

A foggy, nighttime street scene with a row of streetlights and trees. The streetlights are illuminated, casting a warm glow. The trees are bare, and the fog is thick, creating a somber and atmospheric setting. The street is paved and has a metal fence on the right side. The overall mood is quiet and reflective.

Faith Today Presents:

Ready for Reform

***Faith Today* Articles on Understanding and Reforming
Prostitution Law in Canada**

Be Equipped to Make a Difference

By Stephen Bedard, Bill Fledderus & Karen Stiller

Now is the time for Canadian Christians to be informed about the issues surrounding prostitution – and use their voices and knowledge to respond to the government's invitation for input on law reform.

The following collection will equip you by bringing together the best articles on prostitution from *Faith Today* magazine. In rare cases, original texts have been updated where necessary.

We weren't able to fit all the great resources we have in this booklet, so we have also compiled additional *Faith Today* articles along with carefully selected blog posts and other resources by staff of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). Find those at www.faithtoday.ca/ProstitutionSupplement.

The EFC supports a legal approach called the Nordic model. It acknowledges that the vast majority within the sex trade are there not by choice. Instead of punishing prostituted women, the focus is on prosecuting the purchasers of sex and thereby decreasing the demand for prostitution. Read on for more information about the Nordic model, or visit www.theEFC.ca/ProstitutionLawReform.

The goal of this *Faith Today* resource is to equip Christians with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about the future of prostitution in Canada. One way that Christians have the opportunity to act on this information is by responding to the government's public consultation on prostitution.

If you are reading this before March 17, 2014, you can still contribute your opinions on a special Federal Government website. Find out more about that at www.theEFC.ca/ProstitutionConsult, an EFC webpage that outlines the questions the government is asking, offers helpful reflections from the EFC's point of view, and includes a link to the actual government webpage.

Other ways for Christians to act include prayer, of course, and also communicating with your Member of Parliament. You can find general guidelines for taking action on social issues at www.theEFC.ca/TakeAction.

May God bless Canada as our country considers prostitution law reform – and into the future as the Body of Christ continues to minister alongside others to our most vulnerable citizens, whatever the legal situation. **FT**

Mean Streets

After Dark in Toronto, Winnipeg & Vancouver

Three writers in three cities report on life after dark for prostituted women and the Christians who reach out to them.

By Karen Stiller, Doug Koop and Andrew Stephens-Rennie. Sidebar by Julia Beazley. Originally published in *Faith Today*, Nov/Dec 2013.

Toronto, at the Corner of Parliament and Winchester. 7:40pm. Sept. 19.

I did not expect Donna* to look so normal.

In fact, she so much resembled the middle-aged woman next door, I wondered if Jan Rothenburger, my Yonge Street Mission contact for this story, had understood I wanted to speak with a woman who had worked – and left – the sex trade.

But there we sat in a Tim Horton's in Toronto's Old Cabbagetown, about to launch into what I feared would be a very awkward conversation.

There was no need to worry.

Donna, my age almost exactly, has spent the last 30 years in and out of jail. "Every time you get out, you have nothing and you end up prostituting to get a hotel room for the night," she explains.

And when drugs needed to be bought, her body needed to be sold, mostly to "businessmen on their way to work. They're the ones with cash in hand," she explains.

As she shares her story of colossal pain – and how drugs seemed to numb it out for years – Donna methodically tears up the plastic lid from her coffee and sweeps the pieces into a neat pile. "I need stability. I require it," she explains as she describes her days now filled with reading books and cleaning houses when the opportunity arises.

Although the list of people and circumstances she could blame for her life thus far is long, Donna will not read from it. "I take

responsibility for my own actions now," she says.

This is a fierce and tender woman. Life has taught her to rely only on herself.

Jan Rothenburger holds a fragile, fleeting opportunity to be trusted. She is a community outreach pastor whose congregation are the women and girls trapped in this life, or rebuilding a new one.

"I'm not what people expect a pastor to be. I never dress up. I smoke. I swear," says Jan. Donna laughs and says Jan fits right in. It's a big compliment.

Donna loves being with her grandchildren, newly, cautiously introduced into her life by a son willing to give her a chance.

"This might be the first time I make it," she says. Donna's eyes well up, but they won't be spilling over on this night. Pride clearly matters.

Donna tells me she visited a church in Brampton. "When the pastor found out I was from a halfway house, he wouldn't look me in the eyes. It wasn't welcoming." When I ask her what she would like "church people" to most understand about what she has lived through, she says, "People are all the same. We are all equal."

An old, dusty, bent-over man shuffles past our table. This is a classy Tim Horton's with a decorative tin-plated ceiling and nice lighting. He sticks out.

"This guy," says Donna, nodding her head in his direction, "I took him to a halfway house. I gave him my sandals. He was hungry. I gave him a bag of food and I sent

* Names have been changed to protect identities.

ets

him on his way.”

It's like Matthew 25:35 (I was hungry... and you fed me) is being read out loud.

Buick of Hope

Late into every Thursday night Jan drives slowly down Toronto streets, looking for the girls. Her Buick is hospital, confessional. It is Santa's sleigh with outreach bags stitched from beautiful fabric piled on her car floor. They are stuffed with Kleenex, wipes, candy, hand sanitizer, a condom and Jan's business card. Some girls ask for a bag in their favourite colour, or to match their outfit.

Jan's car is also a laser beam that quickly finds the girls and women I slowly begin to see, half in the shadows, emerging, dressed to sell.

“Most of my relationship building is when they are not working. This is ‘Hi, how are you? We care about you,’” explains Jan. “They're my friends, we hang out. We laugh, we pray, we tell dirty jokes. Honestly, when I go to regular church I have a hard time. I like that they are real. I want to be real.”

This does feel pretty real.

We drive by Regent Park and pull over to speak to Sarah*, clearly glad to see Jan, but with little time to talk.

“I've gotta work. Bye, Jan. I love you,” she says warmly and pulls away from the window. It's a very matter-of-fact meet and greet, as if we were chatting by a water cooler and Sarah's meeting was about to begin.

This is not the Toronto I love. It is painful, dark, wrenching.

And Then Pain Fills the Car

Cindy (not her real name) is standing with a crowd of men on a dark stretch of George Street. When she recognizes Jan, she comes over immediately and leans into the window. She wears what seems to be a house-dress that is too big. A stuffed lion peeks out of her backpack as if it is a child she is piggybacking around town. I wonder who it replaces.

Cindy's face crumbles as Jan asks her gentle questions. “How are you? Are you okay? What's going on?” Cindy's voice



PHOTO: WWW.GLOWIMAGES.COM

is soft, whispery in response. She cries and pleads with Jan to call her boyfriend to come down quickly. Her pain floats through the open window and begins to replace the oxygen in the car.

There is something very bad happening here.

Cindy's boyfriend, who Jan thinks might be a good guy, shows up. Jan invites Cindy to a Prayer Day coming up at church, which meets at Yonge Street Mission.

"You want to save her from hell? This is hell right here," says her boyfriend, pointing to the concrete sidewalk. "She's in hell now."

As we pull away from this dark, dark place, Jan says, "You never give up on anybody. I know she loves the Lord, I know that. You just love the person. It doesn't matter if they smoke crack. You love them just the same." Later, we see Cindy weaving across the street, all alone.

It is clear the claws of addiction are sunk deeply into most of the women we see on the street tonight. I volunteer to put a necklace with an angel pendant on Heather, one of the final women we speak to. Jan wants her to have it.

Heather is funny, bright, engaging, and patient as she has to practically crawl into the front seat of Jan's Buick and lie across my legs as I struggle with the clasp. She is wearing a funky tweed cap, has alcohol seeping from her pores, and says she doesn't come out very often anymore. She looks just like a friend of mine.

Just an Addiction Away

More than once on this night I have felt it is only drug or alcohol addiction that stands between the streets they work on and the street I live on.

