

## MINISTERING TO SOUTH ASIANS IN CANADA AND BEYOND

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"Targeting the Second Generation" - August 4-8, 2004)

**and**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This paper has two parts. It begins with T.V. Thomas' annual report on South Asians in 2003 and ends with Pritam Singh's write up on "targeting the second generation"

### II. MINISTERING TO SOUTH ASIANS IN CANADA IN 2003 (T.V. Thomas)

This two-part report is supplemental to what had been submitted for the 2002 Consultation (see below). First, the report presents some insights culled from the newly released 2001 Census of the religious affiliations of Canada's population of 31 million. Secondly, the report will highlight seven salient trends related to South Asians and Christian ministries in Canada over the last 10 years.

#### RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS IN CANADA

Source: 2001 Census, Statistics Canada

Religious Affiliation	Number of People 2001	Percentage of 2001 Population	Percentage of Change 1991-2001
Roman Catholic	12.8 million	43.2	4.8
Protestant	8.7 million	29.2	-8.2
Christian Orthodox	479,620	1.8	23.8
Christian (other)	780,450	2.6	121.1
Muslim	579,640	2.0	128.9
Jewish	329,995	1.1	3.7
Buddhist	300,345	1.0	83.8
Hindu	297,200	1.0	89.3
Sikh	278,415	1.0	88.8
No religion	4.8 million	16.0	43.9

1. Seven out of 10 Canadians were Roman Catholics and Protestants, accounting for nearly 21.5 million people combined. However, the proportion of Roman Catholics dropped from 45 percent to 43 percent while Protestants declined from 35 to 29 percent.
2. Protestants declined by 772,830 while Roman Catholics increased their ranks by 589,500.

3. The number of Canadians identifying themselves simply as “Christian” with no particular denomination or tradition indicated was up by 121.1 percent. People are drifting away from organized and institutionalized religion.
4. Sixteen percent of population have no religious affiliation compared to 4 percent in 1971 and 12 percent in 1991. Almost 40 percent of those with no religion were aged 24 and under.
5. Out of the 1.8 million immigrants between 1991 and 2001, one-fifth reported they had no religion, especially those coming from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.
6. For the first time, Muslims outnumber Jews. Between 1991-2001 the number of Jews increased by 3.7 percent to 329,995 while Muslims increased by 128.9 percent to 579,640. Muslims accounted for 15 percent of immigrants to Canada in the past decade. Islam is currently the fastest growing religion in Canada.
7. There was an 83.8 percent increase in Buddhists, who now number 300,345. Only five percent of immigrants to Canada between 1991 and 2001 were Buddhists.
8. Seven percent of the past decade’s immigrants were Hindus. There was a 89.3 percent increase in Hindus.
9. Sikh population is 278,415 strong. Five percent of immigrants between 1991 and 2001 were Sikhs.

## **KEY TRENDS**

### **1. Increased numbers of South Asians are migrating from the Middle East to Canada.**

With limited opportunities for permanent residence coupled with political instability and insecurity in the Middle East, many South Asians are immigrating to Canada. Canada has become the country of choice of South Asians because of a shorter immigration-processing period. A majority of the immigrants are able to establish a middle-class lifestyle instantly because they have been able to transfer their savings after long careers in the Gulf region.

### **2. Increased number of South Asian Roman Catholic priests serving in Canada.**

With the alarming drop in Canadian Roman Catholics entering the priesthood there is an acute shortage of personnel to serve in Roman Catholic parishes. Hence, the Roman Catholic dioceses are recruiting seasoned Roman Catholic priests from India and the Philippines to serve in Caucasian congregations especially in rural areas. With the early recruits having proven to be successful in their ministry and service, efforts are being stepped-up to recruit more from both countries.

### **3. Increased number of Second Generation South Asians are marrying outside their heritage and roots.**

By sheer observation (and not through scientific research) it is quite safe to conclude that there are more and more Second Generation South Asians marrying individuals outside their culture, race, and/or religion.

### **4. Increased interest in Christian ministry by Second Generation South Asian Christians.**

The last two decades have seen few Second Generation South Asians going into full-time vocational Christian ministry. Rare exceptions are Steve Bains who serves as Pastor of Evangelism in Surrey Alliance Church, Surrey, British Columbia and Santosh Ninan ministering to youth at First Baptist Church, Vancouver, British Columbia. A few more are now enrolled in part-time and full-time training at theological institutions across the country.

**5. Increased vision by the Canadian Church to reach South Asians.**

There is a small but growing awareness, desire, and involvement by Canadian Christians, congregations, denominations and ministry agencies in evangelizing unsaved South Asians. September 11, 2001 and subsequent incidents of global terrorism and violence have certainly contributed to this welcome mood change and momentum tempo.

**6. Increased creativity is being used in ministries to reach South Asians.**

The variety of approaches employed in South Asian ministries include:

- Organized the "International South Asian Diaspora Leaders Consultation 2003."
- Airing radio and television evangelistic programs.
- Distributing Bibles and JESUS videos in vernacular languages.
- Offering practical help to new immigrants ... helping find suitable housing, filling forms, writing resumes, giving driving lessons. etc.
- Teaching new Canadians how to read, write and speak English.
- Organizing Summer family camps.
- Visiting homes and extending hospitality.
- Hosting a prayer center and/or prayer line.
- Offering seminars on Marriage, Parenting, Money Management etc.

