



AGC
ASSOCIATED GOSPEL CHURCHES

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

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God

(Romans 15:7)

Connect 2019

Welcoming the Stranger

It was on a plane that, for the first time, I truly felt like a stranger, like I did not belong. My family was leaving for our missionary assignment in South America. At 6'3" tall, I could see well above the seats to a plane full of people who were different than me. They all had black hair, brown eyes and copper coloured skin. I was the different one. Michele and I along with our two very small blonde-haired blue-eyed little girls were different, we stood out, we didn't belong.

Yet, something remarkable happened when we landed. We were met by a welcoming friend, someone who served as a bridge between the uncomfortableness of not fitting in and our new community. Then, something else unfolded. We were welcomed into a community of believers, we were part of their family. Yes, we looked different, we spoke different languages, but there was a connection that went deeper than our ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. It was a lesson that I have been reminded of many times.

We often think of "Welcoming the Stranger" in terms of inviting others who are different into our fellowship, our community, our very lives. How then, do we do this as an association of churches? How do we practice "welcoming" so that we function like family and reflect that same love to a lost and dying world, a world without Christ?

I'd like to share some practical ways we encourage a welcoming community within our Association:

- Recently, we hosted the first **AGC Pastors' Orientation** in conjunction with our AGC SUMMIT leadership meetings. It was a time for AGC Staff and Board members to meet those who are new to us and welcome them in. We spent time praying for each another and rejoicing in one another.
- Our **AGC Regional Ministry Leaders Gatherings** and **Pastor's Cafés** reflect our desire to strengthen our family ties as an

association. Welcoming, gathering, learning from one another and celebrating one another is part of who we are.

- Our **AGC National** and **Regional Conferences** give opportunity to practice this welcoming.
- Our **AGC National Staff** are available and want to visit and participate in special occasions like pastoral inductions, anniversary celebrations, etc. Just let us know about your family celebrations that we might join with you! These are the things that families do when they get together.
- Your **AGC National office** is a warm and welcoming place. We would love you to stop by for coffee and a chat! Drop in, e-mail or call.

All this and more helps us move beyond our own family to those outside the family, those who are different than us. Developing a *welcoming* culture in your family naturally spreads out to include others, those who are different, the sick, the poor, the persecuted and the suffering. It becomes natural to be a welcoming community, not just to fulfill some religious obligation, ... it flows from the heart! When you feel welcomed and accepted, it helps you to continue to welcome others in the same way.

Rev. Bill Allan - AGC President



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Jesus alone is the true Peace-Giver

(John 14:27)

God is Good All the Time

My story is one of God's sovereign grace at work through one of history's greatest atrocities. From 1970 - 1975 civil war broke out between the Cambodian government and the Khmer Rouge, a militant Communist regime who captured the Cambodian Capital and overthrew the Khmer Republic. They took over all major cities, evacuating and massacring hundreds of thousands of people. Many were forced from their homes and subjected to forced labor. The blood of two million people was spilled on the "killing fields" of Cambodia. My brother and brother-in-law, both policemen, were killed along with my first wife, leaving our 2 daughters, Dany and Dariya. Later, in 1977, I was told that I was on the Khmer Rouge's hit list and was forced to flee Cambodia, leaving my daughters behind. In 1979, Vietnamese soldiers, along with Cambodian forces were able to reclaim and liberate Cambodia. It was then that I learned that my younger daughter Dariya was dead and Dany was somewhere in the country.

After a few months of fruitless searching for Dany, my new wife, Peou and I left Cambodia and entered a refugee camp in Thailand. We remained there for 4 years and it was there that Jesus found me, a man who was filled with hatred, anger, revenge and despair. God used a friend in the camp to share the Good News with me. I will never forget the two strong statements from God's Word. "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22) and Jesus alone is the true Peace-Giver (John 14:27).