Eve (not her real name), another friend of Jan's, free now of prostitution, confirms this hunch. She tried crack three times, and the third time it enslaved her. "The choice was removed from me. My addiction made me do it. It's not by choice I prostituted. To work on the streets, you're doing it for addiction."

Eve, again, strikes me as extraordinarily ordinary in appearance, in how she speaks, in her love for her children, in her gym T-

shirt, headband and small silver earrings. And in her love for God, clearly tested, deeply true.

"I've always been a follower of Jesus Christ. When I went to jail when I was in my addiction, I felt God was protecting me," she says. "Even when I went to the federal penitentiary [on drug trafficking charges] and got my sentencing, that was my saving grace."

Eve credits one woman who stuck by her and told her she saw something else in her. "She told me that she saw such potential in me. It only took one person to do that, having faith in me so I could have faith in myself. And if I can help one person, it's all worth it."

These days Eve is weaving back together her torn relationship with her sons. She tells me she listens to Christian music all the time, recites lyrics by heart. Track five of her Kirk Franklin CD is pretty much worn out.

"I feel like my life is rich. I've had people say to me they

see wealth in me. I really feel like something wonderful is going to happen," says Eve. "I feel like I'm okay. I'm okay." **FT**

KAREN STILLER is a senior editor at *Faith Today*.

Winnipeg. Sargent and Burnell. 11:00pm. Sept. 20.

A young woman hunkers on a store step with her head under a hoodie and a crack pipe in her hand when the sudden appearance of a middle-aged man and woman bearing a thermos and sandwiches startles her back to the Friday night street scene.

"Oh, God!" she erupts, and hastens to let us know she's just fine and doesn't need anything – no food, no drink, no ride, no prayer. Then, for a moment she softens and gives us her name. It's Jasmine*. "I'm a little embarrassed," she allows.

Yet no sooner are these welcoming words out of her mouth than one of her friends appears on the sidewalk. "Hey!" Jasmine calls to her. "Christians!" Her

friend hauls her away. The wailing of sirens punctuates the late night noise of the street.

The Christians return to the Love Lives Here shuttle bus and move on to find other nighthawk souls who may be hungry or tired, lonely or afraid on a brisk September evening. Over the course of three hours we speak with about a dozen prostituted people. Some want warmth. Some want company. Some want a ride. Some want to be left alone. Some receive prayer.

On a dark residential street Stephanie* steps aboard as soon as the bus pulls over. She's been here before. Something within her craves the coziness and safety of this little band of charismatic Christian workers who regularly give up their weekends to show kindness on the harshest streets of Winnipeg and extend a helping hand to those who feel trapped.

Stephanie is just settling in to pray with a couple of women when Noreen* bounds energetically up the steps and changes the mood on the bus in an instant. The two 20-something street workers bounce around like schoolgirls greeting each other after a long holiday. They are giddy in their exuberance and delighted by their chance meeting.

Noreen has just jumped out of a john's van. She reeks of alcohol, but she's in a happy mood and irreverently joins the prayer meeting that's forming at the back of the bus. Five women hold hands in a circle and begin to raise their voices in prayer. Noreen is gripping the arms and hands of Heidi, a volunteer who is speaking in tongues.

As one of the other Christians utters a more conventional prayer, Noreen interrupts with an admonition to "Wrap it up soon and say 'amen' so I know when it is over." When they finally do, Noreen is in hurry-up-and-let's-move-on mode. But before she leaves, she stops and turns to look into Heidi's eyes.

"I didn't understand a word you said." She pauses. "But I felt it. Thank you."

Divine Sanction

Prayer and compassion are the currency of the little band of Love Lives Here volunteers. Before they head out to the streets, they gather together to pray to God for each other and the people they'll encounter. They believe there is work to be done, people to



Jan Rothenburger: "You never give up on anybody."



PHOTO: HEATHER BAREFOOT

Volunteers with Love Lives Here pray with a woman on the streets of Winnipeg.

or somewhere in their childhood. They are just fine with Jesus." Some even welcome the anointing touch of oil and the soothing words of God's unending love.

Of course, not everyone is interested in the God talk. Jessica* shivers on a dark corner on a sketchy street looking at the pickup trucks and boisterous men huddled a half block away. She is desperately unhappy, a hard-looking woman in her mid- to late 30s. "I need \$20, so I'm doing this," she explains. Because

she is cold she climbs reluctantly aboard the bus, complaining how "This isn't making me any money." The volunteers don't carry cash.

Addictions and a lifetime of hardships have brought Jessica to this tough place. As she sees it, renting her body for sex on this street corner is her only option. She doesn't want prayer. "I don't believe in

God." When one of the volunteers asks if she sometimes gets mad at God for the way things are turning out, she says, "No. Like I said, I don't believe in God." She doesn't want food. She doesn't want a ride home. She accepts a pair of gloves and steps back onto the dark street.

Saved

Our encounter with Carina* is very different. We're rumbling along a thoroughfare when the Love Lives Here driver makes a sudden left turn, cuts through a parking lot and heads back the way we'd just come. "I saw a girl at the bus stop," he says as he pulls over.

Two volunteers, a man and a woman, step out to greet her. A few minutes later they return with Carina, who appears to be only 16 or 17. She'd been afraid, waiting for the bus. Men kept pulling over and propositioning her. That's not what she was looking for. She just wanted a ride home and was very grateful to be sitting in safe company. When she realizes she's with Christians, she says she'd been to church recently with a friend who'd gotten "saved."

"Have you been saved, Carina?" asks a veteran volunteer.

"No," she replies. "I'm not saved. I want

be saved and set free. "Give them another chance, Lord. Come against every darkness."

On the streets they are eager to offer prayer to any and all they meet. Many refuse, but others tolerate the request and some respond eagerly and gratefully. "There are a lot of 'Christian' girls out there," advises one of the volunteers. "They may have had an encounter at camp

Exit Strategist

Shona Stewart believes there is a way out of prostitution. She should know. She spent 16 years as a sex worker before shedding her addictions and finding satisfaction for her deeper spiritual cravings in accepting Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

Now she is putting her experience to work by assisting other women who are trying to exit the sex trade. "God has called me to help women – to help them understand that there is hope on the other side of a prostituted lifestyle, that there is hope in Jesus Christ."

Stewart is the director of Dignity House in Winnipeg, Man., a Christian and Missionary Alliance church initiative. Dignity House is a home where Stewart lives with as many as three women who are making the effort to escape the vicious trap of prostitution. She teaches an array of life skills and provides counselling which includes a thorough grounding in Christian discipleship.

"We need Christ to give us the thing we're missing – the love,



PHOTO: KEVIN YOUNG

Shona Stewart: "There is hope on the other side of a prostituted lifestyle."

the hope, trust in a loving Father who will bring us through all trials in life."

Getting out of the sex trade is never an easy process. "These women need to be loved each step of the way," says Stewart. It's not enough for Christians to just talk about good news. "Prostituted women need to see the good and mercy we talk about."

Stewart sometimes finds herself in tension with people on all sides of the prostitution issue. Many people simply avoid it or maintain that since everyone has a right to treat their body as they please, there's no point interfering.

On the other hand, there are the moralizers – often in the Christian community – who slot sex sins into a special category and are insufferably harsh on prostitutes.

She has a message for the Church. "The Christian community needs to understand that the outcomes and successes will differ greatly from their ideal. If my house is not full, that doesn't mean we're not succeeding. When women I've seen and worked with come back and want to try again, that's a success."

Stewart is also a vocal advocate working for the abolition of prostitution in Canada through the Defend Dignity network. She tells her story to raise awareness and lobbies "for stronger legal and social deterrents to eliminate both the illicit demand for and the selling of sex."

"We need to educate men on the harm they're doing to girls and communities," she insists. **TI** –Doug Koop



Volunteers with REED (Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity) hold an unusual communion service in front of Brandi's Exotic Show Lounge in Vancouver.

PHOTO: ANDREW STEPHENS-RENNIE

rock music. For good or ill, whenever discussing Vancouver's prostitution scene, my mind inevitably strays to the stark image presented by Canadian rockers Billy Talent on their debut album:

Standing in the rain
Milk carton mug-shot baby
Missing since 1983
Standing in the rain
20 years of dirty needles
Raindrops runnin' through my veins.

