



The Evangelical Fellowship
of Canada

CHURCH AND FAITH TRENDS

December 2003

Evangelical Beliefs & Practises: A Summary of the 2003 Ipsos-Reid Survey Results

by Aileen Van Ginkel

Introduction

A survey conducted by the Ipsos-Reid Corporation between September 12 and October 23 described in several areas the landscape of evangelicalism in Canada. The survey was sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Focus on the Family Canada, Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and World Vision Canada.

It was conducted to update and compare results of a previous study done in 1993 by Angus Reid and Dr. George Rawlyk, a professor of history at Queen's University. The sponsors of the current survey asked additional questions related to current issues and trends.

Three thousand Canadians were polled for this telephone survey; the margin of error is +/- 1.8%, 19 times out of 20. Lorne Hunter, a researcher with Outreach Canada and leader of the research track in the EFC Vision Canada Roundtable for Evangelism Ministries, worked closely with Andrew Grenville of Ipsos-Reid in refining the original survey questions.

Don Posterski, of World Vision Canada, who together with Reginald Bibby has written several books researching trends especially among young people in Canada, developed several questions as well. Together with Hunter and Grenville, Posterski analyzed and presented some of the survey results to a large group of ministry leaders – representing several denominations, ministry organizations and educational institutions – at EFC Presidents Day, October 23, 2004.

The detailed findings of the survey led the sponsors of the research project to several conclusions regarding how evangelical Christians compare to non-evangelicals and demonstrated how evangelicals are involved in the broader Christian culture. The survey results also raise several questions for Christian mission, ministry and witness in Canada.

How Many are We?

The survey demonstrated that, on the basis of six key indicators, 19% of Canadians (12% Protestant and 7% Catholic) are “evangelicals.” The indicators for evangelicalism were determined by respondents’ agreement with the following statements:

1. I believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins;
2. I believe the Bible to be the word of God and is reliable and trustworthy; and
3. I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian.

To be called an “evangelical” the survey respondents also needed to disagree with the statements that:

4. The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in these modern times; and
5. In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God.

The sixth determining factor of evangelicalism was weekly church attendance. When all six indicators were present in a single person’s response, then that respondent was classified as an “evangelical,” either Protestant or Catholic. These respondents were then compared as a group (or “cross-tabulated”) to the rest of Canadians in terms of all of the survey questions, thus providing a basis for insight into how evangelicals think and act in several areas of life.

Although the six indicators of evangelicalism are found together in only 19% of the Canadian population, a high percentage of Canadians agreed with evangelicals in relation to one or more of the key statements of belief and practise.

Canadians and Evangelical Indicators

% of Canadians agree in 2003

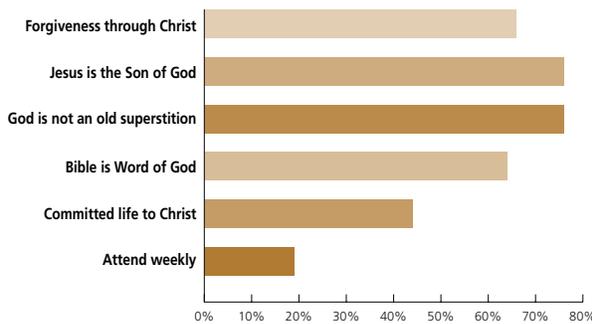


Table 1: Total Canadian agreement (strongly or moderately) with evangelical indicators¹

Comparing the responses to similar belief and practise questions asked in 1993 and 1996 indicates that the percentage of Canadians who agree with the “forgiveness through Christ” statement is on the increase, along with that for those who agree with “committed life to Christ.” Yet the percentages of those who agree that Jesus is the Son of God and that God is not an old superstition is on the decline. So is the percentage of those who attend church weekly.

Canadians and Evangelical Indicators

% of Canadians agree

	1993	1996	2003
Forgiveness through Christ	61%	63%	66%
Jesus is the Son of God	84%	80%	76%
God is not an old superstition	78%	77%	76%
Committed life to Christ	29%	35%	44%
Attend weekly	23%	21%	19%

