

Faith Today

To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

Children in the Church How Do We Welcome Them?



- **New Benefits for Joining The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada**, p. 26
- **What Is Spiritual Friendship?** p. 27
- **Should Evangelicals Accept a Mormon Break-Off Group?** p. 30

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CONTENTS



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Faith Today

33

To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada
January/February 2011

IN EACH ISSUE

- 7 FROM THE EDITOR / Kids and Church by Gail Reid
- 8 FAITH FORUM: LETTERS AND MILESTONES / Sex Is Good; More on Creation; Revival Needed
- 10 KINGDOM MATTERS / Fair Opens Kids to New Forms of Worship; Used Clothing Leads to New Faith; Massive Online Bible Game for Tweens; Original Street Language Bible Turns 400
- 14 THE GATHERING PLACE / Renewing Canada's Care for Children by Bruce J. Clemenger
- 15 GLOBAL VILLAGE / North Korea and South Korea by Karen Stiller
- 16 NEWS FROM THE EFC / Abortion Coercion Bill Drew Attention; EFC Attends Anti-Human Trafficking Event; Challenging Prostitution Decision
- 42 EDUCATION ADVERTISING FEATURE / Preparing Students for Life and Ministry
- 44 GUEST COLUMN / Why Walk 800 Kilometres? by Paul Battjes
- 46 A CHURCH YOU SHOULD KNOW / Urban Bridge Church, Edmonton by Charlene de Haan
- 48 GOD AT WORK IN DENOMINATIONS / Talking the Walk by Blaine Donaldson
- 50 BOOKS & CULTURE / Book and Music Reviews
- 52 RELIGIONWATCH / Rethinking the Crusades by Jim Beverley
- 53 THE NETWORK / Classified Ads
- 54 CHRIST & CULTURE IN CANADA / Listening to the New Atheists by John G. Stackhouse Jr.

BONUS ONLINE AT WWW.FAITHTODAY.CA/DIGITAL
The Family Altar by Don Bastian Sr.

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FEATURES

- 18 Children in the Church: How Do We Welcome Them?** by David M. Csinos / How can we welcome children instead of seeing them as interruptions to adult-oriented worship services?
- 23 All Generations** by Dale Dirksen / Six ways to include children in a worship service in a small church.
- 24 Inside the Child Theology Movement** by Shelley Campagnola / When Jesus brought a child into the disciples' midst, He may have meant more than we think.
- 26 New Benefits to EFC Affiliation** / Would you like to save money on long-distance calling? How about building your pastoral library at reduced prices? Or saving \$400 on a new website for your church?
- 27 What Is Spiritual Friendship?** by Norm Allen / An intentionally Christ-centred relationship can help believers hear God together on our journeys through life.
- 30 Can Evangelicals Welcome the Community of Christ?** by Stephen J. Bedard / Evangelicals have an opportunity to encourage orthodoxy and build fellowship with a small, Mormon-related denomination.
- 33 Mixing Varsity Sports and Faith** By Jeff Dewsbury / Canada's Christian colleges and universities compete surprisingly well against mainstream schools ten times their size in sports, while athletics directors strive to integrate sports with faith.

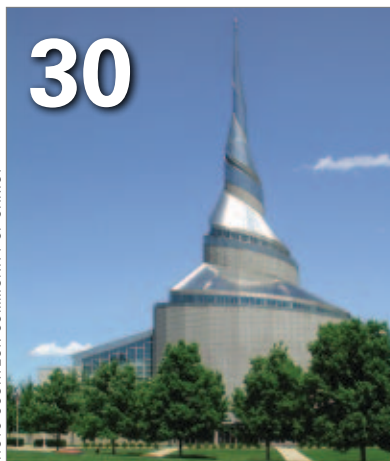
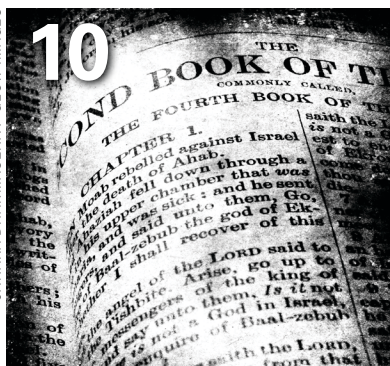


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Kids and Church

We need help seeing beyond cuteness.

Some readers may remember *The Art Linkletter Show* (or may find segments from it on YouTube or elsewhere). It was a 1960s television program in which he interviewed children in front of an adult audience, who would laugh at each child's misunderstanding of adult concepts. Linkletter ended each show with the phrase, "Children say the darnedest things!" In some ways our churches have followed a similar pattern for how we include children in worship.

In "Children in the Church: How Do We Welcome Them?" author Dave Csinos says adults need to beware of seeing children's participation in worship as something cute or entertaining. Instead, he encourages us to consider how "children demonstrate that God is playful, loud, messy and unpredictable. . . . The presence of children changes from hindrance to help when we adapt services and activities to be more child-friendly and intergenerational." Csinos reminds us of Christ's bold inclusion of children and His obvious delight in their presence.

But even more, Christ challenged adults to think like a little child. In "Hearing God Through Children," Dian Layton describes how God surprised her with what she could learn from the children she was teaching. Instead of keeping them quiet and entertained during the more important adult meetings and sermons, Layton discovered children are open to hearing God in marvellous ways, which can bless us with more than laughter. In fact, their insights have changed her

own perspective on God and His view of her.

How can we include children for our collective benefit? In "All Generations" Dale Dirksen highlights six practical ways to include children in a worship service, particularly in a small church with limited resources – from the selection of images to the serving of communion.

Much of this new emphasis on including children is supported by the Child Theology Movement, an international network which asks Christians to rethink the presence of children in the Church. As Shelley Campagnola explains in "Inside the Child Theology Movement," the child can be "a lens through which some aspects of God and His revelation can be seen more clearly." Not only are there important reasons to try different ways to include children, there is evidence in Scripture that we have a great deal to learn from them.

As a grandmother I resonate with all of this. Yes, there are times when I chuckle over our grandchildren's perspective on the world. Not just because there are misunderstandings on their part, but also because there is often a grain of truth in their insights. Still, my spirit leaps with thanksgiving when Grace, our three-year-old granddaughter, speaks to God with reverence and expectation. There is nothing blocking her prayer – her trust and confidence strengthen me. God is in the room, and I feel Him smile. **FT**

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

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Sex Is Good

Re: Sex Education: What Parents Need to Know (Sep/Oct 2010)

The article suggests a negative view of sex – unless you’re married, of course; then it somehow becomes wonderful.

Nowhere do I see Jesus condemn sex. I am a counsellor and many times the issue with-

in a marriage is the degrading view of sex that has been indoctrinated to the young.

Some of your article has some open-mindedness – like “use a condom.” But the fore-runner to that, “you are best not to have sex,” is backed up with the unfounded fear-mongering “every time a person is sexually active, the chemicals in their brain attach them to the person they are with.”

This idea of no sex before marriage comes from a time when virgins were financially worth more. I am not advocating “free sex,” but that [we Christians come to see that] sex within a relationship – married or not – is not only permissible, but healthy.

*Glen Eagle
Churchill, Ont.*

More on Creation

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

In the discussion of creation and evolution the main point that needs to be addressed is what does the Bible say about

creation? We need a detailed exposition of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 plus other scriptures that relate to creation. What does the text say?

Does it mean this literally? What is the evidence for saying so?

Does it mean it metaphorically, i.e., did the author mean “long ages” when he wrote “days”? What is the textual and exegetical evidence?

Did the author mean it literally but we are justified in not believing it? On what grounds?

Arguments from science can be used to help understand the Scripture where it is not clear, but cannot be used to contradict Scripture if Scripture is true, the inerrant Word of God.

*Roger Jacobson
Caronport, Sask.*

I applaud this well-researched and informative article. It’s very helpful to be informed about various perspectives among Evangelicals and to be assured there is no need to choose between faith and science.

An often overlooked way to understand the creation accounts in Genesis is the “framework theory,” which sees the author using a pictorial literary device to portray God’s work of creation in the form of a workweek, in order to teach essential doctrines related to beginnings.

We would do well to listen to Ross Hastings’ words: “How God created the world is not a creedal issue, whereas the fact that God created is.”

I also concur hopefully with Alex Newman’s conclusion: “The conversation among Canadian Christians will, no doubt, continue.”

*Lloyd Alstad
Stettler, Alta.*

Revival Needed

Re: The Gathering Place, Jul/Aug 2010

I would like to comment on two articles.

In the first, David Wells points out that evangelical leaders are linked by the “evangel,” the good news of Jesus; it is however regrettable that they are not also linked on the methodology Jesus gave to “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

That “power endowment” happened in Acts 2:1-4 after a prayer meeting of several days. In these last days the born-again Church of Jesus Christ needs to collectively come together across this nation and apply 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” We need another

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Holy Ghost Revival like the Welsh Revival and the Hebrides Island Revival in our day!

A large percentage of today's evangelical churches do not even believe the command for empowerment for living the Christ-like life, service and evangelism today – let alone obey it. Time is rapidly running out!

The second article, "Where We Came From," contains evolutionary garbage and neglects to give equal time to scholarly books such as *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris (P&R Publishing, 1961), thus giving credence to a demonic evolutionary theory that will cause many young university minds to lose what faith they have and be damned forever!

There is no monkey or ape blood running in my ancestral veins.

David Cann
Bowden, Alta.

Wakeful Nights

Re: Keeping the Night Watch (Jul/Aug 2010)

Thank you for this article. In the past I spent many wakeful nights. My prayer was that this time would not be spent feeling sorry for myself, wrapped in pain, but that the time could be used for God. I was able to pray in the Spirit and in the understanding. Going through the alphabet to find choruses and hymns encourages thankfulness in me. Going through memory verses the same way strengthens my faith.

Mostly my nights are restful these days, but I look back at the difficult nights as precious times with my Lord.

Sharon Barrett
Elora, Ont.

APPOINTED

Kenton Anderson as president of Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, B.C. He has published three books on preaching and holds a PhD in preaching along with two master's degrees. He joined the faculty of Northwest (part of the ACTS Seminaries consortium) in 1996 and became dean of Northwest in 2001. He also directs the Centre for Ministry Excellence at Trinity Western University and has served for 11 years in local churches. Anderson succeeds the retiring Larry Perkins, president since 2000, although Perkins will continue teaching.

Stephen Wile as president of WorldServe Canada. WorldServe Ministries was founded by Garth Hunt in 1976 as Living Bibles International. It supports indigenous churches and development worldwide, especially in China, Cuba and Ethiopia. Wile was formerly deputy



Stephen Wile

executive director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse of Canada. He's an ordained pastor (Christian and Missionary Alliance) with a doctorate in education. Ted Yamamori, formerly both president and chief executive officer (CEO) of WorldServe, will remain CEO for the next year to smooth the transition.



Erwin van Laar

Erwin van Laar as executive director of SAT-7, a leader in satellite television ministry. SAT-7 broadcasts free Christian content to 13 million viewers every

day in the Middle East and North Africa. Van Laar served as chair of the board for the last three years and has helped lead the Canadian Bible Society and most recently Tyndale University College & Seminary.

Don Epp as chief executive officer of Ten Thousand Villages Canada, the country's largest and oldest fair trade organization. Founded by Mennonite Central Committee, it sells crafts from developing countries. Epp was an executive with the Campbell Soup Company for 25 years, and for the last two years has been a financial adviser with Investors Group Financial Services.

Greg Audette as director of ministries of the Canadian Revival Fellowship, a charity based in Regina, Sask., that promotes revival and spiritual awakening. Speakers associated with the CRF include T. V. Thomas, Gerhard du Toit and Donald Gingras. It recently partnered with Sermonindex.net on a revival conference in Victoria, B.C., attended by a thousand people.

Royce George as executive director of Inter-serve Canada, a ministry that facilitates the church in Canada to serve the people of Asia and the Arab world, effective last spring.

Jack Popjes as president of InScribe Christian Writers' Fellowship, a national association that facilitates critique and encouragement groups around the country. It also has an active Internet listserve and online critique groups, and holds an annual fall conference in Alberta. Popjes has worked as a pastor, board chairman, executive director and CEO. He succeeds Lisa Wojna.

AWARDED

Arlen Salte with a lifetime achievement award from the Gospel Music Association of Canada. Salte, of Edmonton, Alta., leads an annual music and worship conference called Break Forth, the largest of its kind in North America. He has also sold more than



Terry LeBlanc

250,000 albums, making him one of Canada's all-time top selling Christian solo artists.

Terry LeBlanc, a member of the EFC Aboriginal Ministries Council, with the E. H. Johnson Award for contribution to Christian mission, given annually by the Presbyterian Church in Canada. LeBlanc is executive director of My People International, a training ministry.

ELECTED

Stewart Hunter as chair of the Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy, the first representative of chaplains labelled as evangelical to hold the position. The committee liaises among faith communities in Canada, members of the Canadian Forces, the government, and the military chaplain branch. It also sets standards for appointing chaplains and offers them pastoral oversight.

Promise Keepers Bridges Generations

Caleb Chatterton, 17, didn't know what to expect from the Promise Keepers (PK) conference he attended with his father last fall in Mississauga. His dad didn't tell him much about PK Canada other than it involved men listening and worshipping together. Chatterton enjoyed the experience, even though he "was the youngest of the bunch. Everyone was looking out for me. Everybody was like, 'Did you get that, Caleb?' I'd rather have people who are older than me who have already gone through this stuff."

Caleb's experience fit perfectly with the conference's theme, built around the idea of legacy. "We had a debate in our office of whether a younger generation would link to the theme of legacy, and whether it would attract them," explains Kirk Giles, president of PK Canada. "But a legacy is something that every single one of us is building every day, and most men don't realize it until it's too late."

Giles says that men aged 35 to 50 are the predominant target group for PK Canada, but the range from 18 to 34 is the second largest group that taps into PK Canada's resources. For the younger crowd, like Chatterton, it is the invitation of older men that draws them in.

"We don't intentionally target an age group," Giles says, "but the biggest reason 18- to 34-year-olds are coming is because a dad or a grandfather wants them to come. There are a lot of guys who immediately kind of shut down and say, 'I'm not married yet, I don't have kids, I don't get how this fits for me.' But there are other guys who sit there and realize it's all about learning to be a man. Deep down, I think every male wants to know [that.]" **FT**

—Braydon Keddie

Fair Opens Kids to New Forms of Worship



PHOTOS COURTESY: WINNIPEG MENNONITE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Children lead worship using a combination of wooden dowels and hand movements at the Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools chapel.

