



AGC
ASSOCIATED GOSPEL CHURCHES

OUR PURPOSE

To glorify God by partnering together in obedience to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission

OUR VISION

To be a movement of healthy reproducing churches

CONNECT 2022

Be ♥
THE
CHANGE

Love in Action

What does it mean to love one another? Jesus said, ***“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”*** (John 13:35). This is more than that warm fuzzy feeling we get when we dim the lights during worship as the music softens, and we repeatedly sing some well-known worship song. More often, the reality is that the words of Jesus’ teaching to love each other often clash with our own biases, attitudes, and actions. The past two years have proven that as we quickly became distracted and divided. As the Church, we need to do better.

To love one another in the way Jesus meant requires three intentional actions on our part. First, it requires that we recognize the differences and uniqueness of each other. We are not all the same, we won’t always agree, and it’s okay, we can remain friends.

Second, it requires that we build others up rather than giving in to our own wants and desires. It means that serving others becomes both an attitude AND an action. Do we have joy in serving and building others up?

Third, it requires that our focus is on Jesus, not ourselves. He is our example. Jesus said that if we love one another, then those without Christ, those lost and in need of His forgiveness, will know that we are His disciples.

In his book *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund says; *“If we allow the world around us in our present cultural moment to dictate to us the significance of friendship,*

we not only lose out on a reality vital to human flourishing at the horizontal level; we lose out, even worse, on enjoying the friendship of Christ at a vertical level” (Ortlund p. 114).

As God’s image-bearers, we are called to mission. One of the blessings of the COVID pandemic is that, in many ways, it moved us from the pew back to the community, rubbing shoulders with neighbours, friends, and others. Do they know we are His disciples? We have a great opportunity to proclaim the truth of the power of the Gospel to many who are weary, hurt, fearful, and seeking answers.

The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Philippi encouraged them with these words; ***“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone ...”*** (Philippians 4:4-5). These same words speak to us as we seek to live out love in action.

I trust this edition of CONNECT will encourage you as we seek to love one another so that the world will know that we are HIS disciples!

Rev. Bill Allan – AGC President



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Why is our World so Lacking in Love?

I grew up hearing Diana Ross sing, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of."

If we had a shortage of love thirty years ago, we're in even more desperate need of it today.

The kind of love our broken world needs is not merely sentimental or superficial. We need a love that is sacrificial. We need a love that isn't just reserved for those who like us (or who are just like us). We need a love that doesn't wither when relationships heat up. We need a love that is strong enough to absorb pain and not retaliate.

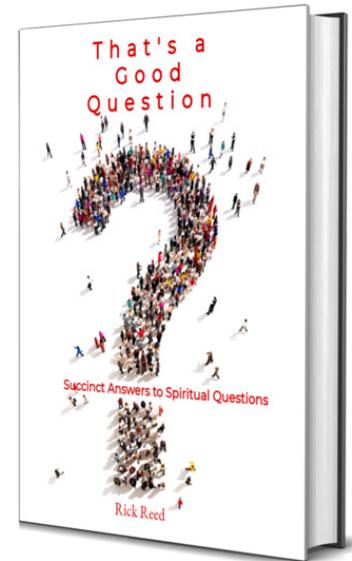
This kind of love doesn't come naturally to us. It only comes supernaturally. It comes from God because God is love (1 John 4:7-8).

God demonstrated what true love looks like when He sent us His Son, Jesus. **"This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins"** (1 John 4:10).

When we respond to God's love by trusting in Christ Jesus, He promises to pour out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). He fills and refills us with the love we need. His love gives us both a reason and the resources to love others. **"We love because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19).

When God's love fills people's hearts, it will make a world of a difference.

(This article is taken from *That's a Good Question*, by Dr. Rick Reed, President of Heritage College and Seminary. You can download a free copy of this eBook here), (<https://rickandlindareed.com/speaking-teaching/books-and-study-guides/>).



Expecting to be Alone

My wife and I are not from Canada, and with our visa restrictions, along with the pandemic, we have not been able to be with our family for many years.

We were expecting to be alone again this past Christmas, which wasn't anything new, but for some reason, it felt much harder. We didn't want to complain about our circumstances and the loneliness we were feeling. We were busy with church programs during the holiday season which helped keep us distracted.

