

Chapter Six

Reaching the World at Our Doorstep

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We've all pretty well figured it out. Canadian cities are growing - in at least three ways.

First - size. I was speaking with a Taiwanese-Canadian friend, who works for a house construction company. He said, "I guess I'll have this job until I retire. It's not as if there is a shortage of people moving to the city."

Second - ethnicity. John Pritchard ministers in NE Calgary, in an area where there are over seventy people groups within a radius. He says, "People from over fifty nationalities, are members here at Gateway International Church."

Third - non-Christian religions. Tom Tan came to Vancouver from Malaysia, with the intent of "converting British Columbia into Buddhist Columbia." After facing several personal challenges and disappointments, he realized that although his spirituality was well-meant, he was still without a real connection to God. As he became a Christian, God renewed his passion for evangelizing the nations. Today he plants Christian churches to reach diverse communities in New Westminster.

So, how can we as Canadian Christians evangelize this ethnically and religiously diverse urban tapestry, which is as new to us as it is to the people from 200 nations who have moved here? In the Gospels, Jesus showed us a variety of ways that we can approach people - depending on their needs. The variety of methodologies he shared was so the Great shepherd could meet the needs of the people he encountered and leave a model of effective evangelism strategies to his sheep that fit the gift He had given them.

I have the privilege to gather the Intercultural Leaders Roundtable three times a year, the members of which are not only pastor churches, but who also mentor, counsel and build reconciliation among other pastors within their ethnic communities. In addition to their

personal spirituality and leadership gifts, they also have hearts for evangelism. Listening to a year of their lives gives us insight into evangelizing the nations, right where we live.

Drive-by Prayer

Pastors Alvin and Lena Nicholson were born in Tobago, an island that we associate with tourism, but which they associate with learning how to minister in Canadian cities. Alvin says, "The challenge is how to present a transcultural message to a multicultural community. As soon as you name an ethnicity, you include and exclude. Downplay where people are from, and talk of what we are called "to;" we are a community of believers called to impact our community." The Nicholson's' often, as in this story, bring the reality of Christ to a person through prayer.

The phone was answered in the normal way. "Hello, this is Agape Worship Centre, how can I help you?" It was the last voice Lena Nicholson expected to hear.

"Hello. This is Police Captain Stevens of 31 District. May I speak with Rev. Nicholson please?"

"He's just finishing a counseling session." Lena said. "Is it an emergency, or can he call you back in ten minutes?"

"No," he said wearily, "no emergency – business as usual. Can he call me back at 4:30?"

Pastor Alvin Nicholson rubbed his face as he emerged from his office. He thought, "It's never easy to help a young man (whose father had abandoned him before birth) to understand that 'The Father's' love is never-ending and His approval and security are significant enough to live for. Half-trusting and greatly fearing the gang leader that got him in trouble, the young man thought he had security. Alvin knew that it was a far cry from loving the trustworthy, Creator-God who walked with Adam in the Garden. The Father is still pursuing Adam's sons and daughters with all His heart.

At 4:30, Alvin got back to Captain Stevens. The police chief briefly asked him how he'd been since they'd spoken together about the activity of one of the youth in the area.

"Pastor," the chief continued, "I don't know what to do."

"In the past year, there have been twenty-three drive-by shootings of youth under the age of 16, mostly kids trying to resist gang membership. Something has to be done. My officers are stretched to the end of their capabilities. The regional church ministerial committee dissolved and this community is in trouble. It has no moral core. There must be something spiritual you can do - rally some pastors together to begin to take an interest in their community again? I don't know... - maybe even pray?"

Alvin and Lena had their own congregation to lead. The previous community ministerial really had been a disaster, enough to scare off many people from ever engaging in ministry. But they took on the challenge anyway. Lena is a marvelous initiator and administrator and one of Alvin's many gifts is gathering people together. They made up a list of churches, ministries, and housechurches in the neighbourhood. Over the next month and a half they invited them together. Over sixty pastors showed up.