A Body Broken

But this is far from that. In the heart of the city, on a warm clear night, REED (Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity, www.embracedignity.org) will show me another side of Vancouver's sex trade. They will also show me a brand new response. "This is the body of Christ, broken for you,"

says the young woman next to me as she tears bread from the loaf.

Michelle Miller, REED's executive director, is invited often to speak about the end of trafficking. As a Christian abolitionist in the tradition of Josephine Butler, Miller is a determined voice in the movement to put an end to prostitution. And while REED offers advocacy for and assistance to prostituted women, REED's work also focuses on abolishing the systems that lead to oppression in the first place. This is why they are strong advocates for adapting the Nordic Model to Canada.

"For years," Miller relates, "it was mostly women who came up to me after a talk." But speaking at churches and college and university campuses in recent years, Miller noticed a growing number of young men who want to be involved. More often than not, they're wanting the rescue side, busting down brothel doors.

Miller bristles, "They say, 'I want this to be my career. I want to go kick some ass,' but when we suggest that they start a men against rape group on their campus, they inevitably leave." Asked to speculate on why they don't stick around, Miller says, "It asks something really different of them. It demands their vulnerability."

Miller and others in the abolitionist movement know the roots of prostitution run deep into a patriarchal culture founded on violence against women. Not con-

to. I don't know how."

As the bus jolts and bounces towards Carina's home, a younger volunteer offers a brief and simple explanation of salvation through Jesus Christ and invites Carina to say a prayer with her. After the prayer the busload bursts into song. "Happy birthday, dear Carina, all the angels rejoice."

When Carina steps from the bus, her arms are laden with bags of sandwiches and chocolate milk. A new prayer scarf hangs loosely around her neck. She has an appointment to meet Heidi at a church luncheon in a few days, the same church she'd attended with her friend. She is smiling. "I'm so glad I met up with you guys," she says.

"Don't forget to tell others," says Heidi.

The Love Lives Here volunteers don't believe in coincidences. They see each engagement as a divinely ordained connection that was meant to happen. They believe they are planting seeds of hope and healing, even in the women who walk away or reject their compassion with cursing.

The encounter with Carina boosts the volunteers' spirits and bolsters their belief. Their intervention has given a vulnerable person another chance. It is an answer to their earlier prayer for "more light in people's lives, more flickers of hope."

They love the prostituted women and men they meet, and pray that God

would give them "a desire for greater and mightier thoughts." They ask God to "put their feet on the right path," and to "let them know they are valuable. They are diamonds." **FT**

DOUG KOOP is a writer in Winnipeg.

Vancouver. Hornby and Dunsmuir streets. 8:30pm. Sept. 9.

When I joined them, they were huddled together in a dimly lit doorway. Eleven or 12 of them, they spoke together, offering furtive glances as men got out of slowing cabs to head inside and upstairs. Passing scraps of bread and a single cup, the group's voices lift above the din of a nearby restaurant, singing, "Hosanna in the highest, let our king be lifted up, hosanna in the highest."

This is a communion service like none I've ever seen, in a place like few I have been. We are in front of Brandi's Exotic Show Lounge around the corner from the prestigious Vancouver Club, overshadowed by sky-scraping bank towers, and surrounded by a plethora of boutique shops. Brandi's has its own version of power-filled excess.

Brandi's does not fit as easily into the caricatures of Vancouver prostitution often perpetuated by the news media and

tent simply to rescue prostituted women, REED is looking further upstream to address both the individual and social causes of prostitution.

Miller hopes Christians will realize this isn't simply about men buying women in Thailand (although that's part of it), but that it has as much "to do with...male violence against women in Canada as well."

Krista-Dawn Kimsey has a laid-back, caring persona. Former worship pastor at The River Community Church in San Jose, California, she and her family followed God's call to establish a Christian community among the poor in Vancouver. Their Servant Partners training centre and internship program launched in 2010.

While ministering at The River, Kimsey took the opportunity to spend several successive summers serving in Bangkok in partnership with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Each year her group included a prayer walk around the city's brothels as part of its orientation. Afterwards, the group reflected on ways they could respond personally and as a group.

On this night, Kimsey shares a story about her encounter with men doing outreach in the red light district. They were there to speak with other men, dissuading potential johns from offending. They'd talk to them, finding ways to humanize the women being prostituted. They'd get them to talk about their families – their children, their wives, their mothers. "Sometimes they'd ask," Kimsey recounts, "What's your mother doing right now?" Affirming the humanity of both johns and prostituted women can be a challenge to our sensibilities.

And yet, the message behind the bread and wine shared this night on a notorious Vancouver street corner had to be one of redemption and restoration for all.

After the Eucharist

After celebrating the Lord's Supper together in that most unlikely of places, I sit with Miller, Kimsey and a number of others in Kimsey's living room to discuss their simple, yet public act of worship in front of Brandi's. Drawing from her experience in Thailand, I ask Kimsey why the problem of demand doesn't appear to receive the same attention here in Canada. "It's almost expected that this is what men do and desire. It's normal," says Kimsey. "Look how quickly we got over

Introducing the Nordic Model

By Julia Beazley

Over the past few years, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) has been working in partnership with other organizations in pursuit of reforming Canada's prostitution laws. We are calling on the Federal Government to amend the *Criminal Code* to implement laws based on the legal and social framework of what is known as the Nordic Model of Prostitution Law.

This model, first enacted in Sweden, recognizes the vast majority of prostituted persons are not engaged in prostitution freely and willingly, and therefore focuses the punitive powers of the law on the purchasers and purveyors of sexual services – the johns, pimps and traffickers – while decriminalizing those who are being sold.

The sex trade operates according to simple market principles of supply and demand. As long as there is a demand for purchasing women's bodies, there will be pimps, traffickers and organized crime ready and willing to guarantee a supply.

Sweden recognized that to abolish prostitution, they would need to focus their efforts on eliminating the demand for purchasing sexual services. They also understood prostitution and human trafficking are intrinsically linked, with trafficking rings established to feed the demand for paid sex.

Under this model of law, individuals who pay for sex are subject to steep fines and possible imprisonment. Those who are being prostituted are not charged, which facilitates their moving on from prostitution.

Along with the change in law, the Swedish government put in place a national strategy emphasizing social structures and systems to ensure that women who want to exit prostitution have the resources and supports available to them to make this possible. They also initiated a broad public awareness campaign to affirm that the purchase of sex is not just illegal in Sweden, but is considered violence against women and a direct affront to equality between the sexes.

The Swedish model is one of the most coherent and successful prostitution policy models ever developed. This model has proven quite successful in dramatically reducing prostitution and trafficking, and has been replicated in Norway, Iceland, and is in various stages of consideration in France, Israel and Ireland.

The Nordic model isn't perfect, but the countries that have implemented it are committed to constant evaluation and improvement with the aim of ending sexual exploitation. In Canada, because of our constitutional division of powers between the Federal and provincial governments, there will be some unique challenges to its implementation, but it is both doable and the most effective, most just model developed to date.

The EFC released a framework report in December 2013 (at www.theEFC.ca/OutOfBusiness) to suggest what a Canadian version of the Nordic model might look like. You can also find more resources including videos you can show in your church at www.theEFC.ca/ProstitutionLawReform. **FT**

JULIA BEAZLEY is policy analyst at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Hugh Grant," or Ben Affleck, for that matter, whose engagement to Jennifer Lopez ended after he was caught in a tryst with a Brandi's girl.

Of course, not all men are pimps or johns. They're not all selling sex, and they're not all buying it. But that doesn't mean our culture or the Canadian Church is immune. Teaching a class on prostitution and trafficking entitled "Intelligent Love," Miller and other experts argued that we participate in the commodification of and violence against women in many more subtle – yet equally damaging – ways.