After those years, God allowed me to come to Ottawa, Canada. Along with other Cambodian refugees, God led us to establish a fellowship of believers, and I became their Pastor. We were greeted and supported by the unwavering love of brothers and sisters from the Metropolitan Bible Church. As a result, the Cambodian Evangelical Fellowship (AGC) was formed and we were able to worship in our own tongue and establish a Sunday school where our children could learn about the Saviour. In 1987, God blessed us with a baby girl, Rosa who has grown up in Ottawa and married a godly man. We are blessed to be grandparents. A very special gift from God came in 1992, when after 15 years of separation, my daughter Dany was able to come to Canada. Dany is now married and has 3 children. God is so good!

In 2003, we obtained our own building and God has blessed as we have been able to reach into the Ottawa community where many Cambodians came to live. Even though we are a physical distance from the Met, we consider it our mother church.

What man intended for evil, God intended for good and we praise and glorify Him. **God is good all the time and all the time God is good!**

Pastor Saroeun Sou – Cambodian Evangelical Fellowship, Ottawa, ON

Taken by Surprise

Once we were strangers was a simple, yet valuable read. Observe what the author has to say about his experience before I relate a similar, yet different story about unexpected friendship.

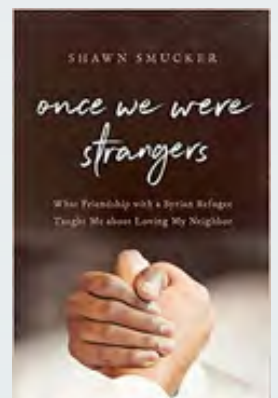
"I never could have imagined I'd become friends with a Syrian man from 6,000 miles away, a Muslim man whose children call him Abba. Mohammad has changed my life . . . If you insert me into the story of the good Samaritan, I'm not only the good Samaritan; I'm not only the one who stopped to help. I'm also the man lying along the side of the road, beaten down. I'm the one dying from selfishness, hypervigilance and fear. The role of the good Samaritan, in a role reversal I couldn't have seen coming, has been taken on by Mohammad. Before I even knew him, he called me friend."

Shawn relates how this friendship changed his life. I also have been blessed with friendships that have been life-changing. Many lessons have literally snuck through the cracks of my office door during interactions with a group of developmentally disabled adults who are in a day program in the building. I see their comings and goings and return many enthusiastic greetings. Relationships have developed which were totally unexpected.

There is one special young lady who shares a weekly lunch date with me. Initially, I wasn't sure how deeply I could go with her, but God has startled me with new insights. I have learned so much from being exposed to a community of people who love unconditionally and find great delight in the everyday routines of life. I notice on occasion that people ignore, back away or mock people with special needs, failing to display love and acceptance. When I come across these reactions, my heart breaks. The world would be a much better place if we received one another with the humility and grace that Jesus displayed as He walked amongst the broken, the lonely and the outcast. Love and compassion break down so many barriers.

I too was **taken by surprise** in reaching out to the stranger. This small action has blessed me and taught me what it means to truly love and be loved by my neighbour.

*Susan Page - Church Relations Coordinator/
AGC National Office*



Angels Unawares

I like watching videos of people being surprised when meeting someone famous. I especially enjoy when it becomes apparent that the unexpected encounter is a thrill to the fan when the celebrity removes a disguise and reveals their identity. After all, who would ever expect your Uber driver to be a favourite musician, movie star, or comedian?

This is not a new thing. In the Old Testament, Abraham and Sarah were visited by three strangers. Two of them turned out to be angels and the third, the Lord Himself (Genesis 18). The citizens of Sodom did not recognize these two angels when they went to town late the next day (Genesis 19). In the Gospels, pretty much the whole nation of Israel was oblivious to the fact that their long-awaited Messiah was in their midst. The writer of Hebrews exhorted his readers, **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”** (Hebrews 13:2).

Jesus gave His disciples (and us) a sneak peek about what the judgement day will be like in Matthew 25. He paints a picture of

humanity being separated on opposite sides based on how they did or didn't help people in their service to Him. The curious thing about those occupying both sides is that they have no memory of helping or not helping Jesus. Jesus explains that how we care for the poor, the needy, and the stranger is the same as caring for Him.