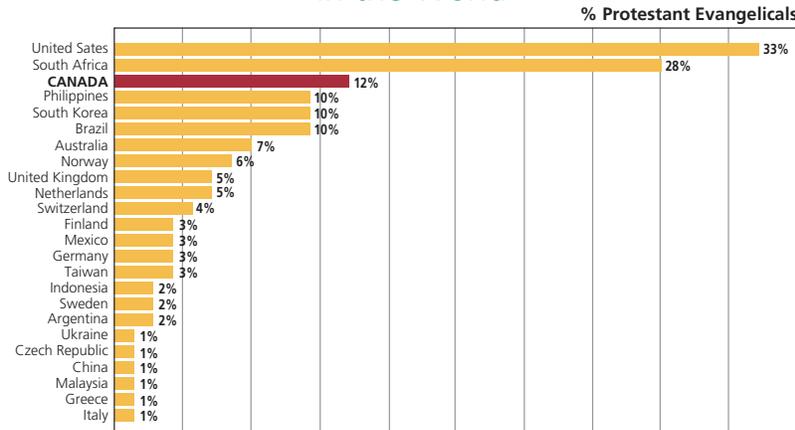
Table 2: Ten-year comparisons of percentages of Canadians who agree (strongly or moderately) with selected belief and practise statements. Note that the question about the Bible as the Word of God was asked differently in 1993 and 1996, so tracking is not possible.

The ten-year comparison also reveals that the numbers of evangelicals or practising Christians is on the rise, increasing from 16% in 1993 to 19% in 2003. In terms of percentage Protestant evangelicals, out of national populations as a whole, Canada at 12% ranks third in the world after the United States and South Africa.

¹ Tables 1-8 and 11-16 are drawn from the October 23, 2003 presentation of Andrew Grenville, Lorne Hunter and Don Posterski.

Canada is one of the most Evangelical Nations in the World

Table 3: Prevalence of evangelicals in Canada and around the world²



The ten-year comparison data suggests that there may be a widening gap between those who believe that Jesus is not God and that God is an old superstition and those who disagree. While some of the increase may be due to the immigration of non-Christians to Canada, this factor is offset by the fact that the strongest areas of growth among Protestant and Catholic evangelicals are in ethnic-minority communities.

Harder to understand, perhaps, is the contrast between the increased percentages of those who believe that God has provided a way of forgiveness and those who have committed their lives to Christ and those who attend church weekly. Here many would point to the influence of an increasing reluctance among younger generations to trust “religious” institutions. Concluding that there is a widening divide between “spirituality” and “religion” would play into the false notion that true Christian spirituality can be practised outside of a worshipping community. Clearly, though, we need to question whether our churches are providing the kind of community that nurtures the faith and practise of all those Canadians who claim they have committed their lives to Christ.

Who and Where are We?

The Ipsos-Reid survey reveals plenty of demographic data that help us to understand what evangelicals look like. In terms of gender, for instance, evangelicals are 44% male and 56% female, compared to non-evangelicals, who are 49% male and 51% female. Evangelicals tend to be married or widowed more than non-evangelicals (64% married compared to 46% and 8% widowed compared to 4%), but fewer of them are divorced or living common-law (7% divorced, 3% common-law compared to 10% non-evangelicals divorced and 14% non-evangelicals living common-law). The percentage of those living singly or having never married is also lower for evangelicals (17% compared to 25% among non-evangelicals).

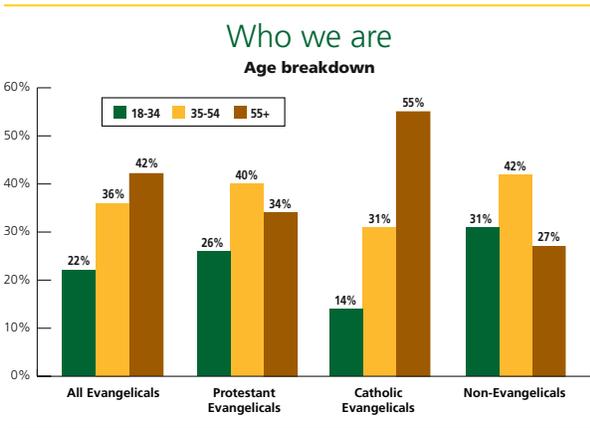
When it comes to household size, ranging from one to six or more persons, there is very little difference between evangelicals and non-evangelicals. Nor are there significant differences between them in terms of the highest level of formal education achieved (grade school, high school, post-secondary and university graduate). Annual household income, however, reveals some different patterns: 30% of evangelicals have an income of under \$30,000, compared to 25% of non-evangelicals, and 39% of evangelicals have an income of between \$30,000 and

² Prevalence of Protestant Evangelicals is less than 1% in India, Russia, Belgium, Poland, Japan, France, Israel, Spain and Thailand. Data source for Canada is the 2003 survey; US data is based on the 1996 “God and Society” survey and uses the same definition as used in Canada. Other data is from a study conducted in 33 countries by Ipsos-Reid in 1997 in conjunction with Mark Noll, John Green and Corwin Smidt. In that study evangelicals were defined as those who pray daily, attend weekly, report religion is very important to their day to day life and agree they are converted Christians who have committed their life to Christ.

