

Faith Today



THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP OF CANADA
To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010
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Canada's 30,000 Adoptable Children

How We Can Help Them Find Home



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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010



Publications Agreement # 40069336

- The "Fatigued by Facebook" Interview, p. 32
- A Cradle in Our Hearts: Five Steps to a Simpler (and Holier) Christmas, p.36

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Faith Today

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November/December 2010

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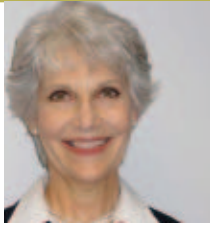
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Eye-Openers

Articles in this issue on adoption, Facebook and Christmas will get you looking at things in a new way.

It's an eye-opener for me that 30,000 children are still without parents in Canada. As our cover story describes, that's enough to fill a very large sports stadium! We rarely hear about them and when we do, we often react with prejudices that hold us back from responding to the need.

Writers Bruce and Tracy Clemenger challenge us as Evangelicals to embrace a new vision – what could be done if we dispelled the adoption myths and found a way to make a difference through our churches and our own families? What would happen if we created a new paradigm and each church found a way to make a difference to each of these 30,000? What would change if we changed our own way of thinking?

The Clemengers are adoptive parents themselves, Bruce being our publisher and the president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and married to Tracy, mom and policy analyst. They have discovered that how we live out our faith in the community and in the home can bring a full measure of blessing.

We haven't done a survey recently, but I imagine most of our *Faith Today* readers have email and many are on Facebook and Twitter. These tools have changed the ways we communicate and, perhaps, think. In "The Fatigued by Facebook Interview" associate editor Karen Stiller interviews Jennie McLaurin, a physician, writer

and associate professor of bio-ethics at Regent College in Vancouver. McLaurin ended up on Facebook when she wanted to connect and view photos of her adult children off at school. It didn't take long for her to see and use its logistical benefits. She also discovered, like many others, how addictive these communications platforms can be. She shares her thoughts about keeping it under control.

Preparing for Christmas can often become a busy and overwhelming experience. Perhaps it's time to evaluate your own Christmas traditions. In "A Cradle in Our Hearts" writer Stephanie Douglas shares five steps to a simpler Christmas that will provide spiritual room for God's presence. It isn't about eliminating gift giving, she says, but there are ways to get our priorities and our hearts straight. It's also important that children be a part of that experience.

Children can help us experience the wonder of Christmas. It's so easy for them to embrace miracles: to delight in the majesty of wise men searching for the newborn King of all kings and to tremble at the threat of those who seek His harm. In all the crowds and busy shopping trips, let's look around with their eyes and feel with their joy and wonder at what God has done! **FT**

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

Faith Today

www.faithtoday.ca
Vol. 28 No. 6

Publisher: The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Bruce J. Clemenger, president
Managing Editor: Gail Reid
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Production: Robert Robotham Graphics
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Senior Writers: Jeff Dewsbury, Drew Dyck, Debra Fieguth, Doris Fleck, Alex Newman, Patricia Paddey, Karen Stiller, Stephanie Tombari, Ben Volman
Printer: Dolco Printing, Ottawa. Printed in Canada
Founding Editor: Brian C. Stiller
Founded: 1983
Member: Access Copyright, The Canadian Church Press, Christian Periodical Index (acl.org), Magazines Canada
Proud sponsor of: www.christianity.ca

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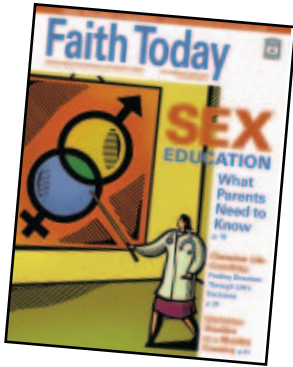
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International Standard Serial No. 0832-1191

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Criticizing Christians

Re: *Christ and Culture in Canada* (Sept/Oct 2010)

There are only two kinds of criticism: one destructive, the other constructive.

Destructive criticism is laying impossible burdens on people which they are unable to bear: asking for gifts they do not possess, raising expectations impossible to reach and depreciating the best efforts of a weaker brother. Too much destructive criticism hinders the building up of Christ's Kingdom and the more it can be eliminated from our communications, the better.

Constructive criticism is always asking the question: How can I do this work better? Ask-

ing and re-asking and asking again, always striving to be our best. We need more – not less – constructive criticism. We need more self-criticism and a welcoming attitude to the criticism of those around us. Someone has said: "The Church is not a mutual admiration society, but a school for self-criticism."

Thank you for this constructive and enlightening article.

DAVID HAMMOND
Burlington, Ont.

August Questions

Re: *Letters to the Editor* (Sept/Oct 2010)

These letters seem ignorant of the 5th century writings of St. Augustine. In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* Augustine pointed out that the evening and the morning in Genesis 1 verses 5, 8 and 13 were before the sun was created. Augustine concluded – one and a half millennia ago – that we have no idea what kind of day was meant. That the days in Genesis 1 are not 24-hour days is not a modern idea.

HERB SPENCER
Waterloo, Ont.

Big Bang Continues

Re: *Where We Came From* (Jul/Aug 2010)

It is disappointing that Alex Newman did not interview more young-earth creationists for this article. There are a disproportionate number of old-earth "creationists" cited – many of whose arguments are mutually exclusive. An interview with someone at Creation Ministries International in Kitchener, Ont., or the Institute for Creation Research in Dallas, Tex. (most have PhDs) would have provided a more



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balanced perspective. Providing hyperlinks to such groups would have enabled readers to explore this position on their own. Here are three: www.answersingenesis.org, www.icr.org and <http://creation.com>.

CRAIG ROWE
Brampton, Ont.

Years ago I heard Duane Gish interviewed. He said that even the *Wall Street Journal* once admitted that creation scientists win more of their debates than they lose. Even if you don't agree with them, they deserve an equal voice in a magazine that is supposed to fairly represent evangelical Christians today. I am sure they would gladly contest Ross Hastings on every sweeping statement he makes in your article.

I spent four years in an undergraduate university science program. There was a lot of psychological bullying, and we were continually told what we were supposed to believe: "Intelligent people don't question evolution" and "It is considered a fact everywhere except the province of Alberta" (where at the time Ernest Manning was premier). More recently my daughter told me her classes in evolution convinced her it wasn't true.

In my opinion, many Western Christians don't really be-

lieve in the biblical worldview. As the great missionary Isobel Kuhn writes, many in the West are "intellectually drugged."

A number of years ago Bishop J. C. Ryle of Liverpool wrote, "Give me the plenary, verbal theory of biblical inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than doubt. I accept the difficulties and humbly wait their solution. But while I wait, I am standing on the rock." This plenary inspiration must include the Genesis record.

PETER SYMONS
Flesherton, Ont.

Thank you for publishing this refreshing article. It is important to bring to light the spectrum of beliefs held by evangelical Christians regarding our origins. The article was fair and well balanced. This is a controversial topic for many, but I believe it is very important to inform Christians that acceptance of an older Earth or of evolution need not shake the foundations of our faith in God and in His Word. This is, in my opinion, one of the best ways to disarm the "new atheists" such as Richard Dawkins who attack our faith, often by perpetuating the false dichotomy that science and religion cannot be reconciled.

JAIMIE ATKINS
Moose Jaw, Sask.

Letters to the editor

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Appointed: Jane Twohey of Port Perry, Ont., as director of the Military Christian Fellowship of Canada, a group supporting Canadian Forces people and their families. Previously she worked at The Word Guild, an organization for the Christian writing community, while developing a personal creative project to honour military men and women in Afghanistan (Team Red Take a Stand Inc.). The MCF is seeking church partners to commit to intercessory prayer and/or to “adopt” a military chaplain, base or wing (www.mcf-canada.ca).

Appointed: Sharon Ganesh as executive director of MissionFest Toronto. She succeeds Jude Hodgson, who led the annual spring expo since 2003. Ganesh has been managing director for the past four years.

Appointed: Chris Gort as president of the Institute for Christian Studies, a Toronto graduate school in the humanities and social sciences. Gort is a board member who has served the past two years as chair. He succeeds Robert Sweetman,

acting president for the past two years, who is recovering from health concerns. The ICS is also establishing a new Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics in Sept. 2011, to be directed by Lambert Zuidervaart.

Appointed: Lawson Murray as president of Scripture Union Canada, an evangelistic ministry connecting Canadians of all ages with Jesus Christ (since 1879) through Bible reading guides and the children’s work of SU Sportz. Murray recently served as regional director for Scripture Gift Mission in the Americas. He has also church planted with Vision Ministries Canada and done research into Bible engagement in Canada.

Relocated: The on-site college programs of Master’s College and Seminary, a school affiliated with four districts of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, to its former campus in Peterborough, Ont., after seven years in Toronto. Master’s Seminary will remain in Toronto, where it co-operates with Tyndale University College and Seminary.

“Where We Came From” would more aptly be titled “Evolution Apologetics.” Most of the people quoted take a position that God kicked off the process of Creation with the big bang, and evolution did the rest. Despite their claims to the contrary, God does not enter into theistic evolutionists’ theories of Creation.

There are only two theories of Creation. One requires a God who created all things, whereas the other is Satan’s attempt to explain the Creation without God. People who claim to be believers, yet teach evolution, are trying to straddle a picket fence. It cannot be done.

ED ANDREWS
Sherwood Park, Alta.

If we cannot accept His revealed method of Creation, why should we accept His revealed method of atonement? Such inconsistency deservedly arouses the contempt of atheists.

JOANNE BEANGE
Thunder Bay, Ont.

Anyone can claim to be both an Evangelical and a theistic evolutionist. But unless they give a credible explanation for how the genealogy of Jesus, recorded in Matthew and Luke, can harmonize with the concept of slow evolution of life into current *Homo sapiens*, over billions of years, they are not consistent in their claims.

Also, Paul tells us that “death came into the world by sin.” So how do we account for billions of years of life and death before Adam’s sin? It could be argued that when Paul refers to “death,” he uses it in its spiritual context.

Newman’s article did not mention it, but many Christians believe the best way to harmonize faith and science is the view known as “the appearance of age,” which suggests that if God created Adam immediately in an adult form, He could also have created the sun, moon and stars with the characteristics of those which

have since formed slowly.

Lest the secularist scoff at such claims, I would only remind them of what is a fundamental axiom of faith: “Behold I am the Lord. Is there anything too hard for me?”

JOHN PLATANITIS
Markham, Ont.

Gretzky and Dobson

Re: God Uses Little Leaguers (Jul/Aug 2010)

The subject of the article does not require the large picture of Wayne Gretzky in the posture of giving a sermon from a pulpit. Posting a picture just because he is a popular figure, a multimillionaire, is a clear example of snobbishness, disregard for more socially useful labour and condoning a waste of resources [on professional sports]. That is not living up to Christian values.

[Elsewhere in this issue] John Stackhouse criticizes James Dobson for pronouncing his views on “complicat-

ed pieces of American legislation” when his credentials are as a “child psychologist.” But his credentials are far more than that. Over the last 30 years he has made an in-depth study of contemporary family and social issues, founded “Focus on Family” [and much more]. Dobson analyzes every issue on biblical grounds and explains the good or bad of it.

S. R. (RAM) RAO
Montreal, Que.

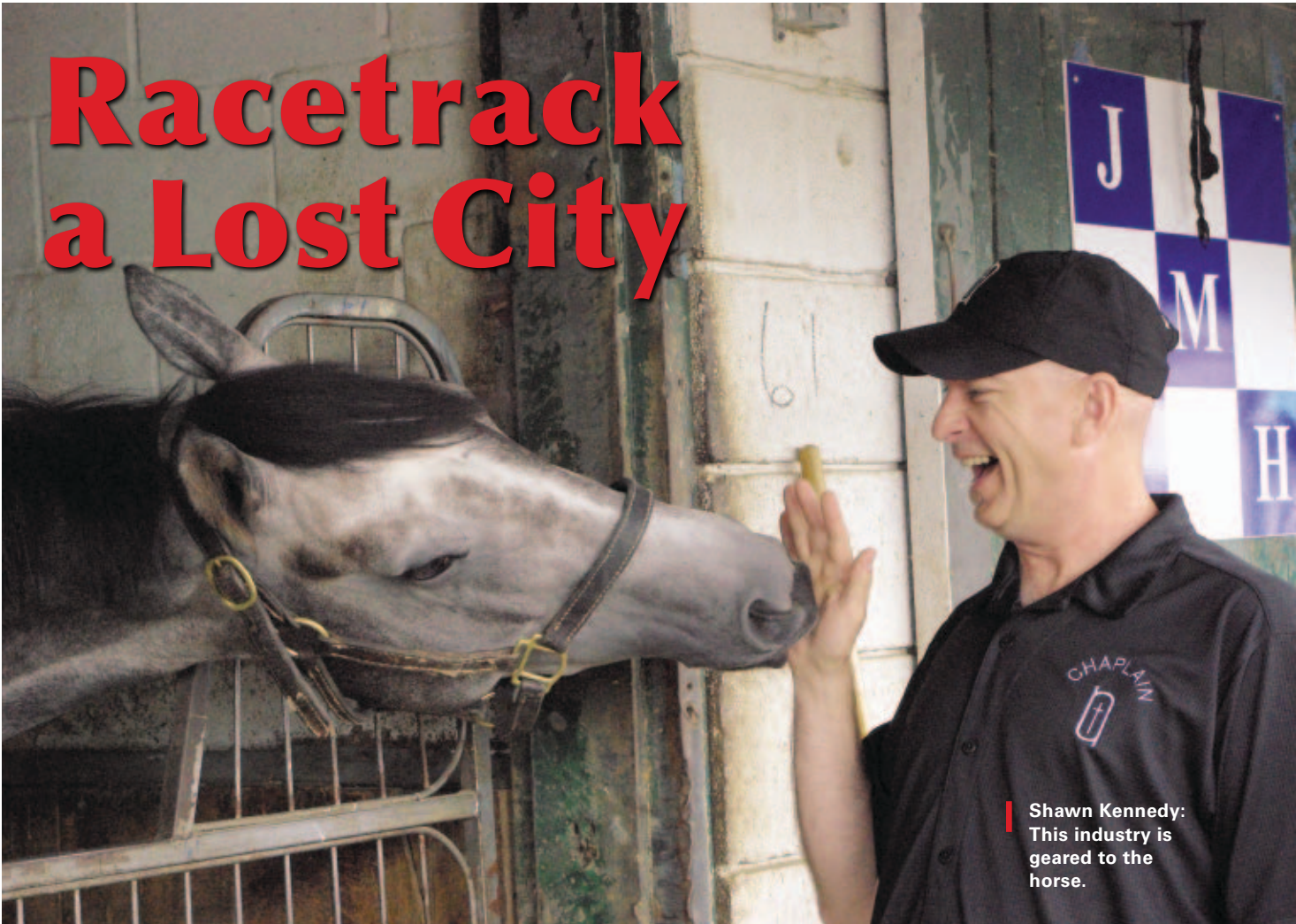
John Stackhouse is out of line with his degrading and belittling comments about James Dobson, Pat Robertson and Franklin Graham.

Should not any responsible citizen have an understanding of their country’s legislation? Surely someone like Dr. Dobson, who founded an organization that helps families deal with all kinds of issues, can have an understanding of even complicated legislation?

CHARLES RUNOLFSON
Ottawa, Ont.

Racetrack a Lost City

PHOTO: ROBERT WHITE/QUAIL COMMUNICATIONS



Shawn Kennedy:
This industry is geared to the horse.

Chaplain Shawn Kennedy describes the Woodbine racetrack, located in northwest Toronto, as a “lost city.” The country’s premier racetrack stables 2,500 horses and employs 1,800 people – in some

ways treating the horses better.

