

An Initial Survey of the ‘Harvest Field’ and ‘Harvest Force’ in Canada - 1996

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An Initial Survey of the ‘Harvest Field’ and ‘Harvest Force’ in Canada 1996

Introduction:

Jesus, after his conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, said:

“My food, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest?’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.” (John 4:34-36, NIV)

The Scope of this Survey:

The purpose of this survey is to overview the condition of the ‘harvest field’ i.e. the unchurched population of Canada, which constitutes the task of Christ’s church in the nation. We will review the extent of non-Christian people groups yet to be reached, the population-per-church ratios in various areas by ethnic group, and the number of churches which will yet need to be planted.

This survey will then also overview a portion of the evangelical church, the ‘harvest force’ for this task, seeking to assess its strength, growth rate and potential for the task.

Finally, we will project progress towards reaching the unchurched in Canada under several scenarios and challenge the Church to give her utmost to her highest calling.

Our Goal and Vision:

Ultimately, the Church’s goal is to see a gathering of Bible-believing Christians within practical and cultural distance of every person in every class and kind of people, penetrating every neighbourhood with the saving love, care, truth and power of Jesus Christ - fulfilling the vision of the prophet that: “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).”

We seek therefore to assist in seeing a broad spectrum of the Church in the nation, each province, region and city mobilized for church planting around shared measurable goals undergirded by shared updated information and concerted prayer.

Completion of the Task:

Can we really expect to complete the task commissioned to us by our Lord Jesus? Yes! Jesus referred to his expectation of our doing so in words such as these:

“This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14) “Go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)”

Completion of the task (‘closure’) is commonly defined as the provision of one biblically orthodox church reaching out to **300 to 1,000 persons** - the average relational ‘footprint’ of a given congregation and practical distance - in specific geographic location or cultural grouping.

Completing the task is not that of any one denomination or tradition, but of the entire Church in the nation - which has been made spiritually one by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2).

Global Context:

Increasingly leaders in most nations of the world are coming to recognize their own nation also to be a part of the ‘mission field’ to be prayed and strategized for, mobilized and approached in exactly the same way, and by the same missiological principles and any other nation to which citizens of that nation would send missionaries to any other nation or people group on the earth.

‘Whole Nation’ strategies were first developed by missionaries to the Philippines and a recognition of the value of the approach has spread, with variations, to many other nations of the world under the acronym D.A.W.N. (Discipling a Whole Nation).¹ The World Evangelical Fellowship has adopted this saturation church planting approach as primary in its goal of world evangelization.

More recently the ‘AD 2000 and Beyond Movement’ has incorporated the essential components of this vision and church planting strategy using the term ‘National Initiative’ to describe the cooperative, interdenominational focus on saturation church planting by region, city and people group - giving priority to the least reached - to ensure that all may hear, understand and be given a culturally relevant opportunity to respond to the invitation of the Gospel. The vision statement in section one of this booklet outlines these principles.

¹ Cf. the section ‘DAWN Principles’ following in this booklet or Dr. Montgomery’s book DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989) for an overview.

A Survey of the 'Harvest Field' in Canada:

Self-Reported Religious Affiliation:

According to 1991 census figures Canadians identified themselves with the following religious traditions:²

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Catholic: | 12,335,255 |
| Mainline: | 6,578,325 |
| Evangelical: | 2,775,025 |
| Orthodox: | <u>387,395</u> |
| | 22,076,000 (81.8 % of population) |
| | |
| Cults (non-Trin.) w/ Christian roots: | 427,360 |
| Christadelphians | 3,375 |
| Jehovah's Witnesses | 168,375 |
| Mormons | 201,540 |
| Spiritualist | 3,735 |
| Unitarian | 16,535 |
| Jewish | 318,070 |
| Eastern non-Christian: | 747,455 |
| Buddhist | 163,415 |
| Hindu | 157,015 |
| Muslim | 253,260 |
| Sikh | 147,440 |
| Other Eastern | 26,325 |
| Para-religious (pagan, native, new age): | 28,155 |
| Other (unclassified): | <u>10,635</u> |
| | 1,531,675 |
| No Religious Affiliation: | <u>3,386,365</u> |
| | 4,918,040 (18.2% of population) |

² Statistics Canada 1991, "Religions in Canada." The question of religious affiliation was not asked by Census Canada in 1996 and will not be asked again until 2001.

Population Not Affiliated with Christianity - by City:

Where do those 18.2% of Canadians who do not identify themselves with any Christian background live? The following table suggests Canadian cities with the largest percentage of non-Christian affiliation:

Percentage of Population Reporting Non-Christian Affiliation:

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| Vancouver | 41% |
| Victoria | 33% |
| Calgary | 30% |
| Toronto | 27% |
| Edmonton | 26% |
| Winnipeg | 21% |

As is apparent, western cities generally hold the highest percentages of Canadians who do not identify themselves with biblical Christian beliefs. Whether these people of non-Christian affiliation are also cities most resistant to the Gospel we do not know, but these are clearly cities where fresh, focused, prayerful evangelism and church planting efforts are greatly needed.

Further detail of the breakdown of self-reported non-Christian groupings in the 25 largest cities in Canada is provided in appendix 1: ‘**Non-Christian Religious Affiliation (1991).**’

The Least Reached ‘People Groups’:

The term ‘people group’ has generally come to refer to groups of people within a larger culture who prefer to associate with one another due to common language, interests, shared history or sub-culture. Generally the Gospel has tended to flow more naturally and effectively within ‘people groups’ than between them.

