

OUR PURPOSE

To glorify God by partnering together in obedience to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission

OUR VISION

To be a movement of healthy reproducing churches



Turn Up the Volume

Hearing God Above the Static

As kids, many of us played a version of the game "telephone line" where you repeated a phrase to the person beside you and so on down the line until the final person repeated what they thought they heard. Inevitably, what the last person heard was often far different from what the original person had stated. Listening and hearing with clarity requires that we tune out all the other noises and voices.

Several things may impede our ability to hear clearly. Turn up the volume! We often hear that expression when listening is difficult because of outside noise. Sometimes that noise is rooted in struggles and challenges we are facing that make it hard to hear God's voice. Perhaps it is an unconfessed sin in our heart or an unforgiving spirit towards others that diminish our ability to hear God's voice. Other times we may be listening to different voices that direct our focus to ourselves rather than those around us.

Hearing God's voice begins with our relationship with Him. We were created for relationship, and He invites us to communicate with

Him and to listen to His voice. The psalmist wrote, *"In my distress, I called upon the Lord; to my God, I cried for help. From His temple He heard my voice and my cry to Him reached His ears"* (Ps. 18:6). God is always attuned to the cry of His children. But do we hear His voice when He calls out to us?

Within the AGC family of churches, eleven distinct language group congregations preach, teach, and worship in their unique language. God speaks to all His children uniquely through His Word and His people. Sometimes, though, we develop a hearing impairment as the noise around us increases, making it difficult to hear God's voice. We need to turn up the volume so that we hear His voice above the static.

In this edition of CONNECT, you will read stories of how God speaks to others within our Association above the world's noise. So be encouraged; listen for His voice!

Rev. Bill Allan – AGC President





Listening Through Song

I am not overstating things when I say that God has used music to change my life. More times than I can remember, while experiencing moments of insecurity, discouragement, or fear, scriptural lyrics set to beautiful melodies have turned my heart and refreshed my faith.

I recall one such occasion when there was a tremendous amount of uncertainty in our lives and ministry. One evening, while driving home from a church meeting, overcome with despair, I wondered if we had made a major mistake in moving to Bridgewater. As I wallowed in self-pity and doubt, a song played on my car's CD player - "*Gentle Saviour*" sung by David Phelps. As tears streamed down my face, God used that song to reestablish my trust in Him even through difficult circumstances. It was as if a heavy burden was physically lifted from my soul. God spoke to me through the truth of that song, and He has seen fit to grant us sixteen more years of ministry in this wonderful church.

Rev. Jeff Woodcock – Bridgewater Open Bible Church, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

The Beauty of His Call

"... *As Christ loved His church*" ... I knew, in principle, what these words from the book of Ephesians meant. I have read them countless times. But reading them again, seventeen years into my marriage, I was made keenly aware that my mind and heart were out of sync. My mind was set on the beauty of this call. My heart was restless, coping with expectations, processing disappointments, and bending under difficulties.

God was leading me to see that I was not living what He, in His goodness, set before me: to "**Love your wife, as Christ loved His church.**" That's very hard. It calls for self-giving without expecting anything in return. But I would ask, "*what about my needs and my hopes?*"

In this season, while searching through these difficult questions, it was as if God asked a question back: "*what do you desire most?*" By His gracious doing, my heart and mind beat in unison on this: "to be in all things to the praise of His glorious grace"; as it says in Ephesians 1. It was a reminder that love for my wife is bound with honouring my Lord. And what about my needs? ... "*The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need*" (Psalm 23).

Rev. Greg Kopczyk – The MET, Ottawa, ON

"If we feed our souls regularly on God's word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually just as we feed on ordinary food several times each day and become robust physically. Nothing is more important than hearing and obeying the word of God."

~ Richard J. Foster



A Collective Murmur

Praying in public can be difficult for many people. Here at Park Avenue Bible Church in Melfort, Saskatchewan, the congregation has been working through a prayer discipleship program on Sunday mornings. For ten to twelve minutes every Sunday, individuals and families bend their heads and knees to pray out loud using Scripture and guided prayer prompts. It has been an excellent way to quite literally "Turn Up the Volume"! For those ten minutes, the "music" that plays is a collective murmur of prayer from all the voices in our church. It's one of the most encouraging "songs" that we have on a Sunday morning. We are so fortunate to have a lady in our gathering who loves prayer and is gifted to lead and inspire. She, along with the leaders of PABC has been able to disciple the church in Melfort to be a praying church. There's much work to be done, but with God's help, we are growing and hearing HIS voice rather than the static!

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"
(Matthew 18.20).

