

BRIDGES OF LOVE MINISTRY SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Executive Director's Report – September 19, 2009

*"Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.
Nehemiah 2:18 (NASB)*

It has indeed been a privilege to serve our Lord for yet another year through building Bridges of Love Ministry. The past year has been especially rewarding as the hard work of laying a foundation for the past four years, to be ready with a Christian response in the event of a pandemic or any other emergency, is now gaining momentum with a real life out-break of Influenza A/H1H1 marching across our globe.

The theme for this year's AGM is "The Phoenix"...let us arise from the ashes. As Tom mentioned in his devotional, the story of the phoenix offers a complex metaphor.

What does this mythical story have to do with Bridges of Love? These states of the phoenix—of death and ashes, of the new self gestating and gathering strength and finally rising up again on new wings—could relate to the stages or seasons of my own life as well as that of the ministry. Sanctification requires our coming to the place of death until there is nothing left of our old self and come to a point where we are identified with the death of Jesus Christ. The characteristic of living a life that is not only devoted to right-doing but especially to right-being by the supernatural grace and power of our Lord and Saviour.

The process of letting go and allowing God to take over is not an easy one but I have learned that it is the process and not the outcome which glorifies God. Our moment by moment obedience to follow Him no matter what is to be our mandate, then each moment as it comes is precious and we will indeed arise from the ashes to become a new creature.

Bridges of Love is also at a point of arising, perhaps not from the ashes but from its infancy with a more defined focus, mission and vision for the future. It has been a steady growth over the past 5 years and now it is time to launch God's strategic plan. The strategy for mobilizing the church to be ready to stand in the gap in the event of a pandemic has been modeled after Nehemiah's plan. Nehemiah accomplished an amazing feat rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem in only 52 days. How did he do this with few resources and people? He had everyone take responsibility for their own piece of the wall, a piece which they each had ownership, as it gave protection where they lived. When it was time to move into action, the people said..."Let us arise and build." We are now at this point where Bridges of Love's vision has become the churches vision, to act as a catalyst for a great movement of God, where each church is responsible to care for their own community surrounding their church.

Before I take you on a journey for the activity of 2008/09 I would like to acknowledge and thank the Bridges of Love Board of Directors. To Herb, our very faithful Chair of five years, I am truly grateful for Herbs continued support and his willingness to help whenever called upon. **Thank you Herb.** Don Ford has continued to fill a great need as Treasurer keeping our financials in order. Don also given wisdom towards the revision on our By-laws. **Thank you Don.** We have appreciated the prayer support of a long time friend, Louise Post, who has been our bridges to heaven prayer warrior for the past five years. Louise lives in Guelph and feels due to not being in Calgary to attend meetings she is going to step down from the board. She has committed to continue to give up her prayers, however, on our behalf. We have appreciated Louise's involvement and will miss our cheery conversations with her via conference call. **Thank you Louise.** To hubby Tom I give thanks on many fronts. His patience and long-suffering through the many ups and downs since Bridges of Love's inception has been invaluable and kept me pressing forward. He continues to see and believe that God is at work. **Thank you Tom** for your continued loving support to your wife and to this ministry. And lastly, we are very pleased to introduce Dr. Wayne Elford, as our newest Board Member. Wayne is a retired Medical Doctor, Professor Emeritus, Epidemiologist and past President of the Christian Medical Dental Society. Wayne has been a member of the Regional Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Coalition since its inception so we go back

to the start of the pandemic planning. We welcome Wayne and appreciate the knowledge and expertise he brings to the board. **Thank you Wayne.**

As well as the board, I would like to thank and acknowledge Dorothy and St. John Lutheran Church for their continued support in allowing this ministry to be located in their church. St. John just celebrated their 100 Anniversary this past summer so it was great to be part of this special celebration. I never tire of my home away from home and Dorothy, Pastor Arnie and myself still enjoy our occasional round table coffee discussions. **Thank you Dorothy and St. John Lutheran Church.**

Also, very special thanks to those individuals and businesses that comprise our membership and have contributed financially. With the economic downturn this past year, many ministries have struggled financially. We were not immune to the decrease in funding but God knew what we needed to sustain Bridges of Love and we have made it through another year and for this we thank God and each of you for your faithfulness. I know the economy affected every sector so I especially appreciate the support given over this difficult time. You have been a constant answer to our prayers as often donations have come in when times have seemed desperate. This has been a faith building experience and even though I still have much to learn on trusting God one day at a time, I am growing stronger as I see Him at work. **Thank you so much for your financial gifts of love and gifts-in-kind.**

Now, please allow me to share the high-lites from the 2008 – 2009 Bridges of Love fiscal year.

