

live

A BAPTIST RESOURCE FOR WOMEN ON A MISSION

A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Celebrating *Live* magazine

STAYING IN THE CONVERSATION

An interview with Rev. Jodi Spargur

PILGRIM'S PRAYER

Praying in a liminal space



**LOVING OUR
NEIGHBOUR**

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live

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Celebrating Live Magazine

AT OUR WOMEN'S CONFERENCE this past spring, Helena Bergen shared about the discernment journey that the CBWOQ Board has been on; a journey that has helped them and Helena to hone in on some key areas and plan for how to bring revitalization to our organization and to the Baptist women we connect with across Ontario and in Quebec.

In order to move ahead and engage our ministry priorities in new ways, we realized that there are some things that need to be laid down, namely, our long-standing ministry of *Live* magazine. The decision has been made to publish our final issue in March/April of 2024.

We know that *Live* magazine, and its predecessor, *The Link & Visitor*, were companions on your journey. They were points of contact. Their stories inspired, challenged and indeed, changed lives. Do know then that we plan to stay connected with you in several ways over the next few months and on an ongoing basis.

This shift in how we communicate and connect with you is a positive step for our ministry and part of a trajectory that we are on for retooling. We are excited for what the future holds for Baptist Women. Having said that, we know you may have some questions around this decision so please do not hesitate to email or call us. We always look forward to hearing from you.

Helena Bergen, Executive Director and
Renée James, Editor

Let's Stay Connected

Coffee or Tea with *Live* March or April 2024

Past editor Esther Barnes and I will host a cosy online Zoom gathering to celebrate the magazine with you – the promoters and subscribers who made this ministry possible. All are invited to this gathering. Dates and details will be published in the January/February issue of *Live* magazine.

Baptist Women's Conference May 2024

We will honour this ministry at our Women's Conference. You'll find details about dates and venue for the Conference on page 23. Mark the dates and plan to join us.

Ongoing vignettes in our Facebook group and Instagram community Until May 2024

We plan to highlight all that this magazine has meant to us through a series of social media posts in the new year – including a poll on the favourite *Live/Link & Visitor* cover of all time.

Our E-LINK newsletter Ongoing

We will subscribe you to E-LINK, our monthly newsletter. This newsletter is full of information – updates, news, links to material on our website. You can receive E-LINK via email or Canada Post. Let your promoter or me know if you already subscribe to E-LINK.

Blog Ongoing

We will publish articles on our blog. You'll be able to access the same great content we've featured in the magazine, only now online.

COMING SOON: JESUS, EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US

BY **LINDA ELLSWORTH**

Christmas is fast approaching. Some of you will have seen the first snowfall of the season already. Take a moment and remember that first snowfall, then meditate on the following verses:

Psalm 19: 1–3 *“The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display His craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known! They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard.”*

Colossians 1:15–17 *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*

Pray these verses back to your Heavenly Father, telling Him how His glorious creation speaks His very nature down through the ages, preparing us to accept His greatest work of all – God come to us in human form.

As we approach the celebration of the birth of God, we cannot begin to understand God’s plan, and yet we can trace the finger of God through time.

Read Isaiah 11:1–10 This prophetic passage details the second advent of Christ on earth, and yet in this passage, there are two references to the human lineage of the Saviour: *“And in that day, there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people”* Isaiah 11:10

The Jesse Tree

During one Advent, our church walked our children through the redemption plan of God as they read the Old Testament stories and built their own “Jesse Trees” at home. Each Sunday at church, “Jesse” and his wife recapped the stories and built the incredible “family tree” branch by branch. We were able to see how God’s prom-

ises were fulfilled over hundreds of years, from the Old Testament to the New.

Read Matthew 1:1-17 Read and absorb this marvelous plan as recorded in these verses – they detail the genealogy of Jesus. Look up the Old Testament stories related to each person descended from Jesse in the lineage of Jesus. What an amazing array of people were used by God to bring about the birth of His Son...the completion of the Plan!

Now review (or make) your own family Jesse Tree. Note how various ancestors/relatives have influenced your biblical understanding, nudging you to the manger, then to the cross and into that vital relationship with Jesus.

Now read the following verses and enjoy the unfolding of this grand Plan.

Jesus’ Birth

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows:

Isaiah 9 *“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine...For a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us...He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 7:14 *“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us...”*

And almost 800 years later...in concurrence with the prophecy:

Matthew 1 *“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born: His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Luke 1 *"...Gabriel appeared to (Mary) and said 'Greetings, the Lord is with you...don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God! You will conceive and give birth to a Son, and you will name Him Jesus (Yeshua – Rescuer). He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High."*

Matthew 1 *"... An angel of the Lord appeared to (Joseph) in a dream. ' Joseph, son of David...do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the Child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus (Rescuer, Redeemer), for He will save His people from their sins."*

Luke 2 *"And while they were (in Bethlehem), the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first-born Son. She wrapped Him snugly in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them."*

Luke 2 *"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night..."*

Matthew 2: 1,2 *"...Wisemen from the east came to Jerusalem saying: 'Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."*

Luke 2 *"...for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."*

Have a very blessed Christmas as you celebrate the birth of the Saviour. ❶

Linda is the member care coordinator for CCI Canada

Unshaken: Call to be Thankful, Encouraged to Trust



Rev. Tanya Yuen is CBOQ's family and children's ministry associate

What's kept you unshaken in your call to ordained ministry?