Rev. Phil Houston – Park Avenue Bible Church, Melfort, SK

"One of the first performances of faith is hearing. We hear the voice of God, not with the outward ear alone, but with the inward ear; we hear it as God's Word, and we believe it to be so; that is the "hearing" of faith." ~ Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Incredible, and Yet, Hard

It is very difficult to watch our children suffer. Interacting with Alex and Amber's story gives a whole new perspective on how we hear from God through the valley of suffering.

Our firstborn, Leonardo, arrived on January 15th, 2023. He was born with Pierre-Robin Sequence. The initial days were challenging as Amber recovered from surgery and our visas would soon expire as we had planned on being back in Mexico to follow God's call to mission.

Initially, Leo had to be on his belly to breathe and was fed through a feeding tube. The wait seemed endless as we anticipated seeing specialists. Yet, we

were thankful for the prayers and love we received. It was a beautiful testimony to the Lord's faithfulness and loving kindness! We held to the truth that God was in control, trusting in His plan.

While reading a devotional from Martyn Lloyd-Jones, this struck me: **"Oh God grant us that we may all be filled with the Holy Spirit, and may we know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." (Phil. 3:10); that we may know what He has done in us.**" The power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings - what an incredible and yet hard privilege.

And then the hard became harder. Leo continued to decline. What could a parent do but plead with God for a miracle? Yet, in and through it all God's love was shared in the hard places. Amber shared the Gospel with a mother in the NICU and we met other believers in the hospital and had fellowship with them.

AND THEN it happened! . . . Amber went to the hospital expecting the worst, but when she walked in, Leo was laying on his back. She was quite upset as this could kill him, but the doctors said "we can't explain what happened. It's as if Leo decided that he is ok to be on his back, his oxygen levels are at 100%!" It is a miracle! We praise God for His healing and incredible mercy for our boy. The medical team brought a cleft palate bottle for Leo to drink from and he is doing well!

We are thankful that God heard the prayers of His people and is healing our boy! We are so blessed and thank God for how He has used this trial/valley to deepen our faith and help us better understand what it means to trust! It has been quite a journey, but we take comfort in the fact that our circumstances don't change who God is, rather God is the one who changes our circumstances. If God is teaching us something, it is to trust and rely on His sovereignty.

Rev. Alex and Amber Bojórquez – Maryfield Associated Gospel Church, Maryfield, SK



Be Still and Know

Being still, I've decided, isn't for me. It doesn't come naturally. I don't want to slow down; I don't want to be still . . . I want to go; I want to do.

Over the last ten months, God has allowed the circumstance of ill health in the form of bone marrow cancer which has forced me to be still. It has slowed me to a crawl, and I couldn't be more grateful. In the quietness of forced stillness, I have seen God's sovereign grace and provision in ways I would have otherwise missed. I've seen the beauty and blessing of His people, and their Christ-like care for myself, my wife, and our family. I've revelled in the laughter shared in our home. I've been blessed by the deep relationships I have with Alanna, our kids, and my brother. My relationships with close friends have deepened and become more meaningful. My relationship with the Lord has never been deeper, more intimate, or more challenging. All because He has used this forced slow down to teach me to be still and to know.



The end of verse ten continuing into verse eleven is part of the text that I have often overlooked. ***"I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"***. I have never been so confident that the Lord of Hosts is with us and that He alone is our fortress. God is good. All the time. May He be exalted in us.

Rev. Jeff Peacock – Somerset Bible Chapel, Somerset, MB

"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!"

(Psalm 46:10,11).

"And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith . . ."

(Hebrews 12: 1,2).

Redirecting Our Gaze

Some time ago, we found ourselves in a season of mental and spiritual exhaustion. As we laboured on in ministry, an idea began to form in our minds. *"Would it be helpful for us and consequently for our whole congregation to take time for a sabbatical?"* Surely a prolonged time of physical and spiritual refreshment would be of benefit.

With this thought in mind, we prayerfully put together a proposal for a four-month sabbatical. Working hard to think of all the details that would need to be cared for in our absence, we submitted our plan to the church leadership. Everything was carefully explained to them and so we felt that due diligence was done on our part.

Week after week passed without any response from the board. At that moment we recognized how increasingly unsettled we would be if we sought to press them for a response. It was a pivotal moment for us when we chose to give the entire situation over to the Lord. We found ourselves looking to Him for an answer instead of to the church board. As we together choose to redirect our gaze to God, we find rest for our souls.