The following definitions are commonly held³ and may be helpful:

Christian peoples are those in which a majority of its members have made a profession of faith in Christ.

Evangelized peoples are those in which a majority of its members have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ with such cultural and personal relevance that it results in sufficient understanding to accept Christ by faith as a believer (disciple) or to reject him.

Unevangelized peoples are those in which a majority of its members have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ with such cultural and personal relevance that it results in sufficient understanding to accept Christ by faith as a believer (disciple) or to reject him.

³ Proposed by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention “Status of Global Evangelization” research arm.

Unreached peoples are those within which there is no viable indigenous church movement of sufficient strength, resources, and commitment to sustain and ensure the continuous multiplication of churches. The numerical minimum for this degree of strength is frequently viewed as 5% churched evangelicals.

A description of ‘ethnolinguistic⁴’ people groups in Canada in an international mission context, indicating name, total population, and status of evangelization is included as appendix 2 - ‘**Ethnolinguistic Peoples**’ as provided in the ‘Integrated Strategic Planning Database of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention “Status of Global Evangelization”’ research arm.⁵

Church-Reported Involvement:

Self-reported Christian affiliation is however not the same as being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, or even to be equated with minimal church involvement. The following table reveals the gap:

| | Reported Membership:⁶ | Estimated Attendance:⁷ |
|-------------|---|--|
| Catholic | 11,512,914 | 3,454,574 |
| Evangelical | 1,160,620 | 946,315 |
| Mainline | 1,964,390 | 753,556 |
| Orthodox | <u>529,502</u> | <u>67,365⁸</u> |
| | 15,167,426 | 5,221,810 |

Note the 6,908,574 difference between self-reported affiliation and church membership, even on paper, and the 16,854,190 gap between self-reported affiliation and personal participation in corporate worship. What do these gaps mean?

Nominal Christians:

⁴ Ibid. Defined as ‘an ethnic or racial group speaking its own language and distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs, and language.’ This is the largest group within which communication can take place without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.

⁵ These helpful materials are available for the entire world on 6 computer disks, at a very modest cost for the disks, shipping and handling, from: John Gilbert, Director of Global Research, Southern Baptist Convention, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230-0763 or by phone: 1-804-353-0151, or fax: 254-8980.

⁶ Membership drawn from denominational yearbooks.

⁷ Attendance figures vary greatly: some denominations report weekly average attendance, other figures (may) reflect annual attendance total.

⁸ Attendance unreported. Estimate based on 499 known congregations with presumed average attendance of 135 persons each. This estimate is probably high, based on the average attendance of 1500 evangelical congregations reporting in 1993.

The gap between self-reported affiliation and church-reported membership may best be understood to represent the number of persons in Canada who are Christian in name only. That is, these are people who may remember an aspect of their Christian heritage when the census taker comes to the door, or who may consider themselves to be nearer to Christianity than to any other religion of which they may be aware, but who remain unchurched and are not a part of the harvest force. The number of persons who are Christian in name only in Canada were nearly 7 million in 1991 and are probably nearer **7.6 million** persons in 1996.

Total Inactive and Perhaps Re-winnable:

The gap between self-reported affiliation with the Christian tradition and personal participation in corporate worship and the life of the church may be understood as composing at least two groups. One group are those Canadians who are Christian in name only, another includes those who, though they may have some understanding of and perhaps even interest in the Gospel, remain unchurched and are not fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. These people may be able to be won to a fervent relationship with Christ through appropriate evangelism and church planting. The number of these unchurched Canadians was 16,854,190 by 1991 census figures and may be nearer in **18.6 million** persons in 1996.

The good news may be seen, as Dr. Reginald Bibby has pointed out⁹, that a majority of Canadians continue to see themselves as Christian, at least by their own definitions,¹⁰ and therefore may be winnable, back into the Christian fold, by congregations willing to change non-essential methods and styles for the sake of the harvest, and by new church plants molding their philosophies of ministry to appeal to contemporary Canadian culture.

Evangelical Christians in Mainline and Roman Catholic Traditions:

A recent study¹¹ reported by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada suggests that 50% of 'conservative' church affiliates are evangelical Christians. In addition, it is suggested that 1 in 7 'mainline' Protestants are in fact evangelical,¹² as well as 1 in 7 Roman Catholics. The total number of Canadian evangelical Christians projected in this study by this means is 3.4 million or 16% of the population.

⁹ Reginald, Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, Irwin Publishing, Toronto, 1987 and elsewhere.

¹⁰ These personal definitions of what constitutes a Christian vary greatly in popular culture, often are limited to a general theism (cf. James 2:19), and are too frequently non-Biblical in nature.

¹¹ Rawlyk/Angus Reid Survey reported by Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in *Canada Watch*, Jan./Feb. 1996 - Issue 1.

¹² Evangelicalism in this above survey is defined as: 1. a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity, 2. a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority, 3. a stress on the new birth, 4. an energetic individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement. Such a definition is the minimum (and is perhaps even inadequate lacking reference to the deity of Christ) which might be considered for a person to be a member of the harvest force with the potential of leading others to personal commitment to Christ.

This would suggest that 84%, or approximately 26,600,000 Canadians, by 1996 population estimates, do not hold to the gospel as understood by evangelical Christians.