Imagine a church service being led by children worshipping God while they clog, offer quiet, meditative taizé prayers and create images together, using a combination of wooden dowels and hand movements.

This was the scene at the Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools chapel, as students applied the skills learned at a worship fair held at their school. School staff members and teachers organized the fair, designed to help

students in grades kindergarten through eight expand their definition of worship and experiment with new worship forms in an accepting atmosphere.

Students attended workshops ranging from jewellery making to sign language instruction. Artists drawn from local congregations, along with current and former school staff and teachers, told their faith



Children enjoy using puppetry as a creative form of worship.

stories as well as taught their craft. A jewellery artist taught students to honour God: while making bead and wire necklaces. Other leaders helped students compose songs, prayers, drama and actions for worship songs, which were included in the creative worship service that concluded the day.

Teacher Janice Penner describes students as “pumped” about the fair by the day’s end – and even eager to download on their iPods the contemporary worship songs they heard that day.

The idea for the worship fair, now an annual event, first came from a school staff member as an alternative to Halloween.

“This is the second time we’ve done this, and we hope to do it every year,” explains Nancy Stefaniuk, director of public relations and development for the two-campus school. “Kids aren’t aware sometimes that there are different ways to express worship, and it’s good to teach them that at a young age, to not get pigeon-holed into one way.”

One student offered this summary of the worship fair: “Awesome!” **TI**

–Michelle Zarins

Used Clothing Leads to New Faith

Volunteers sort children’s clothes.



PHOTO: LONA QUENNEVILLE.

Lona Quenneville loves clothes, kids and shopping. With two young children, she knows the cost of kids’ clothes. In 2007 Quenneville was studying *The Purpose Driven Church* with Bethel Baptist Church in Strathroy, Ont. Dreaming about a project for the community, one question stood out in her mind: How do low-income families afford clothing for their growing kids?

Quenneville became the catalyst for the Clothesline, a monthly community outreach providing meals, fellowship and free clothing to those in need.

At first the congregation donated only children’s clothing, but Quenneville envisioned more – she wanted to build relationships with people in the community. The vision grew to volunteers preparing soup and an invitation for shoppers to sit around tables to talk awhile with hosts and hostesses.

Donated clothes now arrive daily from church and community members. Every Tuesday 20 volunteers sort clothes by type and size. There are clothes for babies to adults, shoes and boots, socks and purses, and bedding.

On Clothesline day each month 30 volunteers serve as greeters, survey secretaries, cooks and shopping assistants. No payment is ever asked, not even for lunch. Meal expenses are a ministry of the church (400 members strong) with members regularly

donating homemade soup and chilli. Donated Timbits arrive frequently. Each December a full turkey and ham dinner is served in two sittings for up to 300 guests with 40-50 volunteers staffing the outreach. The church purchases turkeys but local bakeries provide bread for stuffing and a local grocery store contributes vegetables. “It’s everybody’s community,” says Quenneville.

On average, a hundred families shop at the Clothesline monthly, with new families accessing the service all the time. Shoppers complete a short questionnaire to help Quenneville and her team get to know them better, answering questions like: “What needs does your family have? Do your children require school supplies? Could your family use a Christmas hamper? How can we pray for you?”

One of the first families to access the Clothesline had many needs with three pre-schoolers and a low-income budget. Quenneville and Natalie, the mother, became friends. Natalie became a Christian and her husband reaffirmed his faith as they started attending church. Quenneville paved the way for Natalie to find a job in a law office, which had a positive impact on their financial situation. “The Clothesline changed my life significantly. Through God’s people and His teaching I now have a new purpose for my life,” says Natalie. **TI** –Charlene de Haan

Massive Online Bible Game for Tweens

In the beginning, Yahweh planted a seed in the middle of the sky and Light City was born. In Light City, kids are called Yaheroes because they are heroes of Yahweh and His Word. They are actually, of course, kids who are playing a massive online Bible-based game, which the creators say is the first of its kind.

Yaheroes go on quests to explore mysterious islands and collect Lumiscrolls while playing games, completing activities, chatting with friends and earning badges and points online. Designed for the tween market (children aged 8 to 11), Yahero offers an innovative approach to increasing Bible literacy.

The Yahero project was initiated by the Canadian Bible Society (CBS). CBS wanted to more intentionally engage children with the Bible and instill in them a love for Scripture. In 2008 they approached communi-

cations professionals Marta and Dale LoFranco, based in London, Ont., who suggested the development of Yahero as a Christian alternative in the world of online gaming – somewhere kids can play safely and become engaged with the Bible in a format they already know and understand.

Watching their 17-month-old granddaughter actively respond to Scripture in 2006, as she fought and won a life-threatening battle with cancer, showed the LoFrancos just how alive children are spiritually. “Having seen first-hand what the Scriptures could do in the life of a child,” says Marta, “we were eager to create something where other children could

be influenced by God’s Word.”

Since its launch in March 2010 Yahero has attracted over 6,000 subscribers, and more than 20,000 visitors to the site.



More Than a Soup Kitchen

Winnipeg’s Agape Table is more than just a soup kitchen. Offering eggs, turkey bacon, fresh strawberries, mashed potatoes with the skin on, and sliced tomatoes and oranges for a dollar, it considers itself more of a community nutrition centre.

“We serve in a way that builds dignity,” says executive director Mark Courtney, who operates the program out of All Saints’ Anglican Church. “In doing so, we have earned the trust of the individuals who’ve joined together to become our community.”

Since its inception in 1980 – when it was formed by a cluster of congregations in response to a growing hunger problem in Winnipeg – Agape has served a hot meal every weekday morning. Today, Courtney explains, Agape is striving to do more than fill stomachs. They’re striving to feed souls.

“We’ve come to realize that the one-size-fits-all soup kitchen/food bank often fails to be empowering,” says Courtney.

“It’s a model that tends to ignore basic psychological needs for security, positive social interactions and esteem.”

After a time of “experimenting, community consultation and risk-taking,” the Agape community has now “articulated four pillars to guide us: nutrition, empowerment, dignity and community.”

The result? Agape altered its programs early this year. It now lets patrons choose between a free bowl of soup, cooked from donated ingredients, or a two-egg breakfast for one dollar, made from store-purchased items.

“Agape Table is not only a place that serves an emergency need but also a place where families can take steps away from the cycle of crisis and into a more empowering way [of providing] proper nutrition for themselves and often their families,” explains Courtney, one of five staff who works at Agape.

Ben is a semi-retired 60-year-old who learned of Agape’s services through a local shelter. “The toast seems nice and

fresh, the coffee is as good as Tim Horton’s, and everything is just excellent,” he reports.

Rachel, another of Agape’s 290 daily customers, is also a volunteer. “They help me; now it’s my turn to help them,” says the 39-year-old, who is the envy of many patrons currently on the volunteer waiting list.

“Community members use their volunteer hours at Agape to access additional funds through EIA (Employment and Income Assistance) to build sweat-equity points for use in our programs, and to gain valuable job experience,” explains Courtney. “Most importantly, they volunteer to feel engaged, valued and to participate and belong on a team.”

The volunteer roster at Agape is actually comprised of 80 per cent patrons and 20 per cent other helpers from the community. “This is an aspect that makes Agape Table unique, and one that I am incredibly proud of,” says Courtney.

In addition to its low-cost breakfast program, Agape has also introduced creative circles, engaging patrons in music,



Renewing Canada's Care for Children

The old adage that children should be seen and not heard is not something Christ practised.

My wife Tracy and daughter Lauren recently appeared before the House of Commons committee now studying adoption. Tracy's policy research, based in part on her own access to information requests, offered MPs wading in on the issue some quick insights into the child welfare landscape of Canada.

As Tracy pointed out, the federal government or agencies do not have national standards for describing a child or facilitating adoption across provincial boundaries, nor are there common services or equal access to services across Canada.

Without a national framework, how do we know how we are measuring up to care for children in need, and how will we know if the current approaches are working? Without this information children become invisible to national policy makers.

If you want to know a simple thing such as how many children are in foster care or waiting to be adopted, instead of going to the government, you need to go to a foundation established by Wendy's restaurant founder Dave Thomas.

Lauren, age 10, felt a responsibility to give MPs a snapshot of ground zero: the implications of the lack of healthy resources about adoption, specifically for teachers in Canada's schools. The MPs wondered aloud if she were the youngest person ever to make a presentation to a parliamentary committee.

One of Tracy's recommendations was to encourage the committee to hear from more children and youth, particularly those in government care and those who have "timed out," that is those who are now too old to be in care and

need to find their way in life with no place to call home (in some provinces the age is 16). The committee may heed the advice, and if so, we will be among the first to commend them.

Hearing from those too young to vote is not tokenism, something done so we can say that children matter and have been consulted. And hearing from children is not just empowering for them. It gives decision makers important insights and perspective. It helps adults see the world through the eyes of a child, and to more carefully consider these usually voiceless ones as decisions are being made.

The old adage that children should be seen and not heard was not something Christ practised. He did not turn away children as His disciples wanted to do; nor did He see children as nuisances or potential problems to be managed until they were old enough to be productive.

He valued children, gave them priority and encouraged adults to be more like them.

Not only did He welcome children to be among His disciples, to be in their midst, but He told His disciples that unless they become like children, they would not enter His Kingdom. How are we to hear this instruction? What is it about being a child that is so essential to serving God? Could it be a child's curiosity, energy, playfulness,

honesty, sense of adventure, delight in new experiences, immediacy of thought and feeling, honesty, readiness to learn and tenacity of spirit?

The reality in Canada today is that our country's children are increasingly being "seen" at food banks, in homeless shelters, on the intake sheets of help lines and in the files of children's protective services. We must not stand by, ignore or devalue children in our priorities and planning practices in any sphere of life.

Jesus said to welcome a child is to welcome Him, and to cause a child to stumble is a most grievous failure. There is something vital to our view of life when we see and hear it from the perspective of a child and allow them to speak into our lives. This adds to the necessity to protect children, to allow them to be children and to provide care and nurture. In the process, we will find ourselves better informed, perhaps transformed, and hopefully better equipped to make the world a better place for all children. **BT**

What is it about being a child that is so essential to serving God?



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 president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Read more of his columns at theEFC.ca/clemenger.

North Korea and South Korea

Last November, when North Korea and South Korea exchanged fire along a tense border, the world was reminded of the precarious relationship between these two countries.

The incident raised tensions higher than they have been for years. Around the same time, North Korea rattled its sabres by continuing to develop nuclear capabilities, in defiance of a 2009 UN sanction against such development.

Tension and deep mistrust have characterized the relationship between the neighbouring countries, who share the Korean peninsula and a history with deep roots in the Cold War. In 1948 Korea was divided like a family split after a messy divorce. The United States and the Soviet Union agreed to help distinct zones of Korea rebuild after Japan's 35-year occupation of the region and its surrender following the 1945 Allied victory in the Second World War.

Because of the nature of the two patrons, and the Cold War that ensued, the split became ideological as well as geographic. North Korea became a communist state. South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea, emerged a democracy and a card-carrying member of the United Nations and the G20.

The tensions between the newly divided North and South erupted into full-scale war in 1950. The Korean war became a battleground for Canadian soldiers, with 26,971 Canadians serving and Canadian casualties numbering 516 by the end of the conflict.

Not surprisingly South and North Korea's treatment of Christians has been like night and day. The Religious Liberty Commission of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) states that "Members of religious groups that are not controlled by the government are seen and publicized as less than human [in North Korea]. Those who are arrested, for speaking



about God or reading the Bible, are subject to chemical and biological experiments or other forms of torture."

In the United States the Commission on International Religious Freedom (in its 2010 annual report) called North Korea "one of the world's most repressive regimes. Severe religious freedom abuses occur regularly, including: surveillance, discrimination, and harassment of both authorized and unauthorized religious activity; the arrest, torture, and possible execution of those conducting clandestine religious activity..."

South Korea, meanwhile, is home to a flourishing evangelical community. It is viewed by mission scholars as a force behind the majority world mission movement, eclipsing the Western World as leaders of global mission.

South Korea sends out more missionaries than any other country today, except the United States. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) welcomed the Christian Council of Korea into its fold in 2009, and will hold its General Assembly in South Korea in 2014. "The 2014 General Assembly will provide a significant and historic moment for the leaders of the global evangelical movement to engage in Kingdom work," says Geoff Tunnicliffe, international director of the WEA and director of global initiatives for the EFC. Kingdom work that will include praying for peace for two countries that used to be one — and for the Christians struggling to survive in the North. **FT**



North Korea at a Glance

Full name: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Population: 23.9 million (UN, 2010)
Capital: Pyongyang
Area: 122,762 km² (47,399 sq. mi.)
Major language: Korean
Major religions: Mainly atheist or non-religious, traditional beliefs
Life expectancy: 65 years (men), 70 years (women) (UN)
Average annual income: US \$1,400 (Sources: BBC, World Vision)

South Korea at a Glance

Full name: The Republic of Korea
Population: 48.3 million (UN, 2009)
Capital: Seoul
Area: 99,313 km² (38,345 sq. mi.)
Major language: Korean
Major religions: Buddhism, Christianity
Life expectancy: 76 years (men), 83 years (women) (UN)
Average annual income: US \$17,690

On Our Knees

- Pray for protection for Christians living under a brutal and repressive regime in North Korea. Pray for the innocent, imprisoned in brutal political concentration camps.
- Pray for the upcoming General Assembly in South Korea, that it would foster unity within the global Church.
- Pray for the inevitable transition of power in North Korea, that a younger generation of the ruling family would be increasingly open to a peaceful relationship with its southern neighbour and the rest of the world.

Canadian Connections

- The SIM (Serving In Mission) Korean office primarily exists to partner with Korean evangelical churches to recruit and equip Korean Christians for missionary service around the world, but with a focus on ministry to Asian countries. SIM also operates a training institute that prepares Korean missionaries in English language and serving cross-culturally.

- World Vision supports a project in North Korea which provides raw materials and equipment to produce noodles to feed kindergarten children in two provinces. Its office in South Korea transitioned to a support entity in 1991; it facilitates aid to other countries but also reaches out to low-income families in urban areas of the country.

