

# Home Missions in a New Millennium.

A Workshop by David Webber given at The Rural Conference, Balclutha New Zealand, June 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> 2009  
Session 1: **Our Changing World and the Church**: Discovering the Heart of Home Missions or Developing a missional mind.

## **I. Introduction**

Linda and I bring heartfelt greetings to all of you from the folks of the Cariboo Presbyterian Church and from the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

On behalf of my wife Linda and myself I also want to thank Bruce Fraser and the Presbyterian Church here in New Zealand for not only inviting us, getting us here, and caring and providing for us across this most amazing country as we have toured it in the past two weeks ... but also to thank many of you for upholding us and the rural folk in the Cariboo faithfully in prayer ever since Bruce visited with us near Christmas in 2007.

My topic over the next few days is “Mission in the New Millennium.”

I am going to sharpen that a wee bit.

Since I am a missionary who works exclusively as a “home missionary” (differentiated from an “overseas missionary”) and my experience is exclusively in this area, I will be speaking primarily about mission at home ... for me that’s Canada, for you that’s New Zealand.

And since all my life has been lived in, and since all of my experience in the church has occurred in, a rural context, most of what I have to say about mission is deeply colored by that lens too.

I have one further thing to say before we get into it this morning, and I say it by way of a kind of parable.

## **II. The Neophyte Bear Hunter.**

Three guys (blokes I think you call them) go out in the bush bear hunting. They all want the meat, but most importantly they all want a bear skin rug. Two of the blokes are experienced hunters.

One of the blokes, a guy named Dave, he hasn’t got a clue.

He is totally inexperienced as a bear hunter, a real neophyte, but he really wants a bearskin rug too.

Dave shows up at a the hunting cabin where the 2 hunters have gathered to hunt black bear, only he shows up without a rifle.

The other hunters are very curious.

"How you gonna get a bear without a rifle?" they ask.

"Do you have a knife?"

"No," says Dave.

"Do you have a club?"

"No," says Dave. "But don't you worry. I'm gonna get myself a bear skin rug just the same, just you wait and see."

Dave leaves the cabin and disappears into the hills for several hours.

Eventually he happens upon a bear asleep in his den and he kicks the bear in the butt and gets it awake and really angry.

The angry bear starts to chase after Dave, so Dave starts running back towards the cabin.

Finally the hunters hear him running down the hill and screaming his fool head off, "Open the cabin door! Open the cabin door!"

They open the door and Dave runs into the cabin and holds the door open behind him.

To the terror of the other hunters, an angry bear follows close behind, running into the cabin too.

Then Dave jumps outside the cabin, slams the door shut, and says, "You blokes skin that one. I'll go get another."

Life with a neophyte in your midst can get real interesting.

As to the church, I am a neophyte.

The first time I was in a church was when I married Linda.

I didn't come back to stay for another 10 years.

So for over half my life I had nothing to do with the church.

As to the church I am comparatively a neophyte, a novice, a newbie.

With me in the church, life can get real interesting, so I apologize to you ahead of time.

But neophytes tend to see things with fresh eyes, and do things in new ways and often bring an enthusiasm that can really turn the cabin upside down if you invite them into your camp.

So I need you to remember this throughout the next couple of days; that I do not come to you as an expert but as a neophyte who is in the process of trying to figure it out and is filled with the kind of exuberance for the task that just might upset the cabin.

One further thing, by way of warning.

I am not a great scholar, nor brilliant teacher, nor a gifted preacher.

I am a fair story teller.

So a lot of what is going to come at you, during these sessions over the next couple of days is going to be by way of story.

Sharing story will be our approach for the discussion sessions as well.

### **III. Our Changing World and the Church**

Mission in the new millennium, more specifically home missions in the new millennium.

A while back I was reading what turned out to be a pretty good book.

Well actually I wasn't really reading it.

The author of this book was the guest speaker at one of our Synod meetings and had said inadvertently that he had quoted something or other I had written in the Presbyterian Record, in one of his many books.

All of his books are thick and heavy ones except this one very short one, which is the size I call a bathroom book, about ¼ inch thick with chapters just the right length.