Unchurched Evangelicals:

Though an estimated 3.4 million Canadians are deemed to be evangelical¹³ it appears many of these remain unchurched. How many? This may be difficult to calculate. However if we subtract from this total of 3.4 million estimated evangelicals the 1.16 million members of evangelical denominations, 483,626 evangelicals worshipping in Roman Catholic congregations¹⁴, and 105,497 evangelicals worshipping in mainline traditions,¹⁵ **1,650,257 persons** would remain who may be deemed to be evangelical in their understanding of the Gospel but remain unchurched. If these unchurched evangelicals were re-gathered into the church and significant and needed addition could be made to the harvest force for the sake of the rest of Canadians and the world.

Unreached Canadians:

The bad news remains that

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Self-perceived but non-attending nominal Christians: | 16,854,190 |
| Cults (non-Trinitarian) w/ Christian roots: | 427,360 |
| Eastern Religions: | 1,531,675 |
| No Religious Affiliation: | <u>3,386,365</u> |
| | 22,199,590 (or 82.2%) |

of Canadians remain unchurched and outside of a valid, relational environment in which to be challenged with the life transforming power of the Gospel, needing yet to be reached by fresh waves of compassionate evangelism and church planting.

This summary, combined with the proportion of Canadians attending Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Mainline and Orthodox services is provided as a graph in appendix 3 - **‘Canadian ‘Harvest Field’ and ‘Harvest Force’ Overview.’**

Appendix 4 - **‘Canadian Religious Affiliation, 1981-1991’** depicts 1991 census data showing: (a) religious affiliation in 1991 on a bar graph, and (b) the rate of religious affiliation change on a line graph.

Several observations might be made:

1. The percentage rate in the general population of increased affiliation with Evangelical denominations is greater than that of other Christian groups and general population growth.

¹³ Rawlyk/Angus Reid Survey cited above.

¹⁴ 1/7th or 14% of 3,454,574 worship attendees reported by the Roman Catholic church.

¹⁵ 1/7th or 14 % of 753,556 worship attendees reported by mainline denominations.

2. Four smaller groups holding non-Christian world-views are growing at a percentage rate greater than are evangelical Christians.
3. Affiliation with the largest nominally Christian groups - Roman Catholic and Mainline denominations - is changing least rapidly and is not keeping up with population growth.

How Many Canadians are Without a Church Home?

1996 population estimates reached 29,857,365 mid-year. If the 1991 percentage of unchurched Canadians remains at 82.2% in 1996, we would suggest that **24,542,754** Canadians require a church home today, and the number climbs weekly. Only through thoroughgoing congregational re-visioning, concerted prayer for labourers and the harvest, focused relational evangelism, and large scale new church planting may the vast harvest field be engaged.

Current Church Planting Needs by Province:

Quebec has the fewest evangelical congregations per capita in Canada (1 per 11,316 people). Following Quebec in evangelical congregations per capita is Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and Alberta. New Brunswick has the best ratio of evangelical congregations per capita with 1 evangelical congregation for each 1,575 citizens. Yet even in New Brunswick many additional churches are needed to provide an evangelical church before the Great Commission is completed.

For Canadian provinces listed in decreasing order of evangelical congregations per capita, please see appendix 5 - **‘Canadian Evangelical Church Planting Needs by Province - 1996.’**

Current Church Planting Needs by City:

The five Canadian cities in which the ratio of evangelical congregations per capita is highest - and therefore most urgently require new church planting and evangelism efforts - are all in Quebec. Saint John, NB has the lowest ratio but remains nevertheless in need of new congregations to reach unchurched peoples there.

The church planting needs of the 25 largest cities in Canada are depicted in appendix 6 - **‘Census Metropolitan Areas Church Planting Needs’** For church planting needs in smaller towns, please see the regional “Mid-Decade Progress Reports” produced by Outreach Canada for Vision 2000. Reports on the Maritimes, South-West Ontario, and British Columbia are complete. Quebec and the Prairie Provinces are in process. The remainder of Ontario is yet to come. One copy of each report is available from Outreach Canada at no cost to each denomination. Additional copies are available at \$5 each. In addition tables depicting provincial church planting needs for other (smaller) Canadian municipalities may be requested from Outreach Canada. A sample for British Columbia is included as **Appendix 7.**

Current Church Planting Needs by Ethnic Groups:

The 1991 Canadian census reports that languages, after English, most frequently spoken at home by Canadians are French, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The five page **Appendix 8** depicts Canadian cities with the greatest needs for church planting in these languages¹⁶. Please note the appendices reflect those ethnic congregations known to the researchers and additional information is always needed and welcome. Tables depicting an initial survey of church planting needs by major Canadian city for languages other than these may be requested from Outreach Canada. A sample for three languages in British Columbia is included as **Appendix 9**.

Map Depictions:

Maps showing needs for church planting for major municipalities, depicting population-per-church ratios to the census tracts level¹⁷, will hopefully be available at this greater detail from Lorne Hunter at Outreach Canada, #16 - 12240 Horseshoe Way, Richmond, BC V7A 4X9. Phone (604) 272-0732, fax 272-2744, or email lhunter@outreach.ca subject to changes in licensing agreement with Statistics Canada. A sample of this mapping for the Greater Vancouver area and an order form for detailed maps for various regions of British Columbia is included as **Appendix 10**.

Canadian Population Growth Rate:

Decadal Growth Rate: Between 1986 (25,309,331) and 1996 (29,963,631) Canadian population grew at an average **annual** growth rate of approximately **1.7 %** or **18 % per decade**.

¹⁶ Please note that ethnic population data is from the 1991 census, while ‘Reported Evangelical Churches’ reflects 1996 data. Ethnic population data from the 1996 census will be used to revise these charts when the information is released by Statistics Canada.