The Good Shepherd keeps me unshaken in my call to ordained ministry. He calls me by name, invites me to follow and trust Him daily, and reminds me to seek my strength in Him. Sometimes this comes through the many faithful women and men that speak into my life and invite me into spaces where I can continue to grow and serve in the grace and love of Jesus. And in those times when I have wandered away from the fold, He seeks me out and brings me back, reminding me that I do not do this on my own, but with co-labourers and in the strength that is only found in Christ.

How has thankfulness shaped your approach to ministry and in particular your approach to being an ordained pastor?

Thankfulness undergirds my approach as an ordained pastor. Ministering out of gratitude for the privilege of serving God's people, being entrusted with their stories of faith, joining them on their journey of discipleship and cultivating opportunities for others to grow in the grace and knowledge of God – this keeps me from bitterness at the difficulties of ministry, from entitlement, and from laziness. Thankfulness reminds me that Christ Himself is equipping me for works of service to build His Church in to a collective of mature followers becoming alive in Christ. (Ephesians 4:12, 13)

What encourages you to trust?

I am encouraged to trust by the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 11) that surrounds me. Fellow pastors, leaders and faithful followers of Jesus that pray with me, support me, challenge me, and remind me of my calling all encourage me to trust God's promises. As I study Scripture, meditate on God's Word, and listen for His voice I am encouraged to trust Him who is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) ❶

PILGRIM'S

Praying in a liminal space

PRAYER

By Alison Witt

I USED TO THINK PRAYER WAS BORING. Of course I knew prayer was important, but for me it was more in the category of eating kale or going to the dentist – “things I know are good to do but just don’t bring me delight.”

One of the practices that transformed my attitude to prayer from duty to delight has been the prayer pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is not something we talk about much in Baptist circles. Yet pilgrimage has been a part of the Christian faith since as early as the 4th century. At its simplest, pilgrimage is going on a journey with a spiritual motivation. It is travelling somewhere not as a tourist who goes to consume, but rather as a listener. A pilgrim goes on a journey with the posture of listening to God and with a desire to encounter Him along the way.

I’ve come to understand that pilgrimage is not so much about the length of time – pilgrimages can be a week, a month, a year, or even just one day. A few years ago, some of us at the International Association For Refugees (IAFR) Canada began

PHOTO IVANA CAJINA (UNSPASH.COM)

dreaming and experimenting with ways to build pilgrimage into our ongoing ministry amongst refugees. Some of our team went on an international prayer pilgrimage to the Mexican-Guatemalan border where thousands of people are stuck desperately trying to enter the United States. We also wondered if there might be some strategic places right here in Canada where God was inviting us to go and pray.

Border crossings are a liminal space – a place where life and death decisions are made and life altering actions occur. The Fort Erie – Buffalo border is one of the primary entry points for refugee claimants hoping to find safety and protection in Canada. It is also a symbolic place that represents all the other crossing points along the very extensive Canada-US border. We sensed that this was a place God was leading us to go and pray. So we invited a group of pastors and ministry leaders to join us on a daylong prayer pilgrimage to the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie.

We asked them to bring something that symbolized a question they were bringing with them to this time of prayer – a question for God relating to refugees in our world or perhaps something that they wanted God to show them. One person brought a pair of sunglasses as they were asking God to see the complex issues surrounding immigration in new ways. Another wore a T-shirt that said “Jesus was a refugee” as she wanted God to help her enter more deeply into understanding what people fleeing their homes actually experience. Another brought an amaryllis flower bulb as it symbolized, for her, the long, slow wait that refugee claimants go through before they are settled enough to share the gifts they bring to Canada. She was asking God to show her how her local church could help them hold onto hope on their long journey.

About 12 of us gathered to be physically present in a strategic place for refugees. We visited the Peace Bridge Newcomer Centre and the CBSA offices which operate in tandem, all to experience

what happens in that unique space. We spent time walking along the river meditating on Scripture, crying out to God on behalf of displaced people, and being attentive to God speaking to us. We visited Matthew House, Fort Erie, and heard stories of people from Haiti, Zimbabwe and Rwanda who had arrived in Canada as refugee claimants.

Everyone left feeling energized and with a greater awareness of what it’s like to enter Canada as an asylum seeker. Most went home with ideas of how their congregation could take steps to engage further with refugees arriving in their community. The experience was so meaningful that we have now begun hosting these daylong prayer pilgrimages to the Canada-US border twice a year. While the format is the same each time, the experience is always unique to the particular group of church leaders participating and what God has to say to us that day.

Our most recent group included several people from a Chinese church in Toronto. They are sensing God’s prompting to engage with Afghans arriving in their community. Joanne lives in Fort Erie and is actively involved at First Baptist Church. She shared that the experience gave her many new insights into who is arriving in her own community. Another participant said “...there was pain and discomfort while meeting with refugee claimants – adults and

children – looking at their eyes, listening to their stories – a mix of suffering and perseverance, heroism and helplessness, struggle and hope. I’m very grateful for this discomfort and pain, for through it one’s heart cannot stay unchanged.”