Read more about how EFC affiliates are working in North and South Korea at the EFC.ca/globalvillage

Abortion Coercion Bill Drew Attention

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) led a video campaign in December to support a bill on coerced abortion. View the video testimonials submitted by a variety of Canadians at theEFC.ca/roxanne.

EFC Vice-President Don Hutchinson and Faye Sonier, EFC legal counsel, also sent an open letter to all Members of Parliament requesting their support. Ninety-seven voted in favour in the second-reading vote Dec. 15, but 178 voted against, thus stopping the bill.

Private member's Bill C-510 sought to make it a crime to coerce a pregnant woman into obtaining an abortion. It was launched in April by Winnipeg MP Rod Bruinooog (Conservative Party), who refers to it as "Roxanne's Law" to honour Roxanne Fernando, a Manitoba woman who died after her boyfriend attempted to coerce her to have an abortion in 2007. The bill did not address the legality of abortion.

The events surrounding the vote made it apparent that a substantial number of Canadians think such a law is needed, according to a blog by Hutchinson at theEFC.ca/ActivateCFPL. It's becoming clearer that Canadians are asking their MPs to hold a "position on pro-life issues, including limits on abortion," he writes.

Hutchinson hopes that law enforcement officials will begin to use relevant Criminal Code sections to prevent this type of coercion, but argues that "if no charges begin to appear in Canada's justice system for coercive actions we know are taking place, then I encourage Mr. Bruinooog – or the minister of justice – to do the right thing and reintroduce Roxanne's Law."

Renewal in the United Church

The latest issue of the EFC's *Church and Faith Trends* has two articles taking the pulse and examining the recent history of the renewal movement in the United Church of Canada. The articles are by Kevin Flatt of Redeemer University College. A third article studies the receptiveness of Canadians who normally attend church only at Christmas and Easter to the idea of becoming more involved. Visit www.churchandfaithtrends.ca.

KEEPING UP WITH EVENTS

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

Visit the EFC's Canadian Community Calendar at theEFC.ca/events to keep up with major conferences and events of interest. January's calendar includes details on several city-wide missions expos, conferences on pre-teen and inner-city ministry, a week of prayer, and more. You can even email event information to yourself or download an event to a personal calendar on Facebook, MS Outlook, Google, Yahoo! or Apple iCal. Anyone is welcome to submit a regional or national event to the calendar for free.

Youth and Young Adult Ministries Connect

EFC Vice-President Aileen Van Ginkel joined members of the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable on Dec. 4-5 to develop plans for connecting and resourcing youth and young adult ministry efforts across the country. A research project on why many Christian young adults no longer participate in formal church structures will be a key focus of the roundtable over the next year. The roundtable operates on the EFC's administrative and communications platform.

EFC Attends Anti-human Trafficking Event

EFC Policy Analyst Julia Beazley attended an awareness-raising event in Ottawa based on *Invisible Chains: Canada's Underground World of Human Trafficking* (Viking, 2010), a new book by Benjamin Perrin, law professor at the University of British Columbia. Perrin and MP Joy Smith spoke of the need for a co-ordinated national strategy to combat human trafficking. MP Smith has proposed a national action plan, *Connecting the Dots* (at joysmith.ca), a concept supported by the EFC.

EFC Contributes on Religious Freedom of Institutions

The keynote talk by the EFC's Don Hutchinson, "How Faith-Based Institutions Should (or Should Not) Read *Heintz v Christian Horizons*," is now available at cardus.ca/policy/article/2368. Hutchinson and EFC Legal Counsel Faye Sonier spoke at the one-day Cardus and Redeemer University College symposium "Liberty or Liability? The Future of Institutional Religious Freedom."

Roman Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue Planned

Since the late 1980s the EFC has been working with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on a variety of issues such as religious freedom, sanctity of human life and care of the vulnerable. This occasional co-operation on social issues has led both sides to ask if there might be other ways to co-operate. Starting in March 2011, a group of Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, including EFC Vice-President Aileen Van Ginkel, will begin exploring possible collaborative responses to the growing secularization of Canadian society and attempts to marginalize or dismiss faith-based positions. The focus will be on how to better present a constructive contribution to Canadian society that comes out of a common understanding of what God is doing to redeem all of life and society through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

EFC Opposes "Gender Identity" Amendment to Human Rights Act

The EFC opposes private member's Bill C-389, headed for third reading in the House of Commons. You can read the thoughts posted by EFC Vice-President Don Hutch-

inson at theEFC.ca/ActivateCFPL under the headings “Bill C-389: The EFC Opposes Proposed ‘Gender Identity’ Amendment to Human Rights Act,” and also “Does Canada Need Bill C-389? or Just What is ‘Sexual Orientation’ Anyway?” To write your MP, see the sample letter at theEFC.ca.

Challenging Prostitution Decision

The 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. More details at theEFC.ca/prostitution.

Text to Donate

Now it’s easier than ever to donate to the EFC. Text “EFC” to 20222 to make an instant \$10 donation, anytime.

12,631 and Counting

That’s the latest tally of Facebook fans of the EFC who find resources, inspiration and fellowship on the EFC’s Facebook page. Join us at Facebook.com/theEFC.

What Can Your Church Do During Elections?

This fall the EFC released *Politics & Election Time: How Can Your Church Participate?*, a short document outlining activities that churches may get involved in without jeopardizing their charitable status. Get equipped and engaged! Download it free at theEFC.ca.

Meaningful Work Experience

Are you interested in supporting the EFC’s ministry of encouraging evangelical influence, impact and identity? Paid and volunteer opportunities are available to help with database work or general administration in the Markham office. Visit theEFC.ca/jobs for details.

The EFC’s Justice Series in French

A French version will soon be released of *How Merciful? Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide*, the latest publication in the EFC’s [ACTIVATE] series. These resources (at theEFC.ca/activate) are designed for youth, but suitable for adults as well, to help educate and empower Canadians to engage in some of the most pressing issues. *Not So Ancient: Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery* was the first release in this justice series. **FT**

Why This Is a “Hinge” Moment

By Aileen Van Ginkel

More than a hundred Christian leaders, most affiliated with the EFC through their churches or ministry organizations, met at November’s Hinge Dialogue Conference to talk about changing landscapes for ministry and mission. These changes challenge the paradigms and practices that most Evangelicals in Canada have been operating with for many years.

The EFC’s purpose in hosting the conference was to encourage these leaders to see themselves as positioned at a hinge moment in Church history generally, and in the history of Canadian evangelicalism particularly. The hinge-type questions we posed were: “What was God’s best in the past and what might be God’s best for the future? What do we rid ourselves of and what do we take with us as we move forward?”

The format of the conference included guest speakers as well as time for dialogue among conference attendees. After all, most of those who attended were reflective practitioners, the kind of people who have already been thinking about church-and-mission questions and have thoughts of their own to share.

The guest speakers brought us through a set of themes that included changes in ministry contexts (Glenn Smith and Rick Hiemstra), the need to ground our “missional” theology in an understanding of the nature of our Triune God (Arnold Neufeldt-Fast), and then the need to change our thinking around our understanding

of the mission God is calling us to participate in, as well as the church structures we need to answer that call (Alan Hirsch). Bringing that home to ministry in a local setting on a daily basis (Gary Nelson and Cam Roxburgh) represented the final steps for us – at least this time around.

In all of this we participants recognized that it’s not easy to sort through what was and would continue to be God’s best in the past, much less intuit what might be God’s best for the future. It takes a level of discernment that we develop best when we engage in conversation with one another. No single one of us has the full view on everything – we need one another to determine the best paths for us to take individually and collectively.

And no matter how humbly we may seek one another’s wisdom, even that level of discernment is inadequate without a deep understanding of how God guides us in the Holy Spirit as we listen for His words in Scripture. Seeking the gift of deep discernment together will bring us a long way in responding well to this hinge moment.

The Hinge Conference also reminded us of the value in gaining a bigger picture of what’s happening with ministry of all sorts across the country. The EFC’s role in providing a national platform for viewing Church and mission in Canada was clearly affirmed. The difficulty in holding a national conference, of course, is that – time pressures aside – geographic distances make it difficult for everyone who would like to attend to do so. For this reason the EFC plans to roll out a series of Hinge resources in the months to come – do look out for them in *Faith Today* and at theEFC.ca/HingeResources. **FT**



Children in

Canadian churches love children – that’s obvious at first glance. Many churches have areas dedicated to children with beautiful, child-friendly colours and murals meant to capture their imaginations. Some children’s programs even have their own worship teams, service schedules and pastoral staff.

But when Jesus talked about “welcoming a child in my name” (in Mark 9), did He intend that we create separate congregations for those young ones? What exactly does it mean for today’s churches to follow Jesus’ command to welcome children?

Jesus healed children, performed exorcisms on them and lifted them into His arms. Jesus affirmed that chil-



the Church

How Do We Welcome Them?

By David M. Csinos

Children teach us that God is playful, loud, messy and unpredictable. How can we welcome those attributes of children instead of seeing them as interruptions to adult-oriented worship services?

PHOTO © DON HAMMOND / WWW.DESIGNPICS.COM

dren are vital members of the Kingdom of God. In fact, they are exemplary members. In a world that relegated children to the level of animals, Jesus affirmed their value and worth, and welcomed them into the Kingdom as is. They did not need to grow up, or go through a process of formation first. Rather, Jesus saw children as important and necessary members for who they were at the time.

Do we welcome children into the community as important persons whose gifts are vital to the functioning and flourishing of today's Church? Or do we consign them to church basements and think of them only in terms of their future importance?

State-of-the-art children's ministry facilities and exciting programs for kids demonstrate a love of little ones,

Encourage Intergenerational Worship

Use liturgy: Liturgy has the unique ability to include people of all ages. From Scripture readings to the sign of peace, almost all people – adults and children alike – can participate in many aspects of liturgy. Rather than setting adults and children apart based on their capabilities, experience and understanding, elements of liturgy can welcome and include all people.

Expect the unexpected: Children are unpredictable – that’s just the way God made them. By expecting the unexpected, adults can begin to see such characteristics of childhood as charming and loveable, rather than hindrances to worship. The next time a child cries or a toddler runs up the aisle during a sermon, let’s remind ourselves of the gift of childhood and think of those children around the world whose cries go unheard.

Share responsibilities: Holding a church service is not an easy task. It requires preparation, set-up and take-down. Give children, who often like to help the adults around them, the responsibility of performing some of the many tasks needed for services. Children can greet people, hand out bulletins, collect Communion cups, lead prayers, read Scripture and much more.

Rethink children’s sermons: Although widely practised, children’s sermons can actually become burdens rather than blessings. They can set children and adults apart from one another (after all, they each have their own sermon), and they can become a form of entertainment for adults. Rather than having a children’s sermon as part of the service, consider one shorter sermon that is theologically rich yet accessible to adults and children alike. Sermon material not suited to all ages can be shared at other times or in other ways.

Plan intergenerational special events: Church services are not the only time intergenerational faith communities can gather together. Church picnics, small groups, family camps and special events such as baby dedications, baptisms and musical performances can be great get-togethers for all ages.

Reflect theologically: Child theology is a growing movement examining what it means to be a child, how God interacts with children (and vice versa), the Church’s responsibilities toward children, and many other important theological questions (see “Inside the Child Theology Movement” on page 24). If churches are to become places of welcome for children, they must theologically reflect on childhood and come to their own thoughtful understandings of what it means to be a child and to welcome children. –DC

certainly. But separate programs and spaces may actually exclude children from the wider worshipping community. In ancient Israel, children were essential to memorial feasts, for it was they who often initiated the stories of God’s redemptive work. Exodus 12:26 says the explanation of the Passover festival was to commence “when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ ” God decreed that young people were vital to the celebrations of Israel. Do we live out this mandate in today’s Christian churches?

Including young ones in the community of faith does not only benefit children; the community needs children as much as children need the community. Children can witness people of many ages giving praise to the Almighty in different ways, instead of only their own age group. Adults have the opportunity to see attributes of God that might otherwise go unnoticed. As whole people created in God’s image, children demonstrate that God is playful, loud, messy and unpredictable – attributes of children that are often seen as hindrances and interruptions to adult-oriented worship services.

The presence of children changes from hindrance to help when we adapt services and activities to be more child-friendly and intergenerational. For example, the natural restlessness of children can be used to help collect the offering or used Communion cups. A child’s questions – asked out loud – can open doors to discussing issues that may be overlooked or underappreciated by adults.

As theologian Kristin Herzog says, “The churches’ task, then, cannot simply be a special emphasis on children’s programs in addition to the usual care for the adults. By lovingly putting a child among us (Matthew 18:2) or by our side (Luke 9:46) . . . we as adults will be nurtured and changed” (from her book *Children and Our Global Future*, Pilgrim Press, 2005). Heeding her advice, pastors and lay leaders can make an effort to include children in the faith community in ways appropriate to their experiences and appreciative of their gifts.

CHILDREN WORLDWIDE

While churches take care to welcome little ones into their own community of faith, they can also fulfill Jesus’ command to welcome children by reaching out into the world. His words and actions suggest that, since all children are created in God’s image, the Church must work to protect and care for children throughout our shrinking world.

The planet is growing increasingly smaller, thanks to advancements in technology, transportation, production and consumption. Goods that are purchased and consumed in North America are often manufactured on the other side of the globe. All people are part of a global community by virtue of politics, the economy

PHOTO: ROB ROBOTHAM



PHOTO: ROB ROBOTHAM



PHOTO: DAVID GALLOWAY

Children can take part in church through a variety of ways, such as preparing snacks for after church services, helping with worship music (maybe even leading a few songs), handling out bulletins, and welcoming people at the door.

and mass markets. The habits and customs of North Americans are not isolated, but affect innumerable global neighbours.

The loving embrace that Jesus offered to the little ones brought to Him is an embrace still desperately needed by millions of children around the world. According to UNICEF, about 30,000 children die from hunger and

other preventable causes every day – that’s one child every two or three seconds! Millions of others struggle to survive by living as prostitutes, slaves and soldiers.

When Jesus demonstrated the welcoming of children almost 2,000 years ago, He commanded His followers to care for marginalized people. Perhaps no group in today’s world is more marginalized than poor children. If the

Church is to follow this great commission of Jesus – going into the world to welcome children – then followers of Christ must actively seek justice for young ones who are struggling to survive and thrive. Congregations and organizations can enter the fight more fully against the global atrocities hurting today’s children.