I once entered a contest for a chance to win breakfast with actor/screenwriter Bryan Cranston. I didn't win. But there is always the chance that someday Mr. Cranston will reveal that the whole time a bumbling waiter was messing up my order, it was really him in disguise! I don't think this will ever happen, but then, that is a prerequisite to being surprised.

In the meantime, I'm aiming to be ready for the ultimate “celebrity” reveal that is sure to come on a future great day of reckoning for all humanity. Let's all welcome the strangers of this world so that the surprise on that day is a happy one.

Tim & Susan Davis – AGC Compassion and Justice

Let the Children Come

When the *Hemorrhaging Faith* report was released in 2011, we had the data for why fewer than a third of young people who'd grown up in church continued in faith into their twenties. A major takeaway was that parents cannot subcontract the discipleship of their kids; kids learn by watching their parents learn. They're changed by seeing how the Gospel affects their parents. In their response study to Hemorrhaging Faith called *Transitions: Faith Formation in Children and Youth*, the CBOQ concluded: *“Children's ministry can no longer be a form of babysitting. It is critical that churches intentionally invest in the spiritual development of children. A vital part of this investment is equipping parents to take the lead. While there are many different approaches to discipleship, the important thing is that churches affirm the presence and participation of children in our corporate bodies.”*

What does this look like in practice?

At Benediction, we have a corporate worship where kids aren't just included but integrated. We encourage them to participate and we've adapted our Word and Table gatherings to make it happen. If you're thinking of joining us for worship, you'd see that:

- *School aged kids stay with parents during the sermon. They're invited to listen & write down words they don't understand, drawing pictures of cool things they hear. We offer pre-school kids a separate learning environment during the sermon.*
- *Our sermons are typically 25 to 30 minutes long. When I know I have 25-30 minutes, it forces me to be more selective (and, it turns out, effective). Ultimately it leads to a better-taught church family.*

An integrated worship gathering has implications for us all. As we watch each other, we're forced to grow in our ability to tolerate different people and their choices; we eventually learn not to shame parents of kids who can't hold it together. We learn instead to lend them a hand, and THAT'S every bit an act of worship as anything we think we might miss when kids are in the room.

I'm certainly not saying our approach is the best or only way. If your church has a different approach, it may be just right. Whatever approach we take, we need to recognize that Christians are not well-served by unchallenged consumer expectations. We need think less in terms of “what kind of environment will help me enjoy worship?” and ask instead, “what's most likely to lead us all - kids included - to love Jesus and each other 20 years from now?”

Pastor Mike Mileski – Benediction Church, Hamilton, ON



“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven”
(Matthew 19:14).

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God

(Romans 15:7)

Strangers are Now Family

In our AGC vision, under our strategic END called Compassion and Justice we endeavor to be intentional in our efforts to welcome strangers to Canada. A future generation may look back at this time and call it the global refugee crisis of the 21st century. Millions of people are fleeing war, poverty and persecution. Here at Peoples Church of Montreal we have seen an influx of persons fleeing Nigeria, Iran and Syria. When Canada opened the door to 25,000 refugees from Syria, our church decided to get involved. An action committee was quickly organized, led by Jon Warmington and Grace Lalonde who have experience working with refugees. As soon as we announced our intent to the congregation, we had whole-hearted agreement and money was quickly raised. We saw the Lord pull together a gifted, action-oriented group of people who drafted a plan to help the Nasro family. This appreciative family of six arrived on our doorstep with suitcases in hand.

Before they arrived, our committee had to think about where they should live, where their children would go to school and what a reasonable budget for the first year would be. How could we properly furnish an apartment? All these details were worked out. The committee made sure we gave them a welcome party where bicycles and other gifts were given. It was also our task to help them navigate their way on our bus & metro system as well as plugging them into Quebec's health-care program.

Once the Nasros got settled, they continued attending our church, making the commute from Ville-St. Laurent to the downtown core. Little by little, their English skills improved. Recently, Shukri found a full-time job in his own trade. The Nasros are part of our family; we love them, and they love us! When we get discouraged, we look at this family and realize we got this one thing right - **strangers are now family** and compassion is rising! In December of 2018, the Nasros became part of a welcome crew for a second Syrian family, the Jahjah's who arrived just before Christmas. The joy was contagious, and the lessons learned with our first family made things a whole lot easier.



