

Executive Director's Report

October 13

2011

As we reflect on the activities of Bridges of Love Ministry and the unprecedented achievements of the past year, we are reminded of the core values that have continued to guide our work. From the time we opened our door seven years ago, connecting the church with the community with God's love, has been our mission. This past year we saw the result of years of perseverance come together. We invite you to read the story of Bridges of Love in 2010 – 2011.

**BRIDGES OF LOVE
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING**

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***“And this is love; that we walk in obedience to his commands.
As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love” 2 John 1:6***

As we complete year seven of building Bridges of Love, I am reminded of Bridges of Love's Value Statement which reads... *“To display the Lordship of Christ having the heart of servant hood as an integral part of our mandate as we care for the needs of others in our community through compassion, respect, confidentiality, sensitivity, responsibility, honesty, open communication and above all, love for one another.”*

As we reflect on the past year it has been filled with many moments to celebrate as well as circumstances to grieve. One such instance was the passing last November of Don Ford, our Treasurer of four years. Don was a very faith full Board Member and valued friend who continues to be missed.

Our Board of Directors has handled the extra responsibilities due to a smaller number of members participating than in previous years. Pastor Wilson Nelson stepped off the board as he was moving back to the US. We appreciated the time Nelson gave to our board. Thank you to Herb Arnold and Tom Pollon for their continued dedication to this ministry. We also thank those who have contributed financially, volunteered and offered prayer support which sustained us for another year.

Love can be demonstrated in many ways so building relationships of trust across the various sectors, has continued to be a priority. Our **Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative (FEPI) Advisory Council**, meet twice a year as we collaborate on the common theme of Emergency Preparedness. This year we were very pleased to welcome new members to the Council.

Dean Blue, **Manager of Emergency Preparedness, Alberta Health and Wellness**; Karen Mann, **Coordinator Red Deer Emergency Management Agency**; Bruce MacKenzie, **Director Alberta Emergency Management Agency for Central Alberta**; Jack MacDonald, **Red Deer Fire Chief**; Ken Hoffer, **Coordinator of Disaster Social Services** and Tytus Kociszewski, **Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer – Public Health Agency of Canada**; bringing our Council to 23 members. We met in Red Deer at CrossRoads Church on September 28 inviting Ken Hoffer to present CEMA's new emergency plans. May 30 marked our second meeting which was held in Calgary at St. John Lutheran Church. The relationships fostered are very beneficial not only to Bridges of Love but also to the other members. We appreciate these day long discussions.

Public Safety Canada made the decision to withdraw from the FEPI Advisory Council in September as they felt there was not sustainable funding for this project to continue and they had other more pressing matters which to focus. Jan Donais, Operations Manager, and Public Safety's representative on the Council, also retired and his position will not be filled. My hope is that Public Safety will return, however, so I continue to keep Michel Sigouin, Public Safety's Alberta Director up-dated. He has been pleased with our progress and continues to affirm FEPI.

Ken Hoffer, CEMA's new **Disaster Social Services Coordinator**, was assigned as Bridges of Love's contact. He kindly attended a FEPI meeting at our office in November, with some of our member churches, sharing the plans of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency. I gave an update on our progress to date and opened the floor for questions. As well, we had some discussion on fund raising events for Bridges of Love.

Bridges of Love offered assistance to Disaster Social Services inviting churches to go through the assessment to qualify as a **Reception Site** during an emergency. This inspiration was due to the positive experience of a church being used as a Reception Centre last May during the Millrise Fire. To date, eleven churches expressed a desire to go through the assessment and seven have already been approved. We will continue the process this fall. I have attended most of these visits so it has been an opportunity to see the various churches and meet the Pastors.

An endeavour introduced last year to increase church ownership and offer Bridges of Love sustainability was the FEPI "Bridge" Membership. The membership is built on a three tier structure where the fee is based on church membership. A **"Peace Bridge"** Member (under 100 members) pay \$101.00, a **"Stoney Trail"** Member (100 – 300 church members) pay \$201.00 and the **"Centre Street"** Bridge Member (over 300 church members) pay \$301.00 per year. Out of 45 FEPI Members, 7 are "Bridge Members." Our hope and prayer is to have every FEPI member sign on as a

financial contributor in the coming year so we will continue to work towards this goal. Included with FEPI membership is a laminated “*Muster Station*” sign which was mailed to each church member.