“This industry is geared to the horse,” says Kennedy. “The horse comes first. The horse always has the right of way.”

A former trainer and amateur jockey who grew up in the industry, Kennedy understands the system that leads to the

track’s biggest problem: loneliness.

“It isn’t a glamorous environment. Walking through the barns there’s the sweet smell of success, but it ain’t what you’d expect,” says Kennedy.

He first became a volunteer chaplain at Winnipeg’s Assiniboia Downs only a

Prof Aims at Science-Faith Connection

Last year marked the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth and the 150th of his key book on evolution, *The Origin of Species*. Many people today are still responding to the legacy of Darwin’s challenge to the relationship between science and religion. Among them is Greg Rutherford of Kelowna, B.C., founder of Creation Foundation Ministries.

Rutherford became a Christian in 1973 while studying physics and chemistry at the University of Alberta. He de-

veloped trust in the validity of the Bible but could not reconcile its accounts of Creation and the Genesis flood with his scientific understanding. For 20 years he felt that these beliefs were at odds with each other. During that time, as an instructor of mathematics and physics at Okanagan College, Rutherford interacted regularly with the implications of Darwin’s theories such as natural selection.

Rutherford segregated his conflicting world views until he attended a seminar on biblical Creation’s implications on sci-

year after becoming a Christian (his full-time day job was youth pastor). He has been working at Woodbine since the Race Track Chaplaincy of Canada hired him in 2004 (rtccanada.com).

Kennedy oversees the ministry's chapel and counselling services, computer and language courses, resource library and clothing depot from his office in a converted garage affectionately called The Jake (the Jake Howard Centre after a former Woodbine board chair).

Recently he's been connecting with men's groups from churches around Woodbine – hoping to link Woodbine employees with churches – and developing a Hispanic ministry to reach immigrant workers.

But he's also busy with hospital work, palliative care and funerals.

"Before there was a chaplain it was basically rent-a-pastor," says Kennedy. Now he's able to give God a human face by saying, "I know this person, I've talked and walked with this person."

Kennedy finds himself in ER trauma rooms where, when asked to pray for injured jockeys, he sees staff part "like the Red Sea. Hospitals are grateful for that kind of presence," as are patients, "especially where there isn't an answer, where there's anxiety, where there's fear," says Kennedy.

"A big part of this ministry is just trying to do normal human things for people" and to let them know God cares. **FT**

—ROBERT WHITE



Greg Rutherford

After years of research Rutherford eventually formed Creation Foundation Ministries to help spread his science-based understanding of Creation (creationfoundationministries.org). He wants to assist people who feel caught in a "battle between two ideologies: bib-

ence. He unexpectedly found the evidence presented intellectually satisfying. For the first time he saw a sensible way to unify his scientific learning and his Christian faith. His career and his Christianity began to fuse and illuminate each other.

lical Creation and evolutionary naturalism."

Through a type of "scientific apologetics," the ministry trains Christians to cultivate both reasonable faith and scientific knowledge. Rutherford is also committed to removing non-believers' obstacles to understanding biblical Creation.

The Creation debate is critical to Rutherford because it signifies two competing world views.

"Each belief system will affect how you think, feel and act. One can lead to atheism and the other to a belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God," he explains. **FT**

—EMILY KEERY

Gospel Coalition Fosters Passion for the Word

In 2005 John Mahaffey, senior pastor of West Highland Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ont., was invited along with 40 other pastors to discuss a perceived theological drift of evangelicalism. The event was initiated by American author Tim Keller and D.A. Carson, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois.

It resulted in the formation of the Gospel Coalition, a group born out of concern for the "cultural crisis of truth" in our postmodern context (thegospelcoalition.org).

Mahaffey is one of three Canadian pastors who now belong to the 50-member council of the U.S.-based organization. Council members interact regularly about theological issues.

The group says they are seeking to foster a "new evangelicalism" that adheres to the centrality of the Bible without neglecting evangelism, passionate worship, social justice and cultural engagement.

The Gospel Coalition encourages expositional preaching and Bible-centred evangelism, counselling, discipling and small groups, and provides pastors with resources through regional and national conferences as well as sermons, articles, interviews, courses, book reviews and blogs.

According to Mahaffey, there is significant interest in the group's integrated gospel-centred emphasis. Six thousand people from 65 countries participate in the Gospel Coalition's online community. A regional conference in Hamilton, Ont., in April drew 350 people, including pastors and Bible college professors from 33 denominations. Mahaffey says, "It has done my soul good to have a strong emphasis on what the gospel is and how it can transform lives. I appreciate the Word-centredness of the Gospel Coalition." **FT**



John Mahaffey

—SANDRA REIMER



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The simple believe **anything**, but the prudent **give thought** to their steps. **—Proverbs 14:15**

Relationships That Work

The Bible has a lot to say about how to improve and foster relationships that are fulfilling and developed according to what God would want for us. That's what several thousand female ministry leaders gathered to consider on October 22 and 23 at the Relationships That Work Conference at The Peoples Church in Toronto. The event featured speakers Jill Briscoe, Judy Briscoe Golz and Hilary Price. (The church's senior pastor, Charles Price, is her husband.)

"If you chose to be a Ruth, you commit yourself to another person," Golz said. "She even committed herself to taking God as her God. If you are both Christians, you have that in common and it can form the basis for your commitment to that person."

She went on to say that you have to be determined in your commitment, an issue at the root of many problematic relationships in our society, which tends to celebrate physical attraction-based love (*eros*) ahead of the kind of love in which we give our all (*agape*).

Mary Fantilli attended the conference as a sort of retreat, and she was not disappointed. "It's very motivating. It fills your heart. This kind of thing gives you spiritual strength," she says. She also learned more about analyzing relationships.

Laura Ferron, an elder who ministers to women and youth, believes the conference helped her regain her passion for ministry. "Sometimes we spend so much time feeding others, it is encouraging to have a moment when you're fed yourself," she said. "Jill Briscoe talked about losing your edge the first night, and that's what I came for – to find mine." **FT**

—CAROL LOWES MUSSART



Kids can feel overlooked in Rwanda, and this camp is showing them that they are valued and that they have a role to play in society and in the Kingdom of God: Camp co-founder Jordan Lehmann.

Caring for Kids at Camp Gahini

Daniel Wiebe of Saskatoon, Sask., not only builds houses for a living, but dreams – a fact proven each November at a camp in Gahini, Rwanda.

Wiebe made his fourth trip to Gahini in November 2010 to run the month-long summer program, filling a much-needed role in the lives of Rwandan youth ages 12 to 18.

The camp in Rwanda emerged from a self-designed internship in 2007 through Eston College in Eston, Sask.

The internship saw Wiebe and college buddies Jordan Lehmann and Kenton Klassen travel the globe, working with a Lutheran missionary in Costa Rica, volunteering at a home for street kids in Bolivia and building a home with Wycliffe Translators in Papua New Guinea.

"We wanted to see and experience the various cultures of the world," says Wiebe, now 27.

Eventually the trio found their way to Gahini, where the main translator told them of her desire to find volunteers to

New Digs for a Deserving Family

Three and a half thousand square feet is more house than most families dream of, but that is exactly what Crystal and Bob Mandryk and their nine children got in a gift inspired by the TV show *Extreme Makeover*. What started as an idea to hire a friend to construct a family room ended with a brand-new house bigger than their wildest dreams.

"We had outgrown" the house in Kelowna, B.C., where the family had lived for 17 years, says Bob Mandryk. "We had no family room to speak of."

While the Mandryk family, which has grown so much partly through adop-

tions, was brainstorming ways to make their 1,000 square-foot home more livable, Paul Benson and his wife, long-time friends of the family, as well as their home church, Westside Alliance, were praying for a way to help the Mandryks. Benson is owner of Borebank Ventures Inc., a contracting company in Kelowna.

"My wife Verena and I had been talking, mulling it over and praying about how to help the Mandryks. When they first called, we thought right away, 'Is this the time?' Initially I thought the project was going to be a major renovation, but as we looked more closely, it was clear that they



mentor the youth.

“We were sitting on the grass one day looking out onto the lake and just started to dream about what it would look like to have a camp in that spot. It wasn’t long before we knew it was something that we just had to do.”

Returning in November 2008, the trio set about establishing the camp. After dividing the kids into four groups, singing, dancing, and a short Bible lesson ensued, followed by a choice between sports, swimming, English or drama and crafts.

“Kids can feel overlooked in Rwanda, and this camp is showing them that they are valued and that they have a role to play in society and in the Kingdom of God,” says Lehmann, 28.

The month-long camp is currently in its third year, funded in part by Wiebe’s church, Rock of Ages Lutheran. Wiebe’s goal is to make the operation independent by November 2012.

He and his classmates also hope to inspire other young people to follow God’s call through their ministry (www.limitlessministries.com).

“Whether it’s starting a camp or preaching in their high school, we want to push people into their dreams,” he says. **FT**

—EMILY WIERENGA

Recommended Resources

Faith Today’s latest digest of worthwhile recent titles by Canadian Evangelicals highlights more studious offerings. Academic types may also be interested to visit and participate in the Canadian Evangelical Bibliographies Project, an online wiki initiative at the EFC.ca/cebpbp.

- *1 and 2 Peter* by Douglas Harink. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Brazos, 2009)
- *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy* by editors Deane Downey and Stanley Porter (Pickwick/Wipf & Stock, 2009)
- *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* by James K. A. Smith (Baker, 2009)
- *Doing Church History: A User-Friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* by Gordon Heath (Clements, 2008).
- *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings* by James Payton (InterVarsity, 2010)
- *He Ascended Into Heaven: Learning to Live an Ascension-Shaped Life* by Tim and Aaron Perry (Paraclete, 2010)
- *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology* by editors Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder and Karl Koop (CMU Press, 2010)
- *A Practical Theology of Missions: Dispelling the Mystery; Recovering the Passion* by Eric Wright (Day One Publications, 2010)
- *Revelation* by Gordon Fee. New Covenant Commentary Series (Cascade Books, 2010)
- *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation* by Gordon T. Smith (Baker 2010)
- *West of Eden: Essays on Canadian Prairie Literature* by editor Sue Sorensen (CMU Press, 2008)
- *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement* by editors Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Brill Academic, 2010) **FT**

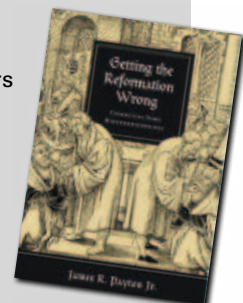


PHOTO: ROBIN CALAO

Construction of the new house is well under way, October 2008.

needed a new house,” recalls Benson.

“Our goal with Project Family Room was to meet the needs of two terrific parents who gladly make sacrifices to be loving parents to so many

children,” adds Verena Benson. “We have been incredibly touched to witness their humble and selfless way of parenting. All of the children are thriving under their loving care.”

As word spread, labourers, donors and volunteers came out of the woodwork, all with the same mission in mind: to build a house free of charge for a deserving couple. Project Family Room was born (and eventually became a website at projectfamilyroom.org).

The Mandryk’s 1/3 acre lot was transformed into a breathtaking home complete with a spacious main floor, built-in

desks and a beautifully landscaped yard. The family room – the focus of the project – included a large, flat-screen TV and comfy seating for the whole clan.

“With our kids the biggest change has been the amount of room to run and play,” comments Bob about the new home. “Our four-year-old has mobility issues, and at Christmas she started to walk. It’s made an enormous difference having big open spaces. Since we moved into the new house we’ve been able to host extended family, friends, sleepovers – more in the last two years than in the 10 or 15 before. To us this is a miracle that this happened and we want to see that it goes to the best use.” **FT**

—CHRISTINA CROOK



A Wake-Up Call: Caring for Canada's Children

It is – or should be – a national concern.

How well is Canada caring for its children? This November, a House of Commons committee will begin hearings on adoption in Canada. Let's hope this dialogue will contribute to the growing realization that Canada needs a national vision and standards of care for children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in need of government care.

Canada has an estimated 30,000 children waiting to come home through the process of adoption, children with no *permanent* homes in sight – this is unacceptable. While assessments may vary in different parts of Canada, we all can agree that no child should have their childhood unfold without a home or parent(s) to call their own.

The recent Ontario report *Ninety Deaths: Ninety Voices Silenced* should have sparked outrage. Recent calls by various provincial commissioners for an overhaul of their systems should have stimulated debate and media interest.

Yet, as children get older while waiting in the system, there is little momentum towards a common standard of care for services within any given province, let alone nationally. When thousands reach age 18 still hoping for a mom and dad, we all need to sit up and take notice. We can no longer turn a deaf ear to their cries.

There are signs that the tide is turning. Bridges are being established between churches and public agencies. In new and exciting ways, congregations are connecting at the local level which is where the children are. Yet there is still much to be done.

Each province currently sets its standards independently, including defining who is a child and at what age

they are on their own – in some provinces it's age 16. Agencies caring for children are overworked and lack adequate resources.

The differing definitions and policies make it difficult to paint an accurate picture, let alone provide a foundation for a fruitful search for solution. That the number of children waiting continues to increase should shock us.

The welfare of children is critical to the health of a nation.

Our constitution divides responsibility between the federal government and the provinces. It also provides for federal involvement in issues of national concern. The last thing we need is another layer of bureaucracy, but we do need a national conversation, a fresh vision and renewed commitment for how we care for children, particularly those becoming lost in the current systems. We need to explore all possibilities.

The Senate has been calling for a National Children's Commissioner for some time. Members of adoptive families, charitable and voluntary associations, public and private agencies and churches have much to offer and should be integral to the strategizing, with a priority given to the voices of children aging in the system. The dignity and welfare of children should be paramount.

Too often in our society children are seen through a reductionist lens, pejoratively labeled, treated as objects or as problems to be fixed or funded. Not much is left to see them as they are: growing persons full of dreams, hopes and possibilities that often defy adult expectations, medical probing, predictions or parenting and educational management techniques. All children are "just kids," and they are also much more than that.

Renewing a vision for children in care requires the cultivation of a fresh perspective, much wisdom and a collaborative spirit necessary to sustain the long and hard work of social reform.

As Christians we have a worldview that promotes renewal and Scriptures that leave us no excuse but to act. This noble task will take time, but what should not wait are the children waiting for a forever mom and dad. If there is to be any waiting list, let it be an overabundance of families approved and waiting to provide a home.

Let's dare to dream this way. The children waiting are dreaming too. **FT**



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 theEFC.ca.

BRUCE J. CLEMENGER is the president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Read more of his columns at theEFC.ca/clemenger.

Sudan: Becoming Two Countries?

When you hear the word “Sudan,” a picture of a strong, vigorous Church might not be the first thing that pops into your mind. But maybe it could be.

“The Sudanese Church has committed itself to speak the truth fearlessly, and to continue its gospel-led mission to give a voice to the voiceless, the poor and the marginalized, and address issues of national concern,” said Geoff Tunnicliffe, the Canadian who heads the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), on the eve of a historic recent visit to the troubled and fractured African nation.

The Sudan Evangelical Alliance, formed in 2003, is among WEA’s newest members. And Sudanese Evangelicals have their work cut out for them.

Sudan’s troubles have topped the list of the world’s worst for years now. Ongoing civil conflict has killed and displaced thousands. Darfur, a region along its western border with Chad, is now a household name synonymous with suffering.

To say it is a country divided is both a literal truth and a dramatic understatement. The conflict has pitted government against rebels, and Sudan’s mostly Muslim north against the primarily Christian south. And all of the mess is drenched in inky oil and the power and wealth that coveted resource holds in the world today.