Being more than a little vain as well as a tad lazy, I decided to invest some porcelain-pew time and cruise this littlest book to see if I could find where I had been quoted.

In the process of this bit of vanity, I accidentally got educated with regards to our changing world and the church.

Incidentally the name of this little book is, *There's Got to be More*<sup>1</sup> by sociologist Reg. Bibby, and if you have a little bathroom time on your hands, well there you are.

It is an excellent thumbnail sketch of the changing world in Canada and how the church is interacting with it. *(incidentally Bibby's more recent book is Restless Gods published by Stoddart in 2002. Although sharpening figures somewhat and offering a slightly more positive slant on the future of the church, it is for the most part consistent with his summary in There's Got to be More and his other books Unknown Gods and Framgeded Gods).*

So here is what I found out.

There are fewer people going to church now than 20 years ago (how was that!).

That means, in the US about 45%, in the UK about 10% and in Canada and in New Zealand, about 20% of the total population regularly attends Church these days.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

In *There's Got to be More*, Bibby lays out what he calls, "...the ten most important findings of my research for religious leaders."<sup>3</sup>

In summary they are as follows (I think you will be amazed at how close our two countries are and I will try to add New Zealand figures where possible).

### Finding #1. Participation in church is down ... sharply!

In terms of past and present trends:<sup>4</sup>

- a) 1945, 60% of the Canadian population attended church weekly.
- b) 1960, 50% in Canada, 20% New Zealand (40% Monthly in NZ<sup>5</sup>)
- c) 1980, 30%
- d) 1990, 20% in Canada, (1999 10% weekly and 20% monthly in NZ<sup>6</sup>)

In terms of future trends, by the year 2015, Bibby projects that in Canada the above numbers will drop nationally by another 5%.

At the same time, Bibby has noted in Canada, a significant growth in those attending conservative-and evangelical churches.

John McNeil in a special report for Challenge Weekly titled, "The State of the Church in New Zealand," notes the same kind of phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

By 2015 Bibby predicts this shift will be so drastic that on any given Sunday in Canada there will be 3 people in a conservative-evangelical church for every 1 person attending United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran services combined.

### Finding #2. Few people are actually leaving church.

Consistent drops in weekly and even monthly attendance over decades has caused church leaders to assume people are leaving and swearing off church.

Christian leadership in Canada and in New Zealand like to count noses on Sunday morning and then go off and write books and articles like the one I just read: "New Zealanders are becoming less religious."<sup>8</sup>

However, recent census data in Canada indicates that this is not really so (1991).

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<sup>2</sup> Source for NZ figure from "The Herald-Digipoll of 1000 New Zealanders, Nov. 2004. All others from Reginald Bibby, 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

<sup>3</sup> Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. page 15

<sup>5</sup> Source for NZ figure quoted by Kevin Ward in "The Future of Christianity"

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John McNeil, Vol . 64 Issue No. 29, "The State of the Church in New Zealand," Challenge Publishing Soc. Challenge Weekly, New Zealand.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-us/news/article.cfm?mnarticle=new-zealanders-are-becoming-less-religious-survey-shows-02-04-2009>.

For example Bibby found in analyzing this census that:<sup>9</sup>

- a. 8 in 10 Canadians view themselves as Roman Catholic or Protestant. (9 in 10 in 1971).
- b. Only 4% of Canadians identify with other faiths, surprisingly, the same as 50 years ago.
- c. Most people in the 8 out of 10 who view themselves as either RC or PRT also view themselves as part of a specific denomination, usually the one of their upbringing...between 85-90%.

Comparatively, in a New Zealand census in 2001, 61% said they were Christian.<sup>10</sup>

All this is to say that regardless of how the churches define those who are stopping attendance, psychologically, emotionally and culturally these people continue to identify with and define themselves as Christian and most as belonging to their family religious tradition.

Much of Canada's and New Zealand's population it would seem is on a sabbatical from church... not really there but never really left.

### Finding #3. Religion a la carte is rampant.

In society in Canada, people are becoming increasingly consumer oriented and they have become very selective in their consumption of all things.