One day, we were approached by a widow in our church who said, "If you don't have plans, we will expect to see you tomorrow for Christmas Day dinner!" Another family had approached us that same day, saying "We would really love to have you over for Christmas Eve dinner with our family." This was followed by another church family offering this loving invitation, "Would you be willing to come for supper the day after Christmas and spend time with us?" Our hearts were so full. We ended up with many more invites and unfortunately had to turn them down because we were completely booked!

We were so overwhelmed by the love and friendship of our church family. It was unbelievable! We even went for supper to one home where the family had gifts for us under the tree. The Lord had blessed us more than we could ever imagine. It was one of the best Christmas holidays that we've experienced in a long time. We simply praise the Lord for His loving kindness and the friendships that have blessed us beyond measure. Our church family showing loving kindness is a true reflection of God's love.

Rev. Alejandro Bojórquez – Maryfield Associated Gospel Church, Maryfield, SK

"Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering... The love of God did not protect His own Son... He will not necessarily protect us – not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process."

~ Elisabeth Elliot



We Didn't Set Out to Fill Seats on Sundays

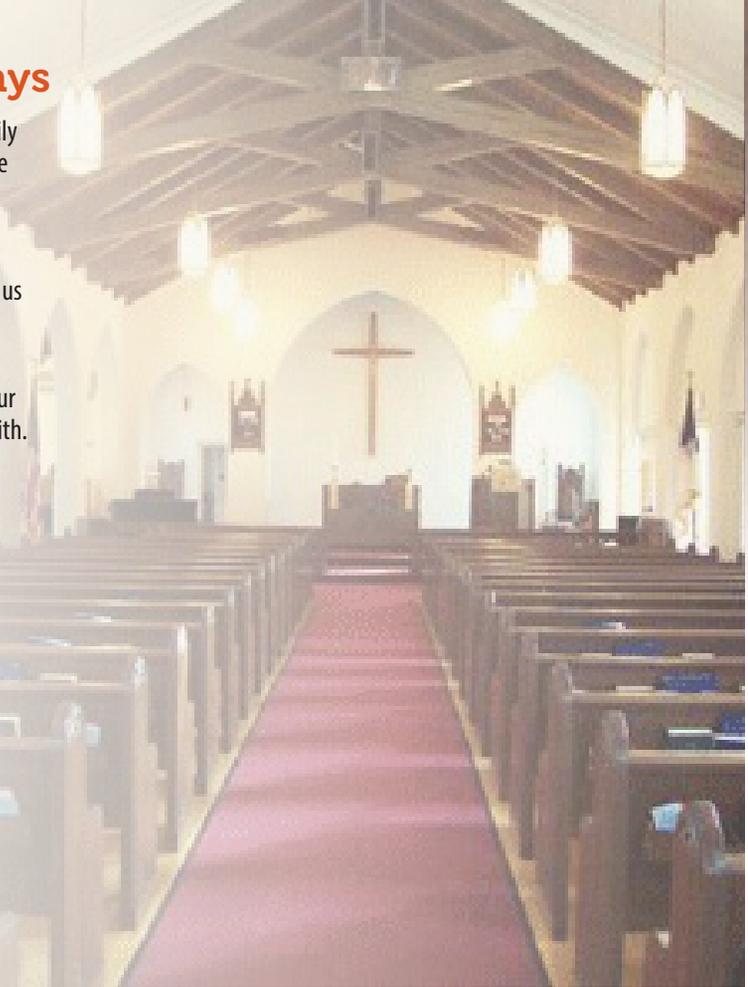
My family lives in downtown Hamilton. Our neighbours include a multi-generational family daycare; six bachelor-till-the-rapture millennials; a drug-dealing 'family business'; a single woman and her dog; a homosexual couple; a widowed artist, and some struggling empty nesters. We know and love them. They've been in our home and we in theirs. We know their stories and pray for them continually. We're committed to loving our neighbours in incarnational, Gospel-rich relationships. Yet so far, not one of these neighbours has joined us for a church service.

Benediction Church isn't a megachurch; we're a handful of committed families who love one another and help one another become more like Jesus. We pray for our neighbours. Our services are Gospel-centered and fulfilling, but not yet filled full. It sometimes tests our faith.

One day my neighbour Joshua yelled for me to "get up here" onto his porch — a common occurrence over the years. But today he looked like he'd seen a ghost. He exclaimed, "Dude! God is real, and He was there all along!" During his recent hospital stay, he realized he wanted to be right with God. I listened and asked some questions, then invited him to pray and simply tell God all the things he'd just told me. He gave his life to Jesus then and there. Since then, we've been reading the Bible together and talking about what Jesus says and does.

