

BRIDGES OF LOVE MINISTRY SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Executive Director's Report – September 23, 2008

*"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me".
Phil. 4:13*

The past year has certainly been a whirl-wind of activity as the Board of Bridges of Love will attest. As I re-read my report from 2007 I was reminded just how this ministry has grown and broadened over the past year. God has been at work and has provided for Bridges of Love to move forward building on the foundation which has been laid over the past several years.

This year's Annual General Meeting is a '**Celebration of the Vision**' God placed solidly on my heart. Andy Stanley, a speaker at a Leadership Summit several years ago, stressed the importance of celebrating one's Vision in order to make it 'stick'. In order to have Vision stick it must be both accessible and compelling. Building Vision as part of the culture; Stanley says we must '**cast it strategically**', '**celebrate it systematically**', and '**live it continually**'. Celebration puts 'skin' on the ministry so I feel we have come along way in the past four years where we are now ready to celebrate our collective accomplishments.

A friend, who also founded a ministry, told me awhile back, once you reach year 4...you're over the hump and well on your way. Well, I hope his predictions are correct as we made it this far, so we have reason to celebrate, the completion of four years of building Bridges of Love Ministry.

Before I begin with my report, however, I would like to acknowledge God's Hand in guiding this novice ministry leader. I know, without a doubt, I am an empty vessel being used for His Glory and to accomplish His purposes.

Also, I would like to thank my dear husband Tom. I know I could not do this without his loving support and encouragement to **never give up**. This undertaking is a shared commitment so I thank Tom for his very important role in the ministry.

I also continue to be so very thankful to St. John Lutheran Church for their kind generosity in allowing Bridges of Love office space. It is hard to believe I have been at this location 4 years with Bridges of Love, as it seems like yesterday, I took up residence at 204 – 6A St. NE. It has been a gift which I will always be grateful. Pastor Arnie and Dorothy are like family so it has been a special place to be.

Many thanks to our Board and their continued commitment to serve as Directors. My warmest appreciation to Herb Arnold who has served as Board Chair for the past 4 years. We also have appreciated Don Ford as a director giving valuable assistance with the financial requirements. Hubby Tom acts as secretary and fulfills many other duties as required. We are also fortunate to have Louise Post a long standing friend who resides in Guelph, ON. She is Bridges of Love's prayer warrior and attends our meetings via conference call along with Steve McDonald, from Burnaby. Steve is stepping off the board this year but we have appreciated his involvement over the past two years, writing two songs in support of this work. You will hear one of them later this evening.

Also, to those who have supported this ministry with their financial assistance, thank you and may God bless you for your faithfulness. Raising ones support has been unfamiliar territory but God has provided in surprising ways so we continue to trust Him for supplying our needs.

Also, warm appreciation to others who have offered their prayers and encouragement, as we know without the Lord at the helm, we could not have accomplished all that has been undertaken.

Tom and I have put together a little Power Point presentation of the past 4 years which we will view during dessert. As we looked back over the past four years it was with great emotion as so many wonderful memories were brought back to mind.

As with all new ventures, however, the road has not always been smooth so I have learned the **‘bumps are what we climb on’**”.

A book, written by Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a little boy who was leading his sister up a mountain path and the way was not an easy one. ” Why this isn’t a path at all, complained the little sister. It’s all rocky and bumpy!” Her brother replied...sure it is; the bumps are what you climb on! I have learned this little bit of wisdom is indeed true.

With any new venture we encounter many challenges along the way which shapes the person we become. Bridges of Love is no exception to this reality yet I have appreciated every facet of this journey. I know God is in control and has provided for each step; in His Way and in His Time. I believe, perhaps a little naively, that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength so I, therefore, forge ahead trusting God for the outcome. I am not saying I do not have my times of insecurity, however, but I strive to live each day growing in my trust to follow Christ into the unknown.

Before I share my report, I would like to cast the Grander Vision for Bridges of Love Ministry by:

1. Defining the Problem
2. Offering a Solution and
3. Giving compelling evidence why Bridges of Love is the only ministry who must fulfill this mandate.

The Problem

Has our faith been firmly locked into the private realm of church and family, and thus we rarely have influence in the public realm? Has the church faded into isolation, disconnected from the community in which it is found? Does the church lack a compelling witness of God’s Love? Is the church, the church, if it does not exist for others?