People are also becoming very individualistic; individual rights and choices are supplanting the emphasis of group rights and choices of the 1960s.

Together with this, there is a rising tide of relativism to the point that the majority of Canadians, according to the Project Canada Survey of 1990, believe that truth and right exist in the eye of the beholder.

External authority is out and personal authority is in.

To quote Bibby, *So Canadians interact with religious groups as fussy customers who want to pick and chose according to their consumption whims and personal sense of what is right. They tend to want only fragments of what the country's religious groups have to offer.*<sup>11</sup>

John McNeil notes the same kind of phenomenon in New Zealand in his article in Challenge Weekly, as he referred to Dr. Peter Lineham's "supermarket churches" and John Drane's "McDonaldisation of the

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<sup>9</sup>Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

<sup>10</sup> Source for NZ figure quoted by Kevin Ward in "The Future of Christianity"

<sup>11</sup>Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC, P.21.

church” as being ways churches have attempted to respond to this phenomenon.<sup>12</sup>

I might summarize that the one thing that people don't want is another institution that represents external authority taking away their individual choice.

#### 4. Religion continues to be relational

So with those who do regularly attend church, how did they come to be there?

Bibby's research in his Unitrends Survey, among others, finds that it is people's relationships, or yearning for relationships, that bring them to church and keep them there.<sup>13</sup>

Religion is transmitted through significant relationships ... family or marriage or friendship.

And religion can often be seen as a place to build relationship or community.

McNeil in New Zealand's Challenge Weekly quotes Peter Drucker as saying that what is happening in churches today that are growing is a “*rebirth of community.*”<sup>14</sup>

People in our societies, though individualistic, paradoxically also place a high value on significant relationships ... especially when it comes to things religious.

#### Finding #5. Religious memory is everywhere

It has become common for those who study religion to say that we are coming to a time when people do not have a religious memory.

If one has grown up not going to church how could they have a religious memory?

Bibby's research in Canada indicates surprisingly, at least at some levels, this is not the case.

He asks, ‘Where do people who don't attend church go for the occasional time that they do go to church, like for the rites of passage?’

What he found was 85% of inactive mainline Protestants rely on the tradition of their families...97% for RC.

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<sup>12</sup> John McNeil, Vol . 64 Issue No. 29, “The State of the Church in New Zealand,” Challenge Publishing Soc. Challenge Weekly, New Zealand.

<sup>13</sup> Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC, P.21.

<sup>14</sup> John McNeil, Vol . 64 Issue No. 29, “The State of the Church in New Zealand,” Challenge Publishing Soc. Challenge Weekly, New Zealand.

It seems even one or two generations down the road people still remember and call themselves what Grandma was and end up using Grandma's church denomination when there are religious needs.

Bibby says, "*Religious memory typically has strong family roots, as such it is not easily erased.*"<sup>15</sup>

#### Finding #6. Receptivity to spirituality is extensive

At the same time as interest and involvement in organized religion is hitting an all time low, large numbers of Canadians and New Zealanders are highly interested in the stuff that religion has historically addressed.

People of all ages are intrigued with mystery.

Bibby found in Canada:<sup>16</sup>

- a. 50% say they have experiences with precognition.
- b. 40% believe in possible contact with the spirit world.
- c. 90% are asking what happens when they die.
- d. 30% believe in reincarnation.
- e. 80% maintain God exists.
- f. 35-45% say that they have experienced God in some way.

In New Zealand, the Herald-Digipoll of 2004 found 68% of New Zealanders said they believe in God and 62 % of New Zealanders say they believe in an afterlife.

Canadian's also indicate that they are searching for meaning.

- a. 90% say they often are asking about the meaning of life, the existence of suffering and the source of real happiness.
- b. 80% are committed to the idea that God has to be brought into the rites of passage.
- c. Less than 20% of teens attend church regularly and only 10% place a high value on religious involvement, BUT 25% of Canadian teens report that spirituality is very important to them and 60% explicitly acknowledge that they have spiritual needs.

No one is in church but everybody seems interested in what is supposed to be going on in church.