Yes, many congregations show love to children through fun-oriented programming and beautiful facilities. But God calls Christians to an even greater love and appreciation of little ones. Jesus demonstrated an authentic acceptance of young people. He commanded

His followers to welcome children as He did – in ways both revolutionary and countercultural. Why wouldn’t we do the same? **FT**

DAVID M. CSINOS of Kitchener, Ont., is the author of *Children’s Ministry That Fits: Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Nurturing Children’s Spirituality* (Wipf and Stock, 2011). See his related article in the *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* at www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/pdfs/vol8/MJTM_8.6_Csinos_Welcoming_Children.pdf. He blogs at suchasthese.wordpress.com.

Hearing God Through Children

By **Dian Layton**

Many years ago I thought my job was to teach Bible stories and entertain the kids while the adults were in the more important meeting in the sanctuary. I liked the children and thought they were cute. During one meeting, I was teaching from the Book of John where it describes Jesus as the Shepherd and us as sheep. The sheep know and recognize the voice of the Shepherd.



Dian Layton

Hearing God’s voice should not be unusual for Christians.

I said to the children, “Let’s all be very quiet and listen for God’s voice. If He speaks to you, please come to the front and tell us what He said.” I was prepared for them to give prayer requests or testimonies; I never really expected them to actually hear God’s voice!

What happened that day changed my life forever.

The children were very, very quiet, trying to listen for the Shepherd’s voice. After a few moments a little girl named Karen came to the front and spoke with great confidence, “The Lord just told me that my spirit is just as big as an adult’s!” As she walked back to her chair I stood there with my mouth wide open in shock. We went on with the meeting, but I could not forget Karen’s words.

My spirit is just as big as an adult’s.

From that time forward I looked at my work among the children much differently. Instead of entertaining and keeping them quiet during the more “important” adult meetings, I prayed and asked the Lord for messages.

Our children’s ministry team worked together to carefully prepare tasty and nutritious spiritual food for the young of the flock. I remember a mom telling me about their drive

home from church when her son said from the back seat, “Mom? I feel...bigger!” That was one of the best compliments we’ve ever received as a children’s ministry team.

As I’ve searched God’s Word for what He has to say about children, I’ve come to realize that my job is not so much to teach kids to “become” but to teach them to *be*. Every little girl I’ve ever met wants to be a princess; every little boy has an innate desire to be a warrior prince. God put that inside them!

One of my favourite things to do is look a child in the eye and say, “I know who you are. You are a warrior prince/princess. You are a child of the Mighty King, the Creator of the universe – and that means you are royalty” (see Ephesians 2:6; Galatians 4:6-8).

During a recent children’s service we were having a time of prayer. Some of the kids had been feeling sick, and we had been learning about our authority in prayer (as in Matthew 17:20). I asked one of the girls to pray, and what she did was yet another life-changing moment for me. She calmly took the microphone and stood there quietly. Then with a confidence that still echoes in my heart, she said, “I... am a princess. Princesses don’t ask for things. Princesses make decrees. In the Name of Jesus I command every sickness to leave this room!” That little girl knows who she is.

Can we hear God through children? Absolutely!

Are we remembering that we are to be like children, that the “greatest in the Kingdom of God” will have childlike humility (Matthew 18:4)? Whose praise will “silence the enemy” in this generation (Psalm 8:2)? Who can be powerful ministers in spite of “seem[ing] to be weaker” and insignificant (1 Corinthians 12:22)?

Let’s open our eyes . . . and learn from [the] children. **FT**

DIAN LAYTON is the children’s pastor at the Word of Life Centre, Red Deer, and a professional storyteller, songwriter, playwright and author. Visit her at www.seekerstories.com.

All Generations

Six ways to include children in a worship service in a small church

By Dale Dirksen

Warning: What you are about to read is countercultural. If you follow even a few of these suggestions, you will need courage and sensitivity. I have used all six in an actual small church and the result is greater child participation in worship, more lively and engaging worship for everyone and a stronger church overall. But please remember: avoid making kids' participation a spectacle. Don't do things for kids where adults watch (and enjoy their cuteness). Kids are viable, necessary, functioning body parts in the community of faith. Here are six ways to encourage that reality even more.

1. Use images. And let kids help choose them.

We live in an image-rich culture. Kids, with their parents' assistance, can help select images for use in a worship service including songs, projected Scripture, even images shown during the sermon. What if, on occasion, the preacher asked kids to email images for an upcoming sermon? When kids help select images, they become very attentive to what is happening. They are engaged as they see their work on the screen. Kids can also do photography and image editing and submit their creations for use in the church service. Sometimes (often!) they are better at this than adults.

2. Create sermon notes for kids.

Prepare interactive, age-appropriate sermon notes that guide kids through the sermon, including fill-in-the-blank questions and notes to encourage them to pay attention. Invite kids to hand them in after the service. Here is the most important part: Someone needs to read each completed sermon note and write comments on them. This is not about grading or critiquing the child's input, but about engaging with what children observed and experienced during the sermon. Return them to each child the following week with a treat. With this kind of built-in interaction kids will pay more attention to the preacher than at any other part of the service.

3. Welcome kids into music ministry. In a small church, kids can often help lead music. Give kids a reasonable task in the worship team – probably not playing guitar or drums. Simple percussion instruments like shakers are often effective. This is an excellent time to use the images for projection that the kids have chosen

and submitted. Avoid doing "kid's music" because this can create a spectacle rather than truly involving them as part of the gathered community of faith.

4. Encourage Scripture memorization.

Kids are amazing at memorizing Scripture. It requires advance planning, but it is possible to have kids memorize passages that are being used for a worship service. The passages can be spoken individually or in a kind of reader's theatre. Miming or other kinds of acting can be a way to involve children as well. Having kids help choose images to project while Scrip-

ture is being read can also be great. This often requires parental help.

5. Invite kids to help serve Communion.

I was once at a church where kids served the bread for Communion. It was very moving to see the keen interest in their eyes as they carefully moved from person to person with a loaf of bread. It takes training and sometimes supervision, but it can be very worth it. Involve the kids in cleaning up the Communion elements as well. Setting up and

taking down necessary equipment is a very important way kids can participate.

6. Use instruments well. Have a box of innocuous percussion instruments (like shakers) available in your gathering place. At a specific point in the service, invite kids to take the instruments and give them to an adult of their choice. The adults then play them during specific songs. This empowers kids and helps adults lighten up a bit, too. **FT**



Dale Dirksen

DALE DIRKSEN is on staff at Forest Grove Community Church in Saskatoon, Sask., and is an adjunct professor at Horizon College and Seminary.

Inside the Child Theology Movement

When Jesus brought a child into the disciples' midst, He may have meant more than we think by that simple action.

By Shelley Campagnola

Ten years ago there was very little in any theological library that spoke of the child with more than a passing comment or as anything beyond a useful symbol to appeal to the adult development of faith.



Shelley Campagnola

Though the child was not absent from the conversation throughout Church history, such conversation was limited to questions of human nature, baptism, education and parenting – in short, what was the adult to do with the child to prepare him or her for faithful living as adults? Seldom was the child regarded for the sake of the child, or for what the child might tell us about God.

For some, that represents a proper approach. The child is dependent upon others, is almost powerless to inform or contribute to the surrounding context, and is being trained to eventually take his or her rightful place as an upright and contributing citizen. The child will begin to have a voice in the important matters of life and faith after becoming a responsible and faithful adult.

It is exactly this mindset that the Child Theology Movement (CTM), an international network with trustees drawn from around the world, wants Christians to rethink.

Jesus placed a small child in the disciples' midst and declared one of the most profound theological statements they would ever hear: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom" (Matthew 18:3).

Keith White, CTM's founder, adds this comment: "It is plain that Jesus thought the child's presence would give the disciples a clue to the essential truth they were missing." Their understanding of who God was and what He expected of them was to be radically informed by the child in their midst.

CTM was first stirred by responses to a paper presented in 2000 at a conference of Christians involved with chil-

dren at risk, Cutting Edge III. CTM began to explore the theme of "child in the midst" through consultations held in Penang, Vietnam in 2002, followed by others around the world. The idea of developing the whole of theology in light of the child pervaded every conversation.

"Child Theology is an investigation that considers and evaluates central themes of theology – historical, biblical and systematic – in the light of the child standing beside Jesus in the midst of the disciples. The child is like a lens through which some aspects of God and His revelation can be seen more clearly. Or, if you like, the child is like a light that throws existing theology into new relief," writes White in *Introducing Child Theology: Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development* (a course text available free at hcd-alliance.org).

CTM recognizes that Christian child-related activity needs to be informed by solid theological reflection. While some theological ground had been established for advocating for the rights of the child, and for the importance of caring ministries for children from all walks of life, there was room for theological consideration to find its way into actual ministry practices and resources, developed not just *for* the child, but *with* the child. The child is to be regarded and included because he is a child. To stop at caring ministries, however essential they are, falls short of God's intent.

Numerous publications flow out of CTM and are available to all who seek to join the conversation (many at www.childtheology.org). CTM also co-operates with seminaries to develop curricula so that child theology can become a regular strand in all theological and mission training.

CTM challenges us to rethink our theological conclusions and subsequent ministry applications to move away from "What do we do with the child?" to "What does the child tell us about God and His Kingdom in every strand of theological discourse and every subsequent ministry flowing from that discourse?"

This is a "hinge" moment for churches in Canada. The child in Canada's short history has already experienced tremendous challenges, horrific abuses and continual change. You need only to reflect briefly on the continuing legacy of Home Children, Aboriginal children, immigrant children, the urbanization of children and the significant

drop in the number of children in Canada comparative to the population as a whole, as well as in our churches, to realize that we are being called to revisit core doctrines of the Christian faith in ways that honour the status of children as persons and to give a firm priority to nurture their dreams and unique God-given abilities.

While Canada has been a world leader in advocating for the rights of the child, only the Body of Christ can lead the way in listening to the voice of the child who has been placed in our midst by Jesus. With the child in our midst, we will see God and His revelation more clearly, and be empowered to respond in activity for and with the child. **FT**

SHELLEY CAMPAGNOLA is chair of the Child in Church and Culture Partnership, a network that operates on the administrative and communications platform of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

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- *Guide to Best Practices in Church-to-Church Partnerships*.

These and many other resources can be ordered by the public at theEFC.ca/ resources but are available at half price to affiliates who order by phone.

Hilsden points out that "our affiliates enjoy the benefit of a national voice in public policy, current information on social issues, and resources to help them effectively minister in a rapidly changing Canadian context." With these additional benefits, affiliates can now enjoy significant cost savings as well.

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If your congregation, denomination, organization or Christian higher education institution is not yet affiliated with the EFC, contact Paul Hilsden at 1-866-302-3362 ext. 238 (local 905-479-5885) for more information. He can also be reached at hilsdenp@efc-canada.com. 





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What Is Spiritual Friendship?

An intentionally Christ-centred relationship can help believers hear God together on our journeys through life. **By Norm Allen**

Five of us are sitting around a dinner table – a fund manager, a corporate real estate executive, a manufacturer, a mortgage broker and me. We have become friends, intentionally working together to create what I call spiritual friendship.

The fund manager opens *Our Journey Home* by Jean Vanier and reads aloud: “What is a friend if not someone who does not judge me, who does not abandon me when he discovers my weaknesses, limitations, wounds, shortcomings, everything that is broken within me? A friend is someone who sees my true beauty and potential, and who wants to help me to develop them. A friend is happy to be with me. He feels joy in being with me.”

All of us around the table – perhaps all people every-

where – recognize and value these aspects of friendship. There is something spiritual in them.

But we are after a friendship that also intentionally connects with and nourishes our inner journey with Jesus. This might be a bit trickier to describe, let alone define – that mysterious place where our quiet prayers connect with those of a friend.

In fact, the basis for what I mean by spiritual friendship lies in discovering a friend who spends time in quiet prayer and would like to share the experience. For this relationship to be spiritually nourishing, that prayer needs to include listening time: listening to God and listening to our friends as they explore what God may be doing in their lives.

Many people see the value of reflecting and journaling, but do it in solitude. This can lead to narcissism or depression. They need to see instead how much healthier it is to share our journey with a wise listening companion.

Simply finding a potential spiritual companion is not enough, however. One-on-one, or in a small group, spiritual friendship only develops with intentionality. Thank God for the historic tools of listening prayer and spiritual direction as we seek to nurture and enable a friendship in Christ.

Here's how I sometimes use these tools. With a friend, I might read aloud a psalm or brief Gospel story. After reading it a couple of times each, we'll sit in the quiet, present to one another, open to God. After an appropriate silence, our conversation will be shaped by what our whole being has experienced in those moments of listening and experiencing together in the living word of God in Christ.

If our visit is an extended one, our conversation and thoughts will be shaped and influenced by that experience. We may find the Spirit leading us to a new conclusion about obedience or to an adjustment of our view

of situations. We may find that our awareness about what the Spirit is doing in our individual lives helps make us more aware of what the Spirit is also doing in the life of another.

A rewarding and sustained spiritual friendship requires that these moments become more than mere transactions. They can instead be reference points on the journey of life. They mark the way, so that the next time we are together we may return to these ideas as the starting point for ongoing conversation.

An ongoing friendship that nurtures the soul – true spiritual friendship – will eventually include our broken places, the places where we discover we need help from God and a few friends, no matter

how powerful and in control we are accustomed to being. The friendship may even begin right from that brokenness. In either case, it is here we also discover the power of receiving and not just giving.

That receiving and giving points to another important characteristic of spiritual friendship: mutuality rather than dominance and submission.

The basis for what I mean by spiritual friendship lies in discovering a friend who spends time in quiet prayer and would like to share the experience.

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Yes, discipleship usually implies a wise teacher and a weaker learner. But a spiritual friendship is different from that. Learning and growing can also happen as disciples of Christ learn from Him together and from each other.

This mutuality runs counter to the common belief that our identity and worth depend on our performance. For many of us this belief about identity is what creates the inner pressure to produce and perform, but it also leads us to fear that our friends will think less of us if we fail. Worst of all, it usually leads us to think and feel that God will respond in the same way.

Friendships that nourish our soul must look to a different energy source than performance. They begin with our own reflective life in times of quiet thought and prayer. They require a commitment to the time and energy necessary to truly be present to one another – for no reason other than listening to the rhythms of God's work in our lives.

