

# My Journey with Gord and God



Gord Martin (L) and Jay Gurnett (R).

## THINKING AHEAD

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BY JAY GURNETT

When I arrived at Vision Ministries Canada as part-time staff-person #3 in 1997, I hadn't stayed at any job more than a half-dozen years. That's because I always wanted a new challenge (though some thought I had too many strong opinions to work for others). I had had good bosses that I respected. But I always moved on. Well, here it is 25+ years later at VMC! I'm convinced that what made my Vision experience different, was **Gord Martin**.

This is the **Gord** edition of *Thinking Ahead*. It's our chance to say something about **Our Journey with God and Gord**. 30 years after the founding of Vision Ministries Canada, Gord stepped down from his VMC work on July 1, 2022 (though no one who knows this man will be surprised to hear of the hundreds of hours he has already volunteered for Vision in his first few months of retirement!).

James K.A. Smith says, "Nostalgia [can end] up being its own form of forgetting". In this issue, we're aiming for something more than that: a bit of honest

remembering about how God used a relatively unheralded but exceptional leader to advance his intentions in Canada over the past three decades.

So let me give you a few thoughts on working with my friend Gord.

Gord and I certainly didn't have all the same perspectives. Over the years, we disagreed about dozens if not hundreds of things. However, we never had complicated relational problems and no bad feelings. There must be stories of struggles between us, right? But I can't really remember them (maybe it's nostalgia as a way of forgetting.)

Perhaps our lack of relational conflict goes back to the beginning when Interest Ministries was looking for someone to lead a Canadian organization they could sponsor. At exactly the same time, God was drawing Gord to help spark church planting amongst the Christian (Plymouth) Brethren – the old movement in which the two of us grew up. Interest Ministries researched a couple of dozen Canadian brethren leaders. Gord was the guy who was smarter, better connected, and more able/gifted than the rest of us. You can't really fight with that kind of guy, can you?

Gord saw it all so clearly and pushed the vision for church planting forward in such a compelling "story-telling" way. But he also had the humility to realize that some of those grand ideas could wait.

It's important to recognize the rarity of this kind of leader. Gord is as *apostolic* as anyone I've known. He can't help scanning the horizon for God's next plan to grow the kingdom.

Years ago, Gord wrote a piece for Vision that describes *three kinds of leaders*—visionaries, administrators, and shepherds.

Gord is a highly directive visionary or

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# GORD MARTIN

## OUR FEARLESS LEADER

BY HENRIETTA KOENIG



Henrietta Koenig worked as admin assistant with Gord Martin for more than 30 years.

**M**y husband Al and I started attending Lakeshore Bible Chapel around 1980. I volunteered in the office to do the church bulletin and type up Gord's notes. Back in the day, he wrote everything down on 5-inch quad pads—sermons,

meeting notes, wedding ceremonies, etc. Sometimes, there would be only a few words scrawled across a page. Gord has a rather large free-hand style, and I think he thought the larger he wrote, the easier it would be to read. Sometimes there were a lot of pages! Over the years, I've learned to decipher his handwriting. Many times people would call to say they got a note from Gord, asking, "What does it say?" I retyped his notes so others could read them, lol. After some harassment, he can write his signature so it fits on one (short) line.

My role began as a volunteer position, but as Lakeshore grew, it became evident that Gord needed a full-time assistant. We already had a solid working relationship when Gord asked me if I'd come along to Vision with him. It was a no-brainer! I was excited for this new chapter to begin.

As I witnessed how Gord handled issues, his wisdom became apparent—truly. I've seen him lead and nurture people to a place where they can be confident in making decisions themselves. He is a great respecter of persons. And he is humble. He loves to laugh (loudly) and listens intently to whoever talks with him. I've seen him care for people in crisis.

He presented hope to many people who thought they were in a hopeless situation.

Gord is also a visionary. The excitement of embarking on a new course of action was never far away. His charismatic nature, and genuine love for God and those around him, moved people to respond in ways they never thought possible. Gord is a great team player, and he stretches people. Yes, he was our fearless leader, but he also gave you enough leeway to make your own decisions (and mistakes) without judgment. I appreciated all of these characteristics in him as a "boss."