I continue to attend the Quarterly **Table Top Exercises at the Airport**. On one occasion, the facilitator, Natasha Koshowski invited my comments on how Bridges of Love would help during a bio-terrorism attack. It was nice to be included in the conversation and showed we have been recognized; having a role in the event of an Airport disaster.

Increasing knowledge and understanding of the emergency field as well as in gaining leadership skills continue to be my quest. This past year, I was accepted into the **Leadership Plus**, six month mentorship program with CentrePoint Non-profit Management. We covered Governance, Fund Raising, Strategic Thinking and Planning, Human Resources and Fund Development. Seven other Executive Directors participated in the course so it was a great learning environment and opened the door to meet others in leadership roles. I was invited to sit on the Advisory Committee for the Cities Attainable Housing Project due to a relationship made during this time.

Each year we try to offer an event to increase awareness of the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative during **Emergency Preparedness Week**. This year, Dr. Arthur Bradley, author and speaker was invited to share his expertise for “**Emergency Preparedness...Ready or Not.**” Dr. Bradley is the author of “*Handbook to Practical Disaster Preparedness for the Family.*” He is a senior scientist and electrical engineer for NASA in West Virginia. His book has been well received all over the world.

We held two sessions, a Saturday morning in Calgary (Rocky Mountain College) and one evening event in Red Deer (CrossRoads Church). We also invited **Jim Stevenson, Alderman** and member of the City Emergency Committee to say a few words as well, a representative from CEMA brought their greetings. Both sessions were excellent and those who attended were very impressed with the calibre of teaching. We thank Dr. Bradley and the volunteers who helped with this very worthwhile event.

The Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) included Bridges of Love in their Emergency Preparedness Week activity, “**Disaster Alley**” which took place May 7. We joined other CEMA partners with a display at their Command Centre. I invited other FEPI partners to participate but they were not available so Tom and I shared our mission and vision with many. It was a great day and was another opportunity to raise awareness of our cause.

The **FEPI Terms of Reference** was completed in January, reviewed and then accepted by the Advisory Council and FEPI Quadrant Lead Churches. The **FEPI Operations Manual** was completed in April and accepted for distribution. I appreciated the help of Chris McKiernan, Emergency Director for Alberta Health Services who critiqued each document as well as the help of others who offered suggestions. This material has been shared with our FEPI Churches, the Advisory Council Members, and has been posted on the Bridges of Love web site.

Two of our Quadrant Lead Churches, **Bonavista Evangelical Missionary Church (SE)** and **Red Deer Lake United Church (SW)** had events at their church to raise awareness of the initiative. Red Deer Lake hosted a Chilli Luncheon with proceeds from the lunch kindly donated to Bridges of Love. Bonavista hosted an information evening inviting their FEPI Churches in the SE. Our hope is to have more such events in the future.

Fred Friesen, spear-headed FEPI in their church taking the SE Quadrant Lead. Fred is retiring and his emergency committee have decided to step down as SE Quadrant Lead but will remain active as a FEPI Bridge Member. Bonavista has been a financial supporter beyond their Bridge Membership which shows their continued affirmation of the initiative. We have appreciated his support and that of his committee both as FEPI “Bridge” Members and Fred’s participation on the FEPI Advisory Council since its inception. Thank you Fred, you will be missed!

Our **web site** continues to be viewed by many from all over the world. It is updated with regularity and the number of hits exceeds 10,000 each month with up to 60 countries viewing the site. Multiple files are down-loaded each day so it is evident that there is great interest in this work. With **hubby Tom’s** expertise, we have added videos to the site which adds a new dimension.

I was fortunate to be included in a **Social Media Workshop** hosted by IBM and CentrePoint. It was a full day of information which stressed the importance of this tool for the non-profit sector. This is an area we have not been too involved so this year we plan to broaden our Social Media presence.