Jonathan Wilson, a member of that first Intelligent Love cohort, is also the Pion-

eer McDonald professor of theology and ethics at Vancouver's Carey Theological Seminary. For him, "Male and female relationships are at the basis of what it means to be human," and yet, sitting in Kimsey's living room, he argues, "Our identity as male and female is broken by sin. There's a lot of confusion in that."

As the group continues to reflect on the Brandi's service, Wilson hangs back. One of only three men in the room, Wilson spends more time listening than talking. He breaks his silence to say, "[One of the things] I've learned from Michelle and others is that as soon as I speak, I'm speaking from a place of privilege and authority. It's just very dif-

ficult to work against that.”

Wilson says, “This is the hard work I [and all men] have to do in the same way that women have to do the hard work of finding your voice, and silencing the voices that tell you you’ve said too much, or you’re being too opinionated.” These are more subtle forms of violence against women, but they’re violence all the same.

“It’s so obvious to me that it’s male violence against women, but you have few men who want to actually do anything about that,” adds Miller.

–“What’s more,” offers Megan McFeeley, an intern with Servant Partners, “passivity is participation in continuing to uphold the institution of prostitution.”

A Show of Power

The celebration of Communion went by without a hitch. Members of the group had been prepared for a negative encounter in advance – whether with patrons, bouncers or police. The only member of the public who stopped for any length of time was Johnny, a young man recently released from prison. He stopped to ask for money, then remained with the group to pray.

Was good accomplished? No doors were broken down. No patrons were dissuaded from going inside. The cabbies may have raised an eyebrow, but who’s to say? It all goes back to the way Miller initially framed the gathering. “I find the spaces around sex clubs to be very contested space,” she says. In these contested spaces, one version of reality is being sold, but, “There’s a lot more going on there that we don’t see.”

Staring up at the towers neighbouring Brandi’s we are surrounded by the city’s symbols of wealth, status and power. But the Christian symbol of the cross represents another form of power these Eucharistic protesters are well aware of.

“There’s something I think connected to power in what we did as well,” shares Kimsey. “People would prefer to knock down the doors of a brothel rather than give up their TV show at 9 o’clock to stand in front of one and have communion. And yet what we did tonight was very simple and very opposite to human power.” **ST**

ANDREW STEPHENS-RENNIE is a writer in Vancouver.

Are Morals Still Relevant?

Some say our prostitution laws should not enforce morals.

By **Don Hutchinson**. Originally published in Faith Today, Jul/Aug 2013.

Ethics, morals and rules of right conduct have generally been established based on principles. Lately though, it seems they are being based in the more flexible currency of values, particularly personal values.

Principles by definition are firm and established, like the Ten Commandments or the call to “Love the Lord your God with all

your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

But with “values” we are more likely to consider the Ten Strong Suggestions; or love the Lord our God for an hour on Sundays and not think about Him the rest of the week unless we’re in trouble; or love those neighbours who are kind to us and hate people who disagree with us.

Kijiji, eBay and Craigslist illustrate quickly how people value objects differently. Each individual’s claim to values has led to a societal mire where morality is derided as old fashioned, based in dubious religious texts. Perhaps it’s relevant to how you might want to live your life, some say, but your personal morality is irrelevant to how I want to live mine.

A friend of mine (a politician) notes that all laws are expressions of morality. Why is murder illegal? Our society has accepted the principle that we should not kill each other. Our legislature has passed legislation to enforce that moral position.

He adds that all budgets are moral documents. What we choose to spend money on identifies what the government values and what it does not. What is or is not valued reveals the underlying principles the government has accepted.

In June we were before the Supreme Court of Canada on behalf of the EFC presenting principled arguments in support of laws against prostitution.

Many people are surprised to learn that



Don Hutchinson

PHOTO: FRED CHARTRAND

in Canada prostitution has never been illegal. Our early parliamentarians chose to make the acts surrounding prostitution illegal, those acts that make human beings into commodities to be bought and sold. So we have laws that forbid communicating to sell or buy (which generally places power in the hands of the buyer); operating a brothel (where women are often hidden from view and

kept from leaving); and living on the avails of prostitution (getting paid, most often forcibly taking payment from the women held in the “stable” of the pimp).

Such laws don’t imply approval of prostitution. This legal heritage indicates an understanding of the inherent vulnerability of almost all women, children and men who find themselves for sale in need of redemption rather than imprisonment. (To be clear, it is primarily women who are prostituted.)

There may be more effective laws to deal with prostitution – laws which directly rather than indirectly target the purchasers and purveyors of sex – but these are the laws we currently have, and they’re being challenged.

The current challenge is that the laws are “moral” and presumably should not be. Could there be any weaker or stronger attack on our laws in the top court of our land than to allege that those laws seek to impose morality?

I say “weaker” because the laws clearly reflect a morality based on the principle that no person should be exploited by another – the same principle that informs our rejection of slavery.

But I say “stronger” because the new morality is perceived to be my right to do whatever I want with whomever I want – without your interference or the interference of the government (unless you can prove what I’m doing is harmful). Individual rights and personal choice rule!

Let’s not kid ourselves. The link has been established by police force after police force

and criminal organization after criminal organization in nation after nation that prostitution is inextricably intertwined with slavery (a.k.a. human trafficking). Virtually all those whose bodies are for sale or rent are in a vulnerable position for any variety of reasons – addiction, abuse, poverty, being without a defender.

While the law does not guarantee protec-

tion, the lack of law guarantees exploitation.

It has been said that you can't enforce morality, which is perhaps why we need law. Morality may not be the outcome of the law, but law has no other source than the moral principles of a community. It's true you can't be forced to respect women, children and men on principle – whether the biblical principle of all being made in

God's image or the biblical principle of loving our neighbours as we love ourselves – but our society can, and must, provide a measure of protection through the law. **FT**

DON HUTCHINSON is vice-president and general legal counsel with The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and director of the EFC's Centre for Faith and Public Life.

Two Days in June

Are our laws on prostitution and euthanasia outdated?

By **Bruce J. Clemenger**. Originally published in Faith Today, Jul/Aug 2013.

Et was an unusual day. On the steps of the Supreme Court were two groups, mostly women with banners and placards. One group wore blue T-shirts, the other wore red.

One group decried the victimization of women and youth in prostitution. Canada should prosecute the johns and the pimps instead, they lamented.

The other group's red T-shirts were emblazoned with the word "whore" (using a familiar Coke-style font). Canada's laws on prostitution are outdated, they lamented – it's none of the government's business if someone wants to be a "whore."

The Justices were very animated. Usually when lawyers present their arguments, judges occasionally interrupt. This day their questions came fast and often.

Presenters from all sides reminded us prostitution isn't illegal in Canada, although many activities associated with it are. Clearly Parliament's aim in the past was to restrict prostitution. The questions asked that day were: Do current laws violate the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*? Are they causing more harm than good?

Some, like those in the red shirts, see the laws as constraints, as chains inhibiting their freedom to make money by selling sex.

Others, like those in blue (and the EFC), say we need laws to protect the vulnerable. Studies suggest 90 per cent of prostitutes would prefer to do something else but feel trapped. They would not be better protected if Canada were to decriminalize prostitution-related activities.

Such a step would be regressive, not progressive. In the trajectory of recent history in the West – from the abolition of slavery to the development of employment laws to universal condemnation of human trafficking – each stage involved rejecting practices that subjugate and exploit.

Selling sex should not be an industry, sex should not be commercialized and people commodified, and youth and women should not be exploited.

The day before the hearing, the Government of Quebec announced it plans to permit euthanasia in limited circumstances. It contends euthanasia is a form of medical treatment – hence a provincial and not a federal matter – and the Criminal Code sanctions on euthanasia should not apply to medical treatment.

Historically Canadian laws have drawn a bright line affirming it's wrong to kill another person. This is consistent with the sixth commandment. Tracing back to the Hippocratic oath, medicine is

committed to "do no harm," and our healthcare system defaults to the preservation of life, not the hastening of death.

Groups representing people with disabilities are particularly wary of attempts to amend the laws. They see legalization as a direct threat.