This past year has brought new challenges which have once again caused me to step out of my comfort zone and tread in unfamiliar territory. The first challenge involved funding proposals and this first valiant attempt went to the Federal Government...nothing like starting big! Michel Sigouin, Director of Public Safety in Edmonton kindly offered to submit a proposal on our behalf. It was a very good exercise not only to draft the proposal but working through a detailed two year budget for the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative. The proposal was submitted to Ottawa in November but unfortunately I just heard a couple of weeks ago that no money was available this year. Michel has indicated, however, they are willing to keep submitting until we are successful, as he says he believes in my perseverance and the possibilities of this endeavor.

Another proposal was undertaken last spring for the Calgary Foundation and after approval of the Letter of Intent I was asked to submit a full-proposal followed by an interview. Kevin McInnes, a Police Chaplain, and Sean Parnell, a director with the Calgary Emergency Management Agency kindly accompanied me to the interview which was greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, again no money was granted and the H1N1 out-break came after the time of their decision process had ended but future grant application opportunities are in the works and I am learning what they require to be a successful candidate.

I was fortunate to attend an Emergency Preparedness Roundtable last February sponsored by Public Health of Canada with the Canadian Council of Churches. The invitation came from Gord Friesen who was part of the planning committee, which I also participated, for the Winnipeg Summit two years ago. I appreciated being included in this all expense paid few days, staying at St. John the Divine Convent in North York, ON. It was an opportunity to hear from others who were interested in the Faith Community contributing in crisis situations.

Following the Regional Faith Community Summit on Pandemic Preparedness and Response which took place a year ago, Wayne Elford, Tom and I worked on a video presentation which could be used for education purposes. Wayne sifted through 8 hours of presentations to capture 35 minutes of the summit highlights. Precision Sound kindly allowed the use of their new Tricaster for editing purposes and Ranaghan Media Centre assisted with the production of the DVD. We were very fortunate to have this produced with very little cost and it has proved to be a very valuable resource. We appreciate the many hours Wayne committed for this DVD production which has been used on many occasions so has been a most useful tool.

I continue to coordinate the Regional Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Coalition which emerged from the collaboration between the Public Sector and the Christian Community during the Regional Summit in Calgary. Last March the Coalition facilitated a Public Sector/Faith Community Workshop with our Coalition Partners each taking a part in various capacities. Two member organizations, NeighbourLink Calgary generously sponsored the lunch and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association/Samaritan's Purse donated their facility.

The Workshop, a two part process, went very well. The first stage was held in January inviting Pastors to participate in a telephone conference call. This time was intended to develop unity among key leaders

concerning the role the faith community could play in the emergency preparedness planning cycle. There were 16 pastors and church leaders who participated representing nine denominations. Coalition Members gave a brief over-view of the initiative and offered a time for questions. The second stage was a face-to-face workshop which provided synergistic planning, and jumping the trust hurdles, so we could all march to the same drummer. This session provided increased education and broke down barriers between the various sectors who participated. Nineteen different denominations attended this introductory information session.

Some training was offered last winter by Alberta Emergency Management so I attended two one day courses. The first was an introductory session on Emergency Management which is a prerequisite for other emergency management courses. The second was from Disaster Social Services and gave valuable information for a command centre and what to expect during an emergency. I was also fortunate to attend an informative training exercise at the Calgary Emergency Management Command Centre by invitation by the Deputy Chief, Tom Sampson. (CEMA)

Tom Sampson has been very supportive of this initiative moving forward and has shown his support in many ways. I was invited over to his office shortly after he took over this position and he drafted a flow chart integrating the Faith Community into their framework. This was a very important step for the initiative and the Coalition were very pleased with this show of support from CEMA.

Over the past year, the Regional Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Coalition continues to meet on a fairly consistent basis. We now have 19 members consisting of Public Sector Partners and the Christian Community representing various ministries and denominations. I have appreciate the opportunity to build relationships with the various members over the past few years. We have had a few changes with members taking on new positions and others coming on board replacing those who left, but on the whole the group has remained fairly constant over the course of our involvement. Jan Donais, Public Safety Canada and I have just completed a 'draft' Charter Project document for the Coalition which will be shared at our next meeting the end of September. Once approved, this document will define the mandate and clearly articulate our mission. We are indeed breaking ground so this template will set the stage for other centres to be integrated into their Municipal Emergency Management framework across Canada.