\$59,999, compared to 36% of non-evangelicals. Higher income levels are present in 31% of evangelical households, compared to 39%, suggesting that overall the various income levels are distributed more evenly among evangelicals than among non-evangelicals.

The differences between evangelicals and non-evangelicals are more significant in relation to age breakdown. Here the trends clearly indicate that the evangelical population is “grayer” than the non-evangelical population.

Table 4: Age breakdown comparisons



An important part of the demographic data relates to the geographic distribution of evangelicals. Evangelicals are present in significant numbers all across Canada, although the Protestant/Catholic balance among them is noticeably different in Western Canada compared to Eastern Canada.

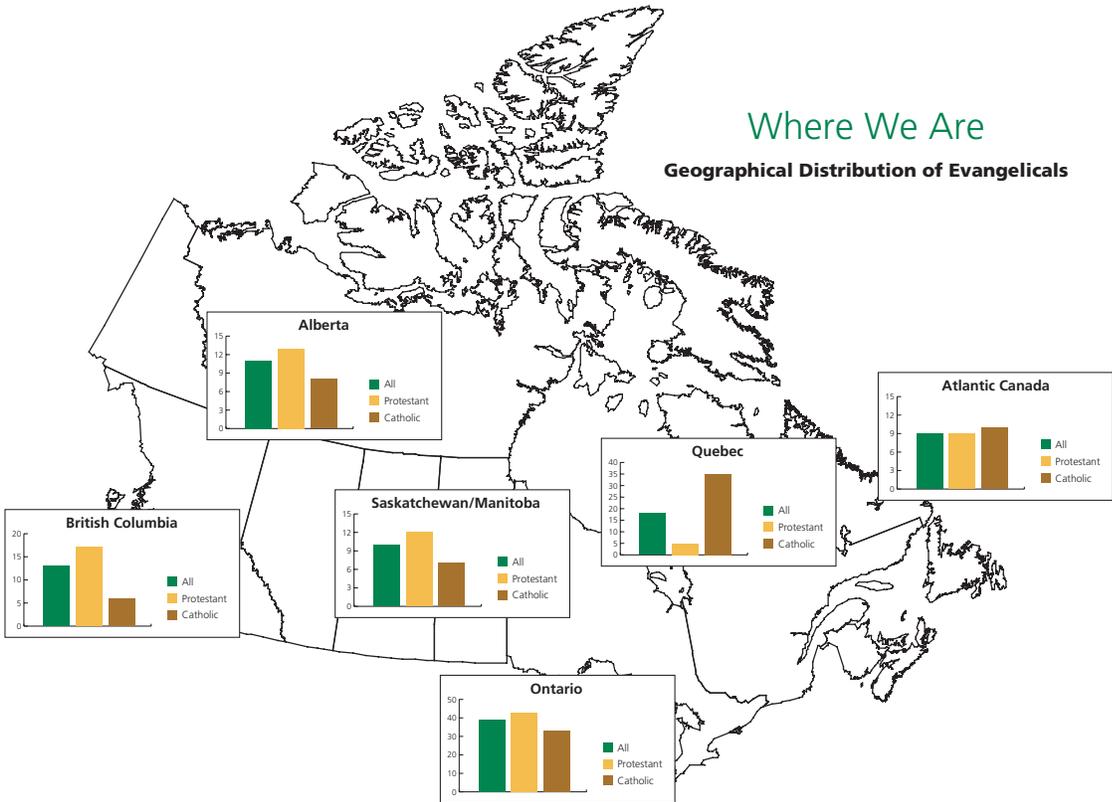


Table 5: Evangelical presence across Canada (note that the numbers on the x-axis indicate percentages)

Where we are denominationally is also revealing. The statistics suggest that the evangelical population is spread out between the historic denominations (20% of them worship in Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United churches), the Roman Catholic Church (35%) and the more predominantly evangelical denominations (45%).