For many years I've had the privilege of walking with men and women, clergy and laity alike, who have a deep desire to experience the God who comes to us in Jesus, often in quiet and restful moments of listening. In retreats and small gatherings they listen deeply to one another – the pain and the joy, the success and the failure – but always with the gentle grace of God evident.

Perhaps the most important truth we reaffirm in such moments is that we are the beloved daughters and sons of God. That love is what can create an atmosphere of trust, based on confidentiality and confidence, that we have one another's best interests at heart.

In that freedom we can share the darkest struggles and deepest fears – and find grace in the presence of God fleshed out in the skin and bone of our friends. Jesus expressed His love for us the same way – in skin and bone. **ft**

NORM ALLEN of Orangeville, Ont., is president of Touchstone Ministries (touchstone.ca), a loosely linked community of friends whose vocations put them in leadership in the business, political, arts and spiritual marketplaces.

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Can Evangelicals Welcome the Community of Christ?

Evangelicals have an opportunity to encourage orthodoxy and build fellowship with a small, Mormon-related denomination. **By Stephen J. Bedard**

A few years ago I received a call from a couple looking to use our church for their wedding, using their minister. We declined the request, but out of curiosity I asked what church they belonged to. They were from the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I was relieved that we had avoided allowing a cult to use our building.

Soon I began to wonder what made them “Reorganized” and what made them adopt the much improved name “Community of Christ”? I went to their website and examined their statement of faith. As a Christian interested in apologetics and as someone with knowledge of Mormonism, I knew exactly what to look for – a denial of the Trinity, an inadequate Christology and a works-oriented salvation. I was shocked at the orthodoxy of what I found. “We affirm the Trinity – God who is a community of three persons. . . . We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. . . . This new life is the loving gift of God’s grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance.”

Who are the Community of Christ? They trace their origins to Joseph Smith Jr., who established a church in April 1830 in Fayette, New York. In June 1844, Smith was murdered by a mob while in jail in Carthage, Ill. After Smith’s death, there was confusion as to the leadership. A large group, which became known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or the Mormons, journeyed to Utah under the leadership of Brigham Young. Another group stayed and convinced Smith’s son, Joseph Smith III, to become president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. On April 6, 2001, the church officially changed its name to the Community of Christ.

Then-president W. Grant McMurray explained that the new name reflected the two central focuses of the church: (1) the centrality of Christ, and (2) the emphasis on building model communities. Community of Christ is a small but active group in Canada. The Canada West Mission includes 15 congregations and Canada East Mis-

sion has 45 congregations.

Many Evangelicals would place the Community of Christ in the same category as Mormonism. Unorthodox Mormon doctrines include:

- the belief that God was once man and that man can become God;
- baptism for the dead;
- former adherence to polygamy ;
- and secretive rituals in the temples.

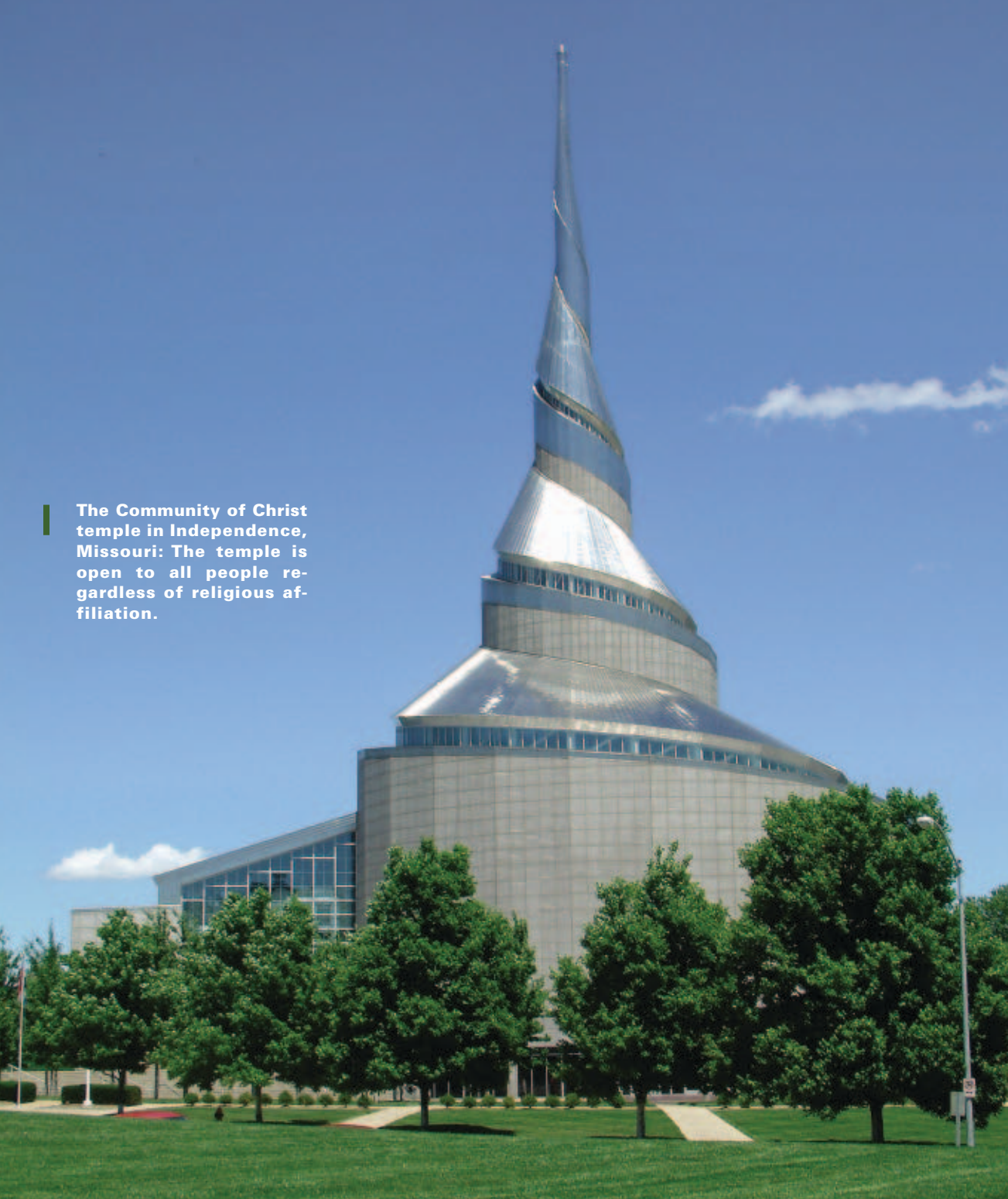
However, the Community of Christ holds to none of these doctrines. They have a temple, but it is open to all people regardless of religious affiliation. The only baptism is baptism by immersion for those who have placed their faith in Christ. A recent decision accepts believer’s baptism from other traditions for those who want to join the church. Bryan Jack, pastor at the Community of Christ in Collingwood, Ont., states that their church is fully focused on Christ, and they are willing to work with any group that is also Christ-centred.

The main stumbling block for Evangelicals is this: “We affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* – not to replace the witness of the Bible or improve on it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God.” It should be noted that many of the controversial Mormon doctrines come not from the *Book of Mormon* but from the prophetic utterances of later presidents.

The question that Evangelicals must ask is: *What shall we do about how much we have in common?* We could choose to ignore and condemn the Community of Christ because of their common origin with Mormons. Or we could choose to build bridges based on our common beliefs.

There is a precedent for such a step. The Worldwide Church of God begun by Herbert W. Armstrong was for much of its existence considered an unorthodox sect. It rejected vital doctrines such as the Trinity and embraced others such as Anglo-Israelism (the belief that the British are the lost tribes of Israel). According to the WCG: “The

What shall we do about how much we have in common?



The Community of Christ temple in Independence, Missouri: The temple is open to all people regardless of religious affiliation.

PHOTO COURTESY: COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

process of doctrinal correction began internally, stimulated in part by several in our denominational leadership taking graduate degrees at Fuller and Azusa Pacific – both major centers of Evangelical learning. Later, our transformation was supported and encouraged by Christian apologists such as Hank Hanegraff and others.”

The result was a process of theological change that saw the removal of heterodox doctrines and the adoption of key biblical beliefs such as the Trinity and salvation by grace. The Worldwide Church of God is now known as Grace Communion International. The change was costly, but now this church is embraced as

an evangelical denomination rather than being seen as a cult. Dennis Lawrence, a GCI pastor from Montreal and Cornwall, Ont., says this about their experience: “I believe that Christ will bring change where He wants it to be and can only hope for all denominations to go through a renewal process as we have.”

The Community of Christ is currently far more orthodox than the WCG was before its transformation. In fact, just as this article was being edited in November, the Community of Christ announced that it had applied for membership in the National Council of Churches USA – and been accepted. (The council is an association including

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a wide range of Christian traditions and experiences, somewhat comparable to the Canadian Council of Churches.) Can Evangelicals begin the process of embracing the Church of Christ as orthodox Christians? Their statement of faith is consistent with most Protestant beliefs. However, the challenge of the *Book of Mormon* remains.

Jim Poirier is the Community of Christ bishop for Canada and field apostolic assistant. He reaffirms that the Bible is the primary Scripture for the Community of Christ and that the other books simply testify to the Bible. Poirier adds that the Community of Christ uses the same common lectionary (schedule of Bible readings) used by many Protestant churches.

In addition, at the 2007 Community of Christ World Conference, current president Stephen M. Veazey rejected a motion to reaffirm the *Book of Mormon* as divinely inspired, stating: "While the Church affirms the *Book of Mormon* as Scripture, and makes it available for study and use in various languages, we do not attempt to mandate the degree of belief or use. This position is in keeping with our longstanding tradition that belief in the *Book of Mormon* is not to be used as a test of fellowship or membership in the church."

There is a tremendous opportunity for Canadian Evangelicals when it comes to the Community of Christ. They are a relatively small group within Canada that gives much independence to each congregation. They have a good orthodox statement of faith and a focus on Jesus Christ. When offered the opportunity to address Canadian Evangelicals, Bishop Jim Poirier pointed to their church's official mission: "We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace." Can we as Evangelicals come alongside the Community of Christ, not denying our differences, but embracing our common faith? **BT**

STEPHEN J. BEDARD is the pastor of two Baptist churches in and near Meaford, Ont., and the co-author with Stanley Porter of *Unmasking the Pagan Christ: An Evangelical Response to the Cosmic Christ Idea* (Clements Publishing, 2006).

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Mixing Varsity Sports and Faith

Canada's Christian colleges and universities compete surprisingly well against mainstream schools ten times their size in sports such as soccer, volleyball and basketball, while athletics directors strive to integrate sports with faith.

By Jeff Dewsbury



Miguel Fictoria (with ball) and Andry Giesbrecht battle to penetrate the Philadelphia Biblical University's defensive line. Providence went on to win 5-3 in penalty kicks (score was 3-3 after regulation).

PHOTO: BRENDA PETERS

It only takes one look at the stands to see that post-secondary sports in Canada are worlds apart from the full-to-the-rafters venues of our neighbours to the south. Regardless of the school (faith-based or not) Canadian attendance at varsity sports is sparse compared to venues across the border, where a local high school team will often draw hundreds, sometimes thousands of fans.

Yet, when you speak with athletic directors at Canada's Christian universities, there is another, more meaningful difference be-

tween the athletic cultures of the two nations. In Canada, they say, a more holistic approach to athletics allows schools to develop students in all the areas – in particular, their faith – that matter most.

Canada's biggest faith-based player in university sports is Trinity Western University, the only Christian school to field teams in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) league, the highest in the country. Since joining in 2001, the Langley, B.C., university has gone toe to toe with much bigger schools such as the

University of British Columbia, Queens University and the University of Alberta, amassing an impressive number of medals, including back-to-back national titles in women's soccer (2008 and 2009) and men's volleyball in 2006.

The school has also been able to build a significant fan base of students and alumni in the community in a number of ways, from hosting in first-class venues – Trinity Western entered a partnership with business and local government to make a new multimillion dollar event centre its home



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for basketball and volleyball – to offering fan shuttles and posting highlights and video profiles of players on its website.

Trinity Western dubs its athletic philosophy the Complete Champion Approach (CCA), emphasizing development in academics, athletics, leadership, personal and spiritual growth. According to the school's website, the program is designed "to help student-athletes use their God-given talents and intellect to live a life of significance, experience true personal success and powerfully influence their families, teams, communities and cultures."

Jason Keegstra, who played basketball at Trinity Western for five seasons, represents the CCA programs for the school. He says it offers a one-of-a-kind learning experience because it is the only school that both plays at Canada's top university level and integrates faith into all facets of an athlete's academic career.

"As a department we offer our athletes an opportunity unlike any other school in the CIS when it comes to exploring faith and spirituality within their given sport," says Keegstra. "This is something that is so important in young athletes defining themselves as they go through a highly competitive career at the university level because it allows them to understand the true purpose behind the sport that they play."

Keegstra makes note of the high standards and subsequent pressures Trinity Western athletes are under – everything from on-court conduct seemingly being examined under a microscope, to the knowledge that, because they are a private university, the athletic department is funded by supporters who are in the stands.

"God has blessed each of them with a platform to glorify Him. This can be a very difficult responsibility to juggle, and it is what I struggle through alongside our athletes every day."

That desire to walk seamlessly between the playing fields and into the community is the hallmark of Christian varsity programs across the country.

"We want our athletes to start connecting all of the dots to see that our faith is integral to the motivation of why we play sports," says Dave Mantel, who has been Redeemer University College's athlet-

ic director for the past five years. Redeemer, based near Hamilton, Ont., has just under a thousand students (less than half the number Trinity Western draws from), yet manages to regularly pull in around 400 people to most of its Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA) games.

This year Redeemer also received a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Mich., to help them promote spiritual formation among their student athletes. Mantel says Redeemer used the funds to gather all its athletes together for a one-day retreat, including a worship service in a local park, which “set the tone for the rest of the year.”

Each Redeemer athlete is also a part of a small group made up of athletes from different sports, not just their own team. Mantel says the relational focus on spiritual growth is one of the reasons the school received a high ranking for community life in *Maclean's* magazine's popular university issue last year.

The school is also in the process of building a world-class soccer facility, which includes two turf fields (one covered for year-round play). A multiple partnership between the school, federal and provincial governments, the city of Ancaster and their soccer club is making the multimillion dollar project work.