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<sup>15</sup>Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC. P.27

<sup>16</sup> Source for NZ figure from "The Herald-Digipoll of 1000 New Zealanders, Nov. 2004. All others from Reginald Bibby, 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

Finding #7. Most people are not looking for churches or religion

Only 20% of Canadian and New Zealand adults and teens attend church regularly and that is dropping rapidly.<sup>17</sup>

Only 25% of Canadian adults and 15% of teens place a high value on religion as such.

And yet, paradoxically Bibby has found that Canadians are looking for the things that religion historically has been about.

- a. They are open to, and fascinated by, the supernatural.
- b. They are trying to make sense out of life and seeking meaning in life.
- c. They are seeking solid self-esteem, personal worth, reduction of anxiety and stress, real happiness and peace, fulfillment in life, the possibility of new beginnings and life invigorating hope.
- d. The thing people of all ages value as most important is good relationships. They want to love and be loved more than all else.
- e. They indicate they have real spiritual needs.
- f. They indicate they have great personal needs.
- g. They indicate that they have social and relational needs.

The research data reveals that Canadians are not seeking these things in Churches ... AND ... they are not seeking them elsewhere either.

Contrary to what churches often think, there is not a mass shift towards the cults nor is there a mass attack upon the helping professions.

Try and get someone to get involved in counseling ... it is often very difficult.

The sad truth is that for most Canadians, and I expect for New Zealanders too, their expressed spiritual needs and interests are going mostly unmet and unfulfilled.

Finding #8. Most Christian churches are a not looking for people.

Churches typically wait for people to come to them with their needs rather than seeking out needy people.

Bibby found of those people regularly in church, 80% have always been in church.

Less than 10% have come from outside the church.

Bibby charges that most of the services of churches are designed to take care of those already there.

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<sup>17</sup> Source for NZ figure from "The Herald-Digipoll of 1000 New Zealanders, Nov. 2004. All others from Reginald Bibby, 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC.

Not much energy or emphasis is put into reaching out in selfless ways to touch people from outside who are in need.

He says churches have become clubs for those who are already there. He says many churches function as if they are oblivious to the possibility that a stranger could be present.

Everybody focuses on the comfortable old friendships.

Liturgy and language, both in traditional and non traditional services assumes and projects the idea that this is for “insiders.”

Bibby states this tragedy: *"Many Canadian's are not associating their needs with the churches and many churches are not associating what they have with what Canadians need"*.<sup>18</sup>

Does this ring true in New Zealand?

Finding #9. Part of the problem is culture.

Selective consumption, pluralism, individualism and relativism are rampant in our changing world.

Our culture has changed to the point where people are over busy, over stimulated and over organized.

In our culture, time is of the essence, and there is just not enough of it to go around.

How can the church compete let alone minister in this kind of changed world?

It seems like this is a huge problem.

But Bibby maintains that ...

Finding #10. The heart of the problem is churches

The picture we have just painted is of a field ripe unto harvest with regards to Jesus Christ and his church.

Most of the research in places like Canada, the United States and New Zealand indicate virtually the same thing.

The bulk of people, upwards to 80% of the population in our countries, are not in church but into the very thing the church of Christ is supposedly into.

The problem, the tragedy really, is that the church seems to be oblivious to this, quite happy to sing the hymn “woe is us we’re dying” while unwilling to reach out to people on its doorstep with real woes and who really are dying.

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<sup>18</sup>Reginald Bibby. 1995. *There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians*, Wood lake Books: Winfield, BC. P.35

The tragedy, in the Canadian rural context is, the church is not only oblivious to this but it is checking out of the mission field entirely, often deeming rural congregations as being “not viable”, what ever that means, and shutting them down.

In our own rural context, the Cariboo Chilcotin, we only focus on places where there is no other existing Christian witness, and in virtually every rural place we are now working, there once was an organized mainline congregation but it was shut down because it was deemed as unviable.

In one place I am intimately aware of, a congregation was shut down that had a Sunday school of over 50 kids, but because there was not enough adults in church to pay the bills, the church was shut down.