In the early 1990s the EFC intervened along with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to argue our laws on euthanasia affirm the sanctity of human life. And the Supreme Court of Canada agreed.

Yet a growing number of people today see laws against physician-assisted death and euthanasia as chains that limit their freedom to die as they wish.

Psalm 2 has a verse that now leaps off the page for me: "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." Usually such language in Scripture refers to the liberation offered by the gospel. But in Psalm 2 the "chains and shackles" refer to the decrees of God the kings want to break. They seek freedom in rejecting God's law.

Are our laws restricting euthanasia and prostitution shackles on our freedom? Or are they good news to the vulnerable who would otherwise be exploited?

Relief from bondage or oppression is not found in the absence of law, but in good laws. Years ago the Law Reform Commission of Canada wrote, "In truth the Criminal law is a moral system. It may be crude, it may have its faults, it may be rough and ready, but basically is it a system of applied morality and justice" (*Report No. 3, 1976, p. 16*).

These issues are emotionally charged because they drive to the foundational principles that sustain our "system of applied morality and justice." These issues raise profound questions about how life is to be valued and stewarded, what it means to uphold or violate the dignity of others, and when we agree to limit our freedom for the well-being of others.

The debates ahead will be vigorous. We should not shun them, but engage with wisdom and respect so we all will come to understand the comfort and security of good laws. **FT**



Bruce Clemenger

BRUCE J. CLEMENGER is president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Can We Help to Break

The crisis over Canada's prostitution laws means now is the time to bring urgently needed improvements in law – and in our attitudes and ministries as individuals and as Christian institutions.

By **Karen Stiller**. Originally published in Faith Today, March/April 2011.

Every time something really bad would happen to Katarina MacLeod, 38, she would get a tattoo. The Toronto-area woman is covered from head to toe. "I thought if I covered myself, clients would be scared," she says. One tattoo reads "D.T.A.," which stands for "Don't Trust Anyone." Another is a black rose, dripping with blood. It says, "Love is Suicide."

Her clients included "lawyers, judges, construction workers, police, guys who want things done that they obviously can't do with their better half, and regular guys who come in and want some comfort."

MacLeod entered the "sex trade" by working in massage parlours at age 21. She had a few more years of life behind her than most girls do when they are first trapped, but what led up to it is agonizingly typical. "I was in an abusive relationship. I had been abused most of my life," she explains. "My father didn't have much to do with us. We grew up in the system."

MacLeod endured violent relationships with one bad boyfriend after another. She lived through abuse better called torture. If her life were a movie, you would want to look away, horrified by what was unfolding on the screen in front of you.

"I think what happened was because I was an abuse victim for so long – these kinds of people prey on the weak. You end up in this whirlwind of wanting to be accepted and wanting to be loved," she says.

A month after she had her fourth child, her 14-year-old eldest daughter told her she was being raped by MacLeod's current boyfriend – the father of MacLeod's new baby. "I needed a lawyer, so I started turning tricks. How was I going to pay the bills? I have these four kids, I need to pay rent. I need to make money. I have no education," she says. "I didn't know any other way."

She estimates 10,000 men bought her for sex during her years as a prostituted

woman. Sometimes she would turn 10 tricks a night and work seven days a week.

MacLeod has been free of prostitution for two years now, and free of drugs for almost that long. "In selling my body I became a drug addict, popping pills. Every girl I've ever met in this industry has been abused," she says. "Girls as young as 14, with moms that were drug addicts. Not one girl I met was stable. All of us did drugs; every single one was high. If you have a soul, you can't do this and feel no shame or not dirty. Feeling like that for so long, if you don't numb it, you're going to kill yourself."

Two years out is not a long time.

But MacLeod has turned her former life inside out trying to make sense of it. "I have gone through every emotion out there," she says. When asked the painful question – if she felt, with the vantage point of time, she could have made a different choice so many years ago – her answer is unequivocal. "No. I don't believe there was a choice. I had no one offering me help. I didn't have people close to me. I didn't know if there were resources. It didn't even cross my mind. What I knew how to do was sell my body. And that's what I did."

An Un-free Choice

Derek Parenteau helps run STAND (Street Alternatives and New Directions) out of Yonge St. Mission in Toronto. STAND helps prostituted girls who are ready to begin the slow, painful climb off the streets and out of the massage parlours. "No one is in it because they like it," says Parenteau. "They've been forced into it, either directly by a pimp or indirectly by financial need."

After years of working in this ministry, Parenteau has reached a conclusion, one he says is shared by "anyone who has credibility and is doing good work, whether Christian or otherwise." His conclusion: "That people working in the sex trade are the victims. The others are sexual exploit-

ers, the predators. If you really know what you are doing and you are really involved, nothing else makes sense."

"Prostitution," says Danielle Strickland, pastor of a Salvation Army church in the inner city of Edmonton, smack dab in the prostitution stroll area, "is something that happens to you, not because of you." And it happens to Canadian girls when they are very young.

"The vast majority of women engaged in sex work get into it when they are still minors," says Greg Paul, director of Sanctuary, an inner-city ministry in downtown Toronto. "The median age is 15 or 16. If we say it is their choice, then we are saying that at 15, the majority of people who will be sex workers are making a clear, adult, non-pressured decision and saying, 'That's what I'd really like to do, is have men pay me for sex.' There's something drastically wrong with that picture."

John Cassells is managing director of Light Patrol, a mobile street program of Youth Unlimited in Toronto. The program has a focused effort called SafeLight "especially for young women whose lives have been affected by sexual exploitation." SafeLight works with two groups of women who are prostituted: high track and low track.

Cassells explains: "We go to build friendships with the high-track girls. Those are the girls who are usually not dealing with mental health issues. It is an opportunity for them to be with someone who treats them with dignity, who knows about their life at street level. The low track girls are literally homeless, usually drug addicted and often have mental health disorders."

What the two groups have in common – besides almost always being fatherless – is "that they are victims of violence. When you look at, not just the dangers, but the harm that comes to girls in prostitution, you can only conclude that it is a very violent

the Chains?

and harmful environment,” says Cassells.

Julia Beazley is a policy analyst with The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). In 2011 its Centre for Faith and Public Life in Ottawa published the discussion paper *Selling Ourselves: Prostitution in Canada, Where Are We Headed?* (available at www.theEFC.ca/prostitutionlawreform).

Beazley says Cassells is right about the violence. “Their stories are all the same once they’re in. Stories of degradation, dehumanization, violence and abuse. It’s horrific. The majority have no say, no choice. How can we call ‘choice’ a decision made out of desperation, for survival, or for utter lack of good, healthy choices?”

Prostitution Goes to Court

Last fall it was almost impossible to look away as Terri-Jean Bedford, a dominatrix clad in leather, stood in front of media cameras and declared it “emancipation day” as three key provisions in Canada’s anti-prostitution laws the legal restrictions against living off the avails of prostitution, keeping a bawdy house and communicating for the purposes of prostitution.

But striking down those prohibitions – a legal decision that, it is safe to say, came out of left field for most Canadians – is “giving a gift to traffickers and abusers. That is the worst thing they can do,” says MacLeod.

During the Ontario case Robert Pickton’s name came up. It was argued the serial killer who preyed on prostituted women in Vancouver’s east end, brutally murdering at least 26 of them on his farm of horrors, would not have had access to the women he killed if they had been safely tucked away in a legal brothel.

Michelle Miller runs REED (Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity), a Vancouver-based group that journeys with women who are being sexually exploited. “Don’t you dare bring up Robert Pickton,” says Miller, “there’s nothing that rattles my cage more than that.”

