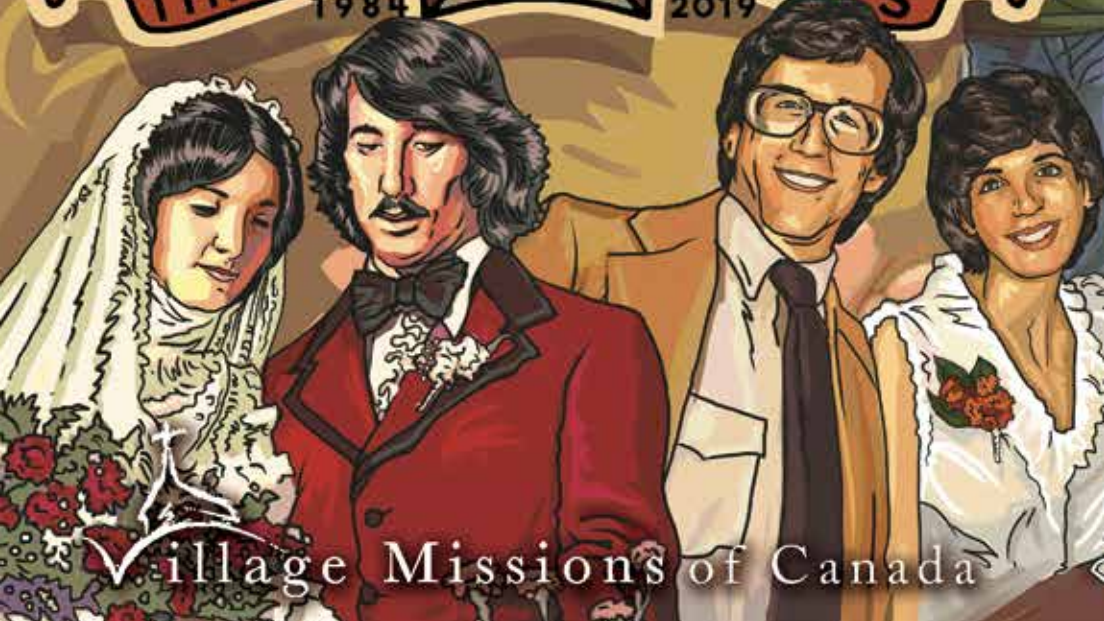
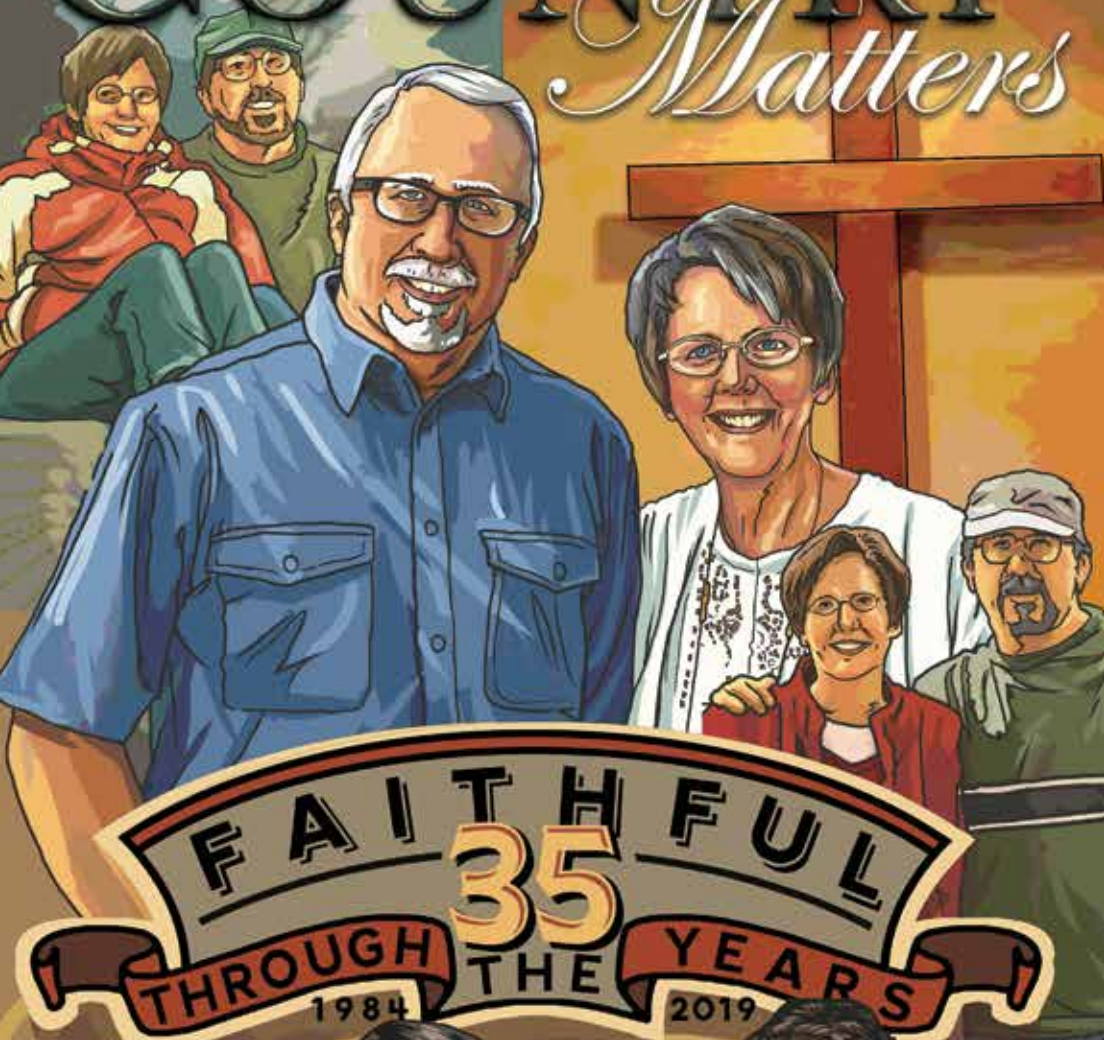