Pastor Bob and Alison Coutts – Glenboro Bible Chapel, Glenboro, MB

The Creator of these Mountains

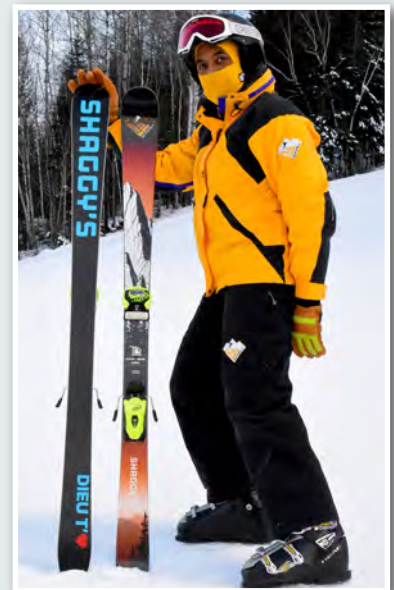
The effects of winter can be felt for six months here in the beautiful province of Quebec. Outside activities play a vital role in the lives of Quebecois. This being the case, the idea of how to reach people with the gospel during the winter months had occupied my thoughts and prayers for quite some time. While skiing with my daughter one day I looked around and realized that the ski slopes played a major role in the winter life of many ski enthusiasts who live in Quebec. It is also something that my family and I greatly enjoy.

Talking to the Lord while riding on the chair lift at the end of the ski season a few years ago I remember saying, *"Lord, I'm not coming back to the slopes unless I can somehow point people to you, the creator of these mountains"*. That was my actual prayer. Over the last two years, God has answered giving me an abundance of opportunities to do just the thing I asked of Him . . . pointing people on the slopes to the Lord.

Rev. Virgil Jones – Église Évangélique de Lachute, Lachute, Quebec

"The mountain peaks belong to Him!"

(Psalm 95:4).



International Imports...



Rev. Louis Scheepers, Lead Pastor, Grace Church, Newmarket, ON

Louis was born and raised in South Africa where he grew up as a preacher's kid. He has a love and passion for Jesus and the Church. He led a large church in Springs, just east of Johannesburg. Since 2016 he was involved with church planting in Cape Town, South Africa.

Louis and Yolandi married in 2010. They have two daughters: Abigail and Annabelle. They love to spend time in nature as a family. Louis was appointed as Senior Pastor at Grace Church, Newmarket, ON.



Pastor David Driver, Forest City Bible Church, London, ON

David arrived from Western Australia with his wife Jess and daughter Zoe. They recently had the blessing of adding another little girl to their family.

David came to know the Lord nine years ago in London, Ontario while on a work visa. He later met Jess and they married and moved to Australia for David to attend seminary and get some church leadership experience. David answered the call to be the Lead Pastor at Forest City Bible Church, London, ON.



Pastor Christopher Joseph, The MET, Ottawa, ON

Christopher Joseph (Joy) serves as the Missions Pastor at The MET. Interestingly, it was a missionary of The MET who led him to the Lord in India in 2007.

Joy had been a pastor in North India where he planted and shepherded two churches with Delhi Bible Fellowship. He founded Life Tree Foundation, a Christian non-profit.

Joy is a gifted songwriter, composer, and singer, and produces Christ-centered and culturally relevant Hindi Christian music. Joy is married to Sapna, who has been a healthcare administrative professional and currently enjoys raising their daughter Ariana.

Remembered



Rev. Belton Rivera - With sadness, we learned of the homegoing of Rev. Belton Rivera on Feb. 2, 2023, after a lengthy illness. Belton served as a pastor in the AGC for many years, most recently as lead pastor of Arise International Ministries in Whitby, ON. Please pray for his wife Charisma and children Matthew and Amara and the church family as they process their loss.

The BIG Move

I am big on calling: I want to be where God wants me to be, doing what He wants me to do when He wants me to do it.

The Apostle Paul lived in a similar way. Following the Spirit's guidance, he started churches in cities where numerous people began to follow Jesus. He preached in Athens where only a handful of people were converted and did not go on to Asia but finally went to Jerusalem knowing he would be captured. His dependence was on guidance from the Holy Spirit.