Providence College in Otterburne, Man., is another sporting example of a David and Goliath story, only a fraction of the size of most of the schools they compete against. In this case Providence is the only Canadian school in the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) in the United States. While not all Providence teams compete in the American league, the college fields men's and women's basketball and soccer teams as well as women's volleyball in NCCAA's Division 2.

“Lots of times people assume it's a typo when they see we only have 350 students,” laughs athletic director Scott Masterson. Providence, which runs its programs with volunteer coaches, has remarkably managed to crack the final four for the past three years in NCCAA's soccer nationals,

held each November in Florida.

Now Providence is part of a group forming a new league with other Manitoba colleges, being headed up by Bill Wedlake, former basketball coach and athletic director at the University of Manitoba.

“Athletes who have played at Providence and gone on to play elsewhere have seen the benefits of starting out in a tight-knit community,” says Masterson. “It's not just about winning. That's where our faith comes in. It means we have a higher standard in how we win, how we lose, how we practise. We've had some of the most meaningful memories after losses where athletes in team meetings express how their faith has grown.”

When it comes to recruiting those athletes, Christian schools keep the message simple – they want students who value the chance to grow on and off the field.

“It's always a challenge to convince a high school athlete that the atmosphere around them on their post-secondary team is going to be important,” says Mantel at Redeemer. “We're actively recruiting in not just Christian high schools now, but also Catholic and public schools, showing kids how they can integrate their faith and athletic abilities in ways they maybe haven't been able to before.”

In the end, Christian schools are part of a larger playing field. At a faith-based school, a student's athletic career should mix with everything it means for them to be a follower of Christ. “We want them to

We have a higher standard in how we win, how we lose, how we practise.”

Where They Play

Christian post-secondary schools compete in sports against a wide range of secular institutions, from community colleges to technical schools. A short list:

Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) League

- Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C.

Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA)

- Briercrest College and Seminary, Caronport, Sask.
- Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, B.C.
- Crandall University, Moncton, N.B.
- Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont.
- The King's University College, Edmonton, Alta.

Provincial College Athletic Associations

- Ambrose University, Calgary, Alta.
- Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Man.
- Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, Alta.

experience the joys that come with athletic success for God's glory,” says Keegstra at TWU, “and leave with a strong passion to go out into God's Kingdom and serve His people. Sport is just a platform to share the love of Christ to others, and I would hope that our athletes take that with them.” **FT**

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

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All scholarship must be submitted to the relationship whereby we come to God with humility and dependence as a child, expecting Him to be our teacher.

Attitude, not aptitude, will determine our training and learning—in the process of Christ-honouring discipleship.

Let's return to the humility and simplicity of childhood in our pursuit of knowing Christ, walking in His ways and discovering "the things of God."

Relationship with Christ, rather than the scholarship of Christ, is the prerequisite for spiritual learning and Holy Spirit-filled "walking."

We need to de-emphasize academics and re-emphasize the indispensability of living on the resources of our risen and indwelling Lord Jesus Christ!

No academic degree ever qualifies anyone for effective ministry in the name and power of Jesus.

The early disciples were "uneducated and untrained men" yet were people liv-

ing in the power and under authority of the risen Christ through His indwelling Spirit. They were recognized as spiritually effective and powerful.

We need to come out from under the pressure of feeling the need to be associated with humanly accredited education systems in order to know and serve the Lord in powerfully effective ways in our generation!

Our Bible training courses need to be available and applicable to those who aren't interested in studying for professional reasons but who really want to know Christ personally.

This would be a return to what often has been termed "lay ministry" in the church. That of course is an erroneous term as there are no professionals in the ministry (servanthood), which is through the Spirit of God! Professional ministry is not in the Bible.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one by whom we know this truth!

Relational training is indispensable to discipleship.

We must return to a “Paul and Timothy” practice (in principle) of attentive, personal involvement, committing ourselves to long-term, responsible, loving, sacrificial care for others – not just for their education but their lives! God is still in the business of transforming lives – but on His terms not the world’s.

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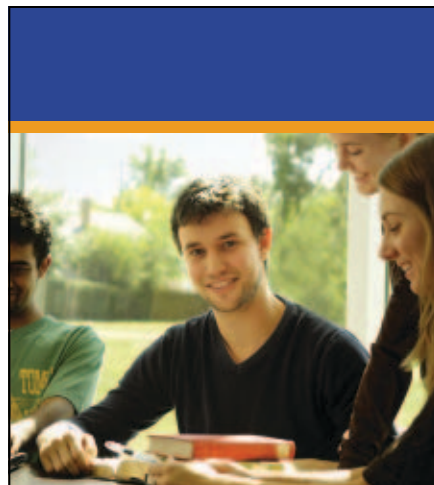
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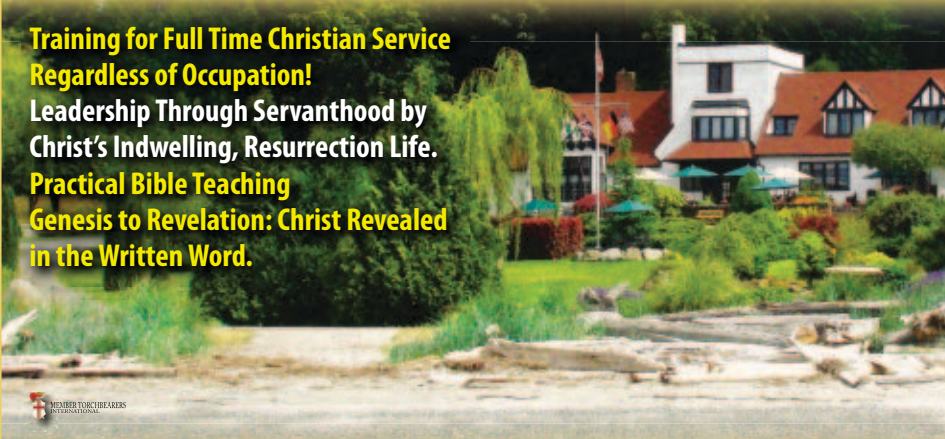
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Why Walk 800 Kilometres?

The Battjes family from Kamloops, British Columbia explains why they walked an ancient pilgrims' trail in Spain.

Our family heard about an 800-kilometre pilgrimage walk in Spain a couple of years ago. We thought it would be great to do someday, and last fall my wife and I and one of our sons actually did it.

A lot of people couldn't understand why we would want to spend so much time travelling on foot. For us, the answer was simple – we wanted to go slowly and experience travel the way Jesus did.

Our pilgrim walk started in southern France in September 2009 and involved 40 days of walking along the Camino de Santiago (Pilgrims' Trail) across northern Spain. We ended in Santiago de Compostela, near the west coast, the alleged burial place of the Apostle James.

People have been doing pilgrimages in Europe for more than a thousand years as a form of spiritual quest. Today about 100,000 people from all over the world do sections of the Camino either on foot or bicycle each year. But a much smaller percentage do so for religious reasons or do the full 800 kilometres on foot.

Historically, pilgrims were fed and cared for by the communities they went through, and today there are still hostels run by local churches and municipalities providing a bed, shower, sometimes a meal – and a stamp in your pilgrims' logbook, a sort of unofficial passport issued at the start of your pilgrimage.

We averaged about 20 km per day winding through some 250 towns, villages and cities. The religious history really stands out. Every village has a church, and often you see icons, crosses and other Christian symbols, some dating back a thousand years.

Some people walk the trail more quickly, but one of the reasons we took this journey in the first place was to step aside from a very busy and often overcommitted lifestyle. We wanted to "smell the roses" along the way. At one point I took the time to watch a snail crawl along the path, something I wouldn't have done in my previous life as CEO of a regional hospital foundation.

Last August I stepped down from that job after almost 20 years. It had been an intense position that sometimes strained my spiritual, personal and family life. Walking each day, one step at a time, helped me step out of the



Forrest, Joanna and Paul Battjes on the Camino de Santiago (Pilgrims' Trail) in northern Spain.

fast lane and appreciate a whole new side of life, one that embraces simplicity. I tried to avoid any kind of transportation, cell phones, Internet, email, instant messaging, TV, radio and newspapers – and one time along the trail I actually had to ask someone what day it was. Not having these things for a period of time helped me to connect better with my family and the people we met.

Each morning we started our day by reciting the Lord's Prayer for strength and encouragement. We also stopped for family devotions alongside a stream or in a church courtyard. People often asked why we were doing the trail, and this presented an opportunity to share our faith.

At one point we made cards with the verse John 3:16 and put them along the trail, realizing that many people were searching for answers along the way. We also took advantage of the many stone altars along the way as places to stop and pray for someone back home or who we met on the Camino.

"The long stretches of silence gave me time to talk with God and reflect on my past activities," says Joanna, who teaches art at a Christian school, and took a leave to do this journey. "I'm certainly going to be more intentional about my future choices. We also appreciated the prayers and support of everyone back home. We couldn't have done this journey without that."

"I was concerned about the distance. I wouldn't walk that far in a whole year, let alone a month and half. But I was able to take it one day at a time, trusting God to provide health, energy, motivation and a great cup of *café con leche* (coffee with hot milk) several times a day! Also, having to reduce my clothing and living supplies to a backpack almost drove me nuts. But even this taught me a lesson – I really can survive with a lot less and my happiness doesn't depend on having a lot of stuff." **FT**

PAUL, JOANNA AND FORREST BATTJES of Kamloops, B.C., attend St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, blog at still-life-worship.blogspot.com and lead a contemplative prayer ministry in the community. They recently published a cookbook based on their Camino experience (www.caminococina.com).



Urban Bridge Church, Edmonton

PHOTO: JORDAN MAJEAU

Sleeping Dragons Slow Pitch is one of Urban Bridge's "smaller groups." These gatherings around shared interests build community and many also help members grow in faith.

"If we don't build it, they can't come," states Darrell Muth, lead pastor of Urban Bridge Church in Edmonton. But he's not referring to an inviting building or program – he's talking about building relational bridges from the congregation to neighbours, bridges that can enable neighbours to understand the community of faith and ultimately come to Jesus.

It's a way of thinking that compels members of this four-year-old congregation associated with The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (www.urbanbridgechurch.com) to engage energetically with their downtown neighbours. One highly educated couple with children moved from the suburbs to live as missionaries in the city.

Congregants and neighbours alike have a shared interest in arts and culture, thanks in part to the church's worship location on a campus of Grant MacEwan University. Urban Bridge is careful to clearly identify the physical boundaries for its parish ministry in the belief that God works through proximity to nurture valuable relationships. It meets intentionally at the campus' CN Conference Theatre, a location that plants them squarely in the middle of action in the city.

Bridge Building in the City

Many of the church's "smaller groups" – its preferred name for gatherings intended to help members grow in faith during the week – reflect the shared interest in culture and ideas. One group called Theologizers explores the ideas of great thinkers

old and new and how they relate to faith. Others focus on books or photography.

Sunday fellowship normally totals about 70 people, 70 per cent of whom are under 30 years of age. Worship services incorporate more liturgical elements – highlighting symbolism and beauty – than Pentecostals are generally known for.

The church also publishes *View From the Bridge*, a public blog and series of podcast messages. One key conversation is how to sharpen its focus on bridging Christ and culture.

Smaller groups try to sharpen that focus using community service and relational transparency. Even though a group may have bonded through shared values and common interests in the arts, its members intentionally join together to volunteer at the local AIDS hospice or in some other community service. Or a group focused on song-writing might invite neighbours to join in.

Transparency in relationships with neighbours can also be a bridge. Church members say they seek to journey openly together as they aspire to live God's example of forgiveness and acceptance. Neighbours notice when accountability and honesty are evident.

Bridges of Creativity and Mercy

Such transparency means openly wrestling with people's questions, including those about the concept of church itself. Urban Bridge members are trying to take a fresh look at how to "be

the Church when we come together” and what it means to cultivate a Christian worldview, says Muth.

“As Christ, we build bridges of mercy, creativity, grace, authenticity and loving relationships,” reads part of Urban Bridge’s mission statement.

But often, admits Muth, we have more questions than answers in those areas. “We are just people on the journey with the One who holds the answers.”

The church’s openness to questioning in no way stifles its creativity. Members are eager to reflect the creativity of their Creator. They host film screenings, art galleries and live concerts. Urban Bridge even wrote a book together as a community. *The Quest of George* is available at www.amazon.ca.

The church group I Love Artists meets and supports people in the artistic, dance,

music and theatre communities. Project Benedict is developing an oasis of hospitality and compassion for business travellers. Volunteers at Kairos House cook and eat with those suffering with HIV/AIDS.

“When we started our community we wanted to make sure that social action never left our hearts, so we made sure it never left our wallets”

When the HIV/AIDS Walk for Life was planned for a Sunday, the congregation joined in. Mercy is becoming a way of life.

“When we started our community we wanted to make sure that social action never left our hearts, so we made sure it never left our wallets,” says Muth. At least 20 per cent of every dollar in the offering is earmarked for

mercy ministries. These funds help local hurting families, educate people in the city about HIV/AIDS and reach people across the world.

The Great Giveaway is Urban Bridge’s way of putting mercy ministries in the hands of the congregation as smaller

groups apply for funds donated from the congregation to carry out their projects.

Social Action Partnerships

“It’s all about spending time in the neighbourhood,” explains Muth. Urban Bridge commissioned a missionary to one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city where artists live and hang out.

“How can you be the presence of Christ in the community if you’re not present?” Muth asks. He volunteers with Catholic Social Services, working closely with Kairos House serving the terminally affected HIV/AIDS population in the city. Furthering faith discussions and sometimes attending funerals honours the people he has come to know and built trust with. Because of his ongoing commitment to HIV/AIDS sufferers, Muth was nominated for Edmonton Volunteer of the Year.

Trust-building relationships are spilling out to Rwanda where Urban Bridge supports an HIV/AIDS Mercy House. Their funds provide shelter, food, medicine and education for one widow-led home comprised of up to five widows and children. A team from Urban Bridge travelled to Kigali in October, offering practical assistance.

Urban Bridge partners collaboratively with Catholic Social Services, HIV Edmonton, Arts on the Avenue, the local Baptist seminary and the Anglican diocese, as well as a variety of social agencies where parishioners volunteer.

A key challenge is balancing social action and justice with spiritual formation, encouraging people to develop priorities as they journey through life seeking to be more and more transformed into the image of Christ.