¹⁷ This information depicted on maps had previously been available to the census sub-division level. This new level of detail at the census tract (units of population averaging 5000 people) has never before been available in Canada.

A Survey of the ‘Harvest Force’ in Canada:

A Snapshot of the Church:

The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches¹⁸ lists 86 ‘religious bodies’ active in Canada. The ‘Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’ lists 28 member denominations and 126 mission agencies. The ‘Council of Canadian Churches’ lists 17 member denominations and 2 associate members.

‘Outreach Canada’ researches the Christian church in Canada and lists 87 Christian denominations (excluding non-Trinitarian cults) of which 10 might be viewed as Mainline with 8,866 congregations, 62 as Evangelical with 8,595 congregations, 4 as (Roman) Catholic with 5,355 congregations, and 11 as Orthodox with 299 congregations.

Canadian Evangelical Church Growth:

Between 1984 and 1994¹⁹ Evangelical denominations in Canada grew as follows on an average annual (AAGR²⁰) and decadal (DGR²¹) basis:

Sample²² Canadian Evangelical Church Growth Rates

| | Congregations: Attendance²³: Membership: | | | | | |
|--|--|-------|-------|------|--------|-------|
| | AAGR | DGR | AAGR | DGR | AAGR | DGR |
| Apostolic Church of Pentecost in Canada | .64% | 7 % | | | 2 % | 22 % |
| Associated Gospel Churches | 2.7% | 31 % | 5 % | 61 % | 2.2 % | 24 % |
| Atlantic Canada Assoc. of Free Will Baptists | 0 % | 0 % | | | -3.1 % | 36 % |
| Baptist General Conference | 1.6 % | 17 % | 1.8 % | 20 % | 1.1 % | 12 % |
| Bible Holiness Movement | - 6.1 % | -81 % | | | 7.1 % | 101 % |

¹⁸ Bedell, Kenneth B., editor. Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches. Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1994.

¹⁹ Or as near to the 1985-1995 decade as statistics were available. Because statistics from some denominations were only available to an earlier period (e.g. 1982-1992 or only for a part of a decade), some figures may not reflect current growth rates. Updates will be forthcoming as current information becomes available.

²⁰ Average Annual Growth Rate is depicted as percentage increase/decrease.

²¹ Decadal Growth Rate is depicted as percentage increase/decrease.

²² All Canadian Evangelical denominations with 15 or more congregations for which statistics were available to Outreach Canada. This sample includes approximately 83% of known Canadian evangelical congregations. If your organization was not included, it may be that inadequate statistics were available for clear conclusions. Please forward number of congregations, average worship attendance, and active membership to Lorne Hunter, #16 - 12240 Horseshoe Way, Richmond, BC V7A 4X9.

²³ Worship attendance is the more accurate indicator of church health and life as compared to membership rolls. Attendance records however have been less well kept than membership rolls. Denominations would be well advised to require attendance records in congregational year end reports.

| | | | | | | |
|---|-------|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| Brethren in Christ, Canadian Conference | 2 % | 22 % | 1.4 % | 15 % | 2 % | 22 % |
| Canadian Baptist Federation (Total) | .2 % | 2 % | | | -.6 % | - 6 % |
| - Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec | -.6 % | - 6 % | | | -.9 % | - 9 % |
| - Atlantic United Baptist Federation | -.1 % | - 1 % | 1.9 % | 20 % | -.4 % | - 4 % |
| - Union of French Baptist Churches of Can. | 6.5 % | 88 % | | | 2.6 % | 29 % |
| - Baptist Union of Western Canada | .07 % | .5 % | .2 % | 2 % | -.4 % | - 4 % |
| Can. Conf. of Mennonite Brethren Churches | 2.1 % | 21 % | 3.8 % | 46 % | 2 % | 22 % |
| Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists | 6.2 % | 82 % | | | 6.4 % | 86 % |
| Christian & Missionary Alliance | 2.8 % | 32 % | 4.4 % | 54 % | 4.8 % | 60 % |
| Christian Reformed Churches in Canada | 1.2 % | 13 % | | | -.2 % | - 2 % |
| Church of God (Anderson) | -.3 % | - 3 % | 2.6 % | 29 % | 3 % | 35 % |
| Church of God (Cleveland) | 3.1 % | 36 % | | | 6.8 % | 91 % |
| Churches of Christ in Canada | | | | | -.3 % | - 3 % |
| Church of the Nazarene Canada | 2.3 % | 26 % | | | 1.5 % | 16 % |
| Conference of Mennonites in Canada | 0 % | 0 % | | | 0 % | 0 % |
| Congregational Christian Church of Canada | 4.4 % | 54 % | | | | |
| Evangelical Covenant Church | -.5 % | - 5 % | | | .3 % | 3 % |
| Evangelical Free Church in Canada | 2.3 % | 26 % | 3.7 % | 44 % | 3.4 % | 40 % |
| Evangelical Mennonite Conference | -.2 % | - 2 % | - 6.2 % | -82% | 1.6% | 17.5% |
| Evangelical Mennonite Missionary Conf. | 2.1 % | 24 % | .5 % | 5 % | 1.7 % | 18 % |
| Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada ²⁴ | .1 % | 1 % | 1.5 % | 16 % | .3 % | 3 % |
| Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches | 1.1 % | 12 % | 3.1 % | 36 % | 2 % | 22 % |
| Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches | .5 % | 5 % | - 1.4 % | -15% | 1.3 % | 14 % |
| Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada | 2.9 % | 34 % | 8.2 % | 120% | 6 % | 80 % |
| Free Methodist Church of Canada | .8 % | 8.5% | 2.3 % | 25 % | 0 % | 0 % |
| Italian Pentecostal Church | 4.1 % | 50 % | | | 1.8 % | 20 % |
| Mennonite Church (Canada) | 3.4 % | 39 % | | | 5.3 % | 67 % |
| North American Baptist Inc. Canada | 1.4 % | 15 % | 2.4% | 27 % | .3 % | 3 % |
| Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada | .5 % | 5 % | 4.1 % | 50 % | 3.5 % | 41 % |
| Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland | -.2 % | - 2 % | 1.1 % | 12 % | | |
| Plymouth Brethren (Christian Brethren) | 1 % | 10.5 % | | | -.5 % | - 5 % |