Miller says the women Pickton killed – plucked out of the neighbourhood where Miller spends most of her time – would never have been employed by a brothel in the first place; they would not have been classified as clean of drugs or disease. They tee-



What You Can Do

- Get educated. Tap into the resources of organizations like REED (www.embracedignity.org), Walk With Me (www.wix.com/timea77/walk-with-me) and the EFC (www.theEFC.ca/prostitutionlawreform), especially for understanding the Nordic model.
- Write and call your MP requesting the Nordic model be implemented in Canada. The EFC offers tips on taking action at www.theEFC.ca/TakeAction.
- Give this article to your minister, and then ask him or her to preach more often and openly on topics like pornography, prostitution and injustice.
- If you have children in your home, create an open speaking environment about topics like sex, marriage, pornography and how we view women who are prostituted. Discuss how pornography and prostitution are signs of God's good gifts gone awry.
- Stop viewing pornography. Get help from an experienced Christian counsellor or specialized ministry such as xxxchurch.com. More links available at www.theEFC.ca/pornography (and click resources).
- Financially and prayerfully support organizations on the front lines of helping women who are prostituted, like the organizations mentioned in this article.

—Karen Stiller

tered on the lowest rung of the slippery, desperate ladder that leads women so quickly into the ugly pit of prostitution – and makes it so incredibly difficult to climb out of.

There is not much that, in Canada today, could have kept them safe.

As shocking as it was for the Ontario court to strike down the prostitution laws, advocates fighting for the safety and rights of women who are prostituted view this moment as an opportunity.

Now we have a chance to reshape Canada's laws to reflect the unpalatable reality of prostitution: the girls, boys and women trapped in its snare are victims – and something more has to be done about the pimps who own them and the johns who buy them.

Hard Questions Can Create Good Laws

"It's time we start asking ourselves – as individuals, as churches, and as a nation – some hard questions about prostitution," says Beazley. "We have all heard it said over and over that it's the world's oldest profession, but we know that in reality, as others have said before, it's the world's oldest *oppression*. And to what other injustice has our response been to tolerate or condone it simply because 'that's the way it's always been'? Or worse, to legitimize or legalize it? None. While we may not always immediately recognize an injustice for what it is – once we do, we fight it. This is a fight whose time has come."

The Canadian government has appealed the Ontario court decision [Read about the Dec. 2013 *Bedford* decision elsewhere in these articles]. Meanwhile the EFC, along with other individuals and concerned groups, is advocating an alternative legal

framework known as the Nordic Model, based on Sweden's success in almost completely dismantling prostitution.

"The Nordic model," explains Beazley, "is the best model out there right now." Implemented in 1999, Sweden's *Law on the Prohibition of Purchase of Sexual Services* establishes prostitution as a form of abuse. It criminalizes the buyers, not the sellers. Pimps and johns are arrested and charged, while prostituted women are offered a strong exit network of support.

Within one year the number of prostitutes in Sweden decreased by 50 per cent.

"I totally believe in that Nordic model," says MacLeod. "If you criminalize the johns and decriminalize the women, I think men will think twice."

If Christians believe there won't be men sitting beside them on the pews on Sundays who need to think twice, think again.

"They are married men with kids," says Danielle Strickland, of the johns who cruise through her neighbourhood. "They are your dads. The busiest time in our neighbourhood is before work."

Johns in the Pews

Michelle Miller in Vancouver concurs: "We see men driving through our alleyways at 7:30 in the morning. They have car seats in the back, and sometimes there's a little fish sticker on the back of the van."

John Cassells of Light Patrol says, "Probably most of the readers will actually be going to church currently with someone who visits prostitutes. They're really the average guy. They cross those boundaries to think that they can obtain a position of power to go and choose who they will be intimate with. The position of the john is much more about seeking power and control than seeking a good and fulfilling sexual experience."

Dion Oxford is chair of Street Level, the EFC's roundtable on poverty and homelessness, and director of The Salvation Army Gateway in downtown Toronto: "When I was working out there more hands-on, there would certainly be men driving around in minivans with baby seats in the back. These are married, middle-aged men, some of whom were picking up boys; church men who are gay and married."

If it's shocking to think the johns come from your neighbourhood, remember, it might be the girl who lives next door they are purchasing.

"Where do these girls come from? They come from our neighbourhoods," says Cassells. "They are going to school with our kids. It is the kid who you don't let your child go to their house, and you don't let your child invite them to yours, because you know

there is trouble. That is the kid who is likely to get involved in prostitution."

So, what is the Church to do?

A lot more, and quite a bit differently.

"We like to have a G-rated church, but as soon as you open the Bible, you realize Christianity is not always rated G," says Cassells. "The Church needs to engage in this issue, and become aware that out of the many pros-

titutes and the many, many buyers, we all know people personally involved in prostitution at some level."

The church indeed welcomes the broken and attempts to usher in healing, while at the same time facing injustice that would be easier to ignore – and opposing it. Prostitution is clearly such an injustice, where vulnerable women (and children and some men) are abused to meet the unrestrained appetites of people with whom we cross paths daily.



Katarina MacLeod: "I had no one offering me help ... I didn't know if there were resources."



Clockwise from above: John Cassells and co-worker Rosalie Sioui during outreach ministry on the streets; Dion Oxford, chair of Street Level, the EFC's roundtable on poverty and homelessness, and director of The Salvation Army Gateway in downtown Toronto; and Julia Beazley, policy analyst at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

A Question of Justice

Evangelicals who work on this issue are calling the Church to shift its thinking from prostitution as an issue of morality – or of a perceived lack of it *in* the women who are prostitutes – and shift the conversation to one about justice – or the actual absence of it *for* the women who are prostituted.

“Like many of these kinds of issues it is important to fight it on the political level, but if we believe it is exploitation, then we have a big job to do as a church,” says STAND’s Derek Parenteau. “We need to give opportunity for people to get out. The average person I work with has a Grade 8 education; there are going to be barriers. If they have a kid at home and have known nothing else for the last 12 years, they’re going to need lots of help.”

Just as the Church is reaching out, it needs to look in, says Michelle Miller. “When I speak at churches, the first thing I do is make the connection with online pornography, which is just enormous in our culture. And as followers of Christ, we are called to go four or five steps further and look at the systems of power and abuse that make prostitution possible in the first place.

“One question that burns me,” says Miller, “is: Why is it that people who are so ready to care for and be passionate about fighting

for justice for a kid who is being trafficked in Costa Rica will blame the aboriginal woman on the street corner in their own town?”

That is a good question.

For all the waking up and soul-searching the Church as a whole might need to do, the Church as community can, and does, provide a healing, restorative – if imperfect – place for women escaping prostitution. “People involved in sex work think that Christians are really inclined to condemn them. I think that’s been the truth, but not nearly as true as people think,” says Greg Paul. “There is also a great deal of compassion historically by people of faith to women trapped in prostitution.”

And, says Dion Oxford, “God is bigger than prostitution. But just because you’ve accepted Jesus into your heart doesn’t mean it will all go away.”

Katarina MacLeod knows that better than anyone.

“I realize that who I am now is who I should have been all those years,” she says. “I want the Church to realize that we are victims, and just welcome us like they would welcome anyone else. I’m someone’s daughter, and that’s the way I want to be treated – like I am precious.”

Her real name, by the way, is not Katarina. “My old name I associate with vio-

lence and abuse and I am in the process of legally changing it,” she explains. MacLeod went to sleep one night, a little while after a friend supported her financially and emotionally deep enough and long enough to enable her to leave prostitution – and after years of her oldest daughter, a committed Christian, telling her over and over again God loved her. She heard the name Katarina in her mind. “I woke up and thought, ‘That is what I want people to call me.’ I knew that it had something to do with God telling me I was beautiful and pure.”

She looked it up and the name Katarina means “pure.”

Today MacLeod works with an organization called Walk With Me that helps victims of human trafficking. She speaks in Toronto-area schools, sharing her story in vivid, hard-core detail to wake up the students to the potential dangers they are in.

MacLeod had 58 tattoos before she got her final one, a little different from the rest. “My last tattoo, on the left side of my neck, says, ‘Grace.’ I didn’t have a word for what I received until my daughter said, ‘Mom, it’s grace!’” And Katarina said to her daughter, “That’s it!” **FT**

KAREN STILLER is a senior editor at *Faith Today*.