As we continue to expand our mission throughout Alberta, we once again manned a booth at Mission Fest, Alberta. One gentleman who came to our booth, Doug Sproule, was so excited about our work and it was very evident he was

a kindred spirit. Following Mission Fest he shared our message with his church and others in central Alberta. Doug was involved in Emergency Preparedness both with his company and with the municipality of Lacombe. Unfortunately, Doug passed away very suddenly at the age of 55 from a massive heart attack. I knew Doug only a short time but his love for God, his kind spirit, and inspiration to build God's Kingdom will be remembered. .

Our FEPI Advisory Council Meeting, May 30, ended with a special luncheon where a **CEMA - Bridges of Love Service Agreement** was signed by CEMA and Bridges of Love. This Agreement formalized our partnership with the City of Calgary with a commitment from Bridges of Love that FEPI Churches would be on hand to assist if called upon during a Level "D" Emergency. **Devinder Shory, MP** brought greetings from the Federal Government offering their congratulations. Also, **Chris McKiernan, Emergency Preparedness Director for Calgary and Central Alberta with Alberta Health Services and FEPI Advisory Council Member** joined Devinder in expressing his affirmation of this initiative. **Dr. Garth Mann, CEO/President of Statesman Corporation** (my brother) shared personal stories as they dealt with a major disaster in one of their condominium complexes

Having a Service Agreement with the Calgary Emergency Management Agency opens the door for training for Bridges of Love and our FEPI Churches. I was invited to attend the **Enrich Project - Enhancing Resilience among High Risk Populations**, which is an endeavour of the University of Ottawa. We spent a day with other stakeholders discussing the vulnerable populations during a disaster and then a few months later spent a day evaluating the results. It was most interesting and gave us an opportunity to meet others in the field. I was also fortunate to attend the Orientation to **ESS Incident Command System Structure** as well as the **AEMA Course-DSS Registration & Inquiry** sponsored by the Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA).

With a major fire in Alberta last March we were given an opportunity to demonstrate God's Love. We invited FEPI Churches to write cards and letters of encouragement to those who had gone through the **Slave Lake fire**. A friend, who volunteers at the Bowden Correctional Institute, was sharing this opportunity with the inmates one evening, and they asked if they too, could write. Fifteen beautiful letters were shared by these men, some of whom came from that area. Tom and I visited St. Peter's Ecumenical Church in Slave Lake to deliver these notes personally during their Sunday morning Service. After presenting our warm wishes to St. Peter's Church they distributed a few letters to each of the churches in their city. We had a tour of the town by Pastor Tracy Ottenbreit, head of the Slave Lake Ministerial and Lead Pastor of the Alliance Church. I also, visited with Slave Lake **Fire Chief, Jamie Coutts** hearing his story and that of their community. A card of encouragement was also left for the fire men who served their community during this devastating fire.

One last endeavour was the **transformation of Bridges of Love's office** which took place over the summer. We continue to appreciate our office at St. John Lutheran Church, but the time had come for a little up-date. It started with a kind donation of laminate flooring from our eldest son and family. As with most renovations, once you get started it leads to further changes. A coat of paint and some wall-paper gave a fresh new look. Many thanks to hubby Tom and sons, Trevor and Mark for their help to bring our office space to a lovely new reality.

It has indeed been a busy but fulfilling year of activities. With the Service Agreement in place, Bridges of Love Ministry opened a door of opportunity for the churches to engage in an initiative which could bridge the church and the community. Inclusion of Faith Based Organizations, particularly local ones, in planning, coordination, integration, training and exercises will assure an effective and coordinated church response.

We know the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative has the potential to augment government services and the services of others who respond to disasters by providing an extensive network of trained, coordinated, educated and equipped church volunteers. (**SWAT Teams** – Servants with Abilities and Training) We welcome the opportunity to serve those in our community demonstrating 'living proof of a loving God.' As Vic Toews, Minister of Public Safety Canada shared with Bridges of Love...*"When it comes to emergency management and emergency preparedness, we ALL have a role to play."*

The Chinese character for crisis means both **danger** and **opportunity**. It is a time to embrace the opportunities before us as we engage in an act of **faith**. Deciding to make change is the easy part; getting people on board is more difficult. Change is the key that unlocks the door to growth so when patterns are broken, new worlds emerge. Thank you for joining in the journey and adventure of building Bridges of Love in our community.

In His Service,
Marg Pollon, Founding Director
October 13, 2011