The morning they met there had been another drive-by shooting. In the midst of their discussion, a pastor of a church nearby - in frustration - suggested, "If they do drive-by

shooting why don't we do drive-by prayer?" Drive-by Prayer – it caught their attention. They decided to organize their churches to focus their people to pray for the sites where:

- the drive-by shootings were taking place,
- drug deals were going down,
- gang initiations were being held.

They also encouraged their congregations – as they traveled through the community to pray for leaders, police officers and firemen. Those pastors meet several times a year to monitor whether if prayer was really happening and continue to encourage prayer in their congregations and ministry settings.

Captain Stevens reported back in a year. "Whatever you are doing, don't quit now. This year we only had one drive-by shooting of a teen." The pastors agreed that that was one too many. In that same year, the majority of the churches in that neighbourhood had tremendous growth -as God answered their prayer for the community.

Local and national T.V. news crews gathered and reported the good news of Drive-by Prayer.

When does Discipleship really begin?

Kristin Pedersen, an intern to one intercultural leader, shares a story that demonstrates how time, ministering hearts, and the Holy Spirit all work together to help reach the lost. Kristin did her best to share Jesus with a couple of students and then didn't hear from them for years. "Teaching English as a Second Language, as an evangelistic ministry is both thrilling and humdrum, Kristin shares, ...similar to winning a race at the end of long hours of training, or to seeing the prize pumpkin at the end of the vine you protected from bugs. Sue and James have shown me that you never know what God will do when you share Jesus."

"A Mainland Chinese immigrant couple, James and Sue came to our ESL class when I was just starting to teach. I'd copy as many cool activities as I could find and combine them into a lesson. Their names were written in my address book from four years ago, but I didn't get to know them well until I returned from South Africa last year. Over those four years, James and Sue moved from casual interest in Jesus, to regular attendance at a local Chinese church, and as we talked after on my return it became apparent that Sue had accepted Jesus' death and resurrection for her.

"As I began to dialogue with Sue, I knew she understood the gospel when I asked her, 'Do I have sin?' Chinese culture highly respects teachers – so when Sue smiled and replied, 'Yes,' I knew that she understood what I was asking, rather than, as sometimes happens with students, responding to my questions to please me. She had an open, heart, and encountered people willing to share their lives, language, and knowledge. Sue explained, 'God used many people – from the Chinese church, the ESL class, friends, and our home visits together – to help me grow in my faith.' As she was baptized, she said, 'This is just the beginning of walking with Jesus Christ.'

Her husband, James had questions, especially about friendly Jehovah's Witnesses who had come by their apartment several times. Imagine being a newcomer to what you had heard was a "Christian" country - Canada - and hearing several different groups of people

claim to be Christians, but that the other “Christians” you had met were wrong about their faith! I encouraged James to look into the differences between Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christianity carefully, and to read “The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus,” by John Cross, a chronological study of the Bible. (This book has been as effective for non-Christian background people as Alpha has, for people of a semi-Christian upbringing in leading many to Christ.) I also encouraged him to read an article, explaining differences between Jehovah’s Witnesses - and Christian - interpretations of the Bible. Our senior pastor, Rodney Hufnagel, talked with James as I worked with Sue, and found that James did indeed have a living and vibrant faith.

Kristin continues, “Many ESL students have deep questions that are real. Getting pastors involved in the process, getting students to read books and other literature that can explain the Bible to them, and seeking out the answers together in a shared weekly Bible study are all good ways to reach out. At the Holy Spirit’s prompting, they often trust Jesus. They often begin their discipleship journey long before their faith becomes public. James decided to be baptized along with his wife. While sharing his testimony, James noted, “Previously I found nature beautiful, but knowing the Creator of nature made nature’s beauty meaningful.”