Helping Prostitutes in

Prostitutes say they've chosen their career. Unconvinced Christians are lobbying for laws that will restrict this "choice."

By **Bill Fledderus**. Originally published in *Faith Today*, May/June 1997.

People who work with prostitutes have to face a difficult truth: most prostitutes aren't interested in getting out until they've done irreparable damage to themselves. Veteran observers agree that young prostitutes (under age 18) who talk positively about their "choice" are uninformed and ignore or deny the life trajectory of all the others before them who have suffered and regretted such choices. In virtually every case, observers say, prostitution leads to harm, various forms of enslavement or early death.

"People are making a mistake when they think of prostitutes as having chosen a career," says Ken Fast who has worked with prostitutes for 13 years and is director of Alternatives in Christian Ministry. A program in Northside Community Church in Brampton Ont., Alternatives involves volunteers from many denominations.

"It's not a choice like becoming a doctor or a farmer. People who choose prostitution usually see few other choices available to them – maybe working in a nightclub or becoming a stripper; that's it."

Most street prostitutes say they ran away from an abusive home and turned to prostitution voluntarily at around age 14. Young prostitutes often believe they can avoid becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol. If they become involved in organized crime, they somehow think they won't get caught.

Prostitution is made to appear glamorous by pimps and clients alike, a way for teens to thumb their noses at authority and to achieve easy financial independence. Pimps can lure runaway girls because they are desperate for money, but the promise of affection is also a lure and is especially successful with girls who are overweight and unpopular, says Ross MacInnes of Calgary, a former vice cop who now heads a non-profit organization to reach out to juvenile prostitutes.

Christian teens are not immune to the lure of prostitution, adds Cliff Heggs, director of about 20 volunteers at Crossfire Ministries in

Vancouver. Heggs says Crossfire is "working with parents of eight girls from somewhat Christian homes. Some of these girls have been found and directed back to their parents and some are still out there somewhere."

Once hooked with gifts and then manipulated into prostitution, it often takes years before a girl will admit to herself that the pimp is lying about loving her.

"The girls don't usually differentiate between a pimp and a boyfriend. The pimp is seen more as a guy who loves her and maybe even says he'll marry her. She's the breadwinner for the two of them by renting her body parts," says Fast.

Teens going into prostitution seek help, love, community and answers to personal problems. Young prostitutes often believe they have made the best possible choice and persist in thinking they can continue in prostitution yet somehow escape the violence, disease and other ruinous problems it brings, even after they have been repeatedly assaulted or forced to do things against their will.

Such thinking makes Christian outreach and legal restrictions difficult. Last year, for example, police evicted a number of teens from an abandoned building on Toronto's Carlton Street. The teens refused offers of placement in youth shelters because they said the shelters "have too many rules." Instead, the teens demanded they be allowed to live in another building.

"I'm going for my third meeting with a 14-year-old nicknamed 'Pillow' to talk about leaving the street," says Fast. "I shocked her when I predicted that she wouldn't want to leave for maybe five years. 'You're right,' she told me. 'I can't see myself living anywhere where there are rules.'"

In response to such attitudes, some legislators – supported by Christians – are attempting to change Canada's prostitution laws to make such "career choices" more difficult, especially for young teens.

"Prostitution is clearly a form of child

abuse," says Brenda McIntire, 42, who was involved in prostitution for 13 years and supports proposals to toughen legislation.

"I don't think a young teen is capable of giving 'informed consent' to prostitution. It's made to look for them that they're in control, that they have complete freedom. But there are a lot of things that push them and keep them there. They are promised acceptance, trust, family – all the things that are missing in their lives," says McIntire.

Two years ago McIntire became a Christian. Today she is a counselor to street prostitutes with Alternatives in Christian Ministry in Brampton, Ont. She also helped establish a re-education program in Toronto that provides alternatives to jail time for clients and prostitutes facing court charges.

Elsewhere, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada released [in 1996] a brief supporting the view that hiring a prostitute under the age of 18 is child abuse, and calling for more severe penalties against clients and pimps, particularly of juvenile prostitutes. The brief called for preventative education about the effects of prostitution, curbs on the availability of pornography and more outreach services to prostitutes. The brief also warned against the creation of red-light districts, city-regulated zones dedicated to the sex trade.

Others think the problem of juvenile prostitution is overrated and the proposed solutions merely superficial band-aids that allow politicians to make mileage from an issue.

"If kids under 16 are turning tricks for money it could be because they can't legally work at any job," argues Andrew Sorfleet of the Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver. "If the laws actually succeed in keeping street kids from turning tricks, then what will the kids buy their Big Meals with? Squeegees? Panhandling? Busking?"

Sorfleet asserts that protecting juveniles in prostitution should take the same approach as protecting them in any other industry.

"Judge the danger and hazards and

Jesus' Name

needs for training as you would for any other occupation," he says.

"[Kids] have died on pipelines, and in mines, and in logging and probably even in fishing. This is a workplace health and safety issue. Jobs, more money, less poverty and less desperation would help deal with street kids needing to do survival sex."

"I would never suggest that we advocate 14-year-olds working in the trade," he adds. "But I know a lot of [older prostitutes] who in their hearts if they found a young 15-year-old working the street might try to get them into circumstances where they could work inside or be much safer rather than put them on a bus home to their parents."

Ongoing Support Needed

Statistics show that very few people enter prostitution after age 20. The Canadian government's Badgley Committee in 1984 found that 96 per cent of the prostitutes interviewed had entered the "trade" before age 18, and that more than 93 per cent had run away. Today, observers suggest, most prostitutes start at age 14 or earlier and end up burnt out by their mid-20s, so pimps are always looking for newcomers. Pimps often shuffle young prostitutes around to different cities, including back and forth across the United States border, to keep them vulnerable, to keep up with demand and to avoid enforcement crackdowns.

Though juvenile prostitution is a tragedy that is attracting attention from legislators as a result of public outcries, Fast finds the selective attention somewhat frustrating.

Tragic stories about 13-year-old girls elicit easy pity and outrage. But, he asks, what about those same girls after they have turned tricks for eight years and developed a drug habit? Public compassion for adult prostitutes is replaced by disgust and the view that "they made their choice, now they get what they deserve," says Fast.

He urges Christians to be consistent in their compassion. Furthermore, he adds, the prostitutes people feel the most sympathy for – the younger ones – will usually spurn offers of help.

"Unless I reach a girl during her first week on the street," Fast says, "it's likely

she won't be interested again in leaving the street for another four to eight years." It's the ones over 25, who have suffered enough to begin reflecting on their situation and their future, who are receptive to assistance, he says.

Fast knows of several prostitutes who went back to school as a way out of prostitution. "But they still had to turn tricks on the weekend to make it." As a result, Alternatives encourages Christians to donate bursary money for prostitutes.

Methods used by Christian ministries to help prostitutes are diverse. Servants Anonymous in Calgary and Morningstar in Regina run transition houses and group homes. Many offer job training and life skills programs.

"Usually they quit the residential or skills programs once or several times," explains Ivy M., a volunteer house mother with Servants. "If they quit, they know they aren't allowed back for three months. But after that the door is always open, and most do come back."

Servants has four houses, including an emergency house that allows first-timers to stay up to 30 days, a house for women who are pregnant or have children, and second stage housing where graduates of the program can live independently for three to five years while they build new lives. Servants cares for 20 young women at a time through the volunteer efforts of 30 people. The organization also operates a secretarial company and a cafeteria where women receive government subsidized job training while bringing in necessary revenue for the non-profit organization.

Most prostitute ministries, including Crossfire in Vancouver and Le Roc in Montreal, hold parties on birthdays, Christmas and other days, at which they give flowers and gifts including Christian literature.