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COUNTRY Matters



Village Missions of Canada



A View From the Country

with Murray Graham, Executive Director

A Lifetime of Selfless Service

It's no secret that small churches in rural communities are not popular destinations to do ministry in modern times. Often, these places experience a vicious cycle of serial short-term stays, where seminary graduates go to learn the ropes for a few years before heading off to a bigger church in the city.

There, you will be more successful and reach more people for Christ, the saying goes.

So, when a pastor stays for many years in a country church in a forgotten rural place, that's a big deal. And if he stays for several decades, that's almost unheard of today.

Here in Village Missions, we encourage long-term ministry because we believe that small places are worth investing in. We believe that committing your life to proclaiming the gospel in one community is as worthy a call as any else. Our God loves the people of rural places, and He desires them to know Him, too.

Over the years, we've had several Village Missionary couples who have exemplified a lifetime of selfless service in one community. They have poured out their lives to preach the Word and love the people right where they are. They've experienced both the hardships and joys that accompany long-term rural ministry. But, because of willingness to devote their lives to that one place, many souls have come to know the Lord.

And that's something that will never cease to rouse my heart, bring a tear to my eye, and leave me in awe of how God has used Village Missionaries to reach the lost in rural Canada!

In this edition of *Country Matters*, I want you to meet one of these missionary couples. They have served on their one and only field for 35 years, and we want to honor them for their lifetime of Christ-like service.

So, please allow me to introduce you to Rob & Deb Hoffman of Gold River, BC, as they share some of the lessons they have learned after nearly four decades of rural ministry.

In Him,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Murray Graham". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Murray Graham
Executive Director

REMEMBRANCES

In August 2019, Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) of Gold River, BC, commemorated its 50th anniversary as a congregation. Members, both old and new, gathered together to remember and celebrate all the ways that God has used this little country church on Vancouver Island to change lives and save souls.

"I am so very thankful to have grown up in a church body that was supportive and kind, where I learned to value the Word and the weak, messy, fallible, beautiful Body of Christ."

"CFC had a great impact on my life because it started me on a journey that would connect me with the life changing power of Jesus Christ."

"God loves this little country church and has blessed those that have come through these doors."

Not only did this month mark CFC's legacy since it began half a century ago, their Village Missionaries also celebrated 35 years of faithful service in Gold River, their one and only field.

Rob & Debbie Hoffman have been here through most of the church's history, and have experienced the ups and downs of life with the whole community of Gold River. Their blood, sweat, and tears are a part of this breathtaking land just as much as the land is a part of them.