Urban Bridge is breaking down barriers in an urban culture that is often suspicious of Christianity. They are bringing the face of Christ to a neighbourhood that often doesn’t see Him. In the Name of Jesus, they bless the city. Christ provides history’s greatest example of social action and mercy, and Urban Bridge seeks to follow His example. **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 more profiles in this series at www.faithtoday.ca.

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Talking the Walk

In the Great Commission, Jesus calls us to not just live out the gospel, but to proclaim it.

The phone call hit him like a body blow. While John knew the end was coming, he was still struck by grief and regret. Kevin, his lifelong friend, had died without personally receiving Jesus as his Saviour.

John had prayed for Kevin regularly and gone out of his way to do nice things for him – he had tried to act like Jesus in their friendship. But he had been hesitant to actually speak with Kevin about Jesus. He had feared an inability to clearly explain the gospel.

He had been scared he might damage their friendship – Kevin might think that he was a religious fanatic. His own past failures had haunted him – he didn't want to be a hypocrite.

Other vague and nameless doubts had also kept him mostly silent about Jesus.

He had talked about church sometimes, even inviting Kevin to attend, but Kevin had never come. John had asked his pastor to talk with Kevin, and eventually the pastor had done so, but Kevin had not become a believer.

On the day of Kevin's death, the last opportunity expired, and John felt nauseous.

Many of us have regrets like John's. They are common in the Christian life.

We all know that as Evangelicals we have a responsibility to share the gospel with non-believers. Many of us have reacted against impersonal, "canned" gospel presentations. Instead we have embraced concepts like lifestyle evangelism and friendship evangelism. We have tried to show Jesus to others through the way we live. Many of us have embraced the concept attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel always, and when necessary use words."

Such ideas are not wrong in themselves, but sadly many of us have used them to neglect a clear command of Scripture: the Great Commission. We can read a version of it in Mark 16:15 where Jesus commanded all of us: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (ESV).

In the story I just shared about John and Kevin, we may commend John in terms of his prayer and his lifestyle evangelism, but we must also consider that he may have failed to obey the command to proclaim the gospel.

Such failure is influenced by societal pressures. Pluralism has made it anathema to talk about the exclusivity of the gospel. Christians perceive that our culture does not want to hear about Jesus as *the Way, the Truth and the Life* – it's much more acceptable to speak about Jesus as *a way, my truth and a source of life*. In our society, we fear offending others by talking openly about our personal experience with Jesus.

Now as evangelical believers we absolutely must live out our faith with integrity. Yes, our *talk* about Jesus will be dramatically impeded without a lifestyle that displays Jesus. We have to *walk the talk*. However, our Christian walk is a powerful but somewhat dull weapon.

Without the *talk* about Jesus, non-believers will have great difficulty in knowing why we are different from other people. They will not be able to know how they can experience the same peace, joy, confidence and hope that we enjoy as believers.

The Great Commission commands us not just to live out the gospel, but to proclaim it. It does not command us to ask our pastor to tell our friends about Jesus – it commands us personally to tell them. The Great Commission is not a command to invite our friends to church, but to *talk the walk*.

In my own church family, the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches (FEBC), we have a 20/20 vision statement which reads: "We are a fellowship of churches that equips and inspires one another so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed by every member of every church

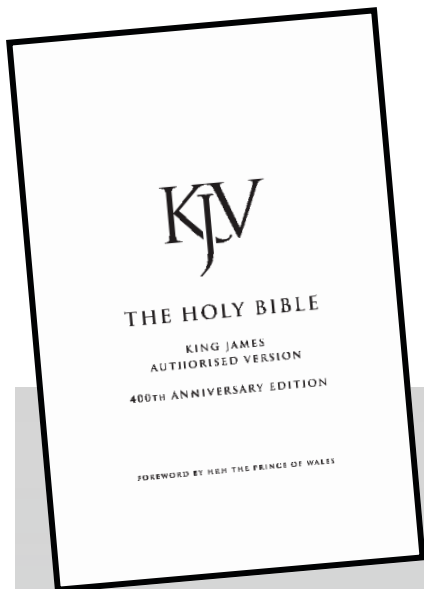
at every opportunity."

In our society and even our Christian culture this seems an impossible dream, but it is required to be in full obedience to the Great Commission. All believers are commanded to talk the walk.

We need a cultural change in our Christian experience. It is more than just knowing that we should tell others about Jesus. We know that, yet most of us do not do it. How can we change? In the FEBC, that is what we are actively exploring. It's certainly a good question for any Christian group to consider. **FT**

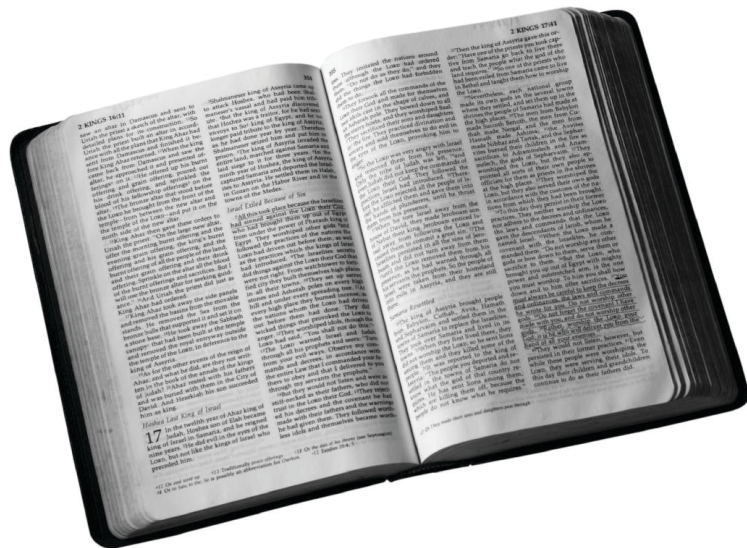
Our culture does not want to hear about Jesus as *the Way, the Truth and the Life* – it's much more acceptable to speak about Jesus as *a way, my truth and a source of life*.

BLAINE DONALDSON is president of the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches, a multi-national denomination with 22 churches in Canada, 19 in the United States and 6 in Paraguay. This column continues a series by affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. For a list, see theEFC.ca/affiliates.



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If Only You Knew: A Novel

Author: Mags Storey
Kregel Publications,
2009. 256 pages. \$14

As a parent, pastor or youth worker, are you looking to understand some of the challenges and angst that nip at the emotional heels of today's youth? A few hours with *If Only You Knew*, Toronto-based journalist Mags Storey's debut teen novel, would be an excellent place to start.



Here is Storey's recipe: Take one aimless female high school graduate, add one young heart-throb, then introduce a second fellow, as personable as the first is good-looking. Mix thoroughly in a cozy lakeside community. Next, stir in one catty ex-girlfriend, one ultra-intense Christ follower, one effusive songbird, one nurturing cousin, and two menacing stalkers. Season with equal dashes of humour, danger, romance and Christian truth, and bake for one summer under the shadow of an attempted assault. The result? A teen tale that delights, informs, and packs a spiritual punch.

Drawing extensively from personal experience, Storey charts the struggles of 17-year-old Jo MacKenzie as she encounters a full cast of characters during her summer sojourn in Silverpoint. As Storey weaves together the threads of this romance/mystery, she simultaneously explores questions of self-esteem, family, love, friendship, faith, direction, and even bullying and substance abuse. *Will I ever really belong? How*

can I come to peace with what I see in the mirror? Where do I find the grace to forgive someone who has deeply hurt me? Jesus died on the cross for me – great. But why should I give up control of my life to someone I've never met? If God loves me so much, why do I seldom feel that love?

The issues Jo wrestles with will resonate with teen readers – and assist anyone seeking insight into the younger generation – just as surely as the “aha!” ending will satisfy.

–Evelyn Pedersen

Disciple: A Catalyst to Transformation

Author: Michael Pawelke
Word Alive Press, 2010.
512 pages. \$23

In an era when it seems that almost as many people are going out the back doors as come into our churches, we can no longer simply expect that people who come to faith, get baptized and join the Church will be equipped with the character qualities of Jesus by osmosis. We need to be intentional about Jesus' last command to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) by making and equipping disciples at one and the same time.

In response to this need Michael Pawelke has written a great tool for the Christian Church. Pawelke, senior pastor at Compass Point Bible Church in Burlington, Ont., succeeds admirably in his aim to craft “an intentional,



clear, cohesive, and inclusive (though not exhaustive) roadmap to embarking on the journey of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and discipling others.”

Certainly, there are other good tools already available in the Christian marketplace to accomplish similar results, but few succeed as this one does in wrapping it all up together in one single, clear and thorough package.

Pawelke defines “disciple” as both a noun and a verb and then supplies excellent biblical teaching in four key areas of a disciple's development – from new believer right through to servant leader. He does so in a format that is easily understood and user-friendly.

For the participant in this lifelong exercise, he submits that real transformation in character to become like Jesus will occur best if the participant commits to working through the material in solitude, discussing it in community and applying it with action. These are integral to both being and becoming a disciple.

Four substantial sections make up this book: 1) The Path of Seeking is the beginning of discipleship; 2) The Path of Discovering is growth by discovering and understanding; 3) The Path of Maturing is the fundamentals of the faith; 4) The Path of Multiplying is the expression of one's faith commitment as a disciple of Christ.

This really is a book that speaks for itself. It is not a self-help book, or another ten steps offering, but rather a tool which has enormous potential to make and develop disciples of Jesus in the Chris-

tian Church. But it is also a book that requires hard work, consistency of effort and commitment. But then, Christ-like character development always does. We owe Michael Pawelke a hearty word of thanks.

–R. Wayne Hagerman

Muninn's Keep

Author: Brian Austin
Word Alive Press, 2010.
336 pages. \$20

This novel is a gripping story set in the year 892, with great battles, severe physical testing, love, honour and faithfulness. Teen to adult readers, particularly lovers of historical fiction, will be drawn to it. Author Brian Austin lives near Durham, Ont.

His main character, Theodoric Thorvaeld, is 15 when we first meet him and suffering from amnesia. His loss of identity and search to find it parallels the plots of contemporary thrillers such as Robert Ludlum's *The Bourne Identity*. Having been severely beaten, starved and locked in a cell, he is filthy as the story begins. As it continues, Theodoric proves to have unusual skills in combat (which leave the reader panting from the exertion). He also has skills in languages and reading of scrolls like no other.

Readers will also enjoy the theme of love as it is developed between Deirdre and Theodoric. When she is introduced, she is pregnant, with no one claiming fatherhood, leaving her destitute and disgraced. But as the story closes, readers realize that there is likely not a more fitting bride



for Muninn's Keep anywhere.

The human quest to fill a void with a god worthy of worship is also developed well. Devious priests, inventing fearful gods, control the masses. Even the Christian priesthood comes under the author's scrutiny. Theodoric's assertion that only the god of creation will be his god causes the reader to ask, "Who will I worship?" The pondering reader will be left with the wonder of God, through the ages, finding us.

Church librarians would do well to have this book on their shelves. *—Kingsley Archer*

Captives of Minara

Author: Eric E. Wright
Word Alive Press, 2010.
340 pages. \$19

This is the second novel featuring Josh Radley, a journalist caught in a web of international intrigue, suspense and murder. In this latest installment, Josh brings his wife Stephanie and daughter Janice along for the adventure of a lifetime in the



frontiers of Pakistan, where he is chronicling the discovery of ancient archeological sites that will radically re-shape the understanding of the Indus culture.

In the course of his investigations, however, he uncovers a local organized crime ring that captures and enslaves women and children. The tension escalates when his own family is ensnared in the brutal slave trade, and Josh faces demons from his past as he races to rescue his family from the grip of ruthless thugs.

Author Eric Wright is a retired pastor who spent many years as a missionary in Pakistan. He uses this first-hand experience to intelligently craft a story that depicts the very real tensions between the various religious factions, modern and traditional Pakistan, and unwelcome incursions by Westerners. Wright artfully contrasts the warmth and generosity of local villagers with the cold



terror of the criminals behind the human trafficking trade. With compelling characters and a storyline driven like a runaway train, the reader is drawn into a twisting plot that captures the imagination and won't let go until the final page. Along the way we discover a new view of Pakistan, its rich cultural tapestry and the humanity of its people.

—Steve Russell

More Questions than Answers: Sharing Faith by Listening

Author: Eleanor Shepherd
Resource Publications/Wipf and Stock, 2010.
184 pages. \$21

This book challenges Christians to actively listen to others to discover their deepest questions. Its introduction puts the issue like this: "When walking with our friends, we encourage them to explore faith with us. We admit that our knowledge of faith is incomplete, but it is growing. We want them to join us as together we test our spirituality and meet for ourselves the ultimate truth, Jesus Christ. We call our journey together

spiritual accompaniment."

Spiritual accompaniment is unconditional friendship, which means that our non-Christian friend is not a project to be discarded if she doesn't come to believe as we do. Nor is our Christian friend to be set aside if he doesn't grow as fast as we'd like.

In the process we learn not to be threatened by questions we can't answer. By honestly and prayerfully facing them, we grow deeper in our faith.

The book is divided into three sections: The Listening Process includes basics from psychology and counselling at a lay-person's level. Discovering and Sharing Faith teaches how to go about spiritual accompaniment, illustrated by personal examples.

It warns of the obstacles we may face. Finally, The Source reminds us to listen to and rely on God. There is also a short Bible study to develop our spiritual listening skills and a shorter "Gospel in a nutshell" to help us answer when a friend asks how to become a Christian.

This is a book for Christians who want to be more valuable spiritually in the lives of those around them. It isn't evangelism-by-the-numbers; it's investment in the lives of those God gives us. It's encouraging to see this emphasis on faith conversations rather than confrontation, teaching us to value the whole person.

Canadian author Eleanor Shepherd is a retired Salvation Army officer now serving with Opportunity International Canada in Quebec.

—Janet Sketchley

Canadian Music Awarded

Newfoundland-born worship leader Matt Maher recently won album and song of the year from the Gospel Music Association of Canada, as well as best praise and worship song and album. His album



Alive Again is available at mattmahermusic.com.

Other winners at the 32nd annual Covenant Awards included Starfield (artist of the year, modern worship song and album), Newworldson (recorded song, pop/contemporary song, folk/roots album), downhere (group, seasonal song and album), Greg Sczebel (male vocalist, pop/contemporary album, video), Stephanie Isrealson (female vocalist) and Junkyard Poets (new artist).

Multiple awards at the event, held in Calgary in October, also went to Thousand Foot Krutch, Hawk Nelson, Trevor Dick and Mark Masri. More details at gmacanada.ca.