Since funding was limited this year we scaled down travel and participation in the various Missionfests across Canada. In previous years I had attended and been a speaker in Toronto and Vancouver but we felt a booth in Edmonton's MissionFest would be the best use of our resources at this time since our work is mainly in Alberta. The interest from those who attended seemed stronger than other years and much information was shared over the course of the event.

We had a booth at Global Focus at Rocky Mountain College again this year but I am not sure if this event is the right venue for Bridges of Love as it is more focused on International Missions.

The annual 'Cross the Street' Conference was held in Calgary this past May and we were very fortunate to be granted a booth. The conference was facilitated by seven of the largest Christian Ministries in Canada so booth space was limited. David Macfarlane, a friend who is with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association kindly gave permission for Bridges of Love to participate. This was a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness of how the church could respond to a pandemic just as the virus was beginning its journey.

The past year has also brought new opportunities to share the vision of building Bridges of Love. Invitations have come from various Ministerial Associations both in Calgary and in surrounding towns. The Evangelical Lutheran Ministerial Association, Millarville's Ministerial, and the Anglican Essentials Ministerial were all on the roister for the pandemic message. I also shared at a Community Impact Seminar at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association which was a good fit for connecting with our communities. A definite high-lite, however, was the invitation to share the Sunday message at Canyon Creek Christian Fellowship. God loves to give us the desires of our heart so this was definitely a great gift and wonderful opportunity for God to work through me and one I pray will be repeated in days to come. For those who knew me before Bridges of Love you will remember public speaking was my greatest fear so it is clear evidence that God uses our weaknesses for His Glory. I have also been invited to share at the Anglican Synod Conference at Ambrose University in October so look forward to this time.

After almost four years of planning for a pandemic, an out-break of Influenza A/H1N1 has taken us all by surprise. Since the increased media coverage of this virus spreading around the world, and the fear of a more severe out-break this fall, the Christian Community is beginning to take note of this out-reach opportunity.

Fortunately the framework has been laid and a clear structure is now in place. Over the summer Bridges of Love has been holding Quadrant Pandemic Information Sessions in each of our Quadrant Lead Churches. Four sessions have been held to date and each is increasing in momentum. Church Resource Assessment Forms are being gathered which includes the resources each church has on hand to aid during an emergency. These could include Inn from the Cold cots, bedding, food storage, child care, etc. To date, 26 forms have been returned indicating these churches are willing to open their doors to assist when called upon.

The means to reach our community has been called “**Operation Crosswalk**” a coordinated approach to care for our community. Each church in Calgary will have the opportunity to engage with their section of the community by delivering a door knocker which contains a magnet business card perforated for easy removal. This refrigerator magnet will have the key emergency numbers posted as well as the number of the Quadrant Churches and the Faith Coordination Centre. When a major emergency takes place where the traditional means of help is over-whelmed, the community will have the option of phoning the Faith Emergency Coordination Centre or Quadrant Churches who will attempt to find the help needed from their local church. This is both a bottom up and as well as a top down operation.

The Emergency Management Agency’s desire is to have a simple structure in place where only one call is needed to activate the assistance for the one in need. Once 100 churches are solidly on board, which will give a good coverage throughout the city; we will be ready to distribute the door knockers. We are in the process of raising funds to cover the door knockers (\$20,000) and our hope is to have these ready to go mid October – before the anticipated fall out-break of the second wave of influenza.

Bridges of Love has taken on the responsibility for the Faith Coordination Centre. This is a big undertaking for this small ministry of one, but we will expand as the needs increase and God provides.

The past year has been a great faith builder as I have witnessed God at work in so many instances. Has it been easy, “no”, but God has been faithful. The Bible gives a clear definition of faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” I believe with my whole heart that God is in control of this ministry and is leading the way and has given me a specific purpose and promise that He is with me through it all. We do not know what is ahead but He does and so we forge on...

Without faith it is impossible to please God, not hard, not difficult, but impossible! So as Bridges of Love continues to step out in faith as we follow Nehemiah’s lead...

"Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.

Thank you and God Bless.

Warmly Submitted,
Marg Pollon
September 19, 2009