Connections

Fred Kahler, served as Associate Pastor at Bramalea Baptist church. He was born in Germany. He understands the pain of immigration and knows the value of human relationship and friendship in evangelism for those who have been up-rooted from their own communities and seek to find a new home. Although he died last year of cancer, his story lives on in the lives of the people he touched. Many of the people he touched were from South Asia, so the names, languages and even countries of their origin do not roll off our North American tongues quite as easily as those from our own background. I can only say that the stories remain valuable, and the individuals are becoming friends.

Fred began his story by saying, “This all grew out of the natural ministry of the church touching the people from the community around us. We were just doing what we usually did – welcoming the people who entered our fellowship through growth groups and allowing them to become close to us. Many people who did this actually came to Christ.”

“At our second multicultural growth group, Surgit, a lady from Pakistan arrived. She was obviously a seeker, and came to the growth group with a Punjabi Bible. But her spiritual search was stalled because of a need for translation. It was time to pray.”

Greeting people at end of the service, at Bramalea Baptist the next week, Fred saw a South Asian family come downstairs, from the balcony. He didn’t recall meeting them before, and as he chatted with them, he asked, “Are you from Pakistan?”

“Yes,” replied Michael and Susanna. Fred lost no time in getting their address and visited them in their home. When he got to their house, he shared the story of this lady who needed translation and asked if they could reach out to Surgit.

Susanna said, “I’d love to do that. Where does she live?”

Fred pulled out their address from his wallet and discovered that that it was just across the street. Susanna began to go over every week to spend extra time explaining what was going on in the small group to Surgit.

Michael said one day, one-and-a-half years later, “Surgit wants to throw a party. I think it would be wise for you to be there Pastor Fred.”

When Fred arrived at the party, there were about 40 people already there - some Sikhs, lots of kids. Michael and Susanna were there as well, as Susanna had led Surgit to Christ. Surgit threw a party to let her friends know. There was a great deal of food and they were all sitting around in the living room - wall-to-wall bodies. Surgit got up and said, “Because of this man, I’ve come to know Jesus. We want to share tonight what Jesus has done in our lives.” She gave her testimony. Then a South Asian friend that she’d invited presented music.

Surgit got up again and asked, “Does anybody else have a story about what Jesus has done in your lives?”

One woman told of having a brain aneurism and how a Christian prayed and she had been healed. Another woman named Fella had been at a point where her marriage was on the rocks. She asked a pastor to pray and her marriage was saved. A man was out of work for half a year. He invited a Christian friend to pray with him. He got a job within a week.

Surgit turned back to Fred and said, “Pastor, have you got a word for us?”

Fred looked around. There were a number of restless kids and so he invited them to where he was and had them role play the story of Jesus in the boat with a storm. “The story with those kids acting it out, had a real impact,” said Fred. “One man talked about a storm he was experiencing in his life - somebody else prayed for the storm in his life to calm down.” For well over two hours the sharing went on. In the back, a group of Sikh men sat with their arms folded, and gritted their teeth in defiance. They didn’t want to hear. At the end of two hours one of them unfolded his arms and started to ask questions.

Surgit’ husband – not yet a believer – came over to Pastor Fred. He took Fred into the kitchen and said, “I need prayer. I have a severe back problem.”

Fred wasn’t exactly sure how to pray for this one, but knew that he’d better do something. He tapped Michael on the shoulder to join him in the prayer and asked Surgit if she had some olive oil. He explained to the husband what he would do and asked him where the pain was.

“On the right hand side of my head and neck right down my spine,” he replied.

Michael prayed with his hand on his neighbour’s shoulder, in Punjabi. Then Fred prayed with his hand on the man’s head.

“Wow, wow, **Wow**. I feel better,” cried the man who had just sought God’s help. Surgit’ husband went back into the living room and gave a testimony of what had just happened. That was the beginning of the new small group in Michael and Susanna’s home.

As Fred told this story, those of us around the Intercultural Leader’s Roundtable that morning asked the question, “What is happening here in Canada among the South Asian people?” As we talked, we agreed that, just as in the Book of Acts, when new cultures are touched with the Gospel, there is often an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Swwwwiiisssh!