—Bill Fledderus



Rethinking the Crusades

Relations between Muslims and Christians today are still affected by events that happened nine centuries ago.

Imagine a flight back in time. You arrive at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on July 15, 1099. What would you see? Well, that depends on your viewpoint. One contemporary Christian witness called it “the greatest event since the resurrection.” The Muslim and Jewish victims would have other words for it: rape, pillage and murder. Oh yes, that was the day Christian crusaders “liberated” Jerusalem. Hundreds of Jews burned to death in their synagogue. Thousands of Muslims butchered.

For most Christians today, “taking up the cross” (Matthew 16:24) does not mean going and killing people of other religions. In the medieval world, Christians thought otherwise. In 1095 Pope Urban II issued the call for a crusade to rescue Christians from Muslims in the Holy Land and restore Jerusalem to its rightful heirs.

Over the next two centuries there were at least six other crusades to liberate Jerusalem. The popes even promised full remission of sins for those who joined the crusades. Just war had become holy war.

The crusades are still with us. Osama bin Laden uses rhetoric about the crusades in his various missives. In 1999 Christians on the “Reconciliation Walk” from Germany to Jerusalem apologized to Jews and Muslims for the crusades. In 2005 Muslim leaders from Egypt’s Al-Azhar University (the Harvard of the Islamic world) asked for a Vatican apology for the crusades.

Keeping the controversy alive, both Rodney Stark (*God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades*, HarperOne, 2009) and Robert Spencer (*The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam [and the Crusades]*, Regnery, 2005) have presented pro-Christian interpretations of the crusades.

Well, what *should* we think about the crusades? After reading and consulting with international historical experts (such as Christopher Tyerman, Thomas Madden, Tom Asbridge and Jonathan Riley-Smith) over the past few months, I’ve found agreement on three major historical items.

First, it is wrong-headed for moderns (Christian, Islamic or otherwise) to posture ourselves as morally superior to the crusaders. Many were wrong in what they did – but who are we to condemn them after our countries engaged in the bombings of Germany and Japan (1945), the Syrian assault on Hama (1980), the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the killings in the Kuwait War (1993), etc.

Second, it is grossly mistaken to picture the crusades as early colonial exploits for land, gold and glory. Yes, there was some of that, but the crusades were essentially religious in nature, rooted in piety, prayer and sacrifice. Madden writes: “I know of no other instance in human history in which so many soldiers marched thousands of miles from their home and endured numerous hardships deep in enemy territory for no good strategic or economic reasons. Their reasons had much more to do with the next world than with this one.”

Third, it is false to use the crusades to exonerate Islam. Muslims have their own crusading history to face, beginning with Muhammad (d. 632) and his immediate heirs. Early Islamic conquests of North Africa, Spain, Asia Minor and the Middle East were unprovoked. These campaigns began within two years of the prophet’s death. Later Islamic leaders such as Saladin (1137-1193) had similar imperial ambitions. For details, see Efraim Karsh’s *Islamic Imperialism* (Yale, 2006).

Things are still complicated and messy. While Christians today separate church and state, this nuance goes unnoticed by many Muslims. Even Christian pacifists are viewed as part of the “crusade” against Iraq and Afghanistan. Christians who support Israel are targeted by bin Laden as the “Zionist-Crusader tide.” On December 3 Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV ran a sermon which implored: “Allah, strike the Jews and their sympathizers, the Christians and their supporters. Allah, count them and kill them to the last one.”

Thankfully, Muslims and Christians can move beyond crusade and jihad. This is the thrust of A Common Word, the 2007 Muslim project for peace with Christians. “So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”

Christian leaders are working on reconciliation projects as well, including Miroslav Volf and Joseph Cummings at Yale (yale.edu/faith/rp), Steve Tollestrup at the World Evangelical Alliance Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (weapri.org), and Rick Love at Peace Catalyst International (peace-catalyst.net). Love, former head of Frontiers, helped draft the Grace and Truth affirmation about witness to Muslims: “We affirm a Jesus-centered approach to Muslims because it highlights the treasure of the gospel. It does not confuse the good news with Christendom, patriotism or our civilization. Jesus is our model, and we seek to embody his life in all we say and do.” **ET**

JAMES A. BEVERLEY is professor of Christian thought and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. He will publish more on the crusades in *Christianity Today* in April.

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Listening to the New Atheists

Can we respond to the doubts they raise – and that we might feel too?

Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and the rest of the Not-So-New Atheists continue to provoke believers and unbelievers alike. Little that they raise in their books and speeches is novel. Indeed, much of it seems to stem from difficulties they have encountered far in their respective pasts, rather than anything revealed in cutting-edge sciences or humanities. But this lack of newness should mean we Christians have had plenty of time to get ready to respond to their concerns. Are we?

The following list is a sampling of questions Dawkins or Hitchens asks in one or another of their best-selling books.

These are not matters of highly specialized expertise, but instead are the sorts of issues that would arise in a Bible study, or a sermon, or simply a thoughtful conversation among people interested in religion. How well are you prepared to answer them?

- Christians claim that the origin of the universe lies in the creative work of God. But who or what made God? Where does God come from? (To reply that “God has no beginning” is not an answer, since everything comes from something previous.)
- Christianity claims to make people moral; many Christians claim that only devout Christians can be good; and many Christians also claim that someone cannot be good without God. Yet many non-Christians are obviously good, and many Christians are obviously not good – such as we witnessed in Rwanda, a country whose population was 80 per cent Christian.
- The God of the Old Testament is a bloodthirsty, jealous, genocidal, misogynistic, bullying tyrant who obsesses about ritual purity and punishes not only individuals but their entire families – and not only their families but their descendants for several generations.
- The God of the New Testament isn’t any better. Bad enough that the God of the Old Testament wanted everyone who didn’t like Him to be dead. Worse that the God of the New Testament, according to His main spokesmen – Jesus, Paul and John – consigns God’s enemies to everlasting torture in hell.
- The Bible itself is a mess of literary odds and ends, full

of absurdities (e.g., Moses wrote Deuteronomy, which contains an account of his own death and burial), disgraces (e.g., laws calling for the stoning of disobedient children) and historical mistakes (e.g., Luke contradicting the archeological facts in his introduction to the nativity of Jesus).

- The Gospels in particular cannot be taken seriously as history. They were composed long after the events they purport to depict. They were written by highly biased authors. They contain obvious borrowings from other cults of the Roman imperial world. And they cannot agree with each other on detail after detail, from the correct chronological order of events to how many angels were supposed to have appeared at Jesus’ empty tomb.

None of these questions are new. And none of them are difficult to respond to, so long as you have a proper understanding of two subjects: theology and the history of the Bible’s composition. Yet how many of us feel prepared to answer them?

We will encounter intelligent friends or family members who struggle with these issues.

Yes, most of us will never tangle with a Dawkins or a Hitchens. But we will encounter intelligent friends or family members who struggle with one or more of these issues. We will raise children who ask such questions. And we ourselves, if we pause to search our hearts, will find that we, too, have been troubled by one or more of these matters.

Apologetics – the part of Christian thinking that helps people understand *why* Christians believe – helps draw seekers in, yes, and helps keep antagonists at bay. But apologetics also helps each of us to grow up in our faith: both in knowledge, yes, but also in assurance.

So let’s have sermons that tell us *why* we should believe as well as *what* we should believe.

Let’s have robust adult Christian education courses and conferences that lead us through the Big Questions and Christianity’s good answers.

Let’s read books that prepare us to help other people with their doubts – and to help ourselves with our own.

And let’s therefore be preaching, teaching and discipling in such a way that the next generation’s Dawkinses and Hitchenses will have more and better to go on.

We had best not delay. That generation is in our homes, in our youth groups and in our pews right now. And they won’t be with us much longer. **FT**

JOHN STACKHOUSE has given apologetical lectures at Yale, Stanford, Edinburgh and Fudan Universities, as well as at numerous Canadian campuses.

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The Family Altar Is No Relic

A former president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada reflects on why regular prayer and Bible reading are important even in busy times.

By Donald N. Bastian

Three children in college together – and all living at home. This was our situation for one year. At the same time, I was pastor of the college church, itself no light assignment. So as that year approached, my wife decided to quit her job as director of a preschool because, as she put it, with four people running so hard someone had to be at home to give ballast to our family life.

It was our custom as a family to have family prayers after the evening meal – we read a passage from the Bible and prayed before separating for evening activities. During that special year, however, now and then we missed the schedule. The children had evening events to rush off to, projects to complete, and I often had night-time duties – hospital calls, pastoral visits, committee meetings. Our efforts continued diligently, but the results were not perfect.

Then came Spring Break. The pressure on the children suddenly lifted. After an evening meal one night we went to the living room, sat around on the floor, as the children and I loved to do, read Scripture and prayed – then lingered. That evening, questions about moral issues surfaced, personal concerns came up. We were reconnecting. When my wife started for the kitchen to finish her chores, the children said, “No, Mother, stay, stay.”

When I walked away from that one hour of family togetherness, Bible in hand, I felt a peace too deep to describe. I remember that moment vividly. It was as though all efforts from the children’s infancy onward to make Jesus Christ the Lord of our home – and the broken schedules, the mediated sibling clashes, the times of special stress – had been capped by this one moment of sheer bliss.

Sticking with the practice of daily family devotions may for some be even more difficult than it was for us. For example, a single Christian mother comes home from a hard day at work 40 kilometres away, bucking heavy traffic all the way. She carries from her van an out-of-sorts toddler collected from a daycare nearby. Her eleven-year-old son is already home waiting to present his special needs, and mother has to scurry about putting a meal together before attending to several housekeeping chores. How do harried parents like this fit in family prayers?

In fact, how important is it for a Christian family of any sort to sit together at least once a day, read the Bible and pray for one another, and otherwise fellowship on the deeper levels of the spirit? And is it really worth the effort?

Marja thinks it is. She is my niece by marriage. She and her

husband David are raising five growing children. Both parents are trained horticulturists, but Marja has decided to stay home with the children. Three times a day, after each meal, she reads the Scriptures with them and prays. Also, she is teaching them to read the Bible for themselves each day and to offer a prayer each night before they retire. She got this family custom from her church roots in Holland.

Is there scripture to encourage such practices? When the ancient Israelites were about to enter the promised land, they had only the law God had given them at Sinai – no extensive Bible such as we have today. Yet, the Lord gave these instructions: “These commandments that I give you this day shall be upon your hearts. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). If Israelite faith was to thrive in the midst of pagan neighbours, it had to thrive in the family life of the nation. Is it any different today?

Family Bible reading and prayer have enormous values. Here are four: First, the Bible is the Book of God – and thus it’s the Christian’s handbook. It is the cradle for the saving message of the gospel – the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Children in a Christian family need regular exposure – it is the message of salvation. They need exposure to the lessons of the Old Testament and to the full sweep of the New. These days reports repeatedly surface of serious biblical illiteracy among young people from evangelical homes, but faithfulness to family prayers can help correct this.

Second, faithful Bible reading and prayer in the home help to form in growing children a proper view of authority – a critical need today. Reverence for the Living God and respect for your neighbour are at the base of a Christian’s moral commitments. Consider at 12 years of age Jesus went home to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents. Paul taught the Early Church to respect civil authorities. Achan brought disaster on his whole family by giving in to greedy impulses. Jeremiah stood up for truth at the cost of being locked up. It’s all in the Scriptures.

Third, there’s the health of family togetherness to consider. Just to have parents and children sit daily close to one another with a spiritual menu to unite them is of inestimable value. They meet on common ground. They acknowledge the presence of one another. They talk to God – and to each other. The horizontal lines of sibling relationships are complemented by the vertical lines of parent-child connections. This exercise helps to settle the children in a Christian root system, and makes them stronger to face the adversities of their world.

Fourth, family prayers can at times be the place where misunderstandings are healed in the presence of God. In family life, clashes occur. Children can be wounded by unintended parental misjudgements, and parents can be hurt by disrespectful words spoken to them in anger. Also, siblings can get testy with one another over territorial rights. In these situations reconciliations cannot be forced, but a family altar is a good place to clear the air by the asking and giving of forgiveness.

But when modern life is so fast paced, how do you get started? First, take inventory of family time-wasters and distractions. Consider: Do video games keep some members of the family out of circulation? What about fascination with the Internet? Does the TV blare incessantly, even when no one is watching? Do long telephone conversations break into family life at all hours of the day or night? Is some member of the family oblivious to family connections because of an iPod glued to his ears or a cell phone that receives a continuous stream of text messages? These are all modern technologies that can make our lives easier or more pleasant, but their unregulated use may make time in the family seem scarcer than it really is.

Second, if children are very young, set a policy and make it known, then stay with it. One mother tells me that from kindergarten on, she made sure the children were at breakfast at a set time.

They then collected their materials for school, and afterwards sat with her on the bottom landing of the stairs while she read from the picture Bible and prayed with them. Then they were on their way.

If children are older, have a family conference and negotiate what you want to do and let them help work out the details. If there is resistance, make it clear that this is only 15 minutes or so a day and you expect their co-operation.

Third, determine what resources you will use.

It’s best to have the Bible itself as the major resource. Small children can benefit from the picture Bible. If the children are older and a Bible version is to be used, consider the NIV. Its diction is contemporary without being dated. If not the NIV, consider the New Living Translation. It’s trustworthy, and its language is fresh and clear. If each child brings their own Bible, they can follow along or take part in reading. For starters, go through the Gospel of Mark, then introduce them to the Proverbs. Make them aware of the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Lord’s Prayer. The Canadian Bible Society publishes a year-long Bible reading guide to follow (biblesociety.ca or 1-800-465-2425). In addition, it’s all to the good if the church where the family attends has an aggressive program for teaching the Bible to children in both content and meaning. And, it’s easier to observe family devotions if a group of parents in the church agree together to follow the same routine at home.

My wife and I are now in our 86th year. Our family has long since been raised, and each has married and raised a family of their own. Kathleen and I still take time after breakfast each morning to read a chapter from the Bible and to pray for a great variety of concerns near and far. For us, the custom is priceless. Over and over it is a precious bonding experience, a time for reflection, a daily reminder that in God “we live and move and have our being.” And we’ve discovered over many years that when we celebrate the reality of God’s care by a daily meeting in His Presence, life works best. **FT**

Faithful Bible reading and prayer in the home help to form in growing children a proper view of authority.

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