Perhaps there are strategic places connected to areas of ministry with which your congregation is engaged? I highly recommend this spiritual practice of pilgrimage as a way to go deeper. There is something very meaningful about setting apart time to travel in community to a liminal place with the intention of interceding and a desire to actively listen to God and those you meet along the way. ❶

Alison works with IAFR Canada and with Open Homes Hamilton. For the record, she’s experienced much delight in eating fresh kale from her garden but still avoids going to the dentist!

At its simplest, pilgrimage is going on a journey with a spiritual motivation. It is travelling somewhere not as a tourist who goes to consume, but rather as a listener. A pilgrim goes on a journey with the posture of listening to God and with a desire to encounter Him along the way.



IAFR Canada anticipates hosting daylong pilgrimages to the border twice a year. If you know a church leader who might want to join us please contact Alison Witt at info@iafr.ca



SOIL BENEATH THE SNOW

SEASONS OF
A THRIVING
NEIGHBOURHOOD

BY **PRESTON POUTEAUX**

AS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PASTOR I care for my church and community with this understanding: at any given time only about one quarter of those I meet are living out of a season of ‘fruitfulness’ in their lives. Only one in four persons has much to give, has abundant armfuls of time and energy to offer to others, and lives in a season of autumn-abundant harvest. The rest, I suspect, are living in seasons of spring, summer or winter; either just emerging, growing into, or recovering from a season of fruitfulness. In other words, the vast majority of people are not big contributors to neighbourhood life, and that’s OK. This discovery has transformed me.

The notion of the perennially productive person is pervasive. We have come to believe that humans are always fruitful, capable, and have an abundance to give. A few life-hacks, productivity how-to tips, and a pep-talk should get people back in gear. Two weeks a year should be enough to recharge the batteries, and get them plugged back in.



Even our metaphors for people become mechanical. We think the same in our neighbourhoods and churches. We start programs, projects, committees and service groups expecting that every member would be capable of giving time and energy to the cause. In neighbourhood social circles we wonder why a family hasn't been to our latest BBQ or signed up to plan our block party. When people feel maxed and taxed to their limit, they also wonder why they've run out of steam and they hide or make excuses. Compassion and care come as we learn to appreciate and embrace the seasons of community life together, including times to give and times to receive.

Author Adele Ahlberg Calhoun has helped me see the seasonality of human thriving. She writes, "The spiritual journey is a marathon of seasons. Sometimes you can hold your own. Sometimes your side aches, you're hot and you can't get your breath." Humans have a remarkable capacity to extend beyond themselves, but this capacity is

also met with seasons of recovery and preparation. She writes, "We have limits. There is a finiteness to our time and energy. And to live as though there isn't is destructive as well as delusional. It can be hard to tell the truth about our human capacity and limits because few of us want to accept the losses that come with this truth. We can't say yes to everything. We can't go everywhere and see everyone. We can't have it all. We aren't indispensable. We are finite beings who need rest. And that is not a bad thing."

I discovered my own need to rest and recover over the past couple of years. My wife, who has hosted events, gatherings, and sat long into the night with neighbours on our porch and deck, has suffered the effects of long-COVID. We have had to drastically change the way she relates to our church community and neighbourhood. We found ourselves no longer able to give as much as we did; instead, we felt the need to winterize, settle and wait. I was no longer able to host our block party or gather for community



Neighbourhoods and churches are not places where we demand perennial engagement, but rather walk with each other in the long seasons of waiting by nurturing each other with our time and presence. When we honour and trust the growing journey of those around us, we may begin to also have compassion for the growth we see.

games night. Now the guy who wrote books and articles on neighbourhood life was absent from so many activities. Our family had new human limits and I wondered how I could possibly love my neighbours when I had so little to give.

The answer to my concerns came from the people I love the most: my neighbours. Through the long season of waiting and recovery we had people come to us. One of my neighbours, Kate, would often come right into our home, pull up at the kitchen counter, and make us coffee. We did not have much to give and she didn't demand anything. She would simply sit, listen, and laugh with us about the silliness of the moment. We told stories, felt seen, and simply settled down with friends around us.

Poet Malcolm Guite's words helped us appreciate this new season and all that could happen even in the waiting. In one poem he writes: "...Because through all of these we held together, Because we shunned the impulse to let go, Because we hunkered down through our dark weather,



And trusted to the soil beneath the snow, Slowly, slowly, turning a cold key, Spring will unlock our hearts and set us free.” The winter season is not measured by productivity, but faithfulness, waiting, and holding onto trust.

Amy Hollingsworth in her book, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers* noticed that “the world’s most beloved neighbour” made it his mission to slow things down. Each episode of his children’s show, *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, began with a shot of a traffic light flashing yellow, a reminder that it was time to slow down. It was at this slower pace that Mr. Rogers could change his shoes and cardigan sweater. It was at this slower pace that children could be nourished again. Mr. Rogers said, “It seems to me, though, that our world needs more time to wonder and to reflect about what is inside.” Mr. Rogers did not expect his viewers to be productive but to be human. In fact, it would be out of this honour for being human, in all its limits, that communities could grow, deepen,

and thrive. In a fast-paced American television culture, Mr. Rogers was an outlier and perhaps a voice of clarity.

So right now about three quarters of my community are not productive in the sense culture might hope for them to be. Still, they are growing, waiting, preparing, and recovering from being productive. Neighbourhoods and churches are not places where we demand perennial engagement but rather walk with each other in the long seasons of waiting by nurturing each other with our time and presence. When we honour and trust the growing journey of those around us, we may begin to also have compassion for the growth we see.