"The parties are great. They really show love to an individual who probably receives little anywhere else," says Christine Myatt Paré, who came from Australia seven years

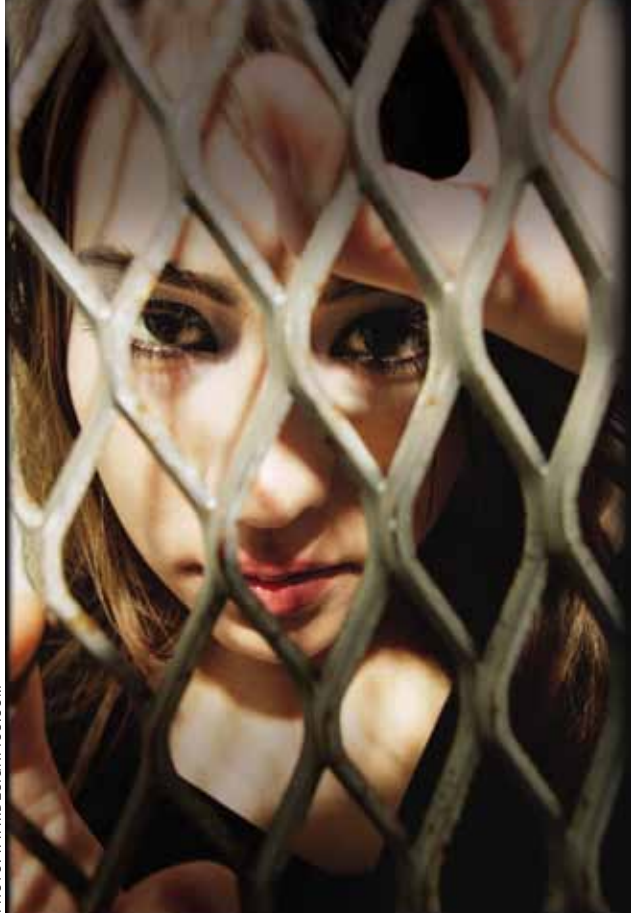


PHOTO: WWW.DESIGNPICS.COM

ago to reach out to female prostitutes in Montreal with Le Roc (formerly the Quebec chapter of Operation Mobilization). She recently took a year-long sabbatical from her work, and now visits the streets once a week.

"We often give them some of the materials produced by Crossfire, testimonies of girls who have quit the street, among other presents."

That giving gifts and attention is the same method used by pimps to trap girls in the first place is not lost on many Christian workers.

"Christian ministry is the opposite of making them dependent on you," argues John Berton, a 30-year veteran who divides his work between the streets of Los Angeles and a group of transition homes in New York state. "It's helping them build self-esteem and self-respect, helping them see themselves through the lens of the Christian gospel."

Berton, whose work is described in the book *One Lady at a Time*, says simple actions like putting a prostitute's name on a welcome sign or trusting her enough to be the receptionist can do wonders.

"I tell them I have a special translation of the Bible that says, 'God thinks you're hot stuff, baby,'" says Berton.

"We never force anything," adds Brenda McIntire. Talking, gifts, parties – all can be rejected and often are. "[Prostitutes] know

the Christians are there. Some open up, but many refuse to be seen talking with you.”

“Many times they’ll smile and even say ‘God bless you’ just to get rid of a Christian who might linger and scare away tricks,” says Berton.

Relationship Building

Most people who work with prostitutes agree that any program, from housing to a drop-in centre to throwing parties, is mainly a way to spend time together and build relationships. “Effectiveness is not so much a matter of programs as building long-term relationships of trust,” says Fast.

With meetings that last usually less than an hour, it takes many months to build a relationship. It may take years before a prostitute will reveal her real name and address.

That length of time requires a commitment that makes new ministry workers hard to find. Alternatives takes a full year to train its volunteers and does not accept seminary interns. In addition, some ministries do not accept street volunteers who are single males, who are married less than 10 years, or who do not have the full support and cooperation of a spouse.

Ministries to prostitutes continue to be frustrated by other well-meaning Christian groups who occasionally visit an inner-city area to pass out tracts.

“Sometimes you see a bunch of them go up to a prostitute and talk with her. They don’t realize that her pimp is down the street sitting in a car and fuming mad, and that he could beat her up later if she wastes potential money-earning time talking with them,” says Fast.

Building a Christian relationship may require persistent overtures, but it also requires mutual interest. Most ministries spend a lot of time in the inner-city at night, on the streets or in the coffee shops, making those overtures and making themselves available to any who want to talk.

Generally, outreach takes a long time to bear fruit, if ever says Myatt Paré.

“I’m learning you have to put aside your hopes and expectations for them and just be out there faithfully,” she says.

Myatt Paré has found that prostitutes with pimps are less needy and less likely to be addicted to drugs, whereas the junkies who are out trying to turn tricks day or night have so many basic physical needs

that verbally sharing the Christian gospel becomes secondary.

Claude Borgognon works with male prostitutes on the streets of Montreal for Le Roc and Jeunesse en Mission (Youth with a Mission). Male teens on the street turn to homosexual prostitution for money, he says. In male prostitution, the clients are less likely to be violent (female prostitutes see an average of one violent trick per month) and are more interested in affection, he explains. However, the prostitutes face the likelihood of becoming HIV positive on average about four years after starting.

Borgognon has witnessed a number of male teens move from simply engaging in homosexual prostitution for money, while still considering themselves heterosexual, to eventually considering themselves bisexuals or homosexuals.

As his relationships develop, Borgognon becomes more confrontational with the prostitutes to try to get them to examine and think about their lives. The ones of age 18 to 20 appreciate honest questioning, he says. They’re unhappy and ready to talk. But as with female prostitutes, it’s usually not until age 27 or 28 that there is any success in helping them leave prostitution.

Hurdles to Ministry

Though most large Canadian cities have one or more Christian ministries that focus on helping prostitutes, workers stress that resources for prostitutes are still very limited.

Christians are “not doing well” overall at reaching juvenile prostitutes, says Glen Povey in Regina. He is pastor of a church that runs Morningstar ministries, a variety of programs to the inner-city poor. Those include a bus with a coffee shop inside called Love Lives Here, an outreach to children from problem homes, a house for HIV-positive people called Amon House, a parochial day school, and a chapter of Prison Fellowship.

His church’s multi-pronged approach is based on the recognition that “prostitution is one of a cluster of problems associated with poverty,” he says. The exploitative aspect of prostitution is very clear in Regina, he says, as many of the prostitutes he deals with are clearly “mentally slow or weak” and come from a “clearly oppressed” group of poor, inner-city native people.

Povey, a teacher who has worked on

native reserves, says life in the inner-city changes natives. The native people he has known on reserves are generally strong and independent compared to those who move to the inner-city, he says.

Many of the limited resources available to them depend on charity, and funding for Christian ministries to prostitutes is scarce, says Povey. His group had to shut down one of its transition homes last year due to lack of finances. His ministry, like most, cannot afford to pay its workers and operates almost entirely with volunteers.

Another hurdle ministries face is the “not in my backyard” syndrome when they try to set up transition houses. Fast and his family, which includes teen girls, get around that problem by taking prostitutes into their own home for periods of time.

“Too often we Christians think of our homes as our castles and we have defences for keeping strangers out.” Fast is not suggesting Christians take in a drug addict who could be destructive, but perhaps people who could change their lives if they had the opportunity to live with a Christian family for a while. For example, he recently invited a young man from Halifax to live with his family. The man had moved to Toronto looking for a job and then ran out of money and ended up on the street.

Christians can offer respect and the gift of self-esteem, says Fast. They should not condone lifestyles condemned in the Bible, but they should accept people and value them as precious human beings made in God’s image. For Alternatives and some other conservative Christian agencies, not condoning destructive lifestyles means not giving out condoms or sterilized needles, as some other established Christian agencies now do.

Christians need to make clear public pronouncements about what the Bible says, adds Povey. Canadian law considers prostitution itself a “legal private act between consenting adults.” The Bible clearly states that prostitution is “wrong, sinful and wicked,” says Povey.

“Any outreach we do is in the context of spreading the truth about salvation in Jesus,” concludes Povey. “But our words must be accompanied by deeds if we are to show we truly care.” **FT**

BILL FLEDDERUS is a senior editor at *Faith Today*.