**7. Increased number of First Generation South Asian Christians in ministry leadership roles.**

More than two decades ago there were less than a dozen South Asians in full-time vocational Christian ministry in Canada. There has been an escalate increase in personnel in local church ministry and para-church ministries across Canada.

**SUMMARY**

The spiritual harvest among South Asians in Canada is still a trickle. It is hoped that the persevering prayer and the diligent sowing of the Word in the matrix of authentic and loving relationships will result in a greater yield in the near future.

**III. TARGETING THE SECOND GENERATION (PRITAM SINGH)**

In July of 2001, God laid a vision in the hearts of various leaders of the South Asian Diaspora for a new and relevant work aimed at the next generation of young South Asians. With this goal in mind, a core group was formed of South Asian ministry leaders and advisory council members from different countries and denominations. These individuals joined their hearts in fervent prayer for God's wisdom and creativity to turn this vision into a reality. And so was born South Asian Connection and plans for the first South Asian Global Convention.

From August 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2004, the first international gathering of South Asian Christian youth, young adults, and ministry leaders from all around the world took place in Vancouver, Canada, at the **South Asian Global Convention 2004** (SAGC 2004). The theme chosen for this first Convention was "*Serving God's Purposes in Our Generation*" based on Acts 13:36.

The objectives of SAGC 2004 were five fold: 1) to celebrate in worship our eternal God, 2) to challenge Christian South Asian youth and young adults to embrace the Great Commission, 3) to equip Christian South Asian youth and young adults to work locally but to think globally in evangelism, 4) to communicate ideas, strategies and resources, and 5) to provide opportunities for relationship building and networking.

There were fifteen different missions organizations represented at SAGC 2004 through informative Exhibit Booths. Each generously made their resources available to interested delegates. Some of these include YWAM, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Interserve, Creation Science Association of BC, Gateway Missionary Training, MGL/South Asian Ministries, and several others.

The SAGC 2004 experience was further enhanced through “Discover Vancouver!”—a half-day sightseeing tour including three of Vancouver’s premier locations: Lynn Valley Canyon Suspension Bridge, Cypress Mountain, and Jericho Beach. Every delegate was given the “land, air, sea” experience of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland.

SAGC 2004 was experienced by 120 registered delegates between the ages of 18 and 35, varying from students to young urban professionals and ministry leaders, and representing over ten different denominations. The Saturday evening and Sunday morning sessions were open to the public and were attended by 1,200 guests who thoroughly enjoyed the program.

The South Asian Diaspora is spread out in many parts of the world thus making SAGC 2004 a truly global experience. Delegates came from Canada, Fiji, India, Kenya, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Singapore, Scotland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The following South Asian language groups were also represented: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalee, Marathi, Nepali, Punjabi, Telegu, Tamil, Sinhalese, and Urdu. SAGC 2004 brought socio-cultural and spiritual unity amidst a great diversity of the South Asian Diaspora to the glory of God.

SAGC 2004 was conducted entirely in the English language. It consisted of eight Plenary Sessions, thirteen Seminars, six different worship bands including some South Asian music. The keynote speaker for the morning sessions was L.T. Jeyachandran, the Executive Director of the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (Asia-Pacific). There were also four evening keynote speakers: Rabi Maharaj, Founder and President of East-West Ministries, Balbir Sheena, the Missions Pastor/Director from the International Punjabi Church, Rob Sinclair from the Dusty Sandals Society, and Dr. T.V. Thomas, the Director of the Centre for Evangelism and World Mission. Each of the speakers delivered challenging and relevant messages inspiring many of the delegates towards becoming visionary, mission-focused leaders, as they purpose in their hearts to serve their God in this Generation.

A large number of young people made public and private commitments to serve God’s purposes in their Generation, wherever God may take them. The prayer is that God will birth many more visions, dreams and strategies transforming each SAGC 2004 delegate into world-changers and history-makers for the South Asian community and beyond.

It was unanimously expressed that SAGC 2004 was a blessing from God with inspiring examples to follow, practical ideas to implement, and lasting friendships to develop. Delegates were equally impressed with the organization of SAGC 2004. The organizers are commended for their

spirit of professionalism and excellence. Hearts are full of gratitude towards all the pastors, mission agency leaders and brothers and sisters in the worldwide community, who have graciously contributed to see the gospel presented to the South Asian community in a culturally-relevant, Bible-based and Spirit-led way.

Future plans for South Asian Connection include holding local, city-wide or country-wide, South Asian events for youth and young adults in 2005, in the delegates country of origin, followed by an International SAGC 2006 possibly in the UK.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The ministry to South Asians is a unique and challenging one. Here in this paper, a glimpse of the target group is illustrated by the situation in Canada and the challenge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation ministry is highlighted.

For more information regarding South Asian Connection and future events, you are encouraged to visit their website at [www.southasianconnection.com](http://www.southasianconnection.com). It is also possible to view the SAGC 2004 slideshow capturing the highlights and reflections of this historic event at <http://photos.yahoo.com/southasianconnection>.

*"Remember us for this, O our God, and do not blot out what we have so faithfully done for the house of our God and its services. Remember us with favor, O my God". Nehemiah 13:14, 31b*