Loving our neighbours is a “marathon of seasons” that may only make sense as we look back with time, noticing all that has grown between us. So, we hunker down together and “trust the soil beneath the snow.” ¹

Preston Pouteaux is a neighbourhood pastor and author in Chestermere, Alberta.



“

Staying in the Conversation

PHOTO NOAH CLARK (UNSPASH.COM)

Jodi Spargur (*third from right*) with the 7 Commitments Indigenous/Settler Working Group of the EFC



An interview with **Rev. Jodi Spargur**

BY **RENÉE JAMES**

Jodi Spargur is a catalyzer of healing and justice with Red Clover Initiatives, Vancouver, a partner project of Canadian Baptist Ministries. She is an ordained pastor and consultant with Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. Passionate about catalyzing movements of justice and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada, her consulting work also spans adaptive organizational change during times of transition, and effective neighbourhood engagement. She's currently working on her doctorate in Indigenous Theology and Ethics at NAIITS.

• • •

How did you get involved in this area of truth and reconciliation?

The church I planted in Downtown Eastside Vancouver in 2009 became a primarily Indigenous church, not the multicultural community I had thought I would be planting. I began to see the impact and legacy of colonization and residential schools on my friends.

I was invited to represent Baptists at a gathering of residential school survivors and church leaders from different denominations. We were to discuss how we could use the moment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings that would be held in Vancouver to catalyze a sustained movement for reconciliation, led by residential school survivors but intentionally engaging the church. This required very hard and honest conversations about the Church's role as a perpetrator of violence in the residential school project and what would be required for true reconciliation to occur even among us in the room making these plans. We sat in that circle for three hours, once a month, for five years.

Five years! What changed in you as you sat with that group?

In the early years I'd seen myself being there as a bridge-builder. I'm an immigrant to Canada and a Convention Baptist. We didn't run residential schools (or so I thought at the time) so I was this person who could broker healing and right relationships. But in the process of sitting with that group I was broken.

For two and a half years as I journeyed with this group, I'd sob when I opened my mouth to speak about this area. This isn't me! In one of the meetings, as we sat in the circle, I went down on my knees and said, "I don't know how healing can happen." An elder crossed the circle, came to me and said, "Your tears are good for a time, but you cannot walk with us from down there. So stand up."

I knew I couldn't "other" those who'd done harm with the Residential Schools System. I had to identify with them. So the question of standing up and owning that I was the accused in this situation was key for my growth in understanding where the work of true reconciliation began. "You church folks see yourselves as people who have a corner on this Truth and Reconciliation process but this is a legal process and you stand as the accused." These were hard and important words spoken to our group by the TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson. My own healing was only possible when I understood this.

Tell us more.

Chief Robert Joseph, hereditary chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation, was one of the key organizers of this group of residential school survivors and church leaders. He offered us two key teachings. The first was this: If I wanted to be part of the journey of truth and reconciliation I needed to start with the knowledge that people who looked like me came to Indigenous communities in the name of Jesus and did much harm. Until non-Indigenous churches know their place in the story – that they were wounders, not healers, right relationship cannot unfold.

In the context of faith, standing as the accused, as those who wounded, can stand as an invitation, not condemnation. Shame isn't the final word on the white Church and residential schools. It does however serve as a point of identification of our need as the Church – those who follow the way of Jesus. It's from that point of need, and only from that point, that healing and redemption happen.

What was his second key teaching?

Chief Robert Joseph identified the work of reconciliation as primarily spiritual work, and if people who prayed weren't part of the work, then we would not see healing for future generations. He asked me: "Jodi, would you help people who pray, stay in the conversation?"



Your insights and lessons learned are so rich. We know they come from the cross-cultural relationships you've built with Indigenous brothers and sisters. What are some best practices moving forward to help us start and stay in the conversation?

Consider how we preach the Gospel

Read Eric Law's book *The Wolf Shall Lie Down With The Lamb – A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. He's a priest, cultural anthropologist and an internationally known consultant in the area of multicultural leadership. In this book he depicts the cycle of the gospel as the journey to the cross and then the journey from the cross to the resurrection. He goes on to suggest that some people groups live the resurrection. The call of the gospel for them is to learn the path to the cross. For others, they live in the crucifixion and for them the whole gospel is learning the path to resurrection. We need each other to experience the power of the whole gospel but we also need to not assume that the challenging part of the gospel is the same for everyone.

According to him, we've made the preaching of the gospel monochromatic. We often get our messages mixed up about what the call of the gospel is to a particular group. I don't believe the gospel calls Indigenous people to sit in suffering more than they already have. I believe the gospel calls the settler (white) Church to walk toward the crucifixion. White people need to learn from Indigenous peoples about how to live in hope because there's a different hope that comes out of starting at the crucifixion and moving to hope. And our Indigenous brothers and sisters must be invited to sit in resurrection. We need to do these calls together and pray that the Spirit is binding us together.

My hands-on mission is really mission to the Church. Indigenous people have received our version of gospel for a long time but I'm not sure the Church has received the gospel in the same way and so as a consequence the Church isn't a good conversation partner.