Filipino Pastor, Elmer Manzo, served as Moderator for the Toronto Area Association BCOQ and pastor of Congregational Life at Mississauga City Baptist Church. In his 'spare time' during his ministry there, his concern turned to reaching out to youth. Elmer recently wrote me this story of "how he had identified the love that these kids had for basketball and formed an outreach ministry around it."

"Basketball is a favorite sport of Filipinos. Though they are on average, shorter than other nationalities, they are agile and are good at shooting and stealing balls. If they are pitted against others their own size, they often emerge as the champion. During the 1950's and 60's, the Philippines regularly received the title in the basketball arena (before China produced seven foot tall players that we have today in the NBA.)

"During the last three years, I gathered some Filipino pastors to start an annual basketball tournament to reach out to our Filipino youth. The idea was to get the un-churched to join a church team and play in a tournament that would enable us to gather people around wholesome exercise, allow growing comfort in relationships and form a place where the body, mind and soul could be ministered to. They loved basketball, became comfortable with us as people, and so respected the message. In the last two years, we had an average of 20 teams joining an inter-church tournament among Filipino churches only. This was geared to reach out to Filipinos. From this venture, we reaped many souls who responded to the evangelistic messages that we gave each game. Many of these youth now attend our churches.

"Last year, I thought of organizing two tournaments (one among Filipino groups and another from multi-cultural groups). We had 20 teams who participated in the "All Filipinos" (September to November 2002); and 16 teams for the "Multi-cultural groups" (in May, 2003). We gathered the players to pray just before the game and gave 10 minute presentations of the gospel (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). From these two tournaments last year, 32 people responded to the message. In our church alone, six who were unchurched before the tournament have now joined our youth group.

"This year, we teamed up with a man named Zhahzad Siddique to present a multicultural tournament. We had a citywide slam dunk contest, with care package for all participating athletes, trophy and medals to the winning team, great prizes and giveaways, live DJs, guest speakers, and Ontario Basketball Association referees. We had three full-size basketball courts to accommodate the games, and 18 teams registered. At least 50% of the players came from outside the church. 180 people gathered for the tournament and 11 responded to an introduction to Jesus. We can't wait until November, when we have the next tournament. We look forward to an even greater harvest of souls."

Stranger things have happened

Peter and Rhonda Koropatwa, missionaries with SIM's "Culture Connexions" minister cross-culturally with immigrants to Canada. Evangelism through local churches is Peter's passion, and he usually brings others with him while he makes these new friends. Sometimes these new friendships are similar to Phillip in the book of Acts - 'Spirit initiated encounters.' Peter shared this story with me.

"A young man named Chris couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned on his bed as he planned how he would have Jane killed for \$5,000. He hated her for lying to him and not

returning the \$15,000 he loaned her to fake her immigration document requirements. Sleepless, and distraught, Chris appeared in our life looking for help with his financial woes.”

Peter goes on. “Shortly before, a young man named Ed wanted to share his faith more regularly. So he called me up one evening and asked about ways to exercise his evangelism skills. Ed had just begun “*Transformations Training in Personal Evangelism*” with me. The timing was perfect. I let Ed join with me as we conversed with Chris through a book called “Stranger on the Road to Emmaus.” We progressed through the Old Testament, beginning with creation and headed for the cross. Each time Ed learned new methods of dialogue and evangelistic Bible study. Each session Chris asked more and more questions and seemed to be able to catch spiritual concepts at a higher understanding.”

As the book continued and we arrived at the beginning of the New Testament we sought to get Chris anchored in prayer friendship, and legal counsel. Then, answers to prayers started to appear. Chris’s anger was replaced with peace. He was reconciled with Jane as he started to make sense of the Bible. He received most of the money back and began to help Jane with some of her problems. Between dinner at our house and doing things together, Chris feels like a little brother to us, now. We sense a relationship with God unfolding. Chris accepted the Lord last week, as we studied and conversed about Nicodemus and Jesus!”