In an age when small churches in forgotten places are overlooked, the Hoffman's ministry of nearly four decades in this little village is truly a testament of their faithfulness, and God's sustaining power.

So as they reflect on their life and ministry in Gold River, Rob & Debbie share some of the lessons they have learned after 35 years of ministry, and what they want their legacy to be when their work is done.



TRUST TAKES TIME

"You and the church changed the direction of entire generations of my family." – Former member of CFC

Establishing trust and credibility in a rural area is not accomplished overnight. It takes years of being involved in the community, building relationships with people, and breaking stereotypes of what a Christian is.

So, when Rob & Debbie were constantly asked for the first five years of their ministry—"When are you going to leave?"—they knew this community's greatest need was a thriving church committed to preaching the Word and loving the people on a long-term basis.



"Building trust can take a long time," says Rob. "Some people had bad experiences with Christians, others have preconceived ideas. First Nations here sadly has a track record of governments and churches hurting them. So, these things had to be overcome."



Even though Rob & Debbie experienced many moments of discouragement, they learned to measure things in small detail and rejoice when progress, no matter how small, was made.

"When someone who formerly gave me the cold shoulder for 15 years now waves at me, that's huge!" Rob says with great enthusiasm.



Over time as the people got to know Rob & Debbie, and saw that they weren't going anywhere, gradually doors would open up to offer a word of encouragement, or even share the gospel. But the key is to be patient and wait for the Lord to move.



"It takes time to build trust and relationships," Rob says, "but when you do, you get a lot more opportunities to speak into people's lives."

BEING THERE THROUGH THE YEARS

***"God has blessed Gold River because of Rob & Debbie's committed ministry to this community."
- Member of CFC***

Putting down roots also allows missionaries to watch their church and community change over time, and be there for them in the good times and bad.

"Being here this long, it's like we've been in several different fields because the church and community have changed so much!" says Debbie.

When they first arrived in 1984, Gold River was a wealthy town with a population of almost 3,000. However, when

the mills suddenly closed in 2000, nearly two-thirds of the people in their church and community lost their jobs and moved away.



Although many services and most of the population were gone, Christian Fellowship Church and the Hoffmans were still there to love and serve the people around them.

"We've gotten to go through life with people, through the ups and downs," remembers Debbie. "We've gotten to be a part of many lives."

And after 35 years, Rob & Debbie have done and seen many things. They've watched their church grow, and other times be small. They've been to births and baptisms, weddings and funerals. They've ministered to the hurting, and served the lowly. They've seen some come to Christ, and others reject Him.

Despite the hardships, Rob & Debbie have striven to see every day of their 35 years in Gold River as an adventure and a worthwhile challenge, because there will always be needs and people who don't know the Lord.

As Rob describes it: "Being a rural, isolated missionary pastor is probably one of the most dynamic, challenging, and rewarding things in ministry."

LEAVING A LEGACY

"Rob & Debbie have been and still are influential in our ministry." – Joe & Laura Letourneau, Village Missionaries in Marysville, BC



The Hoffman's ministry has left an

impact in more ways than can be counted. They faithfully invested 35 years of their lives so that the gospel could be proclaimed in their little village, and empowering others to do the same wherever they go.

So, when their chapter in Gold River finally does come to its conclusion, the Hoffmans pray that their legacy is one that points people to Jesus.

"I would like people to say that we loved the Lord, we preached the Word, and we loved the people," Debbie says. "I hope that's what people remember about us."



And Rob, echoing his wife's wish, also hopes for a similar ending to their story in Gold River. When their time as Village Missionaries ends, this is the prayer of their heart:

"That the church of Jesus Christ is alive and well in Gold River. That's our greatest hope."



Executive Director Murray Graham (left) presents Rob and Debbie with an award honoring their years of service to Village Missions.

Rob & Deb's 35 years of ministry is truly an incredible story of their faithfulness and God's sustaining power. However, they could not have stayed in Gold River if it were not for Village Missions and our team of generous donors.

A lifetime investment into one place for the sake of the gospel is what Village Missionaries strive to do. But, they cannot do that without supporters like you. You can make

more stories like Rob & Deb's possible. You can be a part of changing lives and saving souls. Would you consider how you can support the ministry of Village Missions and our missionaries today?



Keeping Country Churches Alive
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