This is a big part of why we started Benediction. We didn't set out to fill seats on Sundays, but rather that it might be just a bit more "in Hamilton as it is in heaven." I'm still learning to trust God with His timing. May you do the same! May you become more assured than ever that God is sovereign and good. He loves our neighbours, and He is at work doing what we don't see, all in His time and in His way!

Rev. Mike Mileski – Benediction Church, Hamilton, ON



"In the New Testament, love is more of a verb than a noun. It has more to do with acting than with feeling. The call to love is not so much a call to a certain state of feeling as it is to a quality of action." ~ R. C. Sproul

Make Known that Love

It was February 2021, and we were attempting to navigate the emotions that came with the realization that God was calling us to leave our church family and ministry for something new. Pandemics are not ideal times for saying goodbye. Long months of ever-shifting accommodations and differences of opinion had confounded the issue of what it meant to finish well. To leave what had been our spiritual family in a context of divided disagreement was excruciating.

And then . . . our youngest daughter Emma, (age 1) was diagnosed with stage four Neuroblastoma, a rare cancer exclusive to young children. Every issue and plan faded into the background. We didn't know when we might finalize plans to move or even if we could continue serving. Suddenly, the strain and disagreements faded, overridden with love and support.

Someone was bold enough to suggest that God might be using the

crisis to arrange for His love to be lavished on us through the church during our final months there. I believe she was right.

If you asked me to list who I agreed or disagreed with during my final year, the task would be difficult and would call to mind many of my failures and regrets. Ask me instead to list who I am loved by at Wetaskiwin Mission Church, or our new home, Faith Community Church, and my heart fills with joy realizing that God provided the love that is uniquely characteristic of His people.

This love that Jesus prayed for and commanded is considered to be the unshakable evidence of membership in the family of God. The Apostle Paul urges believers to advance in this love "**more and more.**" Perhaps most striking of all, Peter states that sincere brotherly love is an essential and imperishable element of our new life in Christ (1 Peter 1:22-23). He urges us then to "**love one another earnestly from a pure heart.**"

In the crisis we faced, the love which God had already supplied in His people was made known. It's not up to us to *make* the kind of love that Jesus has commanded; it is up to us to *make known* that love.

Rev. Andrew Chambers – Faith Community Church, Blackfalds, AB

~ Editor's note: by the grace of God, at the time of writing Emma's doctors have declared her to officially be "in remission"! This comes after twelve months of treatment and zealous prayer from churches across Canada. ~



Love Unrestricted



As COVID became a household name, its effects spared no one. It has been a dreaded topic of conversation for many people, especially those who experienced the virus firsthand. It brought fear, pain, anxiety, and hopeless thoughts to some people, even Christians. It brought us to an understanding of how transient life can be.

"The ingathering" described in the Second chapter of Acts became the longing of many believers as church fellowships were limited to online means. Though it was the best option at that time, no one could deny that it was not sufficient in addressing the needs of the Lord's flock.

As the virus spread over our city, families in our church were infected. While restrictions were in place, the leadership needed to come up with ways to minister more tangibly. Prayer bulletins were posted on the church's Facebook so everyone could participate in praying for one another. A weekly online prayer meeting was established. Food baskets were distributed to COVID victims, while other families prepared food and shared it with them. Some members even volunteered to do errands for others. The church community was able to adapt to the ever-changing situation and learned ways to continue showing love and care to one another. The current condition, though still far from normal, convinced us that the "one anothers" taught by Christ is vital for the church to be strong. Showing love to one another becomes an effective witness to the world. No matter how simple our act of kindness, when it is done for the love of God, it will reap rewards.

Rev. Gerrad Fortaleza – The Grace of God Christian Church, Calgary, AB

"Only one life,' twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." ~ Charles Studd

Show Grace

One cannot write on the topic of love and unity without referencing these past two years. It's been a unique time given all that came with the pandemic. There were lockdowns, mandates, vaccinations, and passports which was enough cause for a good, heated conversation. Throw in a couple of National elections and you've got yourselves a perfect storm for discord and Christian partisanship. Unfortunately, many of those conversations and arguments were on social media for all the world to see. Now, I won't lie and say that *Grace Church Verdun* was immune from such discussions. We weren't. So how were we able to be a light in our community, demonstrating God's love amid all that?