Pastor Ken Godon & Grace Lalonde - Peoples Church of Montreal, QC

The Wonder and Reach of God's Redeeming Love



Picture in your mind, Aleppo, Syria 2014 ... Walid and Kefaya Sijarzi, along with their three children find their world turned upside down. Their livelihood is gone, terrorists have stolen the automotive body shop where Walid worked. Their neighborhood lay shattered, their children's school bombed. Along with many others from Syria this family had to flee for their lives, and they wound up as refugees in Lebanon.

The Sijarzis never dreamed they would live in Canada. Yet, God used a dream, along with the witness of other believers to assure Kefaya that she should put her life in Jesus' hands and trust that He was working through His Church. God, in His grace touched the hearts of a small group of people over 9000 kilometres away. Varsity Bible Church's Saturday night congregation sensed a growing desire to sponsor a refugee family. Rinus Janson, who at that time was the pastor of this congregation, formed a team of people who

worked together to complete the sponsorship procedure. Funds were raised and the paperwork completed. The process took about 15 months and there was great joy when we finally met our new friends in February 2016. A wide variety of gifts and abilities were put into this labour of love, including help with errands, driving to appointments, navigating Canadian customs, filling out forms, language learning, tutoring, shopping, cooking and simply sharing life together. As a community, we have experienced Jesus' words: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Fast forward to Calgary, Alberta 2018. It's been our tradition to have people with a recent newborn take on the role of the Jesus, Mary and Joseph for our Christmas Eve worship (*see photo*). We shared a profound joy when the Sijarzis acted the part with their newborn son Daniel. The fact that Jesus' family were refugees in Egypt fleeing the violence of King Herod took on a new depth of meaning because of this family's presence with us. The Sijarzis have been a vibrant witness for Jesus wherever they have lived, in Aleppo, in Beirut, and in Calgary. Their presence in our congregation has increased our sense of awe at how God is willing to reveal Himself to those who seek Him. Their zeal to serve the God who has blessed them so richly has helped us see afresh the **wonder and reach of God's redeeming love**.

Pastor Keith D'Eall - Varsity Bible Church, Calgary, AB

AGC Quick Facts - Did you know ...?

- **There are 11 distinct Language Congregations within the AGC**

- English • French • Spanish • Cantonese • Mandarin • Swahili •
- Khmer • Creole • Tagalog • Lao • Ojibwe •

- **We have an ongoing strategic partnership with One Hope Canada**

6 One Hope Canada Churches joined the AGC family and 6 are in process

- **First ever AGC New Pastors' Orientation**

14 new Pastors from Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia attended our first AGC Orientation held in February 2019

- **By the numbers in 2018**

Inductions = 44

Certificate of Ministry = 19

Ordinations or recognitions of = 19



COMING IN 2020

IN IT, NOT OF IT

Transformed : Romans 12:2

AGC National Conference - Kelowna BC, May 28-30, 2020

A Bridge

It's amazing to be in ministry and hear stories from many people whose lives have been changed by a hand warmly extended to them in welcome. Here are a few highlights:

- A man from Bulgaria who was selected to immigrate to Canada. He had doubts about making the trip. *"Who would help us when we arrive in Canada?"* The answer came when a Pastor encouraged him and upon his arrival helped him get an apartment. Entering his new home, he was surprised to see *all these people painting the walls and cupboards!* Our new friend recently started attending our church in Verdun. In Nicolay's own words *"God has done so many miracles for me!"*
- A young Christian man from Australia who, feeling led to serve in Montreal, benefited from mentoring by an AGC Pastor and now he himself is serving in a church.
- A man originally from South America who was welcomed by the interim Pastor of an AGC church has now been chosen to be their Pastor.
- A young man from China, upon hearing the name of an AGC church, exclaimed with great excitement that when he was a boy, he and his parents arrived in Montreal and that church *really* helped his family!

