

Executive Director's Report

September 22

2012

As we reflect on the activities of Bridges of Love Ministry and the increased activities and achievements from the past year, we are reminded of God's unfailing love and faithfulness. We have indeed had an exciting and fulfilling year. We invite you to share in our journey as we come to the close of our eighth fiscal year.

**BRIDGES OF
LOVE ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING**

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***“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”
2 Timothy 1:7***

The verse from 2 Timothy 1:7 is a reminder for what can be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. It has indeed been a year of miracles that can only be attributed to our Lord and Saviour.

We have enjoyed and appreciated the many activities over the past year. Before I begin to share the high-lights, however, I would like to acknowledge and thank our Board of Directors. Herb Arnold who we consider a part of the family served another year as Board Chair. We appreciate his continued support, service and availability to assist where needed. We also thank Tom Pollon who has taken on the IT duties. His gifts in this area have certainly been a great boost to our web sites; keeping them running to their full potential. We are also very grateful to Lois Reid bringing experience in emergency management offering insight and expertise to our planning discussions.

We also thank those who have contributed financially, volunteered and offered prayer support which sustained us through another year. After eight years, the work could be over-whelming but I know the prayers of many have sustained and given strength for the task God has called us to fulfil. We are also grateful for our office space at St. John Lutheran Church. They have been most generous to have me part of their facility for the past eight years.

We continue to build relationships of trust with the Public Sector and were fortunate to be invited by the Calgary Emergency Management Agency to participate in the Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) training in October, 2011. The CERT Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community.

CEMA internal as well as external partners were part of this training which was excellent. We were given a DVD of the training so with CERT permission I added Canadian content. My hope for the coming year is to work with a new contact, Brian Cheung, who is very interested in facilitating a course with Bridges of Love for both church and community.

Our numbers have grown on the FEPI Advisory Council to now include the Public Health Agency of Canada, two new representatives from Alberta Health and Wellness, and the Canadian Red Cross. We were also very happy to welcome Major Roy Langer back on the Council after his move to Calgary. We have a meeting scheduled Nov. 5 inviting Michel Sigouin, Regional Director for Public Safety Canada. Relationships with the Public Sector continue to be built as I entertained Bruce Burrell (Fire Chief), Ken Uzeloc (Executive Officer, CFD), Tom Sampson (Deputy Chief), Cheryl Bourassa (Executive Director, AHS) and Chris McKiernan (Calgary EM Director, AHS) for lunch last October. It is very valuable to meet in a casual and informal setting and they have an opportunity to see our operation and get to know the work of Bridges of Love a little better.

Last summer, Tom and I took a little trip up to Slave Lake to deliver letters of encouragement from FEPI churches to those who had suffered through the fires which devastated their town. While there, I had an opportunity to visit with the Fire Chief, Jamie Coutts. When Jamie heard what Bridges of Love was doing in Calgary he kindly offered to speak about their experiences. We decided to take him up on his offer, so in October we combined our AGM with two



discussions (Beauty for Ashes) about the Slave Lake fire incident. The afternoon dessert time was for the church community and the evening event was targeted at the general public. The event was held at St. John Lutheran Church so we appreciate using their facility for this event. Calgary's Deputy Chief Tom Sampson attended introducing his colleague and friend, Jamie Coutts. We also invited our past treasurer's wife, Dorothy Ford to come and accept a little tribute made to her husband Don who was our long time treasurer for Bridges of Love until his passing the previous year. Pastor Arnie Alkanse welcomed our guests and opened in prayer.

Another memorable event for Bridges of Love took place in November when Calgary was experiencing a horrific wind storm. Due to the strong winds, windows were blown out of downtown buildings so people were being evacuated from their residences. At 12:30 AM our phone rang and it was the Disaster Social Services Lodging Team inquiring whether Bridges of Love had a FEPI church in the downtown core that could open its doors as a Reception Centre. Within a short time period we had a church on stand-by. DSS made the decision to use a larger facility (Mawata Armouries) but it was a great experience and showed how viable this initiative is. One of our FEPI Advisory Council members, Dr. John Lucas was the recipient of the call, and due to the relationship we had fostered over the years, it was not a hard call to make. As always John was most gracious and was very happy to help any way he could. One lesson learned through this experience was the importance of having 24 hr. contact information for each FEPI church.