²⁴ Represents the combined Evangelical Church and Missionary Church prior to merger.

| | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Presbyterian Church in American (Canada) | 16.6 % | 372 % | | | 8.9% | 136% |
| Reformed Church in Canada | 4.6 % | 46 % | 1.7% | 18.6% | .6% | 6.5% |
| The Salvation Army | .9 % | 9 % | -.1 % | - 1 % | -.6% | -6.5% |
| Seventh-Day Adventist | 1.7 % | 18 % | | | 2.1 % | 24 % |
| The Wesleyan Church of Canada | - 1.5 % | - 16 % | 2.3 % | 26 % | .4 % | 4 % |
| United Pentecostal Church | -.3 % | - 3 % | | | | |
| Vineyard Christian Fellowship | 20 % | 520 % | | | | |
| Canada Composite: | 1.1% | 11.5% | 2.7% | 31% ²⁵ | 1.2% | 12.3% ²⁶ |

What is a ‘Good’ Decadal Growth Rate?

The evangelical movement in Canada has been growing at a rate of 31% per decade as measured by corporate increases in worship attendance. It is a rate exceeding Canada’s general population growth rate of 18%. But is it ‘good’ growth rate? Dr. C. Peter Wagner has suggested the following guidelines as a basis of comparison:

- twenty five percent growth per decade is to be considered marginal. It is a rate of growth which suggests that the church is not even retaining children born into the church.
- fifty percent growth per decade is to be considered fair. Children are being retained but few people outside the church are being won to active discipleship.
- one hundred percent growth per decade is satisfactory growth. Some outsiders are being regularly won to active discipleship.
- two hundred percent growth per decade is commendable growth.
- three hundred percent growth per decade is outstanding growth.
- five hundred percent or more growth per decade may be considered incredible.²⁷

Some will consider this perspective too challenging. Nevertheless it is necessary that we answer for ourselves the question of ‘what is good growth?’.

Church Planting the ‘Leading Indicator’:

²⁵ Attendance growth rate is based only upon those denominations which have been maintaining attendance records during the last decade.

²⁶ Membership growth rate is based only upon those denominations which have been maintaining membership records during the last decade.

²⁷ Lecture notes, Dr. C. Peter Wagner, "Church Growth I", Fuller Seminary, June 1987.

However an individual denomination responds to the question of ‘what is good growth?’ it is important to bear in mind that in the last decade the general population of Canada grew at a average annual rate of 1.7% (or 18% DGR).

While evangelical worship attendance grew at an annual rate 1% greater than general population growth, new church planting did not keep pace.

This is significant because new church planting is the best ‘leading indicator’ of future evangelism.

During the last decade, to have kept this ‘leading indicator’ even with general population growth, evangelicals represented in the above sample would have needed to have planted 423²⁸ congregations **more** than we did **just to maintain the status quo**. But to Christians committed to obedience to the Great Commission, the status quo is **not** adequate. Rather we are called to seek to bring to devoted discipleship **all** the nation. A great increase in the rate of development of new congregations of many shapes, sizes, and models is necessary.

Sample of Other²⁹ Canadian Church Growth Rates

Congregations: Attendance³⁰: Membership:

AAGR DGR AAGR DGR AAGR DGR

Mainline:

| | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------|------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Anglican Church of Canada | -1.2% | -13% | | | -1.6% | -18% |
| Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Canada ³¹ | | | -2.9% | -34% | -1.9% | -21% |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada | -1.1% | -1% | | | -.4% | -4% |
| Lutheran Church - Canada | -.3% | -3% | | | -.8% | -9% |
| Presbyterian Church in Canada ³² | -.2% | -2% | 2.3% | 26% | -.7% | -7% |
| United Church of Canada | -.6% | -6.5% | -2.7% | -31% | -1.8% | -19% |
| Composite: ³³ | -.7% | -7.2% | | | -1.5% | -16% ³⁴ |

²⁸ Our sample gained a net of 749 new congregations during the decade. If our average annual church planting rate had kept pace with general population growth however we would have planted 1,172 new congregations.

²⁹ Some may view some of the below denominations to be evangelical.

³⁰ Worship attendance is the more accurate indicator of church health and life as compared to membership rolls. Attendance records however have been less well kept than membership rolls. Denominations would be well advised to require attendance records in congregational year end reports.

³¹ Attendance data was a small sample ending in 1989 (before the 'cut off' date for data generally used by this research) and may not reflect current reality.

³² The latest attendance figure dates from 1990 (before the 'cut off' date for data generally used by this research) and may not reflect current growth rates.

³³ A calculation of a composite attendance growth rate for mainline denominations was not attempted due to incomplete data, denominationally and decadal.