Populations in these rural areas are not shrinking, in fact they are expanding, and yet churches are being closed.

In his book, There Has Got To Be More, Sociologist Reg Bibby goes on to talk about this tragedy in terms of problems the Canadian church has with structural issues, product Issues, promotional Issues, distribution Issues ... and what he sees as remedies in terms of all of these.

But here I am going to take a completely different slant than Reg Bibby at suggesting paths to addressing the "tragedy" that he articulates.

At this point I am going to do a little historical story telling to get to what I believe are five crucial things that I fear the church has forgotten.

Five crucial things that the church desperately needs to remember.

I believe they are crucial to the mission of ministering Christ in the changing Canadian and New Zealand context that I have just outlined using a variety of sources.

## **VI. Grandpa Charlie's Challenge**

I never knew great grandpa Charlie, but I wished I had.

You see great grandpa Charlie was an ordained Methodist circuit preacher at the turn of the century.

For much of his early ministry he wandered up and down the rugged coastline of Canada's most western province, British Columbia, taking the church of Christ to the isolated lighthouses, logging, mining and fishing camps and bands of Native peoples that then dotted our Pacific coastline.

The only method of travel was the treacherous Pacific Ocean and so it became his highway.

The mission ship, the Udahl, became his home.

The Native people he visited called him "The Reverend Charlie on the Sunday come to Jesus boat."

More than once the Rev. Charlie nearly went to Jesus prematurely, for the waters of the Pacific coast were treacherous and the Udahl was just an underpowered 56-foot vessel manned by a captain with a single missionary as crew.

In 1908 The Udahl skewered itself on a reef off Tombstone Bay Alaska on her way to Port Simpson, BC.

She sank quickly in 30 fathoms of water.

For five hours, crew and captain splashed around in heavy seas before someone rescued them. <sup>19</sup>

Great grandpa Charlie escaped with only his mouth organ.

Everything else went down with the ship.

To the best of my family knowledge, Charlie and Captain William Oliver lived on an island of Haida Gwaii for 3 months, guests of some benevolent Haida people.

Finally they were stumbled on by another ship, delivered back to Vancouver and they immediately went right to work procuring another mission boat, the Homespun, a 45 foot vessel powered by a 25 horsepower gasoline engine.

Before years end, Charlie and Captain William Oliver were back on the treacherous sea again.

I have great grandpa Charlie's diary from the last year he spent on the coastal mission.

On Thursday, April 14th, 1910, there is an entry that is fairly typical.

This sample day takes place in the very same region where just two years before Charlie had sank with the Udahl: *"Left Port Simpson for Portland Canal ...ran for about 4 hours ...storm met us so we had to run for shelter ...ran about 10 miles into Williams Bay ...storm blew water off the high waves like dust ...weighed anchor 1:30 PM for Hamilton's Cannery in Dogfish Bay ...intended anchoring there but at 9 PM had to get out from there ...too rough*

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<sup>19</sup>Oliver Howard. 1984. *Godships*. The United Church Observer: Toronto ON. Canada. P.70

*...ran to Tombstone Bay through blinding snow storm ...anchored about 1:00 AM."*<sup>20</sup>

Great Grandfather's diary is full of descriptions of days like this. As I have read it I find myself often wondering; What would make a man and his spouse, living very comfortably in the society of Victorian England, uproot their family, and in the midst of middle age, move to the wilderness of Cape Scott on the very remote north end of Vancouver Island.

What would motivate a man to bounce up and down the treacherous coast of B.C. all year long, visiting a few Native villages, lighthouses, logging camps, fish-canneries and mining towns, to sing and say a few things about Jesus?

Most of us, especially if we have gone through the spiritual desert that we presently call seminary, have been taught that what the church did at the turn of the century was driven by faulty theology, which equated the church with the Kingdom of God.

We have been taught that what the church did at the turn of the century was imperialistic and sociologically detrimental, particularly to Native peoples.

We have been taught to discount the church of this age of missionary zeal. Perhaps we should, at least the aspects of it that caused pain and hurt, particularly in my context, the cultural genocide and physical abuse that happened to indigenous people through the Residential School program.

