

Focus On:

VANCOUVER

Over one hundred years ago some people recognized the potential of what is now the thriving city of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Those visionaries saw that there was money to be made in developing Vancouver as the critical link between trans-Canada railway traffic and round-the-world sea routes. Time has amply justified their optimism. Today Vancouver is a bustling, growing city of almost two million people. Its importance as a port city and its traditional forestry, mining, and fishing industries have allowed it to develop into a major economic centre. Everywhere there is evidence of its prosperity. Even over the past decade the pace of life in the city has dramatically accelerated. Construction cranes dot the skyline—a skyline that is one of the most beautiful any city can boast. The problem of maintaining the city's economic growth and its environmental and cultural heritage is one the authorities are facing with care. Framed by spectacular mountain and ocean scenery, Vancouver is already a major tourist attraction—providing yet another lucrative industry to strengthen its economy.

Just off the coast, an hour-and-a-half's ferry ride through some of the most majestic scenes imaginable, lies the city of Victoria. Victoria is situated at the southern tip of Vancouver Island and is the capital of British Columbia. Named after Queen Victoria, it retains a strong British flavour—right down to its red double-decker busses. Set against the backdrop of the Olympic Mountains, the city is a popular tourist

destination. In fact, tourism is second only to government in importance to its economy.

Racial Diversity

The two regions of which these cities are parts form the area of the *Let the Bible Speak* witness from Cloverdale Free Presbyterian Church. The broadcast covers the greater Vancouver area and Vancouver Island—indeed it crosses the border with the United States into northwestern Washington, though it does not reach the city of Seattle.

The area has a multi-national population. Vancouver is the gateway to Canada for people from the Pacific rim. Asians are the largest ethnic minority in British Columbia. Communist China's assumption of control over Hong Kong led to large-scale Chinese immigration into Canada, and many of the immigrants have settled in the Vancouver area.

East Indians are another important ethnic group. Indeed, the region is home to the largest Sikh population in the world outside of India and Pakistan. Just this year, for the first time, a Sikh became Prime Minister of British Columbia.

Canada's California

The greater Vancouver area is often called the California of Canada. In the heyday of the hippie movement it drew large numbers of drop outs, and today some of these hippies remain. In some ways Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands have become the last stop for the vestiges of the 60s hippie movement.

The spiritual climate in this area of such rare natural beauty and rich ethnic diversity is not good. Less than eleven percent of Canadians attend any place of worship, and in British Columbia the number is below the national average. If we consider only those attending



gospel-preaching churches, the number is miniscule. Evangelical churches are in a weak state and their influence is minimal. The largest congregations are usually Pentecostal. In most cases evangelical churches have had to drop Sunday evening services due to lack of interest.

Free Presbyterian Witness

In this area the Free Presbyterian Church has a small but thriving witness. The church is located in Cloverdale. Rev. Ian Goligher has been the minister since the inception of the work in 1984. From the very beginning, the church has found radio to be a powerful means to make contact with thousands of people otherwise beyond its reach. Indeed, *Let the Bible Speak* preceded the formation of the church. In 1982 Rev. Frank McClelland from Toronto Free Presbyterian Church decided to sponsor a Vancouver broadcast with the intention of preparing the way for the establishment of a church in the area. Two years later Mr. Goligher felt the call of God to move from Northern Ireland to pioneer the work in Vancouver. He had been deeply involved in the international work of *Let the Bible Speak* while in Northern Ireland and soon undertook the production of programmes for the Vancouver broadcast. For twelve years he continued the weekly program and then in 1996 decided to broadcast a brief four-minute programme five days a week. In 1998 the four-minute programme was expanded into a full half-hour broadcast.

“Radio Ministry Built Our Church”

The potential audience is about three million. Obviously only a fraction of that number listen to the station that carries *Let the Bible Speak*, but from the response Mr. Goligher has received and from the visitors at his church services it is clear that he has a great many loyal listeners. He reports, “Every week we receive phone calls, letters of encouragement, and requests for tapes or literature. Since June 1998, when we went to full thirty-minute programming, almost weekly we have visitors to our church from the radio ministry. Some of these are curious out-of-town visitors who listen in their own areas, and others are seeking a church home. Over the years the radio ministry has literally built our church congregation. This has been our first

point of contact with about seventy-five percent of the people who are in our church today.”

Mr Goligher also reports that while it is always difficult to assess the number and reality of conversions among radio listeners, he has had the privilege of praying over the phone with people in spiritual distress and has had other listeners come to the church for counselling in the things of the Lord.

As a result of all this, there is a strong interest in the radio ministry in the Cloverdale church. Says Mr. Goligher, “The ongoing interest for the radio ministry among our people is remarkable. Because so many of our people have been reached and helped through the radio ministry in the past, they are willing to give sacrificially to this ministry to help others. This has been especially true since we paid off our church building fund in 1995. The congregation’s generous support has enabled us to take on extra air time locally and on other stations.” Those other stations are outreach ministries in the Okanagan Valley, as a result of which we now have a small congregation in Penticton under the ministry of Rev. Andrew Foster, and in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where programming has just recently commenced.

The success of *Let the Bible Speak* in the greater Vancouver area is a testimony to the usefulness of the radio ministry to the work of the church. We can see even greater things than these as we pray for and support the worldwide witness of this vital work. ■