A peace agreement signed in 2005 resulted in the Autonomous Interim Government of Southern Sudan. The South was promised the opportunity to a vote in 2011 for full independence. Observers have warned that a delay or postponement of the vote, scheduled for early January, would result in renewed violence. The reality of the oil-rich region of Abyei – whose citizens are also scheduled to vote to determine



if they will join the North or the South – throws another wrench into the tense, unsettled and potentially lethal situation.

Into the melee wades the Church of the South, which has clearly begun to see the potential and power of working together. A fledgling fellowship of representatives from different denominations and churches has committed, on paper, to “glorify God by empowering the community through holistic ministry resulting in transformed life.” The group hopes to target economic empowerment, evangelism and discipleship, education and training, health and sanitation, and counselling and rehabilitation.

During Tunnicliffe’s October visit, he ended a speech with these words: “The people of Sudan have suffered for many years. Now is the time for a new future that will bring peace, wholeness, dignity, freedom of belief and freedom from extreme poverty. The people of Sudan deserve nothing less.”

As the clock ticks towards election day, Christian charities, including some affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (where Tunnicliffe is director of global initiatives), are on the ground in Sudan working with the ordinary men, women and children who are always the real victims – and always the real hope – of situations as complex and painful as Sudan’s. **FT**



Sudan at a Glance

- Full Name:** Republic of Sudan
 - Population:** 42.2 million (UN, 2009)
 - Capital:** Khartoum
 - Area:** 2.5 million km² (966,757 sq. mi.)
 - Major Languages:** Arabic, English (official), others
 - Major Religions:** Islam (70%), Indigenous Beliefs (25%), Christianity (5%)
 - Life Expectancy:** 56 years (men), 60 years (women) (UN)
 - Literacy Rate:** 61%
 - Main Exports:** Oil, cotton, peanuts, sesame, gum arabic
 - Average Annual Income:** \$1,130 (UN, 2008)
- (Sources: BBC, World Vision)

On Our Knees

- Pray for a free, fair and safe referendum in January 2011.
- Pray that the international community including Canada will support the original referendum timeline of early January 2011.
- Pray that the current Sudanese government and the international community will respect the outcome of the referendum.
- Pray for the Christian groups already present in Sudan, that they will continue to be able to minister to the poorest of the poor.
- Pray for the Church in southern Sudan, that it will continue to grow strong, prophetic and practical in its presence.

Canadian Connections

- Samaritan’s Purse has been active in Sudan since 1997 and is currently focusing on strengthening medical capacity in the southern state of Jonglei. www.samaritanpurse.ca
- SIM (Serving In Mission) supports GideonTheological College

in Khartoum, Scripture translation, ministry to street boys, indigenous ministries, school teacher training, ministry training and medical work. The Sudan Interior Church has close ties to SIM and includes 111 churches in the North, 130 in South Sudan and 25 refugee churches in Ethiopia and Kenya. www.sim.ca

See a more detailed version of this article at the EFC.ca/globalvillage

Challenging Prostitution Decision

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) has applauded the Government of Canada for its decision to appeal September's Ontario Superior Court ruling that effectively struck down laws against living off the avails of prostitution, keeping a common bawdy house and communicating for the purposes of prostitution.

The ruling needed to be appealed, explains Don Hutchinson, EFC vice-president and general legal counsel, because it "paid only enough attention to an earlier decision of the Supreme Court of Canada on these same Criminal Code provisions to suggest that times have changed" and the higher court's ruling can be ignored.

Because Parliament has not changed the prostitution laws and the Supreme Court has found them to be constitutional, the ruling's attempt to strike them down is short-sighted and mistaken, Hutchinson argues.

Julia Beazley, a policy analyst for the EFC, adds, "We strongly disagree that the suspension of prostitution laws will lead to greater protection of prostituted women. The reality is that there is no such thing as safe prostitution."

"To state that human trafficking is incidental to prostitution in the very same month that an RCMP report on human trafficking in Canada clearly identifies the link between organized prostitution and human trafficking is at best naïve, and at worst irresponsible," she adds.

Hutchinson concludes, "This is an opportunity to affirm the value and dignity of all Canadian women, in which the government can affirm that, as a nation, we will not condone the exploitation of some for the gratification of others."

In April 2010 the EFC released the report *Selling Ourselves: Prostitution in Canada, Where Are We Headed?* at theEFC.ca/prostitution. The report compares Swedish and Dutch prostitution law models and examines the correlation between prostitution legislation and rates of human

trafficking in these countries. The report also considers the Canadian legal framework and recommends policy proposals for reforming and strengthening Canada's prostitution laws.

Ottawa Open House

Bruce J. Clemenger, president of the EFC, welcomed Members of Parliament, Christian leaders and other guests to the Sept. 27 opening of the new location for



Back row (l-r): Rick Hiemstra, Don Hutchinson, Bruce Clemenger, Robyn Bright, Gina Waugh, Paul Hilsden. **Front (l-r):** Anita Levesque, Faye Sonier, Julia Beazley.

the EFC's Centre for Faith and Public Life, which can now be found in Suite 1810 at 130 Albert Street, Ottawa.

The Canadian Who Doused the Flames

The EFC's Geoff Tunnicliffe, who also serves as CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance, played a key role in the Qur'an burning controversy that arose in September. He explains how he came to phone and meet with the controversial Florida pastor who endangered so many Christians worldwide – there are several interviews available at theEFC.ca/inthenews2010.

The Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims, a group operating on the EFC's administrative and communications platform, was also quick to denounce the Qur'an-burning plans in a news release at that time (cnmm.ca).

Discussing Affordable Housing

The EFC continues to endorse Bill C-304 in Parliament, a private member's bill which calls on the federal minister responsible for housing to meet with provincial and territorial counterparts, First Nations communities and other stakeholders to develop a national housing strategy.

A Bloc Québécois motion proposing to send the bill back to the Standing Committee on Human Resources for reconsideration and amendment kept Bill C-304 alive across Parliament's most recent prorogation.

Julia Beazley, an EFC policy analyst, participated in an Ottawa rally in October supporting the bill, initially put forward by NDP MP Libby Davies.

KEEPING UP WITH EVENTS

Details at theEFC.ca/events or call 1-866-302-3362

Visit the EFC's Canadian Community Calendar to keep up with major conferences and events of interest. November's calendar included 21 events at press time, including several focused on evangelism, writing and parenting. You can even email event information to yourself and copy an event to other personal electronic calendars you may use. Anyone is welcome to submit a regional or national event to the calendar for free. Visit theEFC.ca/events.

Meaningful Work Experience

Are you interested in supporting the EFC's ministry of encouraging evangelical influence, impact and identity? Opportunities are available to help with database work or general administration in the Markham office, and to be an ambassador for the EFC in your city. Visit theEFC.ca/jobs for details. You can also read there about the EFC's opening for a new full-time vice-president of development and communications.

Pray for the Persecuted Church

Evangelicals across Canada and around the world were set to participate in the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on Sunday, Nov. 14. This year's prayers for countries where Christians are persecuted for their faith focused on Psalm 10:17: "Hearing Their Cry." Visit www.idop.ca for more information, including EFC-endorsed resources that your church can use any time of year.

World Evangelization

EFC President Bruce J. Clemenger and EFC Vice-President Bill Winger, together with Matthew Gibbins of the EFC Global Mission Roundtable, attended the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in October in South Africa. You can still join the ongoing online discussion on key issues for the church worldwide at www.lausanne.org/conversation or re-read the series of *Faith Today* articles introducing seven of those issues from a Canadian perspective at theEFC.ca/lausanne. Watch for more coverage in our Jan/Feb 2011 issue.

Back to School Blitz

The EFC's Centre for Faith and Public Life released a series of resources to assist parents and students earlier this fall. You can download the following for free at theEFC.ca/education:

- Hands Up! Identifying Parents' Rights in the Education System
- School Board Elections: How Can Your Church Participate?
- Alternative Approaches to Public Education: A Discussion Paper
- Pro-Life Clubs and the Law: A Reference Guide for Students and their Legal Counsel
- Questions and Answers on Ontario's Sex-Ed Curriculum (also an EFC Open Letter to the Ontario minister of education, plus a template letter for parents who may also want to write).

No to Abortion Coercion

The EFC continues to support a bill that seeks to make it a crime to coerce a pregnant woman into getting an

abortion. Its first hour of debate in Parliament was to happen Nov. 1.

The private member's Bill C-510 was launched in April by Conservative Party MP Rod Bruinooge, who refers to it as "Roxanne's Law" to honour Roxanne Fernando, a Manitoba woman who died after her boyfriend attempted to coerce her into having an abortion in 2007.

"Women are particularly vulnerable during pregnancy," says Faye Sonier, legal counsel with the EFC, "and this bill, along with other societal support programs and resources, communicates to women that we as a society care for them and their unborn children." The bill does not address the legality of abortion in any way, she adds.

"No woman should be threatened, intimidated or pressured into aborting a child against her will. Not in a nation such as ours that values life and human rights," says Sonier who was interviewed on *100 Huntley Street* about Bill C-510. The October 5 episode is available on YouTube.

For more discussion, visit theEFC.ca/activateCFPL.

EFC Staffing Changes

A series of recent staffing changes at the EFC includes the hiring of a digital communications manager.

Jerry Bolton will be working on the EFC's website and social media, as well as producing new video content. Bolton, who holds a B.A. in English and philosophy from Trent University, is married and has a young child.

Rick Hiemstra, formerly manager of the Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism, is passing that hat over to VP Aileen Van Ginkel in the Markham office. Hiemstra has moved to Ottawa, where he will serve as the EFC's director of research and help direct media relations.

The EFC's Markham office recently reorganized its staff and several have moved on to new employment opportunities. We wish them well.

Fighting Child Porn

The EFC has endorsed Bill C-22, Mandatory Reporting of Internet Child Pornography by ISPs. This government bill would require Internet service providers to disclose to police the contact information of clients found to be using or distributing child pornography.

Helping Marriages

The Canadian Marriage and Family Network, which operates on the EFC's administrative and communications platform, was set to launch a one-year Marriage Coaching Track in Saskatoon, Nov. 19-20. Visit cmfn.ca for more details. **FT**

Canada's

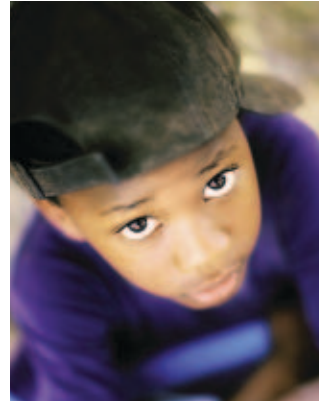
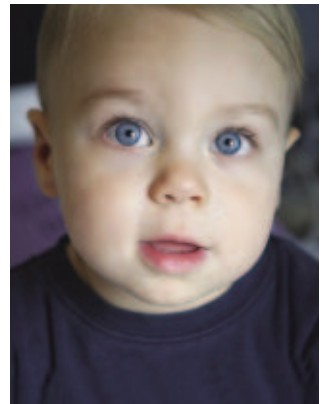


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PHOTO © LUCIAN COMAN / GLOW IMAGES



What can we do to be culturally transformative and care for tens of thousands of parentless Canadian children? The policy issues are pressing, as is the daunting task of transforming how Canadian society views our country's children.

By Bruce and Tracy Clemenger

Canada could fill a stadium with the number of children who, through no fault of their own, are in government care waiting to come home through the process of adoption. There are an estimated 30,000 adoptable children across Canada who are waiting and aging in a system that is fragmented, exhausted and lacking national coordination. They also face a mainstream mentality that holds a pejorative understanding of who they are and who they can become.

The inability of Canada's child welfare systems to bridge that gap for those children between waiting and coming home is disturbing. Domestic adoption is a provincial not federal government jurisdiction, and the piece-

meal system that exists in Canada today lacks national standards – it differs province by province and even county by county. Further, as it struggles with limited resources and faces growing needs, it has become fatigued.

This is not to say that the people working in the system aren't doing their jobs. To the contrary, Canada's child welfare workers are increasingly burning the midnight oil. They are on the front lines, seeing the trends and changing profiles of families and children's needs. They attend as best they can to those children who come into care and seek to satisfy their ultimate need for permanent, stable and loving homes. They too don't want to see children wait.

The question is not "if" but "how" to improve and re-



30,000 Adoptable Children



in a
Labyrinth of
Policy and
Social
Issues

ALL PHOTOS: WWW.DESIGNPICS.COM UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

form the system for better outcomes in protection and recruitment.

Some provinces have commissioned studies to examine systemic deficiencies in protection that in the worst cases have seen children abused or dying in the system. Some of the proposed solutions are indeed being made.

Sometimes steps in the right direction are found in the best practices of non-governmental organizations. For example, a key concern in protection is being successfully addressed in an approach to fostering practised in Ontario at Bridgeway Family Homes.

Patricia Aitchison, its manager of foster care services, explains: "We customize a care plan that addresses the needs of the child through equipping and supporting caregivers."

The Bridgeway approach ensures that "foster families, who are the primary healing agents, are not left to fend for themselves until something goes awry."

This vision started 22 years ago with a Mennonite couple who were concerned about families doing foster care.

Unfortunately, even after such a vision has borne fruit locally, that doesn't mean it automatically becomes standard practice nationwide.

Other practices sometimes fail, not for lack of good ideas, but for lack of funding and resourcing. Consider the issue of recruiting parents to adopt. A major marketing campaign to Canada's compassionate population could make a huge difference, but lack of funding prevents it.

Will British Columbia's 1,300 adoptable children find homes this November when their needs are buried in an ad on a government website? It has taken that method more than five years to find homes for 1,471 children. Yes, it works, eventually – for some. But it means some children will be waiting for years. And in the life of a child, even one day longing for home is an eternity.

Children's agencies are doing the best they can with what resources they have, but we should not assume they will do all the work for us as a society.

Thankfully, there is an emerging consensus on the need for change in the way Canada addresses these issues as a society. Key reports on systemic weaknesses and strengths, supplemented by dialogue with the child welfare community, are making clear an entire labyrinth of policy issues in protection and recruitment – and thus the need for a collaborative national vision and standard. In fact, these are long overdue.

House Committee Study on Adoption

There is good news: an opportunity to come together at a national level has appeared on the horizon. In November 2010 the House of Commons is scheduled to study adoption practices. This study includes public, private and international adoption processes as well.

When the committee looks specifically at the public system, how it cares for and gets its children homes, they may be shocked to learn about the cost, ineffectiveness, lack of national cohesion and overall unsustainability.

And they may discover a more unsettling reality: that children waiting in the system are but the tip of an iceberg of issues facing all Canadian children.

With increased pressures put upon Canadian families, parenting skills in our country are being eroded. Individualism, family breakdown and poverty take their toll. Is it a coincidence that in only five years, the estimated number of children needing homes has gone from 20,000 to 30,000, according to research publicized by the Adoption Council of Canada?

To produce the best report, the committee needs to hear not just from commissioners, child welfare workers and researchers, but also directly from children inside the system – their insights, experiences and dreams – and from adoptive families. This novel approach would go a long way towards improving our care.

No matter where a child is from or what it says in a government profile, every child dreams of something big

Societal Change

Imagine waiting for the beauty and innocence of your childhood to be cradled, for your abilities and dreams to be nurtured in the warmth and stability of a loving "forever home." Imagine dreaming of something big like the Olympics, an exciting career or travel.

Every child has the seeds of wonderful possibilities, but it takes a permanent, stable, secure environment even to allow those seeds to sprout.

A major reason so many children are still waiting is the unexamined social myths we accept about adoptable children. Few of us may be surprised that negative stereotypes about adoption are "out there" in society.

But recognizing just how close to home they really are can be uncomfortable.