A Dream Come True

Ben Sophia - a refugee from Libya – directed a refugee centre to help people from around the world escape impossible situations, understand the culture and work structure of Canada, and find possible solutions to even deeper issues, through the person of Jesus Christ. This story was born out of a legacy of love. Legacies are great, and sometimes they are quite productive in Kingdom work. This time, I believe it has struck oil.

It was Sept. 19, 2002. Ben was called back to the office to take a call just before the rest of the Intercultural Leaders Roundtable arrived. The reception room in which we gathered was finished, but not the hallway, through which we’d entered. Three phones were ringing and we knew there were only two people to answer them. It was three days before the official opening of Adam house and the Intercultural Leaders Roundtable had gathered to share in this joy and pray for Ben as he initiated this vital ministry for refugee claimants.

It was a large, old house in Toronto. The age of the maple trees in the front yard told that story. As Ben took us through the hallways, still strewn with renovation debris, the original woodwork and the other successive layers told other stories; the grandeur of the original home in the late 1800’s, the renovations in the ‘20’s, the boarding house and apartments of the ‘30’s - ‘80’s, the 22 tiny bedrooms of the ‘90’s when 35 illegal immigrants were stowed away each month. Especially those walls of the ‘90’s were coming down.

Instead of “illegals,” Adam House is dedicated to helping those with legitimate reasons for fleeing their communities and homelands. The bedrooms are no longer tiny, windowless caves. The current allocation of 11 bedrooms now had adequate ventilation, appropriate personal hygiene facilities, access to emergency exits and activity areas for dialogue, eating and recreation. The kitchen and dining room were already refinished - the new but standard stove and two used fridges were neat and clean. The dining room was full of refugee claimants, of course. Eighteen had already arrived. On their arrival at Adam House

they registered their claims and whereabouts with the government while those claims were processed. The home helped them process those claims with refugee expertise, created a community which taught them to live with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and taught them how things are done in Canada.

Ben shared that needs existed which would have to be met through other Christians which he defined as, 1) “Token Contributions” - Subway tokens are a major cost for new refugees care in a city like Toronto. 2) Inviting refugees to church events and beginning the transfer of care and relationship, 3) Visitors to do pastoral care and 4) Church based food drives.

How had all this been born? One day, Shaline Adam shared at Rexdale Alliance. “God is going to do something, right here in Toronto, something new that will have an impact world wide.” Two-and-a-half years later an Eritrean lady saw the Jesus Film at Adam House, and got one which she watched over and over again. Then she asked for several copies which she sent to her family - in Eritrea, and to Denmark where her sister is a refugee, to make sure that they heard the story of this prophet, who had become her king.

Salah and Shaline Adam worked with Arab World Ministries in Toronto. In 1999, they decided to visit Salah’s parents and family in Sudan and seek out God’s will for them for their future. There was no great expectation of welcome. The family was firmly Muslim and knew the couple were involved in “proselytizing Muslims to Christianity.” Before leaving, Salah and Shaline put their home in order; wrote wills, engaged a prayer team, and prepared for the future care of their children. They boarded Egypt Air Flight 990 on Sunday, October 31, 1999 and were graduated to God’s higher reality after crossing the coast of Long Island, when the plane crashed into the Atlantic Ocean that morning.

But they had willed their home to Arab World Ministry to be used as a place of hospitality and security for refugees. Their long-term partners, Ben & Heike Sophia worked through the next two and a half years to create that centre. Arab World Ministry opened Adam House, under Ben’s management. It is located in Toronto, and serves the needs of many people escaping persecution and torture in their country of origin. In the face of the current 41,000,000 refugees around the world, this uniquely Christian ministry reflects the heart of the Christ, as He answers the lawyer, about the identity of His neighbour.