Historic:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Roman Catholic Church ³⁵ | - .8% -8.25% | 1.6% 17% |
| Orthodox ³⁶ | -1.2% -13 % | |
| Composite: | - .8 % - 8.26 % | 1.6% 17%³⁷ |

Sample of Other³⁸ Canadian Religious Group Growth Rates

Congregations: Attendance³⁹: Membership:

AAGR DGR AAGR DGR AAGR DGR

Cults:

| | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------|
| Jehovah's Witnesses | 1.6% 18% | 3.6% 43% |
| Latter Day Saints (Mormons) | 1 % 10% | 2.6% 30% |
| Reorganized Church of LDS (Mormons) | 4 % 4% | -1.2% -12% |
| Unitarian Universalists Association ⁴⁰ | | 5.2% 66% |
| Composite⁴¹: | 1.4 % 15.5 % | 2.9% |
| 32.5% | | |

Congregations:

Affiliation:

³⁴ Membership growth rate is based only upon those denominations which have been maintaining membership records during the last decade.

³⁵ The latest figure used in the membership calculation dates from 1990 and may not reflect current reality.

³⁶ Represents a composite of several Orthodox denominations. Adequate information for individual denominations was not available in sufficient detail. Membership figures available are estimates and dated. No attempts to suggest a trend will be attempted. More research is needed.

³⁷ Membership growth rate is based only upon those denominations which have been maintaining membership records during the last decade.

³⁸ Some may view some of the below denominations to be evangelical.

³⁹ Worship attendance is the more accurate indicator of church health and life as compared to membership rolls. Attendance records however have been less well kept than membership rolls. Denominations would be well advised to require attendance records in congregational year end reports.

⁴⁰ Data is from the 1980's and may not be reflective of current growth. Further research is necessary.

⁴¹ Composite membership growth does not include Unitarians due to the dated nature of our data.

Other⁴²:

| | | |
|------------------------|-----|------|
| Buddhist ⁴³ | 20% | 520% |
|------------------------|-----|------|

Please note: If your organization is not included above, or if information is absent or not current, please forward (a) number of congregations, (b) average worship attendance, and (c) active membership - for the last 11 years to: Lorne Hunter, #16 - 12240 Horseshoe Way, Richmond, BC V7A 4X9. We apologize for any inaccuracies. Please help us keep current and clear the dynamic picture of the harvest force in Canada and of her progress in the harvest.

Observations:

In the above sample of evangelical denominations, the good news, as noted above, is that worship attendance is growing slightly faster (2.7%) on an annual basis than the general population (1.7%). New churches will need to be planted however if this worship attendance growth rate is to continue, and many new churches must be planted if a significant gain over general population growth is to take place.

The 1.1% average annual growth rate of evangelical church planting (or 11.5% DGR), is loosing ground annually to the Canadian average annual population growth rate of 1.7% (or 18% DGR). This means both the percentage and total number of unchurched and undisciplined Canadians will inevitably increase annually if not reversed by a vigorous new initiative in church planting by the evangelical community.

A broad based commitment to evangelism and church planting by the entire evangelical church is therefore needed to gain significant progress in the goal of seeing a gathering of Bible-believing Christians within practical and cultural distance⁴⁴ of every person in every class and kind of people, penetrating every neighbourhood with the saving love, care, truth and power of Jesus Christ.

Formal membership appears to be of less value to evangelicals than worship attendance. There is no indication that this trend is likely to change soon. Canadian congregations are therefore urged to keep careful records of worship attendance a the key indicator of personal commitment.

⁴² Growth rates from these groups are drawn from reported affiliation changes between the 1981 and 1991 census responses.

⁴³ Data is from the 1980's and may not be reflective of current growth. Further research is necessary.

⁴⁴ A congregation they could get to, and would go to.

Projections for the Future

The Harvest Field:

If population of Canada would continue to grow at 1.7% annually and the evangelical church would continue to plant churches at a rate of 1.1% annually, what would happen? The simple answer is that we would fall further behind. How much? The following table make the projection:

Number of Evangelical Churches in Canada We Fall Behind Each Year if Church Planting and Population Growth Rates Remain Constant

Goal: One Evangelical Churches for Every:

| | 2000 people | | | 1000 people | | | 500 people | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Churches Projected: | Needed: | Short: | Projected: | Needed: | Short: | Projected: | Needed: | Short: | | | |
| 1996 | 6,645 | 6,645 | | 21,399 | 21,399 | | 51,392 | 51,392 | | | |
| 1997 | 6,567 | 6,657 | 90 | | 21,729 | 21,909 | 180 | | 52,052 | 52,412 | 360 |
| 1998 | 6,734 | 6,916 | 182 | | 22,062 | 22,427 | 365 | | 52,719 | 53,449 | 730 |
| 1999 | 6,902 | 7,180 | 278 | | 22,399 | 22,954 | 555 | | 53,394 | 54,504 | 1110 |
| 2000 | 7,073 | 7,448 | 375 | | 22,740 | 23,491 | 751 | | 54,076 | 55,577 | 1501 |
| 2001 | 7,245 | 7,721 | 476 | | 23,085 | 24,036 | 951 | | 54,765 | 56,668 | 1903 |
| 2002 | 7,419 | 7,998 | 579 | | 23,433 | 24,591 | 1158 | | 55,462 | 57,777 | 2315 |
| 2003 | 7,595 | 8,280 | 685 | | 23,786 | 25,155 | 1369 | | 56,167 | 58,905 | 2739 |
| 2004 | 7,773 | 8,567 | 793 | | 24,142 | 25,729 | 1587 | | 56,879 | 60,053 | 3174 |
| 2005 | 7,954 | 8,859 | 905 | | 24,502 | 26,312 | 1810 | | 57,599 | 61,220 | 3621 |
| 2006 | 8,136 | 9,155 | 1020 | | 24,866 | 26,906 | 2040 | | 58,327 | 62,407 | 4079 |

The highlighted “Short” column shows the number of evangelical churches we would be short of maintaining the status quo, let alone in making advances in reaching the nation with Good News of Christ’s sacrifice and invitation to his grace and yoke, if we maintain our current composite church planting rate. We can do better. We must do better. By the Lord’s grace we will do better.