I loved being part of VMC from the ground up. It was amazing to see doors open, and funds come in to make this all happen. Seeing people giving joyfully and VMC's impact on hopeful church planters, pastors, ethnic pastors, church leadership teams, and churches in crisis was refreshing. My spiritual life has grown simply due to being around people who love Jesus and who humbly serve Him in all situations. I've learned to love God more deeply as I work with the diverse VMC team. The VMC world is caring and loving, and I couldn't have asked for a better place to work. God knew where I needed to be. ■



Gord and Heather Martin in their middle years.



Gord thanking Heather for standing with him in ministry and life at VMC's 25th anniversary in 2017





**“God put Gord and I in each other’s lives—we got to be led by Him together.”**

- Jay Gurnett, VMC Associate Director

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“classic” leader. But then he also gets it done like the second kind leader—a “Solomon” kind of leader. Solomon didn’t have a big vision (nor was he a leader who cared about people). But he built the Temple!

Gord didn’t just draw us into the vision; he worked endlessly, wrote volumes (*I had to edit a whole lot of that writing! And then do it again!*), preached and travelled and met and negotiated and read and researched and reached out ... it exhausts me to think about it.

And now I’m remembering the first time I asked Gord to help me do some marriage counselling. I was overwhelmed and frustrated. I wanted to shake those two people to compel some change. Instead, I watched my friend and my boss, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. I watched him lead with love, like Barnabas or Timothy. This third kind of leader in the “Gord-system” is a shepherd. The New Canadian leaders Gord influences will particularly testify

that he’s a shepherd.

We think that churches need all three kinds of leaders. But we don’t suggest that you’ll find any 3-in-one. That rare visionary-administrator-shepherd is who I’ve been following for 25 years.

I could say so much more—about his stories and his sense of humour (at my expense pretty often!). About his ability to stay focused and cut through the noise (I was going to use a stronger word). About his commitment to justice and the marginalized.

But mostly I want to tell you about the deep sense I have that God put Gord and I in each other’s lives. That we got to be led by God, together.

I think that working with Gord Martin is one of the few really important things that has happened in my life. ■

*Read more comments about Gord Martin’s ministry from Bruce Fournier, VMC’s first board chair, Dr. Rod Wilson, a mentor and early supporter, and Bruce McNicol, former ED of Interest Ministries. [vision-ministries.org/gord](http://vision-ministries.org/gord)*



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# Embracing and Empowering New Canadian Leaders

## He served without expecting something in return

One of Gord Martin's most significant ministry contributions was opening doors for new Canadian leaders. Men and women called to share the gospel with people from their own countries in Canada needed finances, opportunities, connections, and personal support. Gord paved the way for them.



Gord Martin with new Canadian Christian leaders in the VMC Network. Pictured L to R, Indy Cungcin, Ming-Peng Gong, Yonatan Hiruy, Gord, Amani Katanga, Siamak Shafti-Keramat.

When Ming-Peng Gong became a believer while studying at the University of Waterloo, Gord Martin was his pastor. Five years after following Christ, Ming-Peng was hired as a full-time pastor at Toronto China Bible Church in 2001. "The first thing I did was call Gord and let him know I needed help. I had no experience as a pastor!" Gord spent time with Ming-Peng and sent others to help. "Gord always serves people with no expectation of getting anything back."

Ming-Peng says VMC's strong focus on church planting influenced him. "Gord kept mentioning church planting, church planting." Toronto China Bible Church planted its first church in 2004 and has started six other branches. "With each plant, we received financial support from VMC. We appreciated that so much." Gord also connected Ming-Peng with Don Valley Bible Chapel, a VMC network

church. Toronto China Bible Church rented space from DVBC and later collaborated in ministry.

Ming-Peng is also grateful that Gord started a Friday morning prayer meeting for new immigrant pastors in 2020 that continues. "Every Friday morning, we pray together. That was a big help for Indy [Cungcin] who was stuck in Burma after travelling there before the pandemic." The close connections Gord helped foster among new Canadian pastors have had other positive results. Hearing about a Toronto immigrant pastor's need, Ming-Peng mobilized financial support for him and later others. "We started a ministry sponsoring new immigrant church pastors in Canada. We have helped 18 pastors," says Ming-Peng.