2 Recognize the importance of the land

These are teachings I've received from Indigenous Peoples and I'm moving deeper and deeper into what they mean. Do we know the conversations that happened at first contact? How was the land to be shared? Theologically, Christians are meant to be people who live up to their word so what were the commitments made that we, as covenant people need to honour? The invitation here is to seek and find out and then become committed to the idea of reclaiming and repairing. How do we become people who look for what's been broken and torn apart and be committed to repairing those things?

We've bought into the Doctrine of Discovery which was a theological document designed to theologically justify the theft of land by casting Indigenous Peoples – their cultures and everything associated with them – as evil and therefore to be obliterated. One of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was for churches to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery, and terra nullius. As we do that work of repudiating, we have to pay attention to our ways of seeing and talking about the land.

3 The gospel has been given to Indigenous people

I've learned that we need to let go of our sense that we enter into relationships with Indigenous communities and people with conversion as our primary outcome. Yes, conversion will happen as this work is done well, but healing is what we need to attend to first. Remember, the Church has been a site of wounding for hundreds of years in our relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

So how do we begin the conversations and build the relationships that lead to healing?

First, know what was asked of Canadians in the TRC Calls to Action. These Actions form a starting point of which we need to be aware. Educate yourselves: Which of these things might particularly be impacting the nation that is your closest neighbour?

Second, we have been asked to use the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation. Know what that document says and how these principles might apply in your context.

One of the principles of UNDRIP is free, prior and informed consent. Some churches have realized they never asked permission to do what they have been doing on reserves. So ask your Indigenous neighbours what they would like you to say or do as you come alongside them. Ask if they are OK with what you're doing on their land. Some will say: "Leave us alone."



We aren't known for listening to those we've impacted; for listening as they decide whether or not they want to participate in a program; for listening to what they'd ask of the Church in partnership.

What's the one takeaway you'd like readers to remember?

When I started the church plant in Downtown East Vancouver, I said that I didn't want to pastor an Indigenous church – I felt inadequate and those feelings grew as the months unfolded. So I reached out to Cheryl Bear and asked for a contact who could offer me some guidance and help. One day Hector Hill from the Gitsegukla First Nation showed up. He'd been sitting in a coffee shop across the street from the church, watching me for weeks. He wondered whether our church was going to be a sandwich church or a clothing church. I felt more and more inadequate as he ran down that list. "But you aren't any of those things," he said. "And that's why I've come – because your hands are empty, and so they're open for friendship." Hector became my mentor.

My hope is that people will understand that individually, and collectively, we can come vulnerable, broken and empty-handed, and that in fact this is the best way to come into conversations with the potential of healing and flourishing. We don't have to be afraid of the unknowing. Yes, we want to know and understand where we're heading, but we're being invited into a beautiful journey by Indigenous Peoples and we don't know the outcome. That's a gift and we can let Creator-God reveal something He's never before. I've experienced deep transformational relationship when I wasn't afraid of being empty. ①



God Calls. We Obey.

Rev. Carol Owens on loving neighbours at Friendship House and what lies ahead for her in retirement

BY **REV CAROL OWENS**

IN 2006 I WAS BUSY RUNNING a wonderful home day-care centre. One day, an elderly lady from my church called me to ask if I was interested in running an after school program at Friendship House just one day a week. I thanked her and declined. I had a job, I had been doing it successfully for 15 years and why would I take on something else? The following day she rang again and asked if I wanted my interview on Tuesday or Wednesday the

next week. I reminded her that I did not want the job, I wasn't even sure I knew what Friendship House actually did, and besides it was out of town and the money was dreadful. The following day she called, yet again, to say she had arranged for an interview on Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. Not wanting to hurt her feelings and thinking that it was always good to keep one's interview skills honed, I went off to the interview. Lo and behold I was given the job as children's program coordinator assistant. I was not happy! I couldn't believe I'd taken on a job I didn't want.

That first day 45 children arrived after school. They ranged in age from kindergarten to Grade 8. They ate the snack with gusto and were clearly just delighted to be there. My gift of discernment, my love for God and my programming skills took over my discontent. I went to the board and organized three separate days of programming. I then split the age groups: JK-2, 3-5 and 6-8, and so my journey at Friendship House began. Crafts, games, teen activities, life skill classes, and nutritious food brought children from all over the neighbourhood to our front door. The kitchen staff decided at this point to retire. They had been running a breakfast club twice a week and a large number of local kids came for breakfast before school. I went back to the board and took on the breakfast club.

At this point I felt I should be talking to God about Friendship House to find out what He required of me there! His answer came from Micah 6:8: Love justice, do mercy and walk humbly with Him. I was quite prepared to do this, but what did this look like when put into action? God again answered with Scripture: to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and to love my neighbour as myself. "No problem Lord I'm all over it," I replied, "but what does this look like when put into action?" The answer came: Feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, make the stranger feel welcome, clothe the naked and visit with those who are sick and in prison. At last, my mission was clear.

As I began work at the House at the crack of dawn making breakfast, and I was still there to do after-school programs, it only seemed natural to fill in the rest of the day. We expanded the clothing closet ministry which had been running before I'd arrived to include a separate children's closet and baby equipment.

We also deepened all our ministries connected with food: a larger and more accessible food bank, cooking

I learned that God doesn't make mistakes... We all have a place in His kingdom. There is no 'except for' in John 3:16.

classes for Grade 7 and 8 students in local elementary schools, community gardens, Christmas hampers, food baskets for shut-in seniors and special needs adults. student lunches for those who went to school without lunch. Over 13 schools joined hands with Friendship House to feed over 400 hungry children every week.