The Harvest Force - Our Sample:

If we continue to develop new congregations in the next five years at the same rate as in the previous years, the number of future congregations, worshipers and members may be projected without great difficulty.

However we believe the Lord of the Harvest is calling for and willing to provide, in response to fervent concerted prayer, significantly greater growth. If, for example, Canadian evangelical denominations grew at an average annual growth rate 4%, 6% or even 8%, rather than the rate of the past decade, the picture could be as follows:

Projecting New Congregations at Various Planting Rates:

| | Last Reported | | Projected Number of Churches in 2001 as | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|-----|---|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| | AAGR: Churches ⁴⁵ : | | Planting Rates Rise | Now ⁴⁶ : 4%: | 6%: | 8%: |
| Apostolic Church of Pentecost in Canada | .64% | 133 | 137 | 162 | 178 | 195 |
| Associated Gospel Churches | 2.7% | 138 | 158 | 168 | 185 | 203 |
| Atlantic Canada Assoc. of Free Will Baptists | 0 % | 17 | 17 | 21 | 23 | 25 |
| Baptist General Conference | 1.6 % | 84 | 91 | 102 | 112 | 123 |
| Bible Holiness Movement | - 6.1 % | 16 | 12 | 19 | 21 | 24 |
| Brethren in Christ, Canadian Conference | 2 % | 38 | 42 | 46 | 51 | 56 |
| Canadian Baptist Federation: | | | | | | |
| - Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec | - .6 % | 373 | 362 | 454 | 499 | 548 |
| - Atlantic United Baptist Federation | - .1 % | 551 | 548 | 670 | 737 | 810 |
| - Union of French Baptist Churches of Can. | 6.5 % | 25 | 34 | 30 | 33 | 37 |
| - Baptist Union of Western Canada | -.67 % | 168 | 169 | 204 | 225 | 247 |
| Can. Conf. of Mennonite Brethren Churches | 1.86% | 208 | 231 | 253 | 278 | 306 |
| Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists | 6.2 % | 107 | 145 | 130 | 143 | 157 |
| Christian & Missionary Alliance | 2.8 % | 376 | 432 | 457 | 503 | 552 |
| Christian Reformed Churches in Canada | 1.2 % | 230 | 244 | 280 | 308 | 338 |
| Church of God (Anderson) | - .3 % | 52 | 51 | 63 | 70 | 76 |
| Church of God (Cleveland) | 3.1 % | 99 | 115 | 120 | 132 | 145 |
| Church of the Nazarene Canada | 2.3 % | 186 | 208 | 226 | 249 | 273 |

⁴⁵ Currently known congregations. Updates on research data will affect growth projections.

⁴⁶ Projected number of churches in 2001 if the average annual church planting rate of the past study period for the denomination were to be continued into the future.

| | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------|
| Conference of Mennonites in Canada | 0 % | 149 | 149 | 181 | 199 | 219 |
| Congregational Christian Church of Canada | 4.4 % | 77 | 95 | 94 | 103 | 113 |
| Evangelical Covenant Church | -.5 % | 22 | 21 | 27 | 29 | 32 |
| Evangelical Free Church in Canada | 2.3 % | 134 | 150 | 163 | 179 | 197 |
| Evangelical Mennonite Conference | -.2 % | 49 | 49 | 60 | 66 | 72 |
| Evangelical Mennonite Missionary Confer. | 2.1 % | 27 | 30 | 33 | 36 | 40 |
| Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada ⁴⁷ | .1 % | 139 | 140 | 169 | 186 | 204 |
| Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches | 1.1 % | 503 | 531 | 612 | 673 | 739 |
| Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches | .5 % | 21 | 22 | 26 | 28 | 31 |
| Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada | 2.9 % | 52 | 60 | 63 | 70 | 76 |
| Free Methodist Church of Canada | .8 % | 140 | 146 | 170 | 187 | 206 |
| Italian Pentecostal Church | 4.1 % | 24 | 29 | 29 | 32 | 35 |
| North American Baptist Inc. Canada | 1.4 % | 130 | 139 | 158 | 174 | 191 |
| Mennonite Church (Canada) | 3.4 % | 111 | 131 | 135 | 149 | 163 |
| Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada | .5 % | 1050 | 1077 | 1277 | 1405 | 1543 |
| Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland | -.2 % | 160 | 158 | 195 | 214 | 235 |
| Plymouth Brethren (Christian Brethren) | 1 % | 442 | 465 | 538 | 591 | 649 |
| Presbyterian Church in American (Canada) | 16.6 % | 18 | 39 | 22 | 24 | 26 |
| Reformed Church in Canada | 4.8 % | 41 | 52 | 50 | 55 | 60 |
| The Salvation Army | .9 % | 408 | 427 | 496 | 546 | 599 |
| Seventh-Day Adventist | 1.7 % | 331 | 360 | 403 | 443 | 486 |
| The Wesleyan Church of Canada | - 1.5 % | 69 | 64 | 84 | 92 | 101 |
| United Pentecostal Church | -.3 % | 191 | 188 | 232 | 256 | 281 |
| Vineyard Christian Fellowship | 20 % | 43 | 107 | 52 | 58 | 63 |
| Composite/Totals: | 1.2 % | 7132 | 7533 | 8677 | 9544 | |
| 10479 | | | | | | |

Similar projections could be made for attendance and membership growth, which are the normal outcome of new church development.