*Ming-Peng Gong is a pastor at Toronto China Bible Church and leader of the Chinese Church Association.*



## He invested his very life

I call Gord Martin "Mr. Question." In the beginning, he asked me questions, getting to know me, my wife, Molline, and my children. We met in Germany at a conference in 2007, but it took three years writing back and forth before we worked together on Vision Ministries Kenya (VMK).

Gord has been a mentor in my life. At our house, we call him "mature brother." We have talked by phone about every two weeks for the last ten years. I remember one time I called him, he was walking alone in the forest praying for the ministry. It is very rare to find leaders like this who come alongside with wisdom and prayer. He did not invest a million dollars in me; instead, he invested his very life. He exposed me to what he was learning and the people he knew. He introduced VMK to Canadians by bringing 30 to 40 people to Kenya, coming to help as pastors, professionals and counsellors. Gord is humble and transparent. He allowed me to see the process of leadership transition between him and Mike.

Gord has changed my life and he is someone I will never forget. He has contributed highly to where we are with VMK and helped us work through conflict and challenges. I really love my friend Gord.

*Ishmael Ochieng is the Executive Director of Vision Ministries Kenya, a network of more than 40 churches.*

## Gord lives the Bible

“When Gord lived the Bible, he came to our home and not only interviewed us [about our ministry] but he wanted to have a relationship with us,” says Siamak Shafti-Keramat. “Gord has become a member of our family and our church family. He called us every single week.” These consistent calls gave Siamak and his wife, Mina Ghaffari, the opportunity to “release their pain” about family and ministry issues. “Gord doesn’t just teach the Bible; he lives it.” Pointing to Galatians 3:26-28, Siamak says, “We are all one. Without each other we are weak.”

Gord embraced Siamak and other ethnic leaders, which he says is rare among Canadian pastors and churches. “Gord connected us to his friends and organizations to get help.” Thanks to Gord’s introductions, Siamak and his church have deep connections with Wallenstein Bible Chapel in rural Ontario and leaders in BC and Alberta.

*Siamak Shafti-Keramat is the pastor of Spirit of Truth Church in Toronto and the Farsi Christian Network, a global network of about 70 Farsi-speaking churches.*



Gord Martin connected Siamak Shafti-Keramat (L) pastor of a Farsi-speaking Toronto congregation and the late Ron Seabrooke, who was pastor of a rural church in Wallenstein, ON.

# Fostering Christian Networks among affinity and language groups

## He connected leaders and churches

I think Gord Martin’s best contribution to God’s kingdom is connecting leaders and churches. He helped leaders and churches unite in networks in North America, Kenya, and other parts of the world. I was

inspired to do the same on a smaller scale. Only a few churches worked together when I started a network for Christian Assemblies in Quebec in 2006. It was hard in the beginning. Gord reminded me to serve God and to serve people, even if they criticized what I was doing. Today thirty out of forty French Assemblies in the province belong to our network. I appreciate Gord’s humility and his sense of humour. He asked good questions that helped me think ahead and to think outside the box.

*Guy Bourassa, Pastor, Assemblée Chrétienne de Shawinigan, Quebec Network Leader*



## Never lost the vision to plant and strengthen churches

Gord Martin has helped plant more churches than anyone else I know! He introduced me to church planting by taking me to a conference. Gord arranged for funding for my first church plant and helped me move on to my next plant. Gord encouraged me to try new things and supported me without micromanaging. He also taught me to give people second and third chances and to include people of all backgrounds and ethnicities. Gord helped me look beyond people’s faults to see their skill sets. Gord is not afraid to ask hard questions or to stand up to opposition. He’s



also good at working through conflict. Gord endured many difficult circumstances but never lost the vision to plant and strengthen churches.

*Rob Heintz, VMC's first church planter and current chaplain*

# God-Inspired Vision for the Nations

BY MIKE STONE

VMC's work among churches is not the result of human ambition. God inspired Gord Martin to stir up fresh passion for evangelism and church planting among Plymouth Brethren leaders, first in Ontario and then beyond. Gord's visionary leadership is rooted in a life of prayer and discernment—a commitment to listen for God's voice and move when He moves.

As lead pastor of a VMC partner church and now as VMC Executive Director, I've witnessed the impact of Gord's visionary leadership from a front row seat. Perhaps most compelling for me, is Gord's desire to work with pastors, planters and evangelists who were newcomers to Canada.