Over time, Friendship House programs shifted, particularly as other community organizations began to offer breakfast and snacks at local

schools, and afterschool programs. Yet, even as children no longer came out to Friendship House and went to those programs instead, more and more adults began to turn up for the House's breakfast, lunch and social time. The homeless, poverty-stricken, abused, neglected and outcast now became our main focus.

I learned so much while at Friendship House.

I learned that God doesn't make mistakes. I worked alongside people with learning challenges, behavioural issues, addictions, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder. People who had been abused, neglected and rejected. I worked alongside people from every nation and every gender. We all have a place in His kingdom. There is no 'except for' in John 3:16. Our job is simply to show God's love through our actions.

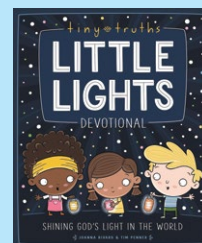
I also learned to let go. I had seen a need for the many children in the community who suffered with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and I had managed to get a large grant. With the help of local professionals, I set up a summer camp for these children, knowing their families would benefit from the respite. The camp did not go as planned and I was heartbroken. However, a local group took on this camp and it continues to this day. God had never asked me to do this camp; I had just wanted to. In His grace, He allowed it to continue but it wouldn't be for me to run.

I have no idea what comes next. I left Friendship House as my body and energy levels began to decline. It'll be interesting to see what the good Shepherd asks this willing sheepdog to do next. Whether it's to encourage sheep to stay in the fold, gather lost sheep and bring them to the Shepherd, or go running into the mire to rescue them – I'm ready. In the meantime, I'll enjoy my rest, cups of tea and good books. ①

Carol is the former executive director of Friendship House, Brantford. Friendship House is a regular recipient of CBWOQ grants.



Bernice's Picks



Tiny Truths Little Lights Devotional: Shining God's Light in the World

Joanna Rivard

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She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry

Karoline M. Lewis

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The Importance of Presence



One of the greatest calls in our life.

BY **LYNDA MACGIBBON**

MY APARTMENT IS QUIET TODAY and I am alone in the mid-morning light. This Thanksgiving Day I am reflecting on past years when I'd already be in the company of a couple of neighbours who'd popped over for an impromptu cup of coffee. Or I might have just set a 20 lb turkey in my oven, preparing to welcome 20 people for dinner, some of whom I'd be meeting for the first time.

But that was a former season, one I feel quite privileged to have written about in my memoir, *My Vertical Neighborhood; How Strangers Became Community* (IVP, 2021). Seasons of life, like the seasons of nature, are a certainty. They will come. And they will go. What we carry out of one and into the next – friendships, memories, experiences, lessons learned – may be a season's greatest gift.

When the season of *My Vertical Neighborhood* began, I had just turned 50 and moved to Toronto. The world had not turned inward against COVID-19; wars, always a reality, were not quite the global

My response to God's command to love my neighbours is allowed to change.

threat they've become today. I had more energy, more capacity to connect with more people and so, it seems, did many of my friends.

Seasons of life, like seasons of nature, have a way of helpfully turning life over so new things can emerge. In the season of *My Vertical Neighborhood*, I was turning over the questions: "Why love my neighbour? And what might I learn if I do?"

God, and my neighbours, graciously provided answers to my questions, and gave me a story to write. Central to that story is the lesson I learned about the importance of presence – what it means to truly see who or what is in front of you and then to ask the questions, "...What is being asked of me in this moment?" Then, "What do I have to give in response?"

Recently, on a morning when I was burdened by work issues, I was riding the elevator to the parking garage in my apartment building. The doors opened midway down and a woman entered, looked at me and exclaimed "You look beautiful!"

Just the day before, I'd had my hair cut and the grey roots erased. Years ago, another stylist used to admonish me that my hair "dragged" me down when it grew past a certain length. That's how I'd been feeling every time I had looked in the mirror before my recent haircut. Dragged down. Definitely not beautiful.

The woman in the elevator took one quick look at me that morning and gave me exactly what I needed: a compliment. A second of spontaneous engagement on her part changed my day.

In the two years since my book was published, people often ask what am I doing to love my neighbours now. Am I still inviting strangers to weekly dinners? Still hosting Bible studies? Still helping run a Writers' Group? These are all things I did in that season of life.

My answer is no. I am not doing any of those things. Initially, when those questions came my way, I felt guilty, even a bit like a fraud. The perspective of season has helped

me through this sense of not being or doing enough. I have come to understand that my response to God's command to love my neighbours is allowed to change.

The command, of course, remains.

In seasons when we personally have less capacity, there are still things we can do to love neighbours. We can pray. We can spontaneously offer a compliment. We can include one extra person around a holiday dinner table already set for family. We can write a note of encouragement. We can make a donation to an organization caring

for the vulnerable in our communities. We can give to a food bank. We can have a brief conversation with the person sitting next to us on the bus. We can smile at a stranger we pass while out for a walk.

In seasons when we have more capacity, we can throw big dinner parties. We can volunteer at food banks or other community organizations. We can join school,

church or community committees. We can host prayer meetings. We can participate in groups that take us out of our comfort zones but engage our interests. We can join a community theatre troupe, start a neighbourhood book club, participate in Alpha.

