of the problem is with the media, some of the problem also stares back from the mirror.

Yes, it was Holy Week and pastors were busy. Guess what: the *other* time of year when reporters want to talk with pastors is Advent when pastors are busy.

Journalists rarely come to us when *we* think we have a story – although most of them are glad for us to suggest ideas. They come to us when *they* think they have a story already. And Christmas and Easter are still occasions in Canada for Christian stories to be told.

I don't understand why pastors who pride themselves on being able to preach well to seekers can't speak well to journalists. I particularly don't understand why churches anxious to connect with their communities at Christmas and Easter won't make it a high priority to connect with the mass media of those communities.

So get ready.

And, please, answer the phone. ■

*John Stackhouse teaches on theology and culture at Regent College, Vancouver. His latest book is a second edition of Can God Be Trusted? Faith and the Challenge of Evil (InterVarsity, 2009).*

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