In seeking a fair understanding, we will find that the voices of children themselves, as persons with their own insights, are significant. Indeed, they can tell us about how we as a society are measuring up.

Lessons from the Past

By Lorna Dueck

With more than 30,000 children waiting for adoption in Canada, it's time to get the story of their need for loving parents into wider circulation. Most of these children are over the age of four and have sensitive needs, 25 per cent of them are aboriginal, and 100 per cent of them need a permanent family.

A 2004 Ipsos Reid Survey showed 90 per cent of Canadians felt favourably about adoption, and 14 per cent of had seriously considered adoption. How can it be that we are a nation in which 500,000 people have seriously considered adopting, yet we cannot find

homes for 30,000 kids awaiting adoption?

The disconnect between knowing and doing adoption wasn't so bleak in the days of my own adoption, though the challenges remain. To be sure, I'm adopted because my parents obeyed a deep, compassionate nudge they received from the Holy Spirit.

It was 1961, and although the media climate wasn't part of their deci-



How we tell the story matters: Lorna Dueck.

For us this truth hit home exactly that way, when our daughter came home from kindergarten one day in 2005. (We have her blessing to tell this story.)

Picture a happy-go-lucky, five-year-old coming home to tenderly announce: "Mom, you need to write a book about adoption because there are a lot of dumb, stupid and mean children at school who don't know about God's love – you know, God adopting *us* and this is what we naturally do on earth."

We had known about our society's derogatory perspective of adoption, but now we were seeing it from her point of view, of her listening to kids chat at the classroom craft table.

We had known that toxic children's narratives about adoption were common in everything from Dickens to Disney to TV. In fact, we had deliberately shielded her from them.

In our family we instead introduced and affirmed the term "adoption" in its sacred sense of being created in God's image, being part of a family and a valued member of society.

As she reached school age, we had prepared her for other views about adoption by affirming, in an age-appropriate way, the simple fact that she would be meeting new friends who might not share her perspective on important matters.

So what surprised us that day in 2005 wasn't the negative views, but that the minds of other five-year-olds were *already* saturated in them. Later, we also learned of the lack of positive and healthy resources available to schools about adoption.

We could tell from the typically stalwart way our daughter related the story that what her friends were saying wasn't emotionally or mentally sticking to her. Thanks to her up-bringing the mainstream negative perspective of adoption was foreign to her. Meanwhile, her friends had no idea that she was one of "those" children they so "factually" discussed (that shock would come years later in Grade Three, when she decided to raise it).

Our daughter basically looked at ignorance in the face

of her friends without being victimized by the experience. To the contrary, the adoption savvy she expressed that day stemmed foremost from a heartfelt empathy for her little friends.

This experience, although mild, can nonetheless begin to indicate what some children face out there.

Adoption as "Plan A"

How can we as a society start addressing our negative perspectives on adoption?

Perhaps we can start by noting a decision to adopt is not always a "Plan B," as many people negatively refer to it, assuming pregnancy risks or infertility "forced" a couple to settle for "second-best."

In our case, the two of us chose adoption as a primary choice in family planning prior to marriage and as an expression of our Christian worldview. Our daughter knows and feels this.

She basks freely, as does our whole family, in the wonder and mystery of a biblical truth: God is adoptive by nature and He chose adoption as a way to express Himself on Earth.

She also knows that after we were married, we wrote to To-



Supporting foster families: Patricia Aitchison, Bridgeway Family Homes

sion, it had carried a government-sponsored advertising campaign for 9,700 children. These children were described as nobody's children who were "left" in the care of Ontario's Welfare department. These children needing homes were also profiled as having age, physical or mental handicaps. Very poor messaging and profiling aside, there was nonetheless still regular room in the *Toronto Telegram* for Helen Allen's *Today's Child* column.

Allen's approach included colour photos of adoptable children and heart-wrenching storytelling. Like the account of three brothers, wanting to be placed together and who were "great sportsmen and boasted perfect Sunday School attendance." Sometimes it even made the front page. In just five short years her

column found homes for 6,000 children. Indeed, how we tell the story matters.

It's time the media step up to the need today to take Canada's shameful secret of 30,000 children needing a permanent home out into the light. Getting the word out and getting the messaging right by profiling the children in dignifying ways and profiling adoption as a positive, caring and natural part of Canadian identity would be a welcome start. These are the essential first steps for Canada's waiting children. **FT**

LORNA DUECK is executive producer and host of *Listen Up TV*, a weekly program exploring news and current affairs from a Christian worldview. Watch the Oct. 27, 2010 episode "Option Adoption" at ListenUpTV.com.

Adoption Awareness: Join In

As we ask why thousands of Canadian children are waiting, we naturally begin to recognize the responsibility to care and the opportunity to express love.

The easiest way to begin is by participating in National Adoption Awareness Month each November. It can begin as simply as watching how adoption is portrayed on TV and asking if it is dignifying. We can ask our children about adoption and where they got their impressions.

Let's have a burger night at Wendy's restaurants to support their charitable adoption foundation, inspired by their founder and adoptee, Dave Thomas. Each Christmas season they air their TV special "A Home for the Holidays" – why not make popcorn and watch this with your family?

Let's ask ourselves how our family's values dignify *all* children and support adoption care initiatives.

And adoption isn't just for couples. Grandparents too can embrace and promote adoption with their children, assuring them of a warm welcome for any grandchildren who come home through the process of adoption.

Being intentional about adoption awareness can simply mean not asking intrusive questions about how or why a child was adopted. Ask about the child's gifts and dreams instead – that is where all children live.

And, yes, more couples and families could give serious consideration to applying to become government-approved families for adoption. Here's a thought: the crisis for Canada's waiting children would be over if 10 per cent of Evangelicals responded to the need for homes – right now, today. We could empty that stadium, turn off those lights and allow the light of God to shine.

We are hoping homes from a variety of heritages will heed the call. Some children are dreaming about being matched with a mom and dad who look "like me" – a parent with the same skin colour or ethnicity. Others say they don't care about the colour of their parents' skin, they just want a home. Some are hoping to remain with a brother or sister.

Some are simply saying, "I'd like a home where people smile." Some can't speak yet, but undoubtedly every child has a birth mother praying for the best of the best for her child.

Yes, there are children in the system with permanent medical conditions – they too are hoping for parents who can be there for them. (CanadasWaitingKids.ca is a website exclusively for children whose provinces have not been able to find them homes.)

Adoption today isn't about erasing a child's unique heritage. It is about matchmaking and respecting the social and medical history, needs and personalities of each person in the family constellation.

For anyone interested in pursuing adoption, the next step is to call your local Children's Aid Society or Aboriginal child welfare agency. There are some private agencies as well. The Adoption Council of Canada website, www.adoption.ca, lists agencies and organizations by province and territory with valuable links and resources to consider. –BC & TC

day's Child, the syndicated newspaper column on adoption, to find out what it takes to qualify as government-approved parents and to keep a paper trail about our intentions for our future children.

As parents, we affirm with her a deep, empowering truth: God holds us – and all the pieces of all our lives. He has a unique purpose which He is unfolding for her life. This same truth holds for *all* people.

All parents will tell you that when that day comes and you hold a child that has become yours – adoptive or not – places of the heart unzip and become larger. This miracle, some would argue, can be experienced in even more profound ways through adoption.

As our daughter matures she is realizing that she may meet well-meaning people who are not adopted and don't understand or those who ask "snoopy" questions about the particulars of her homecoming story. She knows she doesn't have to respond or "sweat it." She's free to focus on the busy job of being a kid.

The good news for those who ascribe to the Christian worldview is that there is always opportunity for healthy introspection about cultural values and what Christ has to say about them. This means facing the reality that sometimes there is more culture guiding our thoughts than truths about the value of all children than we'd like to think.

Levelling the Field

In our experience, given a community whose core identity is found in adoption and loving others regardless of genetic ties, we were shocked in those pre-parenting years by people who repeatedly tried to talk us out of adoption.

The objections and fears came from non-adoptive people and included everything from ugly warnings against getting a so-called "genetically imperfect" child (as if they or any person could be genetically perfect) to others that assumed only adoptive families have challenges (as if only genetically-tied families are permanently ready for their perfect photo op).

Others patronized our commitment as a "nice rescue thing." Still others expressed their fears about children abandoning parents for birth relatives, as if all genetically-tied families are intimately intact. Some even argued that adoption was not biblical.

This social climate persisted right up to our daughter's homecoming. Then came a whole new set of assumptions that moved from objections to comments about supposedly "having" to take the "last resort."

This other – even darker – side was alarming, and at the same time, as parents now rearing a child, it was an enlightening lens on the situation. Here was this absolutely beautiful child of God in the midst of so many people who couldn't see beyond the veil to what heaven looked like.



We chose adoption as a primary choice in family planning prior to marriage and as an expression of our Christian worldview: Tracy and Bruce Clemenger.

At least, unlike some couples, we had unwavering, positive support from the people who mattered most.

We wish our experience was an anomaly to an otherwise open-door, open-home practice among Canadians when it comes to adoption, but it's not. And the gap between knowing and doing adoption isn't closing.

When you listen to members of adoptive families, the fears and objections of the general non-adopting population are there from sea to sea. Agencies helping with recruitment say it's time to take them head on.

Could our culture be in the grip of a cult-like fixation

on genetic ties first, genetic ties best – an attitude Christ repeatedly spoke out against?

This widespread low view of adoption isn't just alive and well in Canada's coffee shops, churches or schools. Sadly, it can encroach upon those inside the system as well.

Consider the experience of Albertans Tom and Esther Olfert, who have 10 children, six of whom came home through the process of adoption. They remember a social worker sharing her view of one of their children. The chances of the child growing into a healthy, well-adjusted young man were supposedly "zero."

"We told ourselves we refuse to take the 'no hope,' but we will certainly take the child," recalls Esther. "For the first two years I cradled his head in my hands every night and claimed his development for the Lord as he slept in bed."

The Olferts thwarted the negative predictions by sound parenting, wisdom and prayer. Their son is now attending a post-secondary college and is a budding leader within their family and community.

Such successful stories about couples choosing adoption just for the love of it or the successful outcomes of the children play out every day in real life, but unfortunately, like so many other things, they often have not registered in Canadian

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mainstream thinking. (For more on the Olferts, see the online version of this issue at www.faithtoday.ca/digital for an extra article by Jeff Dewsbury.)

To level the playing field, we need a new awareness in society. This can start with each of us thinking more carefully about how children and adoption are discussed in the stories all around us.

Media Storytelling

In a media-saturated world we are inundated with messages that appear as facts. Without some level of media savvy, we can find ourselves forming impressions without really knowing why. That's why the abundance of negative stories of adoption is so problematic.

Such stories often quote welfare workers speaking from the perch of child protection and at a very vulnerable juncture in a child's life. Or they quote a transient medical professional who has been brought in briefly to



There are 17,000 kids in foster care in Ontario alone and 9,000 who could be adopted: Pat Convery.

make a general speculation about a child's so-called "chances." Even when members of adoptive families are profiled or do actually get to speak, they are usually used to prop up a pejorative and patronizing view.

"When all we hear in the popular press on adoption is a Hollywood profile on adopting, adoption is actually stigmatized into an oddity. It sits outside of being a normal function of societal care," says Lorna Dueck of *Listen Up*, a TV program that examines current affairs from a Christian perspective.

Media stories "end up focusing on the social and medical history of some adoptees or their adoptive parents, and we don't get to the real issue that levels the playing field of how we tell stories, especially about vulnerable children," says Dueck. (See her "Lessons From the Past," page 20.)

When it comes to adoption, how we tell stories as a society, as adults and as children, requires a fresh approach. Actually describing a child, especially a child in the system, also requires serious consideration.

These Children Are Lovable

An interview with **Sandra Scarth**, president of the Adoption Council of Canada

By **Karen Stiller**

Sandra, can you tell us what the Adoption Council of Canada is and what it does?

It came about because a group of adoptive parents didn't feel they were getting the support they needed from the agencies, and that older kids were not being adopted. It was advocacy, then it broadened its focus to include education and serving all parts of the adoption community.

By "older kids" you mean?

Anyone older than an infant.

Are Canadians aware of the number of children waiting to be adopted?

No. We don't have funding for public awareness campaigns at all. In Canada only 8 per cent of the waiting children get placed. In the United States it's around 30 per cent. In Canada it's a provincial matter, so the federal government has nothing to do with domestic adoptions. We don't even have decent adoption statistics. The latest are from 2004. We get by with volunteers, and by scraping together what little money we have. We get a huge amount done despite that.

Tell us more about the website, CanadasWaitingKids.ca.

It is designed for parents who are looking, and also for social workers across the country to refer children. With



Sandra Scarth

pictures and non-identifying profiles, agencies do the work with the families and so on. The children that appear on our site are the ones the provinces have been unable to place. We are very successful at placing. It can be as little as three months, usually within a year. Pictures really do help. We recently did a very innovative (for Canada at least) program in Ontario where we created a photo gallery of 18 children over 11 years old. We had a photographer offer her services,

and took wonderful portraits. The kids all chose their own anonymous names. Within a few months, 15 of the 18 kids had families very interested in adopting them and agencies are working with them.

We have the sense that adoption must take years and years. Is that true?

It doesn't take years and years if you're willing to adopt an older child. The screening process has changed and improved. There is the SAFE home study, which is very comprehensive; police checks – people get asked a lot of personal questions and some people don't like that, it can bring up memories of loss and abuse in families. People might be afraid that these issues will preclude them from adoption, but the process looks for people's strengths. If we find someone who has worked through

Defining Special Needs

Pat Convery, who has worked in child welfare for over 35 years and is now executive director of the Adoption Council of Ontario, reports that there are 17,000 kids in foster care in Ontario alone and 9,000 who could be adopted (children whom the state has no active plans to return to their birth parents). Such numbers suggest how important it is to unpack terms, especially the label “special needs,” that get so easily tossed around.

Convery explains that “special needs” can mean many things. It may be used to refer to older children, where “old” means more than four or six years of age depending on the jurisdiction. Or it can refer to children needing to be paired as a sibling group, to children from cultural minorities, to those who may have experienced abuse or neglect, or to those who have been removed unharmed from environments deemed “at risk.”

“Special needs” is also applied to children with medical diagnoses or merely suspected medical conditions, for ex-

ample, when the birth parents or grandparents have a suspected or medically diagnosed condition. In some jurisdictions, like Ontario, “special needs” can simply be applied to a child who has had to move at least once to get into foster care.

Given the myriad of meanings ascribed to this term, it is no wonder that many couples who might otherwise give serious consideration to adoption will say they’ve thought about it but eventually dropped the idea altogether.

And yet at home and settled in, adoptive families are doing just fine. They’ve gleaned a wisdom that comes from having sorted through what’s relevant and what’s not.

Churches can pray for a renewed heart and mind toward all of Canada’s children

Church in the Public Square

The role of Canada’s churches and Christian humanitarian organizations in the public square are significant. As a pool of volunteers and activists, we are second to none. Christian communities must continually seek ways to exemplify the core doctrine that all humans are made in God’s image and possess inherent dignity and worth. This doctrine, alongside other core doctrines such as

an issue successfully, that speaks to their strengths.

What about fears that older children come with especially challenging issues that might make the whole adoption experience really difficult for the average Canadian?

I think most of the children who have come into care through child welfare have experienced some difficulty, some loss, some separation, been neglected. They didn’t get the kind of care they should have received, or they wouldn’t be there. All of them bring something with them, it could be very minor. With some of the older children, particularly those moved from home to home to home, it will take them longer to settle in. People have to be very patient. You won’t get many rewards quickly in that situation. It’s not going to be an overnight love story. The SAFE home studies have a training component, and most provinces have moved towards it, where the adoptive parents are required to take so many hours of educational sessions about dealing with children who are older [not infants].