Where We Are

Denomination Affiliation

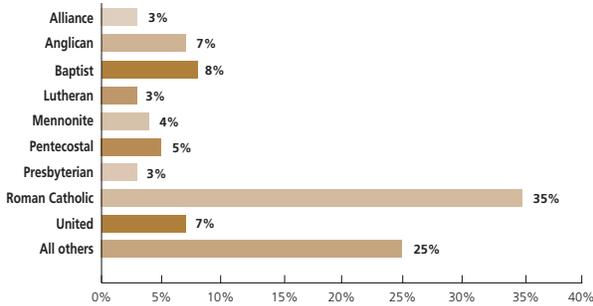


Table 6: Evangelical presence across denominations

Several questions arise in relation to the demographic data provided by the Ipsos-Reid survey. Likely the most outstanding relate to the age demographics: how well are we relating to youth and children within our midst? How likely is it that they will remain practising Christians when they are in their middle and later years? Can we take heart in the fact that over 1/5 of all evangelicals are in the 18-34 age range and thus comprise a very significant minority? Are we listening to them?

In relation to the denominational spread of those survey respondents who present as “evangelical,” even though they may not use that word, are we aware and supportive of those who may feel themselves to be in minority situations within their denominations? Do we operate with unwarranted stereotypes about where evangelicals worship?

What do we look like in our beliefs and practices?

The survey statistics reveal much about the common beliefs and practises held by evangelicals in relation to non-evangelicals. For instance, evangelicals more clearly indicate a strong relationship with God, and are less likely to believe that their own private beliefs are more important than what is taught by any church (although a surprising 41% do agree with that statement). Also, evangelicals are much more likely to attend religious services on a weekly or monthly basis.

What We Believe – Relationship with God

% who strongly agree

	All evangelicals	Non-evangelicals
God is understanding and forgiving	96%	52%
God is the source of everything	91%	34%
Intense personal relationship	70%	20%
Private beliefs more important	41%	45%

Table 7: Comparing evangelicals with non-evangelicals on relationship with God

What We Do

Attendance at Religious Services

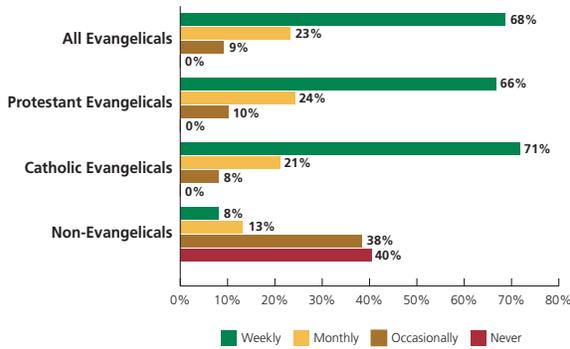


Table 8: Comparing evangelicals with non-evangelicals on worship practises

Attitudes Toward Church Attendance

I don't think you need to go to church in order to be a good Christian.

	All Evangelicals	Protestant Evangelicals	Catholic Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
Strongly agree	25%	24%	26%	63%
Moderately agree	34%	32%	39%	22%
Moderately disagree	18%	20%	13%	7%
Strongly disagree	23%	23%	22%	6%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	2%

Table 9: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on the importance of church attendance

An important corollary to the question on frequency of church attendance is revealed by the responses to the agree/disagreement statement, “I don’t think you need to go to church in order to be a good Christian.” While respondents in the “evangelical” category are regular church attenders themselves (or else they wouldn’t be in that category), a majority of them (59%) agreed strongly or moderately with this statement.

Attitudes Toward Evangelism

I feel it is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christian.

	Evangelicals	Protestant Evangelicals	Catholic Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
Strongly agree	48%	57%	32%	7%
Moderately agree	31%	29%	35%	13%
Moderately disagree	12%	9%	18%	23%
Strongly disagree	9%	6%	14%	55%
Don't know	1%	0%	1%	2%

Table 10: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on the importance of evangelism

Opinions on the importance of evangelism provide another view into the beliefs and practises of evangelicals. In this case the large majority of evangelicals (almost 80%) were inclined to agree to the “importance of encouraging non-Christians to become Christian.” Most non-evangelicals, however, were inclined to disagree (78%).