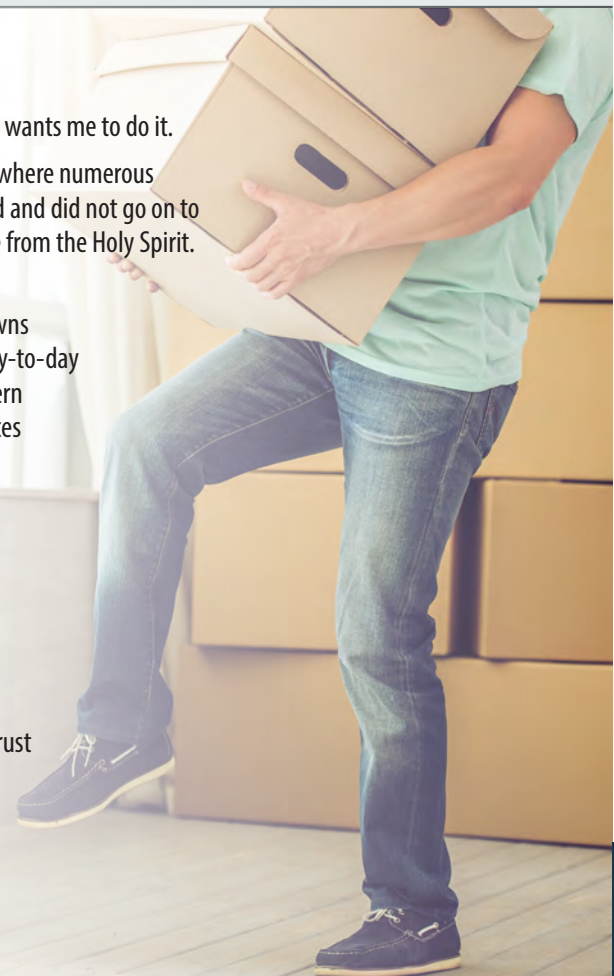
In 2021 my family moved from our home country in South Africa to Canada to pastor Grace Church in Newmarket, ON. This was a BIG move for which I needed to hear from God very clearly. Covid lockdowns probably helped, as it slowed me down enough to hear God's voice above the noise of the normal day-to-day busyness. But, with BIG choices like moving my family across the ocean, I also follow a recipe to discern God's guidance - not because I don't trust Him, but because I don't want to fall back on my preferences when decisions are hard. When I sense the Holy Spirit moving in my life, I ask God for confirmation:

- from the Bible
- from my wife
- from a Christian stranger who does not know my thoughts and is therefore without prejudice
- in the form of either a growing certainty or a sign that I cannot miss
- in the form of open doors

God has so much grace and has provided clear direction in these ways throughout my life. May you trust God enough to find a way that you can discern His guidance above the noise of your own busyness.

Rev. Louis Scheepers – Grace Church, Newmarket, ON

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).





Listening in the Lament

Sometimes it is difficult to grasp what God is saying when our souls are in turmoil and our bodies are marred by disease or serious injury. These realities interrupt our lives, and our emotional and spiritual equilibrium is knocked off balance. We wonder, we fear, and we search for hope and answers. We long to hear God speak words that breathe life and offer perspective amid profound uncertainty.

This was the experience for my wife Peggi and me. The uncertainty came in the form of a cancer diagnosis for Peg and a serious leg injury for me. Yet, we heard God speak words of life and hope. Months of enforced solitude and relative quietness afforded times of unhurried reading and reflection. Relative inactivity allowed for stillness, not a desired solitude, yet real nonetheless! Crucial to hearing from God was our need to be honest with Him. We needed God to hear our confusion, fears, longings, and laments. Often, the Psalms became our 'voice' to God. The ancient laments turned modern, and God's Spirit spoke words of 'life and light' through His Word. Did we hear with clarity a word from God each day? No. Some days the pain was so intense that we just gutted out the day, and when we couldn't discern God's voice, we believed that God was good and at work even in the hard.

Not only did our gracious God speak above and through the 'noise', but He also caressed our souls through the actions and touch of His people. People who showed up and simply listened, reminding us of truths we needed to feed on, praying for us when we just didn't have the energy to pray.

Our experience continues to shape, refine and prepare us to deepen our walk with God, helping us step away from the busyness and noise to hear clearly and speak honestly with Him. This crucible experience enables us to draw near to others in their hard realities as we seek to be 'the voice and touch of God' to them.

Rev. John Garner – Associate Regional Director, AGC East

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

God Hears

This watercolour painting is displayed in my home because it speaks to my soul.

Artist *C. Michael Dudash* explains the inspiration behind this piece; ***"Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and He hears my voice"*** (Psalm 55:17) *is the Scripture that inspired this painting. It has long been one of my favourite passages and is a reminder that regardless of the time of day or night when we pray and cry out to the Lord, He is there to hear and listen. I have attempted to convey a particular sense of timelessness and a place with this painting – not sure if it's morning, noon, or early evening, if she is in a sunlit room or on a porch or in the open air – if she is happy or sad, if she is giving thanks or beseeching the Lord for some great need. I personally sense a deep feeling of peace when I look at this print, a place of rest in the Lord. Whatever your interpretation, we all know that a solid prayer life is a universal necessity if we are to have a meaningful walk with the Lord. It is His chosen way for us to hear from Him and He from us. I pray that you will be motivated to seek the Lord and find through your own prayer life, a place of rest in Him.*

As life seems to move in a whirlwind and the noise around us increases, we must purposely choose to be still and listen. We learn from Jesus and are grateful for His example to "come aside" and spend time with the Father. Being thankful allows us to hear God in the praises of His people, like in the stories that have been shared in this edition of Connect Magazine. We give glory to God as we listen to Him above the static.

Susan Page – AGC Church Relations Coordinator



Visit our website @
agcofcanada.com

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