How do you find families?

What we are lacking in this country is a really, really good national awareness campaign of some sort. It should be regular. It could be during Adoption month, which is November. We don’t have the money to go out and advertise. But, when families are looking, they do find us.

Do you see faith communities as potential partners in improving adoption in Canada?

Absolutely. There is a group in the States called One

Church, One Child. They’ve been quite successful at finding homes for children. That is a model that can work quite well. My experience with some Christian families has been more of inter-country adoptions, which have been very successful. I don’t think we have reached out to them in the same way with older kids in Canada.

Sandra, how did you get involved in this work?

I was going to become a journalist, but then I worked one summer at a home for girls. I was so appalled at what was happening with these victims of abuse locked up in this horrible place, so I went into social work. There was one girl who was so bright and had so much potential, but wound up on the streets. I got into it through a child, which is what often happens. I got involved in adoption work, because it got children out of foster situations and into permanent homes with families who would be with them the rest of their lives.

What is the biggest misconception we might have about Canada’s waiting children?

It’s that we think they will be too difficult to manage. Some of the best adoption placements made are by foster parents who have fallen in love with the children. These children are lovable. That is the best answer I can give people. But foster parents can’t adopt them all. It doesn’t mean the children don’t have issues, and it will be a lot of work, but then again, parenting is a lot of work. It will take time, patience and understanding. But when you see a child blossom and grow, the joy is worth it.

—FT

justice and mercy, affects all aspects of our caring.

The role for Canada's churches must be based on solid teaching with sound exegesis and sensitivity to cultural application. The Christian worldview is about *agape* love, not rescues, not filling voids or seeking status. And this love isn't an option either. There are some firm and dreadful warnings in the Bible about not embracing others – embracing children properly, in particular.

Canada's churches can offer support to agencies by connecting at ground zero in some simple but profound ways.

Convery, back at the Adoption Council of Ontario, speaks very positively of the One Church, One Child program started in Chicago in 1981 by Rev. George Clements.

Clements' idea was brilliant in its simplicity: invite each church to commit to welcoming a child in government care. Give the child rides to Sunday worship, to other church programs, to the occasional birthday party, and help him or her to be part of a community.

Connecting with the children changed lives forever. All of a sudden kids were being adopted. "And you know who most of them are adopted by?" laughs Convery. "The volunteer driver, the person who says, 'Sure, I can give them a ride, no big deal.'"

Clearly, once a child is welcomed as a real flesh-and-blood member of the community, the myths and ideas of who the child may be melt away, and the child becomes seen for who he or she is – "just a kid."

A whole package of love is worthy of unveiling. Churches can pray for a renewed heart and mind towards all of Canada's children. Churches who already pray for their government ministers can pray especially for those Members of Parliament who will be studying adoption and children's care issues during this coming year.

Churches can also invite a local agency representative to come to a Sunday morning service perhaps every November to speak about what the agency is doing. Churches can make room for them to leave a poster and offer to distribute the agency newsletter to congregants year round.

We have heard of church communities that support snow-suit campaigns at their local Children's Aid Societies and of grandmothers who hold quilting bees so there may be a handmade gift for every child leaving care. Some churches even come together to hold fundraising events to assist couples in paying the expenses of private or international adoption.

We know of one church that held a Christmas dinner for all the staff and volunteers of their local Children's Aid Society to say thank you for the work they do, to pray for them and be available to help. It made an amazing difference.

And let's not forget to celebrate. International adoptive parents Jeff and Melinda Dewsbury of British Columbia were

given a surprise "waiting shower" by their friends – as were we! (See also "New Digs for a Deserving Family," page 12.)

Our family also proudly remembers the day our first child came home from the process of adoption. Staff and affiliate leaders at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) literally smothered our girl with flowers and gifts and beautiful cards expressing love for and over her. The same followed for our second child.

Towards a National Strategy

For several years now, in quiet conversations with various people and groups inside and outside church communities, we have been talking and thinking through the labyrinth of policy and social challenges, and ways in which we can all do right by Canada's children.

The EFC, especially through its Centre for Faith and Public Life, has consistently promoted the protection of children in law and public policy. The work of the EFC transcends political personalities and election outcomes. The EFC's vital role in the public square provides a stable vision of a quality of life over generations.

The EFC mandate is also to gather people together to investigate what they can do better together than alone. As an umbrella association, the EFC is bringing together individuals and a variety of organizations this November to explore collaborative long-term initiatives for all children and discuss strategies for getting Canada's adoptable children home. And the EFC will also be closely tracking the policy work of the House of Commons committee looking at adoption.

Our personal goal is to speak not just to policy issues, but to collaborate widely to generate a surplus of government-approved healthy homes waiting for children. Children should not have to wait to come home, nor should they grow old without a mom and dad of their own. If there is to be a waiting list, let it be a host of families waiting to welcome a child home.

How we tell stories, how we practise love and life, how the state, the media, individuals and families and church communities care for Canada's children – all of us can do better. **FT**

The EFC has consistently promoted the protection of children in law and public policy

BRUCE AND TRACY CLEMENGER are co-editors of an upcoming book and study guide, *A Mom and Dad for Me: Coming Home Through the Process of Adoption*, by 35 Canadian adoptive families and others who work with Canadian children, to be published in 2011. Bruce Clemenger is president of the EFC. If you or your organization have ministry plans related to adoption, or you want to share your adoption story, let us know at children@evangelicalfellowship.ca.

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Pleading for the Poor

Micah Challenge is a network mobilizing Christians against poverty. It hopes to build on the success of the many grassroots events it spurred on worldwide on Oct. 10, 2010. Its target, the Millennium Development Goals adopted by countries around the world, is only five years away. *By Emily Wierenga*

The kids lay in the grass, unmoving, recalls Roy Berkenbosch, an Albertan working in Bangladesh at the time. "I thought maybe they were dead," he says. "They were quite sick – they had open sores and ulcers and flies."

The kids' parents had lost their jobs and subsequently, their home. Berkenbosch had been advised not to help them since it would lead to unhealthy dependency, but he paid for their medical bills.

"When you're confronted with poverty, you have to do something," he explains.

Berkenbosch now lives in Edmonton, where he is still doing something to intercede for the world's one billion poor by serving on the board of Micah Challenge Canada.

Recently he, along with thousands of Canadian Evangelicals, participated in Micah Challenge's global day of action, held on the tenth day of the tenth month of 2010.

"We joined brothers and sisters and campaigns in over 70 countries to say: Poverty matters to God and to the Church," says Berkenbosch, a member of Fellowship Christian Reformed Church whose day job is overseeing the interdisciplinary studies program at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta.

TARGET 2015

Micah Challenge is an international network inspired by the words of Micah 6:8 to pursue justice, mercy and

humility. It was created in 2003 by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Micah Network as a means for Evangelicals to raise awareness concerning world poverty.

Locally, Micah Challenge Canada got a big initial boost and ongoing support from The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), where Don Hutchinson is a vice-president.

"Micah Challenge's campaign allows the Church to demonstrate how it has engaged people and money to alleviate poverty in the developing world while at the same time challenging governments, including Canada's, to keep their commitments to do the same," says Hutchinson. The EFC's partnership with Micah Challenge is "mutually beneficial," he adds.

Micah Challenge groups in various countries have held Micah Sunday events in the fall in years past, but 10.10.10 was a one-of-a-kind effort, says Robyn Bright, director of Micah Challenge Canada. "We are highlighting the fact that we have now been working on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 10 years now, and that we are only five years away from the target date for the MDGs," she explains from her Ottawa office. The event also follows on the tails of both June's G8 Summit and the UN MDG Review Summit in September. "We've talked a lot about poverty and accountability, and now the global Church is calling on nations to follow through."

The goal of 10.10.10 was threefold: to raise up 100 million people in prayer, to inspire 10 million to make a promise to remember the poor, and to provide proof of said

What's Next From Micah?

Christians who want to stand up for the poor will have a number of special opportunities from Micah Challenge Canada over the next year, according to director Robyn Bright, who works from the Ottawa offices of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

1. Great new advocacy and education tools and resources will soon be available on a new Micah Challenge website at www.micahchallenge.ca.
2. Good News for the Poor, a workshop examining the biblical call to respond to poverty, and biblical methodology, will

be available from Micah Challenge across Canada.

3. Select students from across Canada will travel to Ottawa in May 2011 for advocacy training as part of the Raise Your Voice Student Challenge.
4. OutRun Poverty, a series of local walk-a-thons like one just held in Ottawa, are being planned for October 2011 as part of a global Micah campaign called Stand Up, Take Action
5. Micah Challenge continues to work with evangelical communities across Canada to consider climate change and environmental degradation from a faith perspective, and as a justice issue. *FT*

–FT Staff

After 10.10.10

promises by sending handprints to 1,000-plus politicians.

"We're hoping to keep inspiring churches about the role that the Body of Christ can play in alleviating extreme poverty, and the causes of poverty," says Bright. "Our hope is to see Evangelicals recognize that part of the 'good news for the poor' (which Jesus announced so frequently through the New Testament) is a church mobilized to combat injustice and extend mercy.

"Our hope, too, is that through a mobilized and active Church, Canadians will see, manifest in the Church, the heart of God for the poor."

Bright thinks that many Canadian believers "are just starting to look beyond personal salvation to a more complete view of what it might look like to see the Kingdom of God come to Earth, and the work that we have been saved for."

It's only by working out our salvation, says Karen Hamilton of Toronto, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, that the MDGs will be met. "If you play the numbers game, we won't make it," she explains. "If we emphasize faith and commitment as caring for our neighbours, and really put our shoulders to the wheel, then I think we can do it – but there's a tremendous amount of work that has to be done."

And work *is* being done, thanks to churches like St. Paul's Anglican in Edmonton. To honour 10.10.10, St. Paul's youth did a 10-minute church presentation, photographed the congregation holding up their hands in promise to remember the poor, and delivered the photo in person to MP Laurie Hawn. "I am excited to have an enthusiastic group of very young students to head up this initiative," says youth pastor Amy Croy.

Croy and her youth were joined on October 10 by over 60 million believers from around the globe, according to Amanda Jackson of Micah Challenge International. "This is arguably the largest prayer and advocacy action undertaken by Christians," says Jackson, based in Middlesex in the United Kingdom.

Yet the campaign is about more than a day, she continues. It is about energizing the Church to be a voice for justice, integrity and generosity.

EMBRACING THE POOR

Greg Paul, director of Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto, agrees. "Congregations, and in particular, church leaders, still see people who are poor or excluded as 'others' to be ministered to," he says. "They seem to have little interest in discovering and embracing people who are

poor in their own neighbourhoods."

Paul believes the Church in Canada needs to radically reform itself, making the poor its primary concern, before speaking to governments and corporations about *their* responsibility.

When love for your neighbours is put into action, you will then be motivated to advocate on behalf of the world at large by learning about government policies, writing to parliamentarians, forming social justice committees, establishing Micah Challenge groups and urging pastors to speak out on poverty.

"Canadian Evangelicals should also work at opening up better, more direct personal channels of communication with Christians and churches in the global south," says Dr. John Hiemstra, a political science professor at The King's University College. "We need to hear directly their personal stories of struggling. We need to hear their admonition, but also their words and vision of hope for the future."

Such admonition was received in August of 2008 in a letter from churches of the Global South, which stated: "Therefore, we have this against you, brothers and sisters: that along with this powerful announcing of the gospel, the Church [in North America] has not also raised its voice in protest against the injustices that powerful governments and institutions are inflicting on the global south – injustices that afflict the lives and ecosystems of millions of people who still have not seen the sweat of their brow turned into bread."

Poverty, explains Berkenbosch, is not just about people lacking material possessions. It's about broken relationships, both locally and globally. "And justice is about restoring those relationships."

As the letter from the Global South urges, "Out of love" the global Church should "use your citizenship responsibly for the benefit of the entire world; it is for this very reason that the Lord poured out His life on the cross." **FT**



Robyn Bright

EMILY WIERENGA is a freelance writer in Neerlandia, Alta.

The Fatigued by Facebook In

Jennie McLaurin is a physician, writer and associate professor of bio-ethics at Regent College in Vancouver. In an essay she wrote recently in *ChristianWeek* she described a summer experience of withdrawing from the “constant ping of emails, tweets and Facebook comments...that act like tiny doses of a drug.” Karen Stiller, *Faith Today's* associate editor, called her up to talk more about Facebook, friendship, addiction and “What would Jesus think about Facebook?”

KS: Jennie, you wrote about your withdrawal from technology that took about three days, during a recent retreat. Why do we get so attached? And why is it so hard to break away from social media – and everything else?

JM: There isn't anywhere we can't be contacted, or where we can't check in on others. I have a BlackBerry, I work virtually a lot. My BlackBerry has three different work and personal email accounts, and I use it as my alarm clock. When I wake in the morning, I can see new email and Facebook messages instantly. The power of knowing at a glance that you have access to all sorts of outside contacts is intoxicating in a lot of ways.

When I was a medical student, we looked longingly at those who had beepers – they were a sign you had power and authority. It was a status symbol. You got one and then resented it pretty quickly because you were pulled away from where you were. But there was some pride in it. There is the same sense of power and authority in being connected and in touch in some ways.

KS: I've been Facebook-free for a couple of years now, for a variety of reasons, but I remember the first while without it was a bit like a detox. A couple of people seemed to envy my break from it, in a strange way.

JM: During my time away on my retreat it did take me three days to feel comfortable. If you want a relevant Scripture verse, it might be “Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.” I didn't realize how attached I was. I joined Facebook late. I had no interest at all in having one more thing that people could connect with

me on. Then my daughter went away to school and some Regent professors I really loved retired, and they were on it. I joined so I could see the pictures. It was a way for a mother to troll around and see what they were doing. I was rapidly drawn into it. But I'm getting so I don't like it very much. I find myself just randomly going to it and checking, and checking people I don't even know, clicking on people, and then reading and feeling like I had to read the entries from my friends that were on. I felt like I had to pay attention. But a lot of it was stuff I wouldn't know otherwise, and don't really care about, yet my attention was given to that. And I felt it demanded a response from me.

The positive with Facebook is that when we already have a strong face-to-face relationship it can augment that, especially with photos and so on. But it can be counterproductive when people we don't know want to be our Facebook friend. We are drawn into a relationship with people we wouldn't normally have table-relationship with. If I wouldn't meet you for coffee, and wouldn't have you to my house, then I wouldn't want to be your Facebook friend. But, as soon as I say that, it sounds exclusive and harsh.

KS: It's a little strange to “friend” [or link electronically] old grade school companions that you wouldn't normally be friends again with.

JM: Well, how many people can you be in a meaningful relationship with? And if it's not meaningful, where is its proper place? Is it okay just to skim? Could a person use Facebook for a once-a-month scan? But every day, or several times a day, just to see what is put

There isn't anywhere we can't be contacted, or where we can't check in on others.

in, that's where the addictive part can come in. Those dopamine bursts, that's where it becomes more addictive... with another comment, another alert.

KS: Tell me about those dopamine bursts.

JM: It's the same with gambling, and it's even how we teach our toddlers, through reward systems. When you get a positive feedback of any kind that causes a pleasure arousal, you get a little squirt of dopamine. We seek out the pleasure. If we're little, and we get a treat for doing something our parents have asked us to do, we go back and do it again. We train dogs like that. It's that conditioning and it's an actual release of a chemical that this is pleasurable, and so we repeat the action to get the pleasure. "Oh, I have a new Facebook friend," and it releases the chemical. Later, it doesn't even have to be pleasurable; the action alone releases the chemical. It feeds the pleasure centre, similar to endorphins that runners get, but in much quicker, smaller bursts. I can't think of anything that goes as fast as our communication technology. That is why it's so hard to withdraw. It's so constant.