A Solution

Living out our faith means putting our love for God in **ACTION!** Emergency/Pandemic Preparedness is an open door of opportunity to not only connect with our communities as ‘salt’ and ‘light’ but it also provides an arena for Christians to engage with the public sector to fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:30) and thus attain Biblical ‘reality’. If renewal in leadership is going to take place, we must rally around something in which we believe, to shape the church’s identity and vision as that body of people called to participate in God’s redemptive mission.

The Grander Vision

There is compelling evidence that preparation by governments is not enough to completely lessen the impact of a future pandemic influenza without the support of the private/faith sectors. The Health Regions/Government in Alberta have recognized and acknowledged the need for the Faith Community to stand in the gap. The church could be a critical network piece in any emergency scenario to provide important emergency services in the event of a citywide or global crisis. Are we ready with a church response if such an emergency should occur and we are called upon to assist?

Bridges of Love Ministry was founded to connect the church with the community. Emergency/Pandemic Preparedness affords an out-let for such a connection and has spear-headed this initiative in Canada for the past three years. Scientists confirm it is only a matter of time before we are faced with an Influenza Pandemic or perhaps another disaster or crisis. We know Christians will answer the ‘call’ due to their love for the Lord, but we could be more of a hindrance if we are not properly prepared and coordinated into Emergency Management structure?

As a visible and influential pillar of the community, the Church has the divine moral, spiritual and ethical mandate to not only care for one another but for their neighbour. Let us harness and mobilize this network working with **‘Unity of Purpose’**, to be ready with an effective and appropriate response, to a pandemic or any other disaster which might occur. The beauty of such pandemic planning is any entity which engages in such an exercise, from individual families to community collaboration, automatically finds its capacity to respond to other emergencies, big or small; greatly enhanced.

A question which is often asked is **“What if a Pandemic never comes?”** What if, in 5 years we have had no Pandemic or Emergency in our city? Will we look out into our community and say we should not have gotten to know those who might not know Christ as their personal Saviour... Perhaps, the church has prayed for those they

met while building those critical relationships and they are now vital members of the church. Will be regret taking time to build those loving relationships? Is the Pandemic the issue or the outreach opportunity?

Let us now go back a year and please let me share the high-lites of our Ministry since our last AGM.

CHARITY STATUS: Last August we were waiting for the papers from Revenue Canada to make it official that Bridges of Love had attained it's Charitable Status. We heard unofficially that we had successfully fulfilled their requirements but didn't want to announce it too broadly until we had the papers in hand. Well, they arrived just after our AGM last August so we were able to issue receipts back to January 2007.

The purposes laid out for Bridges of Love by the CRA are two fold:

- ♥ To educate and instruct religious leaders and their congregations on emergency preparedness and the church's role in pandemic/emergency situations. And...
- ♥ To preach and advance the teachings of the Christian faith and the religious tenets, doctrines, observances and culture associated with that faith.

This was quite a mile-stone to reach and gives the ministry credibility with added accountability, to move forward.

FORGIVENESS MATTERS SEMINAR: There was no time to rest after this accomplishment; however, as we already had in the works a Seminar/Workshop called "**Forgiveness Matters**". This event took place on October 19 and 20th, 2008. Pastor Dale Lang and Les Stahlke were invited to share their stories and training on Forgiveness and Reconciliation. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association/Samaritan's Purse kindly offered their beautiful facility for the 2 day event. The training was excellent and hearts were healed. We were also very fortunate to have the "Fehr Family" share their gift of music. It was a wonderful seminar and I feel this is a topic where we need more understanding to overcome hurts and grievances within the body of Christ.

MISSIONFESTS: In 2008, I attended three MissionFests, and gave sessions on the Pandemic topic in Vancouver and Toronto. Bridges of Love had a booth in Edmonton and Toronto. As well, I have had opportunities to speak at a Rotary Luncheon, the High River Ministerial, A Chinese Alliance Church in Edmonton, A Calgary Church, and recently, the Lutheran Evangelical Ministerial. As well, Top Story on CTS invited me to be a guest on Top Story and Dr. Wayne Elford joined in for the panel discussion.

REGIONAL FAITH COMMUNITY SUMMIT ON PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE: Last year, I was on the planning committee for the National Pandemic Summit which took place in Winnipeg, June 19/20, 2007. Dr. Larry VanBeek, past President of Rocky Mountain College had attended the Winnipeg event and felt we now needed to carry a similar event to a Regional level. He kindly offered Rocky Mountain College as a venue for the first Regional Faith Community Summit on Pandemic Preparedness and Response. This summit took place on May 14/15, 2008.