Susan Fernandez, Lodging Team coordinator and myself visited 9 churches to do Reception Centre Assessments. CEMA is responsible for the reception centres but it was great to collaborate on this endeavour.

We had another opportunity to help during the evacuation of the Huntington Hills condo due to mould in the complex. CUPS was asked to look after the evacuation and due to the over-whelming job ahead, they called Bridges of Love to see if we had volunteers who could assist with the move of 24 families. I dropped in to see what the situation was and had the good fortune to be introduced to a family who was in need of assistance. After speaking with this lovely family (from Iraq) I was able to convince them they had to leave the building the next morning so they finally accepted CUPS help to relocate. We took them some dinner after they settled in their new home and later entertained them in our home for a meal. It was a great experience and it was indeed a blessing to be included.

I gave a presentation to an Adult Sunday School Class at Hope Lutheran Church. A power point was presented offering a glimpse into the church emergency response and out-reach opportunity. We appreciated Lois Reid making introductions to her church and opening this door.

I appreciated the opportunity to attend Disaster Social Services Open Forum (November 9) in Calgary. There were all day discussions on various topics presented by Alberta DSS representatives. It was a very valuable experience meeting other partners in the field. The topics I participated in were Communication, Volunteerism, and Donations. I could readily identify areas where FEPI could assist with some of the concerns which were identified. I also had the opportunity to attend an all day discussion with Ottawa University on best practices for assisting vulnerable populations during a disaster.

The wheels were in motion as the New Year began to submit an application for a Council Strategic Initiative Funding Grant for Pandemic Tabletop Exercises to be conducted in each quadrant of the city by Emergency Response Management Consulting. After completing the proposal and gathering nine very encouraging letters from Public Sector partners and one church, we were not successful in the bid. Fortunately, however, as a backup I also put in a Letter of Intent to the Calgary Foundation. They very kindly offered a small grant for \$5000 to conduct one Pandemic Tabletop Exercise which was held at Emmanuel Church on May 11. We were so very thankful to the Calgary Foundation for giving this opportunity to test our FEPI structure and it opened the door for future grant applications.

Twenty participants from FEPI churches and FEPI Advisory Council members spent the morning going through a pandemic scenario with a goal to introduce individuals to a theoretical pandemic scenario that would require a response from the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative (FEPI) partners. A follow-up evaluation report was documented by ERMC. They offered to give us an additional day to discuss their findings and recommendations which was held on



July 5 with AHS attending and four other participants from the Tabletop Exercise. The follow-up was very beneficial as we developed a template for a more comprehensive Contact and Resource Assessment Form which gives greater depth to our church information.



CEMA's Disaster Alley took place May 12 and Bridges of Love was again very pleased to be part of this day. Tom and I had a lot of fun and spoke too many visitors to our booth. We gave out heart suckers, 60 Love Bee...ing Prepared toques and 100 magnets with City Emergency Numbers and FEPI Coordination Centre Contact information as well as resource material and FEPI brochures. All was well received and we both came home feeling very pleased with the day. I attended the debriefing session at CEMA's head-quarters and they reported a very good day with lots of emergency preparedness interest generated.

I continue to attend the Leadership Prayer Breakfast as often as possible so we are asked to give the devotional every six months. My devotional was focused on my favourite topic "Love Bee...ing Prepared" so each one received a Bee Prepared toque. I have made over 200 toques and given most of them away to Public Sector partners, friends, and colleagues.



The Lord has certainly blessed us this past year as on September 13, 2012 we were honoured by the Calgary Chamber of Volunteer Organizations, with the Calgary Non-profit Innovation Award. A reception was held at the Kahanoff Centre to present the engraved plaque and we also participated in a discussion with the other three recipients. A cheque for \$2500 accompanied the special Award so it was greatly appreciated. Honouring a Christian organization by a secular agency was a milestone and will help with our credibility and future endeavours.

Summary – We have reason to celebrate the accomplishments from the past year as the hurdles jumped and relationships developed will stand us in good stead for future endeavours. We again thank all those who have contributed to our ministry and we will look forward to a new year of building Bridges of Love.

In His Service,
Marg Pollon, Founding Director
September 22, 2012