But, I for one still find myself haunted by the likes of great grandpa Charlie and most particularly their motivation.

From reading and pondering great grandpa's diary, from reading and pondering many of the writings that came out of the missionary fervor of the late 1800s, I am convinced that what motivated Charlie, and others like him, to give up the comforts of home for the risks of the treacherous sea or a pulpit in a seedy smelly bar and a bed in someone's hayloft, was the conviction that the gospel of Christ was the most important thing in the world.

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<sup>20</sup> The Rev. Charles Webber, West Coast Marine Mission, Methodist Church of Canada, Diary for 1910.

And we need to recover that motivation.

Today, sociologists in my context and yours, tell us 80% of Canadians want and need what Christ can give ... and they live right on our doorstep. Our mission field is right outside that door, not on the backside of the world somewhere ... that is how our countries have changed.

But we need to recover something of what the missionaries of the past had by way of motivation.

I want to suggest five things that they had that we need to recover.

I want to suggest five things that I believe are at the very heart of doing mission in Canada and in New Zealand in this new millennium.

**First** and foremost, those early missioners believed that Christ was the same yesterday, today and forever; and that faith in Christ had the power to bring healing, wholeness, salvation and justice into a life that was being tossed about in the turbulence of a changing world.

They really believed what they said they believed concerning who Christ was and what Christ said he could and would do ... even in the face of their rapidly changing world.

**Second**, they really believed Christ, when Christ said he would do and could do his works of Shalom making through his disciples or the church.

They firmly believed that they were *The Body of Christ* ... that Christ had no other body in the changing world but them ... that the Risen Christ was incarnate in the church.

**Third**, the nineteenth century missionary and their churches had a genuine concern for people.

When the likes of great grandpa Charlie sat contemplating the call of Christ in their comfortable European homes, it was with the faces of real people who were in real need that was before their minds eye.

They were into people.

And, It was this love and concern for people that spurred them on to what was often unusually courageous and costly action.

**Fourth**, The church and missionary of the turn of the century realized that Christ's call to mission carried with it the call to serve selflessly, in a corporate as well as a personal sense.

For them, the Cross was at the center of their understanding of mission. They had a much more astute sense of what Tullio Vinay, the founder of the Agape Community in the Waldensian Church means when he says: *"The Church's task or mission is not to save itself ... Christ has already done that. It is rather to give itself in love and service... in fact to die for the world."*<sup>21</sup>

They believed that before all things, they had a mission in life... a mission to share Christ with the world, at all cost.

At all cost to themselves and at all cost to the church, even if the cost was the ultimate one ... for persons or for institution.

They took Jesus seriously when Jesus said: *"As (God) sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."* (John 17:18, NIV)<sup>22</sup>

They experienced Christ's power in their lives and they felt called to experience his Cross as they shared the gospel.

**And Fifth**, The missionary minded church and its missionaries at the turn of the century seemed to have a handle on this simple truth: The problem in mission is not how to get people into the church, it is how to get the church into people... to get the church to where the people are ... in a physical, liturgical, spiritual and theological sense.

This meant then, as it still means today, incredible risk taking, for individuals and for congregations and for denominations.

Before, great grandfather Charlie came to the west coast of Canada, before he was ordained as a Methodist missionary, he and my great grandmother Agnes were a part of a London congregation who had a large mission group.

No they did not study Mission and wish for people to come to their Church. Theirs was a large mission group of young people that took the church to the dregs of the docks of London.

And they adapted their church to fit into the people who lived and came and went around those docks.

They went there.

They met people's needs there.

They shaped the church to fit the people there.

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<sup>21</sup>As quoted in *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christian Belief*, by Robin Keeley. 1982. *Eerdmans*: Grand Rapids Mich. USA.

<sup>22</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

Yes I know, there was all kinds of problems with the zealous missionary minded church of the turn of the last century.

But I am convinced that its missionaries were, for the main part, and in spite of all our desires to want to rewrite history, properly motivated.

Sometimes they erred in carrying out their mission.

Sometimes European imperialism, and even denominational imperialism scooped their mission.