What We Do

Volunteer in the Community

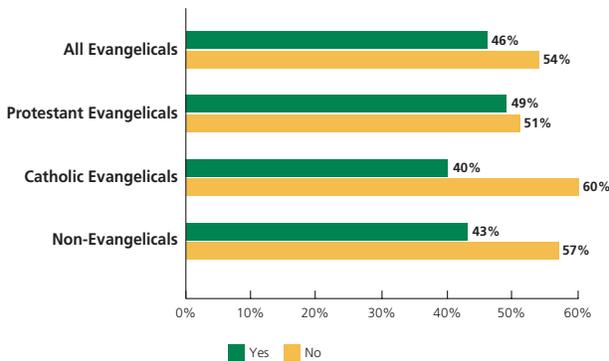


Table 11: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on volunteer practises

Taking a look at how evangelicals practise their faith in practical ways is another way of learning from the statistics. For instance, when it comes to volunteering in the community, evangelicals are somewhat more likely to do so than their non-evangelical neighbours, though not significantly so. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the evangelical population, the question they were asked indicated volunteering beyond their church; if church volunteer hours were included, the percentage would be much higher.

What We Do

Charitable Donations to the Community

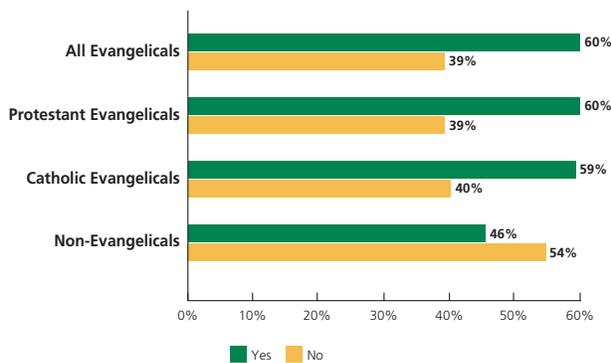


Table 12: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on charitable giving practises

A more significant difference in the statistics emerges, however, when comparing evangelical and non-evangelical patterns in relation to charitable donations (respondents were asked if they had made a claim on their most recent tax return for charitable donations, other than donations to a church).

Attitudes Toward Family and Marriage

Should same-sex couples be allowed to marry?

	Total Population	All Evangelicals	Protestant Evangelicals	Catholic Evangelicals
Strongly support	27%	9%	5%	15%
Somewhat support	24%	15%	14%	16%
Somewhat oppose	12%	11%	12%	11%
Strongly oppose	34%	64%	67%	58%
Don't know	3%	2%	2%	1%

Table 13: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on whether or not same-sex couples should be allowed to marry

The expressions of belief and practise among evangelicals and non-evangelicals differ sharply in relation to the political issues around the definition of marriage and the prospect of same-sex couples being allowed to marry. Evangelicals are much less likely to agree that the word “marriage” should also apply to the legally recognized union of two men or two women, although a significant percentage (38%) are in close agreement with non-evangelicals when it comes to agreeing that the word “marriage” should apply exclusively to a union between a man and a woman and that there should be another legal term for a legally recognized union of two men or two women.

Attitudes Toward Family and Marriage

Marriage Defined

	Total Population	All Evangelicals	Protestant Evangelicals	Catholic Evangelicals
The word "marriage" should apply exclusively to the legally recognized union of a man and a woman.	35%	54%	58%	47%
The word "marriage" should also apply to the legally recognized union of two men or two women.	28%	7%	6%	8%
The word "marriage" should apply exclusively to the legally recognized union of a man and a woman and there should be some other legal term for the legally recognized union between two men or two women.	36%	38%	35%	45%

Table 14: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on attitudes toward the definition of marriage

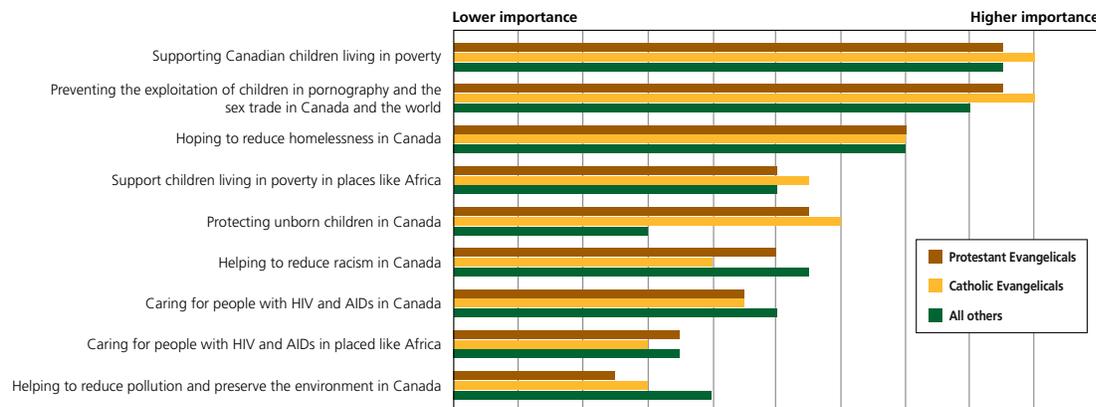
The Ipsos-Reid survey respondents were asked to rank the relative importance of nine areas of social action on the part of the Church in Canada. The priorities that they were asked to rank included:

- Supporting Canadian children living in poverty
- Supporting children living in poverty in places like Africa
- Helping to reduce pollution and preserve the environment in Canada
- Helping to reduce racism in Canada
- Helping to reduce homelessness in Canada
- Caring for people with HIV and AIDS in Canada
- Caring for people with HIV and AIDS in places like Africa
- Protecting unborn children in Canada
- Preventing the exploitation of children in pornography and the sex trade in Canada and the world

The responses to the ranking questions resulted in evangelicals placing highest importance on helping children in need and reducing homelessness. Protecting unborn children had a medium priority for evangelicals and helping to reduce pollution came in as the lowest of the nine priorities. When the responses from non-evangelicals are taken into account, the emphasis is placed very similarly on helping children and reducing homelessness. Differences emerge significantly, however, in the area of protecting the unborn: non-evangelicals ranked this as the Church's lowest priority, while ranking the reduction of pollution as third-lowest.

Table 15: Comparing evangelicals and non-evangelicals on ranking priorities for the Church in Canada

Priorities for the Church according to Evangelicals and all other Canadians



The statistics related to belief and practise indicate that evangelicals differ sharply from non-evangelicals when it comes to orthodox doctrine and the essentials of a strong relationship with God. Evangelicals are regular church attenders, but they tend not to insist on church attendance as an indicator of whether or not a person is a good Christian. They believe strongly in the importance of evangelism.

Evangelicals tend to volunteer and give charitably at somewhat higher rates than non-evangelicals. While they differ sharply from their neighbours on issues related to the definition of marriage, they see eye to eye with them on most points when it comes to ranking priorities for the Church in Canada.

Several questions emerge. For instance, do our churches uphold the value of regular attendance while allowing for other ways of experiencing worship, either individually or with small groups? What is it that evangelicals who hold orthodox beliefs and have a strong relationship with God are missing in their church experience? Should the difference in comparison with non-evangelicals be even more pronounced when it comes to evangelical involvement in relation to community volunteering and giving? How willing are we to work with non-evangelical Canadians on issues of common concern?

Opportunities for collaborative impact

The survey results imply that 6 million adults in Canada participate in an orthodox and vibrant form of Christianity. Their beliefs and practises are evident in how they participate in their communities (volunteering and financial contributions) and in how they view issues related to marriage and family. They believe strongly in the need to protect children (born and unborn) who are vulnerable and in reducing homelessness in Canada. They are concerned about caring for people with HIV and AIDS in Canada and, to a lesser degree, in places like Africa. Yet are they contributing as actively as they could or are they holding back, afraid to enter into the arenas of community life and unwilling to impact public policy?

The indicators for living lives that are abundant and overflowing in grace to non-believers are there: evangelicals are committed to living lives that are based on their own right relationships with God through Jesus Christ and that are guided by God's Word. They have committed their lives to Christ, and they are active participants in worshipping communities. The stories of evangelical Christians truly making a difference in their neighbourhoods, in the country as a whole and around the world are numerous; we know that many are living out their faith in loving service to God and others.

Yet, given our numbers, ought we not to be having a greater impact on our culture? Many non-Christians expect us to demonstrate our faith and "walk our talk" by protecting vulnerable children, ending homelessness and working with them to reduce pollution and protect the environment.

We are bearers of Good News that relates not only to our lives as individuals but also to our lives as communities of believers. In many instances, we can engage non-Christians in a common purpose, demonstrating all along that our actions are based on our hope for new life in Jesus Christ and that we are led by God, through the Holy Spirit, in all that we say and do.

We can take no pride in our increasing numbers over the past decade, but we can gain some confidence that together we can do more than we can do alone. The implication is that now is the time for us to undertake Christian mission, ministry and witness – whether organized formally through denominations and agencies or undertaken informally in small groups – in the joy that we can have a positive impact on our culture and that, indeed, many Canadians are expecting us to do so.

A shortened version of this article appears in Canada Watch, EFC's quarterly newsletter (winter, 2003).