- A missionary and a church community helped a family from Albania get settled with an apartment, furniture and warm clothing. They went on to refer the family to a French church since the couple conversed more fluently in French.
- A young first-time expectant mother who felt very much alone in Montreal as she waited for her husband's immigration to Canada. In her eyes, the church who welcomed her became her family!
- The Muslim man who referred to the church community as his family's only real friends!

When we consider the many, who have arrived in Canada, we begin to realize that as "strangers" we all need a person or a church family that becomes a key connection . . . **a bridge** so to speak. Let's be praying for opportunities to show God's love to the "stranger" among us. Let's do something to offer a new connection and maybe we could be that bridge, and watch God work a miracle in the life of a "stranger." Be prepared to be amazed by the blessings!

"Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Rev. Del Gibbons - AGC Quebec Regional Director



Welcoming the Strangers Among Us

"Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh when we learn where the outcast weeps."
 (Brennan Manning)

Within Israel's understanding of what it was to be God's people, a central theme was living in peace (shalom). Living in peace is so much more than having a feeling of peace inside oneself. Today, within the Global North, peace has been personalized and individualized. We often pray for someone to feel peace when they are trying to make a hard decision or face a difficult situation. Peace (shalom), in the biblical sense, is to live in peace, meaning to do what is right, to love kindness, to show mercy; it is to have compassion. James understood it as taking care of the orphans and widows among us. Israel was often called to and reminded to care for the sojourners in their midst. Jesus taught, in parable form, what it truly means to love your neighbour.

In 2015 a group of Sudanese (Uduk) began to attend our church. They had come to Moose Jaw as refugees, struggling to find their way in this new place – learning to trust and be trusted. Sunningdale decided to open our doors and our lives wide to this community of brothers and sisters, and they graciously returned the gesture. In and through this connection we have learned what it is to be shalom people, together.

This past Fall, October 2018, we were privileged to welcome another Sudanese family not only to Canada, but to Sunningdale. The Ezra family landed in Canada with really nothing by way of possessions or cultural understanding, but due to our connection with our Uduk brothers and sisters, they landed here with a church family. We have been able to walk with them in getting settled and adjusted, immediately provide them with a place to continue to learn and grow in their relationship with our one Lord and God. They have provided us once again with the wonder of the immensity of God's family and have shown us greater depths of the love of God which is beyond economic, cultural, and racial differences. In a sense, it is in **welcoming the strangers among us that we find God in a profound way.**

Pastor Richard Hovey - Sunningdale Community Church, Moose Jaw, SK

The Saviour of men came to seek and to
 save the souls who were lost ...
 His Spirit was moved for the world which He
 loved with the boundless compassion of God.
 And still there are fields where the
 labourers are few, and still there
 are souls without bread,
 And still eyes that weep where the darkness
 is deep, and still straying sheep to be led.
 Except I am moved with compassion,
 How dwelleth Thy Spirit in me?
 In word and in deed burning love is my need;
 I know I can find this in Thee.

WORDS: ALBERT ORSBORN MUSIC:
 TRADITIONAL TUNE – THE OLD RUSTIC BRIDGE
 S.A. SONG BOOK #527 SECTION:
 THE LIFE OF HOLINESS – CONSECRATION AND SERVICE

Thank you Heavenly Father for Your never-ending faithfulness and tender loving care. Grant us burning love and compassion for the wounded and the weary. May we have open hearts and stretched out arms to minister to the lost, the least, the lonely, the strays and the stranger.

"I Myself will tend My sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak ..." (Ezekiel 34: 15-16).

Thank you to those who contributed to this year's AGC Connect Magazine. I pray that our hearts have been moved and challenged. With thanksgiving for all that God has done by His Spirit, may we be inspired to continue His work, ever mindful of the Great Commandments and the Great Commission . . . to love and to go, demonstrated as we welcome the stranger.

*Susan Page - Church Relations Coordinator/
 AGC National Office*



Visit our website @
agcfcanada.com

Find out more about:

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