KS: How real are our Facebook relationships?

JM: It can be very superficial, and we're totally in control of what we share. When we respond, we pick and choose what we share. Facebook is a positive way to share joys or funny things, but it's not a good vehicle for sharing sorrow, and it's not a good vehicle for sharing more of the totality of who you are, and what your life is about. It will cut you off actually, when you try to share a story that is too long. Albert Borgmann is an American



Jennie McLaurin: Facebook is a positive way to share joys or funny things, but it's not a good vehicle for sharing sorrow.

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philosopher who specializes in the philosophy of technology. One of the helpful things he wrote was the idea of vital things. Technology allows vital things to be mediated by signs and substitutes, which is both the good thing and the danger. He's a fan of technology, but he says we need to keep the vital things central and not peripheral. You can become comfortable enough with your substitution of the presence of another, so you don't need to be present. I don't need to see my friend or call her because I've seen her all week on Facebook. I can sit in my house and be with my Facebook friends instead of visiting my neighbours.

KS: As someone who loves to write, I enjoyed composing the update lines, and then enjoyed – a bit too much for the good of my ego – the positive strokes I would receive back.

JM: Me too! I get it. We are thinking too much about how somebody is going to respond to us.

KS: We're all very human.

JM: It's time for true confessions. Lately, instead of reaching for my Bible, and having a prayer, I'm checking my messages. That's the first thing I see in the morning, and the last thing I see at night. It is a sign, I think, of disordered accountability. It's a socially awkward thing to say that I'm quitting Facebook. It can come off as holier-than-thou. But, I'm judging myself. I need to be more invested in the people around me. Or maybe just quit [electronic links to] "friends" if you wouldn't stay overnight in their house. I'm going to only schedule a certain time when I will look at it, maybe Saturday afternoons, for only one hour. I tried to schedule my kids when they lived at home. I'd say, "You can go on for half an hour right now and that's it for the day," for the same kinds of reasons. I don't know if it needs to be a total quitting or a repositioning of the vital and the technology. For you and for me, maybe it needs to be a quitting and then

a regrouping. What I've been thinking about is the place of all of this in the context of my life, my time at home and work, and a sense of Sabbath. Sabbath may mean that I will use a cell phone, but not use technology of any other kind – not Facebook, not Craigslist, not on Sundays.

KS: And now for the question we've all been waiting for: Would Jesus be on Facebook?


JM: Jesus on Facebook? He knew His mission, He didn't seek out the crowds. For me, am I seeking out crowds? Am I looking for a crowd to respond to me? Or am I looking at who God has put me with? He was a healer, and it was pretty rare for Him to heal remotely. For the most part He was with the person and touched them. He didn't get as much done as He could have, and we all know what that feels like. He really limited his participation in the world with people. There were a lot of things He could have done, but didn't do. For the most part He went to visit people needing healing and made others accompany Him.

Listening takes intentionality, and it's an active process. My experience with most of our social technology is that the focus is on our response, not on our listening. It's on our input. You're not really being heard for who you are, you have to put in a little smiley face to make sure the person knows you're happy, and you're not even sure what the smiley face means. It's a sad substitute for being heard by somebody else. If we know anything about God, we know He's a listener. He listens to us. Jesus asked great questions. He asked more than he answered, it seems to me. Facebook is about telling, and any questioning is liable to get very filtered responses. So, another no vote for Jesus on Facebook.

KS: I'm predicting many letters to the editor on this interview. Thanks, Jennie. **FT**

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A Cradle in Our Hearts

Five Steps to a Simpler (and Holier) Christmas

By Stephanie Douglas

At some point in our Christmas celebrations, most of us wonder what all the hoopla and stress actually has to do with the birth of Jesus Christ. Here's a simpler path to Bethlehem's cradle.



PHOTO: DON HAMMOND / WWW.DESIGNPICS.COM

We love Jesus, and Christmas in our family has always been a worshipful celebration of His birth. Or at least that's our intention. Somewhere on the journey, past the burnt

gingerbread cookies, around the corner from the matted Christmas lights and the panicky shopping excursions, we lose our way. We invariably arrive breathless at the manger on Christmas morning, throwing ourselves at His feet in a wild-

fully at Christmas. Christmas is also a season for personal piety. With this in mind, Wilkinson proposes a second question to consider when evaluating our Christmas traditions: Is this helping me to prepare Him room?

eyed, apologetic heap.

Experts assure me there is a better way to do Christmas. It calls for a bit of prayer, courage and planning – but it can be done.

Ask the Right Questions

Loren Wilkinson is a professor at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C., and is in the habit of challenging Christians to think more deeply about how we live in the world. He and his wife Mary-Ruth have given much consideration, as a family, to what the Christmas season means for those who follow Jesus.

For Christians intent on revising their holiday practices, Wilkinson says to begin by locating Christmas within the whole biblical narrative. "If we understand the incarnation in its full scope, it's Joy to the World," he explains. The birth of Jesus is about salvation, not just of human beings, but of all Creation. Asking ourselves, "Is this good news for Creation?" is a healthy habit to develop throughout the year, but perhaps most meaning-

Consider Creation

Armed with the right questions, it's time to tackle practicalities. What, for example, would a good-news-for-Creation Christmas look like?

It could look as simple as switching your old tree lights to energy efficient LED (light emitting diode) ones, adding

up to a wattage of positive change. Sending the kids outdoors to collect pine cones saves purchasing a plastic centerpiece and, as a bonus, buys you some quiet. Wrapping gifts in one of your child's many

"Let not our hearts be busy inns that have no room for Thee, but cradles for the living Christ and his nativity"

artistic masterpieces will delight the grandparents and save trees; newspapers (perhaps a colour comics section) are a similarly creative option. Or, if you want to avoid paper altogether and can thread a needle, whip up some cloth Christmas bags and re-use them year by year.

The Wilkinson family considers whether a gift is designed to be thrown away or treasured. Much of their gift exchanges involve homemade presents, whether it's wooden building blocks made by Grandpa Loren or hand-decorated stationery courtesy of their teenage granddaughter. If handmade gifts are not your thing, shop at stores like Ten Thousand Villages that feature fair trade items and where beautiful gifts link buyers more closely to their makers. Buying from websites like Etsy.com (featuring handicrafts) or from local artisans in your community means your purchase brings good news to the recipient, but also to the artist.

Think Quality, Not Quantity

The Wilkinsons have found they can create an appealing sense of pacing to

their Christmas. When pressed to outline the how of it, Wilkinson offers this Welsh prayer by way of explanation: "Let not our hearts be busy inns that have no room for Thee, but cradles for the living Christ and his nativity."

While not an answer per se, this prayer ought to curb any nascent perfectionist streak. Here's the truth: 30 varieties of baked goods in the freezer do not add up to a better holiday. A more modest (and manageable) display of Christmas will not leech away our seasonal joy. Paring down an overloaded schedule will not spell the end of awe and wonder. Let's remember, we're making room in our hearts for Jesus, not Martha Stewart.

Focusing on a few traditions rich in Christian meaning, including the Church's historic celebration of Advent, can help us slow down and savour the season. Drawing from the image of Light coming into the darkness, the Wilkinsons make great use of candles and natural lighting, creating a magical mood. The advent wreath, with its associated Scripture readings and prayers, also figures large, as does the Christmas tree. (Wilkinson notes that Christmas trees are a crop, and therefore a perfectly acceptable use of God's Creation.) An equally rich tradition is that of the nativity scene, especially one solid enough for children to play with.

Give Differently

Understanding Christmas' intimate ties with Creation can help us actively resist a consumerist mentality. The "less is more" principle applies to volume of presents, too. Of course, reducing or redirecting seasonal bounty can lead to mutiny if you forge ahead without consulting the rest of the crew. Having a conversation with family is a must.

Changes around gift-giving practices are delicate to negotiate. Judi Vankevich (a.k.a. the Manners Lady) from Langley,

B.C., offers sage advice. First, she says, don't wait to the last minute to discuss the change. Talk to people as soon as possible about your proposed gift-giving changes before Christmas shopping gets underway. Within one's immediate family, set expectations early around the number of packages under the tree.

Vankevich also warns against completely eliminating gift-giving. "When

Easy Ways to Change What's Under the Tree

Looking for quality, handmade gifts but not sure where to start? Check out these websites for ideas:

www.tenthousandvillages.ca, www.canadiancraftsonline.com and www.etsy.com.

Goats, microfinance projects and school supplies for children are just a few of the more common choices offered in the Christmas gift catalogues of the charities you probably already support the rest of the year. If you need ideas of Christian ministries who may offer gift catalogues, visit theEFC.ca/affiliates for a list of websites of organizations that offer gift-giving alternatives for Christmas and the rest of the year.

Think of supporting local community projects. Make a donation in someone's name to an organization doing good work locally, and then share the good news of your gift-giving decision in a beautiful card – maybe even a handmade card!

Support a missionary from your church, or sponsor a child as a gift to your whole family. Make it a year-long family project to pray for them and send letters and postcards. –SD

we give gifts," she says, "it's a symbol of the gift we've been given in Christ." Gifts don't have to be expensive or frivolous. For adults, coupons for a free evening of babysitting or a fancy meal make meaningful presents. Extended families can draw names or give a single "family present" to reduce the volume, but not

the fun of gift giving.

Even better, says Vankevich, is celebrating the change by turning the giving outward. "Ask your kids how we can give Jesus a gift for His birthday. 'How can we, as a family, bless others, as God has blessed us?' I've seen kids get excited about giving gifts from a World Vision

catalogue or a Samaritan's Purse Christmas box." However, be sure to involve family members in choosing the project. "People will support that which they help to create," she says. When giving a present that is a donation, it may also help to ease the change in tradition by wrapping a small memento that symbolizes the gift, such as a sheep ornament or a tiny stuffed bunny.

Plan Ahead

When all is said and done, even a simpler Christmas means work. With most of that work falling in December, how easy for our hearts to become busy inns! Debbie Bruce, member of Faithful Organizers, a network of Christian professional organizers, and founder of Neatfreak in Calgary, says that

Let's remember, we're making room in our hearts for Jesus, not Martha Stewart

even a small amount of advance planning can lessen the frenzy. Take, for example, our perennially gnarled mound of Christmas lights. Devoting 10 extra minutes to properly wrapping the cords before throwing them into the box can spare us several hours of frustration next year. Baking and freezing at a leisurely pace in November allows for more time for reflection and visiting when Christmas arrives. Above all, says Bruce, stick to your new plan. Resist that seasonal temptation to excess. "We don't need more to be thankful," she says. "We need to be thankful, more."

Gratitude and worship are what Christmas is about, after all. No one wants to arrive at the manger on Christmas morning wild-eyed and harassed. The good news is, with a few prayerful changes this season, it's entirely possible to make our hearts' cradles ready for Him. **FT**

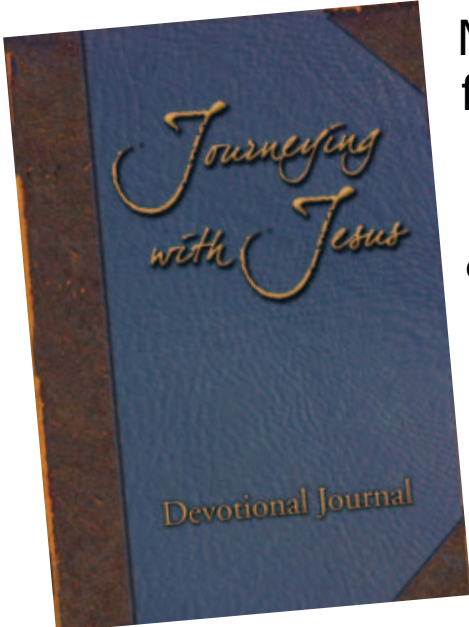
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Hark, Do Herald Angels Really

Sing?

By Carolyn Arends

Was the angelic chorus of the Christmas story really a chorus? And why human singing matters.

The crèche of my childhood featured exquisitely fragile figurines in an awesomely rustic setting. We weren't allowed to touch breakable Mary, brittle Joseph, or their vulnerable little baby, but we could rub our fingertips as much as we liked against the scratchy green moss that coated the splintering roof of their stable. Even better, we could arrange "angel hair" (back when everyone thought it was a great idea for children to decorate with spun fiberglass) on top of the moss to create a shimmering perch for the angels, who could then be nestled gingerly into place by a certified adult.

Each year, at the exact moment when our nativity scene angels were secured to the stable roof, our family would belt out a carol such as "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" or "Angels We Have Heard on High." Admittedly, it was a touch *West Side Story*



for us all to spontaneously burst into song. But it was a point of fact that the angels themselves had burst into song to get the first Christmas started. If it was good enough for them, it was good enough for us.

Our nativity traditions left me with an enduring fascination with angelic choirs. When I was still a kid, I wrote my first Christmas song called “He Had His Angels Sing.” It expressed my wonder at the idea that God the Father, separated from His Son and anticipating His crucifixion, loved us so much that He would still have His angels celebrate the whole endeavour. I’ve written a Christmas song almost every year since (I don’t even want to count how many songs that is), and the majority of them mention angels singing.

So you can imagine my shock when, reading the second chapter of Luke a few weeks ago, I noticed that verses 13 and 14 say: “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel,

praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’ ”

The angels were saying, not singing, these things? That hardly seemed possible. I wondered if my trusty NIV was uncharacteristically inaccurate (not to mention unpoetic) on this point. So I checked another translation. And then another. They all described angels *saying* the most important news ever delivered.

I felt crushed. Was the angel song really more of a newscast? Had there been no melody, no harmony, no rising crescendo as the heavenly host grew and grew? Had I (not to mention the carol writers and crèche makers of the last eight or nine centuries) simply been swept away by a sentimental notion rather than a biblical account of the inaugural Christmas?

The only Greek I can expertly dissect is *souvlaki*, so I emailed my theology professor friend, Daryl Busby, to ask him about

the original text in Luke 2. His reply was not initially encouraging. “Technically, the word is *lego* which means saying or speaking,” he confirmed. But before I could accuse him of being a theological Scrooge, he added: “However, this is similar to the word used in Ephesians 5:9, where Paul talks about ‘speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ and **THERE** it is obviously singing. So it seems to me, based on the word in both places, that they were singing.”

This was more like it! But though I was relieved, I was not as convinced as I wanted to be. After all, if they really were singing, why didn’t Luke say so? Needing to establish precedent for angelic beings singing, I wondered about the creatures described in the Book of Revelation, the ones that never stop crying “Holy!” I sent Dr. Busby another email.

“What about in Revelation 4:8?” I asked him. “Are the creatures gathered around the throne saying or singing that God is holy?” His answer came back quickly. “*Lego* again. Technically, saying.”

It turns out that it’s not until Revelation 5 that a specifically musical word (*aido*) is used to describe what the creatures are doing. But that word is translated “singing,” so at least I have proof that angelic creatures sometimes sing. And, intriguingly, *aido* is also used in the Ephesians passage that Dr. Busby mentioned in his first email. There, Paul encourages believers to: “Speak [a form of *lego*] to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing [*aido*] and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (KJV)

It seems to me that in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and in John’s Revelation, saying something important and singing something important are virtually interchangeable ideas. If a word is worth speaking, it’s worth singing. So maybe it’s not a stretch to say that Luke thought the same thing. Maybe, if I could ask him, he’d tell me that of course the angels were declaring peace on Earth and goodwill towards men by singing it. Jesus – the *Logos*, the ultimate Word worth saying – had come to Earth! Why wouldn’t they sing?