To be effectively integrated into the Government/Health Pandemic Plans it is necessary to include this sector as part of the planning process. Representatives from the Calgary Health Region, Capital Health, Public Health of Canada, Alberta Health and Wellness and Public Safety of Canada as well as friends and colleagues from the Christian Community interested in this topic, were invited to our first meeting (October) which took place in Red Deer. Sixteen attended and I remember how nervous we all were, not knowing or trusting, one another.

We persevered through this time, however, and gradually a sense of cohesiveness began to develop. We were so very fortunate to have the support from Public Safety, Calgary Health Region, Emergency Management and 2 Representatives from Alberta Health and Wellness as well as members of the Christian Community share their expertise at the Summit. There were 16 speakers who took part coming from areas across Canada and one from the US. It was a wonderful time of education and building relationships with others. Our key-note speaker, Danuta Skowronski stressed the importance of education and then sharing this knowledge with others. **Education brings power.**

As well, we had 8 break-out sessions giving practical tools and resources on various topics pertaining to Pandemic Preparedness and the Faith Communities involvement. I have included a News Release in your hand-out with a few key points from our main speakers.

The committee, who were part of the planning process, has continued to meet since the Summit. Jan Donais, Operations and Program Director for Public Safety of Canada has put together the Policy and Guidelines for our group, now named the **Regional Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Coalition**. I have been appointed as lead for this committee as Administrator over-seeing representatives from the Faith, Public and Private Sectors.

The Coalition made the decision to mobilize the Christian Community initially, developing a template which can then be duplicated across Canada. As you can appreciate, there is much work ahead to integrate the Faith Community into the Emergency Management Structure.

To aid in the process, Dr. Wayne Elford, a member of the Coalition and I, together with the help of the Ranaghan Media Centre, collaborated on a 35 minute DVD of the Summit High-lights. I had an opportunity to show the video at a Lutheran Ministerial meeting last week and it was well received so it will be an effective tool to aid in raising awareness of the pandemic issue. Once funding is in place, we plan to have this available for anyone wishing to show it in their church or small group. We will see how our time goes tonight, and if there is time will give you a little bit of a preview.

Thank you to Wayne who spent many hours reviewing 8 hours of speeches choosing the key points. We also appreciate the very kind assistance of Ranaghan Media Centre who gave of their time and equipment to put this together, at their lovely new facility.

Bridges of Love Ministry has reached a plateau, so in order to move to the next phase, it is essential to have additional funding in place. To facilitate this process, a 35 page funding proposal has been written. This was my summer project and it has been reviewed by the Coalition and now is in the hands of Public Safety of Canada. "Seed Money" is required to launch the "**Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative**" and our initial 'ask' will be to this Federal Government. This '*pilot project*' if successful, will provide the infrastructure and template, to incorporate the Faith Community into the Emergency Management Structure.

Parameters of Success for the Coalition

- ✓ Partnerships and Alliances with a common vision and goal of connecting with their communities through Emergency Preparedness.
- ✓ Government and Health leaders valuing the participation of the Faith Community in Emergency Preparedness and seeing them as a force for good in the community.
- ✓ Large number of members actively engaged in, and passionate about, community service using their gifts and abilities in ways and at levels they never thought possible.
- ✓ A 'Movement' of Churches who are actively living out their faith in positive and tangible ways putting their efforts and resources to the benefit of the community.
- ✓ Fulfillment of the goals set out by the National Faith Community Pandemic Summit on Emergency Preparedness and Response:
 - To ensure the Faith Community is effectively integrated into a local pandemic response structure before a pandemic/emergency occurs; and...
 - To create a meaningful dialogue to ensure the Faith community is addressing pandemic or any other emergency; proactively, responsibly and with meaningful action.
- ✓ People coming to Christ because of the positive witness of God's love in ACTION!

It has indeed been a fulfilling year and God has blessed us as we followed Him. The foundation has been laid and once the resources are secured we can develop the framework to put 'meat' on the bones. The church has an unprecedented opportunity to put our faith into **ACTION**. I am excited and anticipate God to continue to work through this ministry in the coming year, as ALL things are possible through Him who gives us strength.

May the '**GRANDER VISION**' be on each of our hearts as we work together in **Unity of Purpose** building **Bridges of Love**. Let the Celebration begin... Thank you.

Warmly Submitted,
Marg Pollon
September 23, 2008