Recently I came across this quote by Sam Kim, Lead Pastor, Good News Church, New York City: "The greatest call of our lives is presence not productivity."

Pastor Kim has expressed so well the most important lesson I learned in what was a season of significant productivity. Being present to people and being present to the realities of our world is the first step in loving my neighbours. God knows my current capacity for action and calls it forth with grace, not with guilt.

In this season when I find myself far less productive than in seasons past, I am grateful to be reminded of this truth. ①

"The greatest call of our lives is presence not productivity."

Lynda is Vice-President, People and Culture, with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Canada. Read our review of *My Vertical Neighborhood: How Strangers Became Community* on page 22.



Jazz with mom, Rev. Tina Rae, meeting Jose on their family mission trip to Costa Rica in Jan 2018

Skip the Vacation

Plan an overseas family mission experience instead

BY REV. TANYA YUEN

DURING THE SUMMER between Grade 11 and 12 I went on a two-month mission experience to Portugal. The couple that led our team brought along their three kids – ages four, six and eight. That summer had a profound effect on me, but as I continued to grow and develop as a pastor, I realized that observing that family throughout that summer had also deeply shaped my outlook on the value of an experience like that in the life of a family.

You step out beyond your comfort zones

In our Western culture of prosperity and instant gratification, children are growing up adapting very easily to a relatively comfortable lifestyle. There is immense value in providing our children with the opportunity to step

beyond their comfort zones and develop an awareness of and concern for a hurting world. Family overseas mission experiences offer a unique and invaluable opportunity for this transformation, allowing children to become truly counter-cultural.

You spend time together

In our fast-paced world, families often find themselves pulled in different directions, and the opportunity to serve together can be a unifying experience. Serving in this way allows family members to connect on a deeper level, building memories and shared experiences that can last a lifetime. These shared adventures foster a sense of togetherness that can help families navigate the challenges of life.

Missional living becomes real

Early exposure to cross-cultural missions begins to shape a missional mindset in children. It instills values of compassion, empathy, and the desire to make a positive impact on the world. By stepping outside their comfort zone, children learn to appreciate the diversity of cultures and perspectives, leading to a broader and more inclusive worldview.

Through overseas missions, families have the opportunity to see and understand the needs of others in a

tangible way. While it's easy to turn a blind eye to global issues when living in the comfort of our own homes, these experiences shed light on the realities faced by many in our world, even in our own country. This firsthand understanding of poverty, social injustices, and humanitarian needs can be a powerful motivator for children and adults alike to take action.

You learn from each other

Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children's values and beliefs. When families embark on cross-cultural missions together, they set an

They offer something... valuable – a profound shift in perspective and a nurturing of the soul

example for one another. Children witness their parents' values of compassion and selflessness. In turn, parents can learn from their children's enthusiasm and fresh perspectives on making a difference in the world.

You do outreach as a family

Overseas missions also offer an opportunity for families to tangibly share their faith. By engaging in acts of kindness and love, families can demonstrate the principles of their faith in a practical and meaningful way. These experiences can be instrumental in developing a heart for spreading God's love.

You learn to be cross-culturally sensitive

However, it's crucial to acknowledge that overseas missions, when done wrong, can have adverse effects. Therefore, the approach to these experiences must be carefully considered.

Respect and understanding of the host culture are paramount. Families must take the time to learn about the customs, traditions, and values of the community they are serving. Cultural insensitivity can lead to misunderstandings and hinder effectiveness.

Long-term sustainability should be a primary focus. It's not about providing temporary relief but contributing to lasting change. Families can engage in projects that empower local communities and promote self-sufficiency.



Ready to go?

Read *Don't Forget to Pack The Kids – Short Term Missions for Your Whole Family* by Jill Richardson

This book is an excellent, practical resource for families wondering about or interested in an overseas mission experience with their young children. Using her own experiences, the author shares why such an experience is a valuable and important opportunity for families to consider. She also provides detailed, step-by-step instructions of how to make such an experience come to fruition.

Finally, if you feel God nudging you to take your family on an overseas mission, start talking about it as a family. Most trips take 12–18 months of preparations and conversations to materialize, even for a one to two-week experience.

Flexibility is key. Mission experiences can be unpredictable, and families must be prepared to adapt to unforeseen challenges and changing circumstances.

Family discussions about the experience is also important. Upon returning from a mission, families should make time to reflect and discuss their experience.

Embarking on overseas missions as a family can be transformative and life-enriching; an experience that offers a unique opportunity to grow together, instill valuable lessons in children, and make a lasting impact on the world. These benefits may not translate into immediate or quantifiable returns on financial investment, but they offer something far more valuable – a profound shift in perspective and a nurturing of the soul. The impact of these missions is not limited to the individuals involved; it ripples outward, influencing communities and inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. 🌱

Tanya is CBOQ's associate for family and children's ministries

We Remember

Each generation has the opportunity to fuel mission for the next. We are thankful for the following gifts:

IN MEMORY OF

Helen Hales, Belleville

Bev Keys, Woodstock

Ellen Tree, Waterloo

Barbara Jantzi, Hamilton

Mary Jackson, Hamilton

Eileen Greenwood,
Strathroy

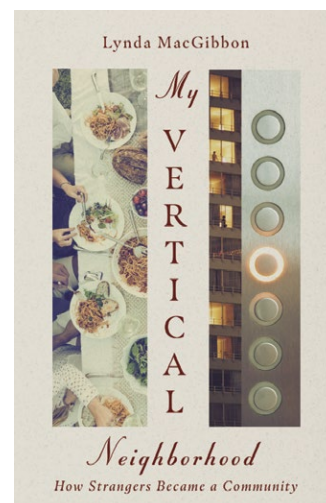
2023 CIRCLE LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

Carol McCallum,
*First Baptist Church
Wallaceburg*

BOOK REVIEW

My Vertical Neighbourhood

How strangers became a community



BLOCK OFF A MORNING and turn off your notifications. Steep your favourite tea or brew some coffee then settle down in your favourite reading spot as you won't be able to put down Lynda MacGibbon's candid account of how she learned to love her neighbours. I couldn't.

Of course, that's the mark of the journalist she is. Lynda was a journalist for over 20 years in Nova Scotia before obeying the Spirit's call to move to Toronto and assume what's now her post of Vice-President, People and Culture for Intervarsity Canada. Crisp details of neighbourhood living infuse every page and as someone who now considers Toronto home I loved her references to the lakefront, views from her balcony, the tumbling awkward discomfort of high-rise living. Vertical indeed.

The specific becomes universal in the hands of a seasoned storyteller. Lynda's descriptions and stories of the neighbours who become the core of this high-rise community literally give us seats at the many tables around which it was formed. The ebb and flow in relationships between all those idiosyncratic personalities; waiting on tenterhooks at the first Writers' Group meeting (would anyone come?); the meals cooked for Monday night dinners; the olives and libations carefully chosen and served at Writers Groups demystifies what I suspect intimidates most of us: how to strike up, grow and maintain authentic relationships with strangers who would stay strangers except for the fact that we live next to them.

Lynda's own questions and queries of the Lord challenged me. As I read, I asked myself what would happen if I did what Lynda did and prayed and listened to the Lord for a season about how to bring neighbours together. Could I be as brave with my non-work/writing time the way Lynda was at the beginning of her neighbourhood outreach?

Lynda's memoir reminds me that obeying Jesus command to love my neighbours is at once easier than it seems and yet deeply life-changing. There's a cost involved when I choose, in obedience to the Lord, to open up my life to others. What would love look like where I lived? Lynda's answer to that question is to take us into the sticky mess of authentic relationships, all cross-cultural in the truest sense of those words. For it's there, she shows us with every anecdote and musing, that grace lives. Because Emmanuel is already there.

Rush and buy this book at READ ON Bookstore today. You'll be so glad you did. ①

A HISTORY MOMENT

Letter in Time of War

October 31, 1939

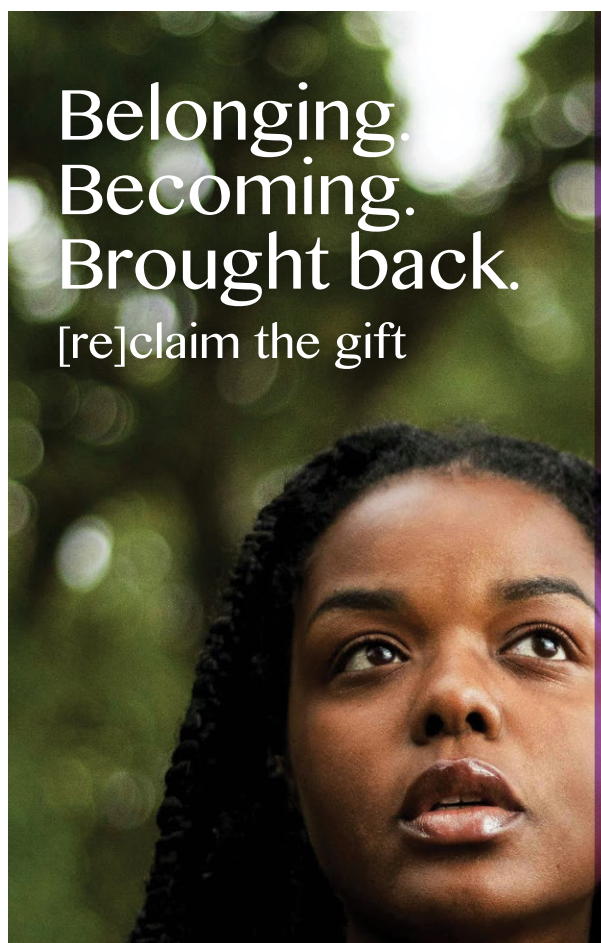
To My Fellow Baptist Women Throughout the World:

My dear Friends:

The war has brought any number of opportunities for the Christian service which women can render. In many countries there are homeless and poverty-stricken refugees from other lands. We must do all we can for them in the spirit of Him who said, "In as much as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto Me." We represent many nations; we differ in many of our views, but we are one in the belief that the last word in human affairs is with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yours in the one great Fellowship,
Eva Brown, Chairman of the Women's Committee, BWA ①

— from *Coming Together – A History of the Women's Department, Baptist World Alliance* by Esther Barnes, p. 33



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“

Not everyone is your brother or sister in the faith, but everyone is your neighbour, and you must love your neighbour.”

Attributed to Timothy Keller

live

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