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There is an expectation throughout Scripture that those who know God, sing. Singing, after all, asks our bodies – our vocal chords, lungs, diaphragms, mouths and ears – to agree with and act upon what our hearts and minds know to be true. Our thankfulness is deeper when we sing it; our faith is more ingrained when we give it a tune. Skillful vocalizing is a special source of pleasure, and there is certainly a place for performance-oriented musical expression. But even the most tone deaf among us can be faithful to the basic and pervasive command to make a joyful noise. My friend Rich Mullins used to say that he loved going to church as a kid because it was the only place he could hear men singing enthusiastically out of tune.

Many of our churches have changed since Rich was young. Often the congregants' voices are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of those who are leading them, turning would-be participants into, in the words of music professor Harold Best, "observers and competitors." In many of our homes and cars, too, the constant din of televisions, stereos, radios, iPods and YouTube videos discourages the rising up of humble human voices in song.

But in passages too numerous to list, the biblical writers tell us to sing to the Lord, shouting new songs and remembering old ones. Even more than commanding singing, they assume it. They describe countless believers in varied

times singing in jubilation, proclamation, lamentation, anticipation, and every other condition imaginable. Through the prophet Zephaniah, God even poetically describes Himself singing, rejoicing over the ones He loves with song (3:17).

So, we who believe there was one particular night, a night when angels sang to shepherds about a Prince who would save the world; a night when a young mother sang over her tiny baby and realized that in some impossibly miraculous way she was holding God; a night when the Creator of the Universe sang over us all and was glad to give us His Son...we who believe, we know what to do. Jesus has come! Why wouldn't we sing? **FT**

CAROLYN ARENDS is a recording artist, author and speaker based in Surrey, BC. Many of her Christmas songs can be found on her CD release *Christmas: An Irrational Season*. She blogs at www.carolynarends.com.

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and churches to engage with the issues surrounding human trafficking and other violent injustice around the world. Across Canada, IJM Canada speakers raise awareness and promote action and assure Canadians they can make a difference. IJM Canada invites Canadians to join a growing number of prayer partners, the network of "Justice Churches" or an IJM Canada Campus Chapter. The first step is to visit our web site to become informed – and then become active.

Web site: www.ijm.ca. Phone: 519-679-5030. Address: 150 Dufferin Avenue, Suite 604, London, ON N6A 5N6.

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Last year, over 550,000 children and their families were ministered to through Upward basketball, flag football, soccer and cheerleading leagues conducted by nearly 3,000 churches in 40 denominations across the United States, Canada and around the world. To learn more, visit www.upward.org/interest.

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Water Ambassadors

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half of the world) do not have a toilet. Women and children spend hours walking an average of four miles (about six kilometres) carrying heavy buckets of water to their homes.

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Water Ambassadors Canada helps to provide clean water to those who have little or none. The first step in development is good health as a result of drinking clean water. Treatment of HIV AIDS starts with clean water.

We work to give clean water by drilling wells or repairing existing wells, distributing filters, setting up purifier systems and teaching health and hygiene.

Canadians are blessed with an abundance of clean water. You can help by donating, praying or by joining one of our water teams. See first hand how we can all be "changing lives with clean water."

Please visit our web site www.waterambassadorscanada.org.

A TIN-ROOF WITNESS

World Serve

In a world mired in spiritual and physical brokenness, we're called to show mercy to the homeless, the hungry and the vulnerable. God reminds us that the work we do is a spiritual endeavour that can be accomplished only by the power of God working in us as we are guided by the Word of God.

Here in Canada, we build churches with few obstacles in the way. We would not think of starting a church and not putting a roof over it.

But in Ethiopia they are excited to just put up some walls—and if they can later find the money or the tin to put a roof over the church, that is an extra blessing. They're relying on the power of God.

To us it's just a tin roof, but to Christians in Ethiopia it's the finishing touch on an important part of their witness to their neighbours. It becomes a magnet attracting Christians, Muslims and animists alike as they come to see what this new church is all about.

Local churches in Ethiopia have an important role to play in evangelizing, equipping and discipling of believers to live out the gospel in their daily lives. ■



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Grandview Calvary Baptist Church, Vancouver



PHOTO COURTESY: GRANDVIEW CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

The Pottery Studio is a ministry committed to community building, acceptance, creativity and healing.

“Christianity has become so building centred,” states Tim Dickau, senior pastor of Grandview Calvary Baptist Church (GCBC) in Vancouver. Two decades ago neighbours hardly noticed the church building on the downtown fringe of Eastside Vancouver. Most residents were rather suspicious of this worship centre as the gap in the community increased between rich and poor.

Dickau arrived in 1989, commissioned to help the church reconnect with its neighbours. “We’re expressing a new kind of monasticism,” explains Dickau, “learning how to read and evaluate society in light of biblical tradition, seeking shalom within our community made up of business owners and pan-handlers.” Today, \$750,000 homes share the neighbourhood with social housing.

Inhabiting a Neighbourhood

Twenty years ago, 60 people, mostly seniors, were cautious about change inside the church. Few wanted to step outside their comfort zone, yet a faint hope remained that the church could thrive. Dickau invited some people to join his move into the neighbourhood and a few responded.

His small flock reserved a year to repair the building and recast a congregational vision of love for the neighbourhood. Sixty

per cent now live within 20 blocks of the church. More than 250 people from Asian, African, Latino, Aboriginal and Caucasian cultures worship in two congregations in the same facility. A decade ago the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (then the Baptist Union) helped fund an immigrant pastor. Today 25 nations join in worship.

Living Hospitably

A hundred years after its inception, GCBC is a community of people who extend the radical welcome of God in Christ for transforming their neighbourhood. They look out for “the least of these among us” and stand with them.

Currently known for sharing their homes with people in transition, this congregation helps refugee claimants get established in Canada. They invite community residents to find their way into the gathering spaces of the Salsbury Community Housing Society, a local offshoot of GCBC committed to the welcome and support of vulnerable people. The JustWork Economic Initiative fosters dignified gainful employment (gardening, catering, repairs) for those facing work-related barriers. JustGarden, a landscape company, works with a small group of people on a long-term basis, stewarding relationships as it stewards Creation and the gift of work.

Dickau’s concern for the needs of East Vancouver led him

to nurture a ministry that touches individual lives at their point of need. A parents' group blossomed from a conversation in the park with a lonely woman who eventually became a Christ follower. Another woman, deeply depressed, came to The Open Door for single moms. Attending The Pottery Studio, a ministry committed to community building, acceptance, creativity and healing, she now declares, "I've been given my life back. The church offered me a chance to use my art and live a normal life."

A 27-year-old man lived on the street before he was welcomed into a house with four other guys and became part of the worship community. "People here care about me," he says. "Before, people cared about my construction work but they didn't see me. Now I want to do my job well to make room for others."

Social initiatives are expressed as individuals buy houses together or invite neighbours needing shelter to use their guest

rooms. It's a new and common way of life together that reflects the Kingdom of God. Plans to construct a social housing project above the church parking lot are underway.

It's Counter-Cultural

Most leaders of these various ministries are part of the church – some from other churches, a few not yet followers. People sometimes volunteer first and attend church when they feel comfortable. "It's counter-cultural," states Dickau. Half the adults in the two GCBC congregations are involved in ministry outside the four walls of the church. They're aware of opportunities and needs – with an openness to get involved.

Dickau encourages his congregation to engage politically without becoming entrapped in partisan politics. "Jesus was confronted by issues of power," he says. Through the Out of the Cold program some are involved in relief and development, offering haircuts, on-site nursing, a

computer lab, movies and board games, alongside prayer and Bible study.

Other churches are encouraged to examine their resources and dedicate them for Kingdom purposes. Streams of Justice presentations challenge churches around the issues of homelessness. Roots and Wings offers parenting seminars. "Being engaged in the neighbourhood builds solidarity with the poor while pursuing well-being," says Dickau, who is also a member of Street Level, the National Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness, a group operating on the administrative and communications platform of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Stewarding Creation

This faith community cares about the neighbourhood, its beauty and sustainability. Gardens are planted in abandoned properties. A community garden right beside the church houses a beehive for pollination and honey. One of the founders of A Rocha Canada (www.arocha.org/ca), an international conservation organization, attends the church. He has led both congregation and community members on Creation outings – through gardens, across watersheds, even into garbage sites – to learn about caring for and enjoying the world God entrusts to our care.

Searching for sustainability in the midst of theological diversity and urban transience has been a challenge, Dickau admits. There will always be a mixture of rejoicing and grieving as people come and go. Focusing on a common vision, with common practices of hospitality and prayer, helps them confront the idolatry of the economy. Over the last 20 years, God has blessed this congregation's striving to become a community that inhabits the neighbourhood as they share life and build a vision of the Kingdom of God. **FT**

CHARLENE DE HAAN is a freelance writer in Toronto. She is also the executive director of CAM International of Canada and founder of stepUPtransitions.ca. Read all the profiles in this ongoing series at www.faithtoday.ca. At press time Dickau was set to publish a book on his church entitled *Our Journey*.

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Sharing Water

The executive minister of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada introduces another EFC-affiliated church denomination.

In recent years the leaders of our denomination have been drawn to the story of Isaac looking for water (in Genesis 26). It reminds us of the constant human search for the living water found in Christ Jesus our Lord, and how every time a well is dug, people can receive sustenance for life and gather as a community of faith.

We as Canadian Baptists feel excited and called to Western Canada, which for us includes the four western provinces and two territories. We don't frame it as a dry or empty land, but a land filled with challenges like many others, and with more work than can be done by a single denomination. We take heart from Genesis 26:22: "And Isaac dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'" It seems as true today that the Lord is making room for many denominations and churches in His land.

The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) now includes 168 churches, with 14 new churches set to join us in the next six months and 20 more in the following year. We have found many places of dryness and need in the culture and have felt very encouraged as we raise the resources to meet those needs.

Our beginnings were rather fragile. The first Baptists who ventured forth into the North-Western Territory, as the area was then called, were Thomas Davidson and Thomas Baldwin, who left Ingersoll, Ont., in June 1869. They arrived in Winnipeg after a 14-day journey by rail, mule and foot covering 1,400 miles (2,253 km). Their first act after crossing the border was, technically speaking, vandalism. They recalled: "We drove over the boundary post, wrote the word 'Canada' on the British side, took off our hats and sang with full hearts: 'God Save our Gracious Queen' and waded the awful stillness of the West into echoes of praise to our Sovereign Lord." Below their "Canada" graffiti they might just as well have added, "Not to us, Lord, but to Your Name be the glory."

There are five significant Baptist groups in Western Canada. The CBWC belongs to a tradition well articulated by Peter Reid in *Faith Today* in May/June 2010, going back to the Atlantic Baptists and the story he recounts.

Today the CBWC is an eclectic group of an evangelical

and orthodox commitment, longing for people to come to know Christ, with a strong engagement in issues of social justice and mercy, and a clear commitment to the health and building up of the local church. We have a diverse history, producing former premier Tommy Douglas and former prime minister John Diefenbaker through to Operation Eyesight leaders Ben and Evelyn Gullison, and further to the founders and co-founders of Mustard Seed urban ministries in Edmonton, Calgary and Victoria, and still further to chaplains at every level of society.

Some of this commitment is lived out in our seminary and college, Carey Centre in Vancouver, where we re-launched our Master of Divinity (MDiv) program in September 2009 with just over 30 students – a program which now includes 70. More than seven camps are affiliated with us across Western Canada. While we remain committed to them, we are also developing urban overnight and daytime Christian camp ministries in as many contexts as possible.

We have been delighted, as have many Christians, with the push to embrace short-term ministry work internationally. But we need to see individuals ministering within their own country as well. Thus, this year about 200 people visited other churches and ministries in Western Canada to serve, encourage and build up those ministries. Opportunities included rebuilding cabins at a camp, working with inner-city and at-risk children and visiting a refugee advocacy house.

We have also, in the past two years, worked hard at creating curriculum and teaching resources for our churches around baptism and welcoming liturgies.

And of course there is more, some of which you can read online at www.cbwc.ca.

We are particularly concerned as an evangelical denomination that we, in faithfulness to our Lord's call in John 17, seek partnership with other denominations and ministries where possible. Bernice Gerard, a dear friend known to many as a broadcaster and Pentecostal pastor, used to say, "We don't have to agree on everything, but we can pick specific things to work on together." She was right – the Lord requires it of us. I trust we at the CBWC will learn to grow in that truth in the years ahead, remembering with all of Canada's other Evangelicals that "the Lord has made room for us and we shall flourish in the land," but also that, at the end of the day, indeed at the end of all time, "Not to us, not to us, but to Thy name be the glory." **FT**

REV. JEREMY BELL is the executive minister of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. This column continues a series by affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. For a list, see theEFC.ca/affiliates.



Atheism Rampant

As atheism waxes and wanes worldwide – mostly waxes, lately – what should Christians do?

As numbers go, atheists have much to celebrate. The number of Britons signing up for de-baptism certificates is now over 100,000. One Gallup poll shows a doubling of Americans claiming no religion, a category including but not limited to atheists, over the last two decades. Estonia, the Czech Republic and Sweden have high concentrations of atheists. In Canada the last major census showed those citizens claiming “no religious affiliation” growing by 44.2 per cent. In contrast, Christian groups grew by 1.5 per cent. There are now over 100 organizations that promote atheism globally, especially on university campuses.

Atheism is also making a splash publicly. The star here is, of course, Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion* (2006), a former Oxford professor and celebrated science writer. Dawkins is often joined on the campaign trail by other celebrity atheists Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and the controversial Christopher Hitchens, author of *God is Not Great*, now battling cancer. These “four horsemen of the atheist apocalypse” represent a dogmatic and strident new atheism. It is a “take no prisoners” and “no holds barred” approach.

The stridency is evident in several ways. First, atheists have started a campaign to advertise their ideology on buses. This is the brainchild of British comedian Ariane Sherine, funded in part by Dawkins. Buses in the United Kingdom bore signs that read: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” American atheists used this slogan: “Why believe in a God? Just be good for goodness’ sake.” The Italian atheists chose this message: “The bad news is that God does not exist. The good news is that you don’t need him.”

A more disturbing signal of atheist hubris lies in the notorious “blasphemy challenge” campaign started in 2006 by the Rational Response Squad. It involves inviting atheists to post a video on YouTube that blasphemes the Holy Spirit. The Squad gives this instruction: “You may damn yourself to Hell however you would like, but somewhere in your video you must say this phrase: ‘I deny the Holy Spirit.’” They even add this ironic note: “This is a one-way road you’re taking here.” Video responses are full of swearing, curses and mockery.

Granted, atheists are also having internal struggles. Paul Kurtz was recently ousted by other atheists from his own Center for Inquiry and its related organizations, including the Council for Secular Humanism. As well, Richard Dawkins’

reputation has suffered enormously because of nasty internal squabbles over a forum shutdown in his charitable foundation. Dawkins also just launched legal action against Josh Timonen, his long-time assistant, who ran the foundation website and store. Timonen calls the lawsuit “completely ridiculous” and claims that it represents “the ultimate betrayal.”

Christians who seek to engage atheism face crucial intellectual and spiritual issues. First, the success of the new atheism is daunting. Given this, Christian apologetics (from the Greek word for defence) has become more important than ever. Thankfully, there are great scholars who meet atheism head on – including Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig and Richard Swinburne.

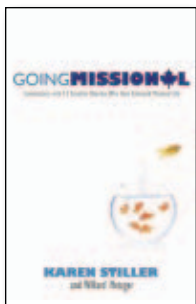
Second, Christians must keep to the high paths of tolerance, wisdom and love as atheists increasingly do the opposite. As a tangent, their nasty internal squabbles are proof of the truth of the Christian view of humanity’s sin. Of course, Christians need to remember that we have our own internal squabbles – and that atheists have often been on the receiving end of intolerance through history.