The Harvest Force - The Church in Canada:

⁴⁷ Represents the combined Evangelical Church and Missionary Church prior to merger.

Let us summarize with a look at a broader picture of the Body of Christ in Canada. If the entire evangelical community in Canada is growing at the rate of our sample,⁴⁸ and the evangelical community in Canada continues to multiply churches at an average annual growth rate of 1.1%, we will not fulfill the Lord's desire for his house to be filled (Luke 14:23). But what would happen if our current average annual growth rate increased to 4%, 6%, or 8% and extended into the next decade?

Imagine the impact on Canadian society: the quality of human life and relationships, addictive behavior, crime rates, the experience of marriage and family life, abortion rates, and many other dimensions of human life!

Imagine the impact on eternity: the number of those enjoying the presence of God and worshipping in unspeakable joy increased, the Kingdom of God enlarged, the prince of darkness diminished, God honored forever!

Projected Evangelical Churches in Canada at Various Future Planting Rates

| Average Annual Planting Rate: | Projected Congregations: | | |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | AD 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
| 1.1% (current planting rate) (1.7% - Canadian rate of population growth) | 8595 | 9078 | 9588 |
| 2.5% | 8595 | 9724 | 11,002 |
| 4 % (4.5% - Overall World Evangelical Growth Rate) ⁴⁹ | 8595 | 10,457 | 12,723 |
| 6 % | 8595 | 11,502 | 15,392 |
| 8 % | 8595 | 12,628 | 18,555 |

The above table is also depicted in bar graph form in appendix 11 - **“Projecting Total Canadian Evangelical Churches at Various Planting Rates.”**

God's Call, Our Response:

In light of these facts, what are we called to do?

It may be that the Lord of the Harvest is calling us to lead our organizations, districts and congregations to pray, believe, and work trusting him to increase our respective church

⁴⁸ This is yet to be demonstrated. However, with our current sample representing approximately 83% of known evangelical congregations in the nation, the extension is probably warranted.

⁴⁹ Johnstone, Patrick. Operation World. Grand Rapids, Michigan (Zondervan), 1993, page 26.

planting rates to 4%, 6% or 8% annually as depicted in the above “Projecting New Congregations” table.

For some denominations such church planting rates would challenge greatly, others could increase their planting rate somewhat more easily.

Some denominations have in the past decade been developing congregations at a rate exceeding 8% and others may be able to do the same.

Further, the Lord may speak clearly now, or knowing his direction may require a season of prayer and consultation. But we are called to seek his will, listen and respond with creative strategies in bold faith.

Next Steps:

How may we move to response to the call to the harvest before us?

We propose that:

1. Each evangelical denomination or district which has not yet done so, by 1997, set its own goals for the number of churches to be planted by a given date, and develop and implement plans to reach their goals.⁵⁰
2. Each denomination and agency prioritize prayer and evangelism training for the harvest.
3. Each denomination gather worship attendance records as a key indicator of health and growth.
4. Each mission agency reconsider their mandate to determine if they may be able to help start embryonic churches and/or train leadership for doing so. If taking such initiatives seems inappropriate, mission agencies are asked to so orient their ministries that they work closely ‘alongside’ churches and denominations in their church-multiplication projects.
5. Means be engaged to determine which means and methods for church planting are currently being used by the Lord of the Harvest in groups and denominations producing the best growth, and that this information be shared by all.
6. We seek to determine which leadership equipping/training processes may be of greatest corporate benefit to the harvest force in the nation, province and neighbourhood.
7. We engage in a more expanded ‘harvest force’ and ‘harvest field’ survey. If you deem specific items of information useful to you in fulfilling your task, please let us know. Such research may be of value to all.
8. We commit ourselves to function together, as Christ’s Body in the nation, province, and city, each contributing what we are able, all committed to the task, understanding

⁵⁰ In this vital process Jim Montgomery’s [13 Steps to a Successful Growth Program](#) may be of assistance.

that it takes the whole Body to build the Body. So the stage is set for cooperative efforts and partnering.

9. Denominational district and city associations ministering in regions of the nation where population-per-church ratios are under 2000:1 should be challenged to assist in the planting of churches in regions and/or among people groups of the nation where this ratio above 2000:1. All districts and congregations should also be challenged to allocate a portion of their mission resources annually to church planting in the 10/40 window and other needy areas of the world.
10. We seek to gather national and area denominational executives, district superintendents, directors of evangelism and church extension, mission agency personnel, church planters and other interested persons for a major national three day conference - possibly in Toronto during October, 1997 - at which time we will share the clearest light we have on the 'harvest field' and the 'harvest force,' wait upon the Lord in prayer, and set national corporate goals for increases in church planting and worship attendance growth rates.

Our Utmost for His Highest!

May the Church in Canada give its corporate utmost, in prayer, priority, time, leadership, and finances to reaching the unreached in our high calling as ambassadors of Christ so that:

“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14)”

and we soon see the fulfillment, with the Apostle John, of:

“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

‘Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb! (Revelation 7:9-10)’

Murray Moerman, Lorne Hunter, Outreach Canada
Canadian National Church Planting Initiative, October 27-28, 1996, Toronto