Mistakes are the cost of being human.

But they were mostly on target when it came to motivation and focus ... an unchanging Christ for the Shalom of people of an ever-changing world.

Theirs was what has been called a missional mind set.

I call it a heart for mission and people.

Do you know what?

I'm afraid that as we head down a new millennium, that we Christians... we Presbyterians ... we don't have a missional mindset any more ... that deep down we don't believe this Jesus stuff anymore ... that somehow we don't have a heart for home missions any more ... that some how we don't have a heart for people anymore.

I am afraid of that.

I am afraid that somehow we have lost our christocentric motivation and our focus on people, on the persons of our own countries.

I am afraid that we seem to have become a people motivated by a desire for institutional success and paradoxically at the same time, a fear of institutional failure.

I am afraid that we have adopted tinkering with church structures and programming and marketing as our mission.

I am afraid that we are becoming motivated by a strong desire to save the congregation and denomination ... mostly for ourselves.

In the past three decades at the national level, my denomination has initiated numerous national studies and campaigns.

“Lamp Reports” have been followed with “Committees To Double In The Eighties” which have been followed by “Church Growth Committees” which have been followed by “Restructuring Committees” which have been followed by “State Of The Church Committees” which have been followed with “Think Tanks” which have been followed with “Flames Initiatives”.

Not long ago we spent over a million "mission dollars" on restructuring the national church office hierarchy only to discover that the restructured hierarchy did not suit us.

At the local level it doesn't get much better.

Much of the resources in time, energy and money of many Canadian congregations, gets sucked down the tube of self-serving congregational programming and maintenance.

Sound familiar?

Where is the outsider in all of this self-serving?

Where is the person who does not know Christ in all of this?

Where is the person in need of Christ in all of this?

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me try and summarize two things I am I am trying to say. First, Canadian sociologist and expert on the sociology of religion in Canada, Reginald Bibby, relates the statistical finding that since 1945 regular church attendance across Canada has dropped from 60% to about 20%.

A similar pattern exists in New Zealand.

Bibby projects that at the present rate of decline that this number will go down to about 15% by 2015.

Indications are even lower in New Zealand.

All this is to say, that the population outside the church is enormous.

And considering that the populations of both our countries have doubled from 1960 until 2008, this makes this population doubly enormous.

*(Canada 1960-17.8 to 2008-33.7 million people. New Zealand 1960- 2.4 to 2008- 4.2 million).*

At the same time, sociologist's findings indicate that there is, perhaps more than ever before in our history as nations, an incredible need and thirst for the very thing that the Christian church is in the best position to provide through bringing people into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

For example, more than 90% of people surveyed by sociologist Bibby admitted to serious concerns about life after death and the meaning of life.

Can a relationship with Jesus Christ make a difference?

Over 60% of teenagers surveyed explicitly acknowledged that they have deep spiritual needs.

Can a relationship with Jesus Christ make a difference?

As we begin to hurtle down a new millennium, more than at any other time in our history the mission field is right on our doorstep, and it is huge both in terms of size and receptivity.

My second conclusion is this.

Almost none of these spiritually thirsty and earnestly searching people are finding their way into our churches.

And do you know why?

Grandpa Charlie could tell us why.

Speaking from my Canadian context, how would any outsider with a thirst for the things which Christ can provide, have any idea that their questions about life, death and spirituality are on the agenda in church when, in most cases, the only thing readily seen in the community is a church building.

A building with a little sign telling how many degrees the minister has and what time he or she shows up for work once a week; what does that tell anyone about what is on the agenda in Christ's church?

And, if by some small miracle one of these needy questioning folk happen to show up on a Sunday morning for worship... what are they going to experience ... an orthodox (in our case Presbyterian) worship service, specifically designed to meet our own needs, whose content is foreign and intimidating, usually boring to the outsider and hardly ever inviting an outsider into any spiritual dialogue?

What are they going to find? ... a community that is stroking itself, committed to meeting its own needs but oblivious to the needs of the outsider?

Look, motivation is the bottom line when it comes to being an effective church in a changing nation and world.