Third, Christians have to avoid overstating their case or minimizing problems in Scripture, theology and lifestyle. Apologetics runs the risk of over-emphasis on rationality. After all, we walk by faith, not by sight. Our ultimate grounding involves trust in Christ, not human wisdom or reason.

Here the fideistic (faith-related) emphasis in Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Lev Shestov (1866-1938) and Karl Barth (1886-1968) is important. Pascal carried a note with him everywhere that read: “Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the scholars.” Shestov wrote: “To find God one must tear oneself away from the seductions of reason, with all its physical and moral constraints, and go to another source of truth. In Scripture this source bears the enigmatic name *faith*, which is that dimension of thought where truth abandons itself fearlessly and joyously to the entire disposition of the Creator.”

Carl Becker, the famous historian of ideas, describes the rise of atheism this way: “It has taken eight centuries to replace the conception of existence as divinely composed and purposeful drama by the conception of existence as a blindly running flux of disintegrating energy.” While atheists celebrate this change, even in today’s climate of opinion it reads like a distressing course, streaked with darkness and decay. The Christian is under obligation to bring some light and life. It is a wonderful opportunity. **FT**

JAMES A. BEVERLEY is professor of Christian thought and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.



Going Missional: Conversations With 13 Canadian Churches Who Have Embraced Missional Life

By Karen Stiller and Willard Metzger
Word Alive Press, 2010
161 pages
\$16.45 (paper)



The Day Metallica Came to Church

By John Van Sloten
Square Inch (a division of Faith Alive Christian Resources), 2010
250 pages
\$14.99 (paper)

Going Missional

Canadian evangelicalism is maturing. It's obvious as one reads about the qualitative growth, organic development, desire for excellence and humble spirit in this book, a distillation from 46 interviews with 13 congregations involving communities ranging from Duncan B.C. to Halifax, N.S.

Those interviewed were asked, "What does it mean for you to be a missional church?"

Among the rich variety of responses and definitions of what "missional" means, several pivotal insights dominate. To be missional is to be open and aware of what God is doing in the community – within and beyond the congregation itself – and then to help people join into those things God is doing. The responsibility to do this belongs to everyone, not only the formal leadership, since all have unique gifts to offer.

A focus on serving the wider community by discovering its real needs requires careful listening and then acting to fill a niche needing attention. Merely "filling pews" and "counting heads" is not enough – Christians are called to move past spiritual consumerism to authentic servanthood.

Many responses reflect a serious desire to be more fully the Church. People are called to a heightened consciousness of what God is doing outside the congregation so that all can join in that activity. Quantitative growth, while important, is intentionally complemented by a strong commitment to qualitative member formation. People stop "coming to church" and start "being the Church."

One weakness in this generally healthy collage might be that attention is so often fixed on present and future that there seems to be little consideration for Christian tradition and its lessons for moderns. Business, a common evangelical characteristic, is strongly evident – contrary to the quiet, contemplative life which can be a worthy ally in efforts to be effectively missional.

Still, this book provides valuable sketches of some very creative ministry taking place in Canada today.

–WAYNE HOLST

The Day Metallica Came to Church

Can God's truth really pierce through the song lyrics of the heavy metal band Metallica? In his electrifying first book, Christian Reformed pastor

John Van Sloten, adopts John Calvin's adage that, "All truth is inspired by the Holy Spirit," including the, "righteously-indignant-high-decible-passionately-screaming-for-justice truth" of Metallica's lyrics.

As Van Sloten gives examples of their lyrics next to Old Testament scriptures, he reveals the underlying theme of this profoundly written book: "to see the fingerprints and hear the voice of the Creator in every corner of Creation."

Van Sloten adeptly carries his readers on an extraordinary journey, enabling us to re-discover a God who reveals himself not only in the majesty of a sunset, but also in the paintings of Van Gogh, in the deeply flawed characters of the Academy Award winning movie, *Crash*, and in the endgame glory of a World Cup soccer match.

The definitive point of this book comes as Van Sloten studies Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Still Life With Open Bible*. Here the family Bible lies open to Isaiah 53, a passage describing the "future Messiah who would usher in salvation...as a suffering servant." Next to it lies a worn copy of *La Joie de Vivre*, Emile Zola's story about a young girl

willing to lay down her life for others, even as they wrongfully accuse her.

Van Sloten contends that God reveals himself through the Bible and culture at the same time, and that these living texts "co-illuminate" one another. Both are speaking God's truth and it is in understanding both that we understand God better.

This new perception of creational revelation dramatically changed Van Sloten, along with many members of his Calgary church. After reading this book, it changed me too.

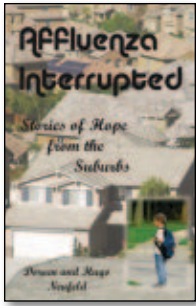
As for Metallica coming to church, they actually did . . . kind of. But you'll have to read the book for the full story.

–DORIS FLECK

Affluenza Interrupted

Doreen and Hugo Neufeld are Mennonite Christians who, like all of us, want to be good stewards of all that God has given and lent to us. But the Neufelds believe that we Christians are very bad at realizing that goal, and that living in North America's affluent suburbs is one of the reasons.

The Neufelds – who have lived in the country, the inner city and the suburbs – concur with the common critique of



Affluenza Interrupted: Stories of Hope From the Suburbs

By Doreen and Hugo Neufeld
Millrise Publishing/Mennonite Publishing Network, 2009
217 pages
\$18.00 (paper)



Greg Sczebel
Love & The Lack Thereof
Soulstone, 2009
\$14.99 at
gregsczebel.com

the 'burbs as fence-building, soul-deadening, wealth-chasing, anonymous places that keep us (or makes us drift) from where we should be in the Kingdom of God.

Yet the evidence they muster for that view is flimsy and based on assumptions they don't carefully examine. Are inner cities or towns or rural locations structurally, functionally better places for Christian to live than suburbs are? Is it inately harder to be a Christian

in the suburbs, to relinquish a soul-hold on one's worldly goods and to act in compassion toward those in need?

They write, "In the suburbs the clear message is that appearances must be maintained. Everything is in order. There are no noisy outbursts. Conflicts are hidden." But is that true? And automatically untrue about other places?

The Neufelds don't mount convincing arguments. They want us to examine our atti-

tudes but their own stewardship views are intertwined with pacifism (armaments money could go to the poor), an unrealistic picture of economics and how businesses operate (higher taxes on the rich are the answer), and with tinges of anti-Americanism (Americans are war-mongering and grossly materialistic; we're not told that Americans give more than twice as much to charity as a percentage of income than Canadians do).

The Neufelds' concerns about materialistic Christians must not be dismissed. But they would have been more successful at getting fellow Christians to examine our own attitudes toward money and lifestyle had they simply mounted a thorough study of what Scripture actually teaches about how to "seek first the Kingdom of God" and appropriately use the profligate gifts God has given us.

—MARIAN VAN TIL

Greg Sczebel Love & The Lack Thereof

Greg Sczebel doesn't like to rush things, be it with his music or in romance.

Musically, it's taken him more than five years to release the much-anticipated follow-up to his 2004 Juno-winning debut, *Here To Stay*.

Relationally, the affable, Shuswap, B.C.-area bachelor in his mid-20s sings in *I Will Come*, "What's the hurry? What's the point of being hasty? Why waken love before its time? Why would I give my heart to strangers? Instead I'll just wait until you're mine."

This stands as a testament to his maturity. But make no mistake, Sczebel is no stranger to love. He's seen it modeled from his youth, coming from an extremely tight-knit family that's been intimately involved in his career. What's more, Sczebel has tasted from the cup of the Author of Love, God Himself. It's what makes him wholly qualified to pen this 13-song

disc that both celebrates love and, at times, laments its absence.

A song which has stirred up the radio charts (and become a personal favourite) is the rootsy "Cousin' a Commotion." This upbeat, foot stompin' number incites hunger for a "love revival."

Stylistically, Sczebel embraces an R&B, soul, pop-rock sound spiced with jazz, roots and even classical flavorings. His major influences include Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Andrae Crouch, Keith Green and The Beatles. As such, Sczebel freely incorporates a number of retro elements into his recordings while still coming across as current.

Sczebel exclusively wrote all of the songs between 2004 and 2008. But far from being slothful, it's his relentless perfectionism that delayed the CD's release as he continually rewrote and re-recorded the tunes until they finally met his standards.

The result is an intricately-woven work of art that grows in appeal with each listen.

—PETER FLECK

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Oh, Yeah, There's a War On

Why aren't we talking about war, money and sex?

I looked at the front page of the *Globe and Mail* today. And the *National Post*. And my hometown favourite, the *Vancouver Sun*. Lots of stories. No mention of Afghanistan.

Are we still over there?

No, "we" aren't, at least not mentally. It's astonishing how Canadians seem to be in a weird sort of denial about fellow Canadians fighting and dying in Afghanistan. In the United States they certainly talk about the war. They talk about it in other countries. What's going on here?

Meanwhile our churches reflect – and do not challenge – this national sleepwalking. How many ever pray for the soldiers, their families and their leaders – our leaders – who decide whether our troops will stay there and how long and in what roles?

And how many preachers in this country address the ethics of this war – or any war? Are there any adult Christian education classes devoted to understanding why God might want Christians to take up arms, or when we should, and how – or, alternatively, why God would never want us to do so?

Well, it might be said, such preaching and teaching would be divisive. You know how passionate people are about politics.

So let's talk about something else that the media do talk about constantly: money. What's up, what's down, what's happening and what's going to happen, and how we should spend our money best.

Faith Today is among the few Christian media in Canada I know of that have tried to help us understand the global and national economic challenges in a Christian way. But given the ongoing crisis – lost jobs, changing economy, mounting debts and deficits, increasing bankruptcies – where are the sustained and practical Christian discussions about money?

Perhaps we're worried that we'll drive seekers away if we talk about money. (In actuality, we'll drive them away if we act like we're obsessed about money and want more of theirs. We'll attract them if we act like we know how to handle money sanely and can help them do the same.)

So how about sex? That seems important. Our society is certainly obsessed with it. Who's having it, who isn't, how to make it better and how to avoid its negative consequences.

But is anyone setting out a clear set of compassionate, healthy, celebratory and protective teachings about sex in our local congregations? Are we equipping Christians to resist sexual temptation in its various forms, and to enjoy good sex in our marriages by showing that God's instructions about sex are not just "good" but in fact *good for us*?

But then people would squirm in the pews, or get defensive, or roll their eyes.

(Note: We have to get into details about what God says and why. To offer a few passing references to normative sexuality – as if everyone in the congregation both knows and agrees with Christian teaching – is nowadays worse than being merely unaware. It's irresponsible.)

So we won't talk deeply, practically, and extensively about war. Or money. Or sex. It's as if no one has any difficulties in any of those areas.

"Unfair!" you might retort. It's not that we think no one has any problems in those areas. It's just that they are controversial and delicate. Opening up those subjects might pit some people against each other in argument or make others simply so uncomfortable that they would avoid the conversation. And that, we fear, would hurt the unity of the church.

A cynic might respond that pastors understandably prize that unity of the church above all other values, even at the expense of keeping their sheep unaware, ineffective and vulnerable, because keeping them both docile and together maximizes pastoral power and the church's resource base.

I would never say that, of course. But I am indeed asking whether we church leaders and teachers are avoiding subjects we ought to be addressing, and instead addressing the same subjects over and over that we have found will make everyone smile and nod and go home content.

We're not talking about war and money and sex. Why? So we can devote ourselves instead to what we enjoy talking and singing about most in church: How Jesus makes us feel better? And how we can go out and attract more people to join our church?

Perhaps we've forgotten: There's a war on. **FT**

JOHN STACKHOUSE teaches at Regent College and is the author of *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (Oxford).



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- Romans 10:14



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Adoption in Families of Faith

Profiles of two Christian adoptive families

By Jeff Dewsbury

The idea that one's faith is viewed as a strength could be a startling revelation to those who would like to adopt through the government but are skittish about the process.

"Faith based families have a strong commitment to something," says Pat Convery, executive director of the Adoption Council of Ontario, "And that's the number one thing that works well in adoption – families who have already shown that they have some commitment."

The director has worked in the child welfare system for 35 years. In that time, she says, there have been a lot of changes. "We've learned a lot about kids and a lot about families and the importance of nurturing and stability and giving them safe places to be."

And often those places are in Christian homes, such as that of Tom and Esther Olfert, farmers in Hays, Alta. They have ten children, six of them chosen through adoption. By the time their youngest daughter grows up and heads out on her own, they will have parented for 35 years.

The couple can recall each child's story in vivid detail. For example, there's the son who had lived in four foster homes between age four and six before coming to the Olferts' for fostering. Just after his third pre-placement visit, he told the social worker who escorted him, "This is going to be my real family. I'm not going to move *any more*." It was on that visit that he started calling Tom and Esther "Mom and Dad."

A year later, when the couple formalized their decision to adopt the boy, the social worker told them that, because of instability in his life for the formative early years of development, the chances of him growing into a healthy, well adjusted young man were zero.

"We told ourselves we refuse to take the 'no hope,' but we will certainly take the child," recalls Esther. "For the first two years, I cradled his head in my hands every night and claimed his development for the Lord as he slept in bed."

The Olferts, who attend nearby Vauxhall Mennonite Brethren Church, speak glowingly about their answered prayers for their son (as they do all of their children). He has done well in school and became a leader in their clan, helping usher in and mentor other siblings who joined the family later. Right now he's finishing his first semester at a Bible college in Saskatchewan.

"Every child has been a family decision," say the couple, whose four biological children were all "fabulously supportive" teenagers

when their parents began adding more siblings to the mix.

Three of those brothers and sisters, aged 8, 10 and 12, came at the same time. The first time the Olferts saw their profile on a government website, "we just knew they were our children," says Tom.

Though they are upfront about the deep joy their children have blessed them with, the couple is equally candid about the unique challenges adoption can present. "It takes a lot of work to be parents," says Esther, and adopting older children can mean a lot of "gaps to fill," a lot of catching up to do. Tom, for instance, carried one eight-year-old daughter in his arms for the first year and a half she was in the family. "She needed that," he says with pride.

While the adoptive parents who *Faith Today* spoke with agree that adoption is not for everyone, they also believe that many more Christians need to accept the blessing that comes with giving a child a loving family. "You have to really openly pray about it," says Esther Olfert. "Pray for those children *specifically*. . . . Once we start praying for someone we find it easier to do something."

"The framework is not to feel like we're saving a child's life," says Dale Plett, who along with her husband Galen has adopted two children – a four-year-old boy (17 months old when he came home) and a five-month-old. The couple also has a 14-month-old biological son. "Adoptive families feel overwhelmingly blessed, because it's such a great privilege to raise these children. It's so humbling to be their parents."

The Pletts first adopted in Ontario, but the second adoption was completed in Calgary, where they now live. "I knew as young as four or five that I would have children who weren't my own," she says. "As I grew up, I learned that the term for that was adoption and that became my frame of reference."

She was so committed to the idea that it even became a "deal breaker" when she was dating, says the former college instructor who is currently at home with the kids.

Galen shared Dale's enthusiasm for building a family through adoption, though, and the couple decided to adopt first before having any birth children. "We didn't want our kids to feel like they were 'Plan B,' so we decided to adopt right from the beginning." **FT**

Many more Christians need to accept the blessing that comes with giving a child a loving family

JEFF DEWSBURY of Langley, B.C., is a senior writer at *Faith Today*.