

Evangelism in Canada

By: Serena DeGarmo

Four years ago my husband Daniel and I made the decision to move our family, then just ourselves and our two-year-old Noah, to Jordan, Ontario, Canada. After preaching and working a secular job in Columbus, Ohio, Daniel decided that full-time preaching would be more profitable and we were led to Jordan.

Jordan is an agricultural community nestled amongst the vineyards of



the Niagara region. When most Americans think of Canada a few things come to mind. First, I find they think of penguins and polar bears. Actually, the region that we live in is the southern most part of Canada paralleling Buffalo, New York. You have to go much, much farther north for polar bears and

penguins which are actually found in Antarctica- the South Pole.

Most Americans also assume that the culture is similar because we share the English language. While there are similarities between the life and culture of Americans and Canadians, there are also profound differences.

Unlike the United States, Canada never fought for its independence. After being colonized by the Europeans, Canada was a refuge for loyalists to Great Britain. The English influence is still evident.

Also the area of Quebec was often referred to as a New France after the founding of Quebec City by the French in 1608. The English and French battled back and forth for control and the British finally gained complete control in 1764. It was not until July 1, 1867, that Canada was granted sovereignty and was ruled independently by their first prime minister, John MacDonal.

I say all that to say, that Canada is much more European than the United States. Its founding and history is independent of American history. It is a bilingual country speaking French and English. Therefore, the concept of the “melting pot” that is known to Americans is not so prevalent in Canada.

Canada has a population of approximately thirty-two million people living in ten provinces and three territories. The land area of Canada is much greater than the U.S. but the population is about 10% of the U.S. The greatest concentration of people is located along the U.S. border. The farther north the one travels the sparser the population becomes.



Also, the government system is different than the elected republic known to Americans. Canada is ruled by a constitutional monarchy similar to what is found in England and Australia. The Prime Minister is elected as the head of government, but the head of state is still the queen, represented by a Governor

General in Canada. This is another example of the European cultural influence.

Canada also has more socialist tendencies than the U.S. Our family has enjoyed a universal health care system, a Canadian Child Tax Benefit and a monthly budget for childcare for me being a stay-at-home mother.

Moreover, the culture tends to be quite liberal. For example, homosexual marriages are legal throughout Canada, and if preaching against homosexuality incites violence, the one preaching the message can be found liable. Likewise, television programming is not regulated; therefore, it is not uncommon to see nudity and hear vulgarity on regular television. This is another example of how worldliness has invaded the culture here.



The people in our community generally are more reserved and private. The hospitality that is known in the southern U.S. is quite foreign here. This especially makes opening doors to teach difficult.

There are many denominations represented in our area, but various forms of Dutch Reform are predominant. This is a Calvinist teaching that holds to

the idea of the original sin, predestination, and other Calvinist doctrines.

Jordan is also the oldest Mennonite community in Canada. There are still many that hold to the Mennonite doctrine as well. People in our community hold to their religion because it is their family tradition and part of their heritage. Most consider themselves to be religious.

All of these differences do affect evangelism especially for Americans coming in.

In order to evangelize a people we must know the people. We must know their culture, their background, and their often-sincere religious beliefs. Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I may save some," 1 Corinthians 9:22. That is still important today.

As Americans living in Canada we have had to leave our nationalism at home and truly become all things to all men. My husband and I have been cautious not to carry the gospel wrapped in an American flag. We are first Christians and Americans second. Canadians, even Christians, do not want an American religion. They want a biblical religion.

Lee C. Camp in *Mere Discipleship* makes the point that:

"The proclamation of the 'gospel' has often failed to emphasize a fundamental element of the teachings of Jesus, and indeed, of

orthodox Christian doctrine: 'Jesus is Lord' is a radical claim, one that is ultimately rooted in questions of allegiance, of ultimate authority of the ultimate norm and standard for human life. Instead, *Christianity has often sought to ally itself comfortably with allegiance to other authorities, be they political, economic, cultural or ethnic*" (page 16).

True Christianity is not about other authorities; it is about the claim that "Jesus is Lord." We have tried to embody this philosophy in our work. It is not about politics or economics that may separate our nations. It is about Jesus being Lord.

Furthermore, our work in Canada has been focused on equipping the



saints here. The congregation of the Lord's people have been meeting in Jordan for around 200 years. This being the case there are many mature and grounded Christians. Thus, we were able to scripturally organize the church by appointing elders and deacons. This divine

plan for organization has led to a greater efficiency and effectiveness in congregational evangelism.

While here we have used correspondence courses to reach people leading to profitable studies. We hosted community Revival Sing-Songs, which were well attended by non-believers. But our most successful means of reaching this religious community in a non-offensive way has been our annual Vacation Bible School.

Our congregation of eighty doubles that week. Our members get excited and our kids are enthusiastic about inviting friends. Our VBS has truly proved to be a unified effort by the church to get the gospel message out to those around us. Our community has responded with great support. This effort has led numerous contacts and successful Bible studies.

Although the conversions come slowly in our area, they are not impossible to come by. There are still souls that are searching for the completeness of God that comes through His word.

Our work in Canada has come to a close and our family has left here with two more children, a better understanding of Canadian customs, and a sincere love for Canadian brethren. Pray for the brothers and sisters that will continue to labor for the Lord in Canada. Through our efforts may the population of heaven grow!

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