Motivation is the heart of home missions.

It is not so much what we do is wrong ... but why we do it.

Reg Bibby in Canada and John McNeil in New Zealand note that for the main part, only the conservative and evangelical churches are increasing in people participating... to the point of out numbering the combined mainline Churches by 3 to 1 by 2015 in Canada.

Bibby can't really explain why.

Could it be because these churches tend to be fervent in their belief concerning God and his power and his call to share Christ with the world?

Could it be that we in the mainline churches have confused tolerance with love, to the exclusion of speaking the judgment and salvation of the Gospel, out of a deep love for people.

Could it be that we in the so-called mainline churches have confused Christian liberalism with a sanction for a less fervent faith?

Until we begin to really believe the power of God inherent in the person of Jesus Christ to dramatically impact people lives, until we begin to really believe that our prime purpose as church is to selflessly share the powerful gospel of Christ with persons in our own communities with deep hurts and needs, until we develop a heart and a burden for the people outside our churches, until we develop a truly missional mindset, I am afraid that whatever we do with regards to home missions in this new millennium will miss the mark.

And that is tragic ... not so much for the church ... but for the broken people of our communities and country who really do need Christ.

## **VI. Questions ... Tea ... Insights and Story Telling.**

A. Spend about 15 minutes for people to share insights with regard to the social analysis around “our changing world and the church” as well as the concept of rediscovering a missional mindset as outlined in my 5 points below:

1. First and foremost, those early missionaries believed that Christ was the same yesterday, today and forever; and that faith in Christ had the power to bring healing, wholeness, salvation and justice into a life that was being tossed about in the turbulence of a changing world. They really believed what they said they believed concerning who Christ was and what Christ said he could and would do ... even in the face of their rapidly changing world.
2. Second, they really believed Christ, when Christ said he would do and could do his works of Shalom making through his disciples or the church. They firmly believed that they were *The Body of Christ* ... that Christ had no other body in the changing world but them ... that the Risen Christ was incarnate in the church.
3. Third the nineteenth century missionary and their churches had a genuine concern for people. When the likes of great grandpa Charlie sat contemplating the call of Christ in their comfortable European homes, it was with the faces of real people who were in real need that was before their minds eye. They were into people. And, It was this love and concern for people that spurred them on to what was often unusually courageous and costly action.
4. Fourth, The church and missionary of the turn of the century realized that Christ's call to mission carried with it the call to serve selflessly, in a corporate as well as a personal sense. For them, the Cross was at the center of their understanding of mission. They

had a much more astute sense of what Tullio Vinay, the founder of the Agape Community in the Waldensian Church means when he says: *"The Church's task or mission is not to save itself ... Christ has already done that. It is rather to give itself in love and service... in fact to die for the world."*<sup>23</sup> They believed that before all things, they had a mission in life... a mission to share Christ with the world, at all cost.

5. And Fifth, the missionary minded church and its missionaries at the turn of the century seemed to have a handle on this simple truth: The problem in mission is not how to get people into the church, it is how to get the church into people... to get the church to where the people are ... in a physical, liturgical, spiritual and theological sense. This meant then, as it still means today, incredible risk taking, for individuals and for congregations and for denominations.

B. Spend  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour of people telling stories of what has happened in their experiences where people have developed a real heart for people and mission ... missional mindset and acted upon it. (Our story ... Kids Space ... Adult space.)

Quote: *The term "missional" is frequently used by emerging churches to describe their approach. According to Australian Scott Vawser: "Many of the emerging (church) leaders I have met and spoken with seem to operate out of a different paradigm than I have seen in the church in the past. They seem to think missiologically a long time before they ever begin to think ecclesiologically. In other words, they frame their thinking, their reading, their language as if they were missionaries, not church planters or church pastors."*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As quoted in *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christian Belief*, by Robin Keeley. 1982. *Eerdmans*: Grand Rapids Mich. USA.

<sup>24</sup> John McNeil, Vol . 64 Issue No. 29, "The State of the Church in New Zealand," Challenge Publishing Soc. Challenge Weekly, New Zealand.