We showed grace to one another...

It wasn't a perfect grace. That only comes from God. Yet, it was a grace that left our church body standing in one piece, even healthier than before. It's not that everyone didn't have their opinion on masks, passport mandates, political affiliations, etc. We most certainly did and still do. It doesn't mean that all the elders have agreed on every item on the agenda. We don't. It doesn't mean that our congregation has agreed on every decision we've made on certain matters such as masks and passport mandates. They haven't. But what it does mean, is that as a body, we've decided to extend grace, allowing for a difference of opinions and positions, while not falling into the trap of caricaturing the other individual.

It's in such grace for one another that the world has been able to see the grace of God played out while others continue to crucify one another over their differences. May we as the Bride of Christ offer the world something different in how we engage with others. May we, by God's Spirit, show grace, so the world will know that God's love is in us.

Rev. Brad Mellette – Grace Church, Verdun, QC

"You can always give without loving, but you can never love without giving." ~ Amy Carmichael

Pouring Out onto Our Streets

Moving into a new city and connecting with a new church is difficult for any family. To do that during COVID while churches were back and forth between meeting and not meeting in person made things challenging. Not being able to have fellowship time after the services made the ordeal an even greater challenge.

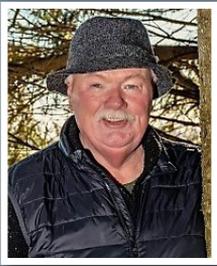
When a family moved in around the corner from our home and began to attend our church without having the benefits of the usual points of connection, my family took the opportunity to pour into them. The result was a gift as our relationship developed into an incredible friendship. My wife, Sarah, and I understood their challenges and wanted them to be supported and loved, and our three young children have been blessed by their love in return.

We knew that this was important for the family coming in, but what we didn't expect was the effect this had on our next-door neighbours. As young parents themselves, they saw the openness of our home and the joy that we all had when we were together. When we hosted *VBS At Home* in our backyard last summer with a few families of kids from the church, one of our neighbours joined in with her son. She was welcomed by all and was able to see a clear picture of love as she heard the Gospel message.

We continue to pray that our neighbours will respond to the Gospel. In the meantime, we thank the Lord for how we have been truly blessed. We have been enriched in our relationships with other believers. God has blessed each of us and these blessings are literally pouring out onto our streets and the neighbours around us.

*Andrew McGrath, Youth Pastor
– Calvary Church, St. Catharines, ON*



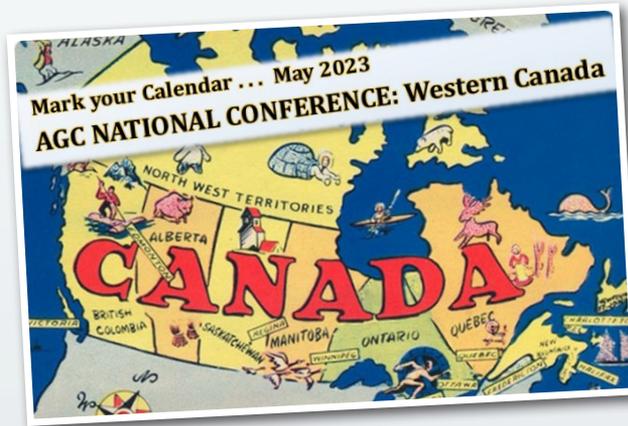


Remembered

Rev. Brian Barr, (*The Gathering House, Chesterville, ON*) was called home to be with the Lord on February 28, 2022. Brian is lovingly remembered and missed by many friends as well as his congregation and his AGC family. We continue to pray for his wife, Judy, his children, and grandchildren. Well done, good and faithful servant!

Graduate Preaching Cohort

In a cohort partnership with Heritage College & Seminary, Cambridge ON., the AGC has nine pastors enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Biblical Preaching program. This five-module program is both peer and professor-reviewed, helping these pastors further develop the gift God has given them in preaching the Word!



By the Numbers 2021

The National Coordinator of Doctrine & Credentials kept busy with the processing of applications of potential pastoral candidates and credentialing interviews. This assures that our pastors are doctrinally aligned with the AGC.