Visible minorities represent approximately 50% of Toronto and Vancouver's population and roughly a third of Montreal's. This diversity is also reflected in the broader Canadian population outside our three largest urban centres. Its difficult to imagine faithfully contextualized mission for Canada that ignores our ethnic diversity. Yet, this has been the case for many evangelical denominations until recently.

About a year ago, while participating in a discussion with other denominational leaders about mission for ethnically diverse Canada, a well-known

leader said, "We should get Mike to comment. He represents Vision Ministries, who's founder, Gord Martin, has been successfully working among Canadian newcomers for longer than most."

Long before many Canadian denominations understood the importance of embracing ethnic voices, Gord discerned the potential kingdom impact in human migration and the multiple diasporas settling in Canada. While many prioritized euro-Caucasian leadership, culture and ministry models, Gord realized the future of Christian mission in the west was dependent on the Nations.

For centuries we sent missionaries to minister to far away people groups. Now these same people were moving in next door, shopping in our supermarkets and sending their children to our schools. This was an opportunity to fulfill the cross-cultural priority of the Great Commission without leaving Canada.

By the turn of the century, the Church in western society was struggling with its own marginalization and Christianity's global center had shifted to the east and south. Suddenly, Canadian immigration represented not only a new opportunity for mission from the west to the rest but from nations with larger Christian populations and greater gospel

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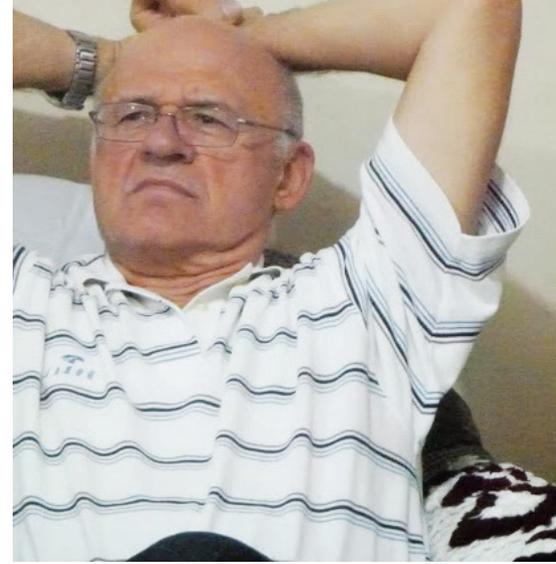


## Mission Among New Canadians, Gord's Way:

1. Pay attention to where the "fire is already burning". Which people group (ethnicity) is most open to the gospel? Where is kingdom activity flourishing?
2. Look for a person of influence among these people—someone known for their trustworthiness, humility and sacrifice.
3. Love, serve and care for this leader, as someone made in the image of God—not a pawn to manipulate for missional outcomes.
4. Learn their culture intimately. Share a meal in your home. Visit their home to meet their family. Bridging cultural divides can be intimidating and awkward but is essential.
5. Partner with this person to form an evangelistic community (pre-church plant) from their relational connections.
6. Publicly endorse his or her leadership among peers—even if this person doesn't fit the prevailing North American leadership profile.
7. Celebrate their stories widely, even when "movers and shakers" of the host culture seem uninterested. Describe the powerful things God is doing among this people group.

# Reflecting on the VMC Journey: What Was He Thinking!?

## *Reflections on the founding of Vision Ministries Canada*



“What is he thinking?” That’s what people who knew me were asking themselves when I told them in 1992 I was starting Vision Ministries Canada! I had no problem explaining my first two objectives.

1. Help people start new churches
2. Encourage leaders of existing churches

But the third, “Cultivating a partnering network of churches, primarily in Canada” was hard to communicate to a group of fiercely independent Brethren background church leaders.

Yet here we are, 30 years later a partnering network of 150 + churches across Canada, plus networks of Chinese, African, Burmese and Afghan churches in Canada and a network in Kenya. These churches have discovered the joys and benefits of working together.

A few weeks ago, I was overwhelmed with thankfulness to God as I emptied a 5-drawer filing cabinet in my VMC office. Each document reminded me of milestones along the way. Surely, God has carried me, and us, on a blessed and fruitful path! Thank you, Lord!!