Approximately 200 clients have been a part of Adam House in the last year and God has been at work. Today 31% of the clients and former clients attend churches, Bible studies, or fellowship groups. 21 Muslims have made decisions to follow Christ. “Last Tuesday,” Ben told me, “we had eleven former Muslims sitting in the Bible Study.” Some clients have become baptized. All of the refugee claimants have recognized that the centre would not offer the grace, love and justice it does if it were not for the person of Christ. One recent new client said, “I have broken my arm. I lost my job. The atmosphere of the home I lived in was very uncomfortable. Moving into this home, I realized that here, I feel the presence of God.”

Communities that Care!

Ivan and Silvia Kostka arrived from India as part of the “Intellegencia Diaspora.” When Ivan, then a “media missionary” in India felt God calling him back to his home and (adopted) land of Canada - for mission to South Asians - his wife Silvia was skeptical. But what used to be a bedroom community on Toronto’s northwest was now a bustling city of

nearly 400,000 - 40% of whom are immigrants. Today both of them introduce people to principles that Jesus taught as they present the message.

In the summer of 1999 as she followed Ivan to their new home in Brampton, Silvia wandered around the Bramalea City Centre mall. She would hear various South Asian languages - Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Marathi and Gujarati. No wonder, when Ivan had originally moved to Brampton from Toronto, a Caucasian colleague moving out had said "Welcome to Bramladesh!"

Ivan and Silvia were increasingly impressed this was God's intentional doing - the movement of so many people groups into this "brown belt" (as this vast South Asian community calls itself) of the Greater Toronto Area was so that "they may seek Him and, perhaps, find Him." [Acts 17:26-28] They saw the fields in and around Brampton were indeed "brown unto harvest." As usual, the labourers were few in relation to the size of the harvest. They saw their local church, Bramalea Baptist Church (BBC) in their case, as the launching pad for this mission.

In the fall of 1999 the Kostkas, with the blessings of Pastor Fred Kahler, launched an intentional South Asian small group in their home. The intention was to create a homely atmosphere that at least once a month South Asian seekers could be invited to join them in a culturally sensitive environment before being drawn into an intercultural – big church experience.

Silvia began to volunteer at the Hope Centre, a Christian drop-in centre in the mall. Through these and other contacts they helped many new Canadians, mostly South Asian. Silvia even trained as an Income Tax volunteer with Revenue Canada so she could help them with their taxes. "I use it to teach new Canadians, most from corrupt cultures, to integrate with integrity," says Silvia.

A vision began to grow in Silvia's heart for a more accessible, possibly church-based drop-in centre exclusively for new Canadians. They started with a needs survey of the New Canadians in the community. One public holiday as Silvia and a missionary friend went knocking on doors in the high-rises near the Bramalea City Centre they were ready to give up because of the lack of response. Then they decided to try one last high-rise; they noticed a bunch of South Asian kids playing the lobby, a sign their parents were home upstairs, but in which apartments?

They prayed and entered the elevator. Silvia decided to press "10". The first door they knocked on the 10th floor was that of a Gujarati engineer from India. They were invited in and treated to warm (hot coffee!) hospitality. The wife needed conversational English classes.

The centre is growing. On three consecutive Saturdays, they offer half-day workshops to New Canadians on the following subjects: (1) Conversational English for Beginners; (2) Job Search Skills; (3) Introduction to Canadian Culture. Gradually more and more BBC members are volunteering to get trained on reaching out to their new neighbours, learning to practice true New Testament hospitality - love for the stranger.

The Moral of the Stories

These stories tell of people who have caught the heart of God and His will. Out of a global concern the leaders developed new, intercultural relationships. They understood

Jesus words, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven,” – that God cared for the 200 nations who live next door and they said, “This is my neighbour.” In fact, that brought recognition that the gifts which God had entrusted to them could be used to reach their unreached neighbours who live throughout Canada’s cities, as well as to bless local Christians. I believe that woven within these stories are ideas and initiatives that can be modified to work in each of our communities, through each of our lives, as we are led and empowered by the Spirit of the Living God who has brought each of us to this country for such a time as this.