- Applications Processed:* ■ 42
- Interviews Conducted:* ■ 36
- Inductions Completed:* ■ 22
- Inductions Pending:* ■ 5
- Credentials Issued:* ■ 33

Spurring Us on to Love

My husband Rob (*Regional Director, AGC West*) and I have the special privilege of travelling to our 49 churches in Western Canada. While it's true that these past two years have been hard for pastors, it's also been a time of purifying in our churches. Most churches have lost people but have gained others. However, I don't want to dwell on the problems we've had, instead, I want to share a story of one of our favourite pastoral visits in hopes of "*spurring us on to love.*"

In the Fall of 2020, Rob and I made our first trek to a little place called Bonanza, AB. We met with two men who wanted to keep their little church "alive." We found out that they were down to 6 people attending on a good Sunday. We prayed with them but honestly wondered how we could do anything to help them. We kept on praying though.

Fast-forward to our next road trip to Bonanza, September 2021. We were expecting to have a sad conversation about how to close this little church. But God had a surprise waiting for us! We were met by 11 people who were busy preparing lunch. Just before our meeting one of the ladies enthusiastically announced that we were first going to have a service. This was a surprise as it was Monday morning - not Sunday! My always-prepared husband went out to the car to grab his Bible, while I volunteered to play piano for a few hymns. We sang with exuberance, and then Rob shared from the Word. Afterward, we received the wonderful news that their congregation had grown from 6 to 16 during COVID no less and all this happened without a pastor! We could quickly see why; the people at *Bonanza Gospel Chapel* were loving one another! We left there feeling so blessed.

A few months later, we received an e-mail telling us that the church now had 9 couples, 7 singles, 3 teens and 8 children attending. That's 36 people if you're counting! And still no pastor. Let's continue to pray while we spur one another on to love and good deeds!

Wendy Cochrane – Swift Current, SK

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23-25).



Inside Out

A drive-through food give-away, a neighbourhood care day, a partnership with a local youth centre. The past 24 months turned our approach to ministry upside down—or perhaps more accurately, inside out.

In a divisive season, our church family found unity by rallying around a shared vision to be a community for our local neighbours, spurring one another on to carry the Gospel to the places we live, work and play.

Turning our united focus to our neighbours, we were quickly struck by the reality of food insecurity. Partnering with an established local food bank, we hosted and staffed a drive-through grocery giveaway. One food drive led to another, evolving into a strategic partnership with Village of Hope (thevillageofhope.ca). Together, we've distributed more than 50,000 pounds of food over the last year.

Encouraged by our community's response, our local outreach team launched a follow-up initiative: *"I Love My Neighbour."* We invited our community to share requests—handyman tasks, gardening, spring cleaning—and our Calvary teams showed up to help. Volunteers of all ages rallied together, literally getting their hands dirty, supporting our neighbours' practical needs.

We've been privileged to hire a staff member to champion these outreach efforts and mentor youth at our local drop-in centre. His willingness to do

life with the youth has already yielded fruit. Students who, by their own admission, didn't want anything to do with God or the Church have found that Sunday mornings are a highlight of their week.

We're learning that carrying out Christ's command to serve the least of these is a sweet amora to our Heavenly Father—and our neighbours. We celebrated with two neighbours who put their trust in Christ and welcomed 28 members who caught our inside-out vision. As we've increased involvement with people and ministries outside our walls, the sense of community inside our church family has grown, not because we all hold the same opinions and preferences but because it's not about us, it's about Him.



Rev. Andrew Melo – Calvary Gospel Church, Beamsville, ON

The Fullness of God's Love

Love One Another! Can the whole Gospel message be summed up in these three little words? We can love because we are loved. Jesus, our Redeemer, first loved us. By His Spirit, we, in turn, can and should intentionally love others, both the easy and the hard.

Jesus' love is radical. He loved us so much that He gave His all, His very life on a cross of brutal suffering. His love breaks down all barriers. It's a beautiful thing.

Together, in community, let us take in the deep meaning behind the Apostle Paul's prayer found in Ephesians 3. When we, by faith are rooted and grounded in Christ, we receive strength to understand the vastness of His love. When we receive His love, it will ultimately spill over and touch our world! As you've read these stories, we invite you to join us in giving thanks for the many testimonies of love demonstrated throughout our family of AGC churches. God is indeed able to do more abundantly than we can imagine!

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Susan Page – AGC Church Relations Coordinator

The Power of
God's Love
(Ephesians 3:14-21)



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