### **What I’m most grateful God used me to do**

- Many people came to faith and are learning to walk with God in the churches that VMC helped plant. That was my passion from the beginning. Since 1992, more than 140 new church planting initiatives have been launched. 75% lasted for at least 5 years. Those that didn’t continue, courageously made disciples during their years of ministry.
- Many established churches found paths to recovery and fruitfulness, at least in part because of VMC.

- God introduced us to outstanding co-workers from immigrant communities who found a safe haven in Canada. They have been a great blessing to us. The work in Kenya has also been a source of mutual blessing. I have had the joy of encouraging and networking with international church network leaders whose journeys are similar to mine.

### **What I would tell my younger self to prepare for VMC**

I would tell my self, “What you thought was missing from the churches you knew best, was missing. The three big priorities you landed on: planting, encouraging leaders and cultivating a network of collaborative churches were definitely the right things to give your life to.”

I would also tell 40-year-old Gord, “Don’t be so cheap! Doing something like this will cost money!” Our years as missionaries taught us to be frugal, a valuable trait that has its limits.

### **What I would have done differently**

I would have recruited 10-12 churches to become supportive, partnering churches from the start. However, I didn’t believe I could find churches willing to partner on such a venture. I am glad we started with a primary focus on planting. It gave us a missional thrust that others could value and support without getting tangled up in debates about – everything.

I knew cultivating a network of partnering churches would be challenging but had no idea how uphill that part of our calling would be. Perhaps I should have researched that aspect of the ministry more at the beginning.

### **What God taught me**

1. If God says in the Bible to do something, just do it by faith! Don’t wait for additional revelation. He meant what he said.
2. If you notice or are impressed by an essential need not being addressed by anyone else, then do it.
3. Our adequacy comes from God, not from others and not from knowledge alone.
4. Starting from scratch, with a blank sheet of paper, is a beautiful thing!
5. He is able; He carried us as we struggled with the burdens of a son whose life and death were so complicated.

I’m grateful to have been supported by a multitude of people. They prayed, gave, encouraged and linked arms with me. In my book, *Doing it Afraid*, I expressed deep appreciation for my many co-workers. It’s “my own Romans 16!” *Doing it Afraid* also tells my journey with VMC.

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*Though he’s retiring from VMC, Gord is not retiring from ministry. He will continue to consult with church leaders, preach, mentor and support immigrant pastors and planters. Gord’s book “Doing it Afraid” is available on Amazon, Kindle or by contacting him at Gord1906@gmail.com*



Gord Martin (back left) and Mike Stone (front centre) with a group of international Brethren leaders in France.

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passion to the west. As evangelistic zeal diminished among domestic Christians, Gord noticed that God was sending potential missionaries to Canada. Was this God's plan to rescue the Canadian Church?

Today close to 25% of VMC churches focus on and are led by Canadian newcomers. We work with the Chinese Church Association, Farsi Christian Ministries and the Chin Christian Fellowship of Canada. VMC plays a supportive role among a group of Ethiopian and Eritrean churches and has also come alongside the planting of several

Muslim background churches. Most recently, VMC partnered with ECWA, a large Nigerian denomination, to plant a network of Nigerian churches in Canada.

Not only has God given Gord a vision for the Nations but is resourcing this vision with apostolic partners born outside of Canada, friends like Ming-Peng Gong, Siamak Shafti-Keramat, Indy Cungin, Yonatan Hiruy, Obed Rod and Peter Johnson to name a few. Together these friends are pursuing mission from everywhere to everywhere.

The Scriptures remind us that it is easy to miss God when we ignore the stranger. Sarah laughed at three strangers Abraham brought home and nearly missed the news

of divine blessing. Later, two disciples journeying to Emmaus nearly missed God when they failed to recognize the resurrected Lord.

Don't miss God by ignoring the strangers who are making this country their home. Heed the words of the writer of Hebrews and welcome the refugee and immigrant into your life as a way to encounter God. You never know when you are entertaining angels. For years, Gord Martin has sensed the divine presence and potential blessing through the lives of newcomers. His legacy of missional hospitality has shaped the vision of VMC and blessed the Church in Canada.

Thank you, my friend! ■

## THINKING AHEAD



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