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# COUNTRY Matters



Village Missions of Canada



## A View From the Country with Murray Graham, Executive Director

Since our founding, missions has been in our name and has been the focus of our ministry in rural communities. Because we are missionaries to the whole community, we don't just focus on the needs of those who know Christ. We seek to serve and help people inside and outside the church doors. Village Missionaries serve as pastors to those who have come to know the Lord while at the same time reaching out to the community.

In this issue, you will read about one of the many ways Village Missionaries are serving their communities in the name of Christ. Fire chaplains have an open door to come alongside people during traumatic situations and be a God-centered presence. Other Village Missionaries serve as firefighters. Some volunteer at a local school, help troubled students, or drive school buses. As missionaries meet essential needs in the community and demonstrate that Christ cares about all aspects of life, they are laying a foundation of trust for the day when people are ready to hear the Gospel.

Those who turn to Christ as adults often come to faith because of some life-changing event. A crisis becomes a catalyst to reconsider their life purpose. And for those who find Jesus, their journey often includes a trustworthy person who came alongside them during their pain and grief. Every day, missionary pastors – and people like you – have an opportunity to be that caring presence for someone walking through a crisis. Let's live out the Gospel and be a God-centered presence in our communities.

Serving our Savior together,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Murray Graham".

Murray Graham, Executive Director

*This issue's cover art depicts another Village Missions pastor who serves as a first responder chaplain.*



## COMING ALONGSIDE

Chris looked around the fire hall at his fellow firefighters. He had anticipated this day for a long time. The fire chief and Chris announced that he was switching to a chaplain role. Then the two of them left for the hospital to visit a firefighter who had just lost his wife and unborn child.

Chris and his wife, Naomi, are Village Missionaries in Rich Valley, Alberta. It's a small town with under 30 residents. After moving there in 2006, Chris became aware of the need for firefighters. After all, Rich Valley Community Church is just down the street from the fire hall. He realized becoming a firefighter would be an ideal way to be involved in the community.



*"As pastors, we are to be there in people's darkest times, and that's what firefighters do," he said.*



As Chris responded to fire and accident scenes, he pondered how he could also minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of people affected by tragedy. With the support of a new fire chief, Chris officially took on the fire chaplain role in 2016. Now he is one of two chaplains in their county and is chaplain for a neighboring county.

According to the Federation of Fire Chaplains—an international group that Chris belongs to—the essence of fire chaplaincy is to come alongside the firefighters and the community.



## COMING ALONGSIDE FIREFIGHTERS

Chris comes alongside his fellow firefighters in many ways. He enjoys practicing and training with them at least once a week. He goes on fire calls with them. He looks for ways to meet their needs and lighten their burden. When there's a long fire call, Chris or another pastor from the local ministerial association delivers food they had pre-cooked and frozen. At Christmas, Chris and his wife take home-baked cookies to the fire hall.

The goal is to build trust with firefighters so that they contact him when they have questions or need help.



*"People call firefighters when things go wrong. Firefighters call me when things go wrong for them."*

Often they don't need to call him—they run into him around town. One day he stopped at the local bakery and ended up staying for an hour talking with a firefighter who needed encouragement.

A large part of a fire chaplain's role is to help firefighters debrief and recover after stressful or traumatic experiences. When they watch an infant die, for example. When they fight a fire at the home of a relative or friend. Shortly after events like these, Chris meets with them for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM).

Chaplains also conduct funerals for firefighters, which may be the hardest thing they face.

A couple years ago Chris came upon the scene of a fatal accident minutes after it occurred at the deputy chief's driveway. He stopped and discovered that the victim was a local firefighter. Chris spent a long, painful night at the scene with the fire chief. Throughout the following days, he ministered to the family of the young firefighter and the members of the local fire hall. And he officiated the large funeral with the support of another chaplain from the Alberta Association of Fire Chaplains, an organization that Chris was instrumental in founding.

Sierra White watched her father train and serve as a firefighter.

*"Men and women in the fire service need someone who cares for them personally and spiritually. I couldn't be prouder of my father for being the one to do it. I hope more will follow in his footsteps."*



## COMING ALONGSIDE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

First responder chaplains also come alongside community members when they experience tragedy. They offer practical assistance and emotional support.



*"On the worst day of a person's life, I walk beside them and love them," Chris said. "I sit with a distraught person at an accident scene or spend a day taking someone whose home burned to thrift stores. They know I am there as a pastor and a Christian, and if they start asking questions about God, I am there to help them find answers."*

Chris believes his chaplaincy role is an extension of his role as pastor of Rich Valley Community Church. Initially people in the church were puzzled by his involvement with the fire hall, but after seeing firsthand the ways he helps people, they have a better understanding of what Chris does and the value of it.

*"He interacts with many different people and impacts their lives so much," Naomi White said.*



*“His availability to help people through difficult situations and answer their questions has expanded our ministry.”*

Just ask Delrose. Her husband was a firefighter. After he died, Chris and the church reached out to her. They took her meals and firewood and called often to check in with her. Because of their love and care, she is now part of their church family.



*“We all appreciate what Chris does for us and the support systems he provides. Firefighters talk to him about their family problems, their work problems, a spiritual problem. Children and relatives of our personnel also call him. He has proven to be highly trustworthy.”*

Fire Chief Randy Schroeder

Village Missionaries are pastors inside and outside the church doors. They are present for people during the good times and in the midst of grief and trauma. They “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15 NIV). For some of our pastors, chaplaincy is a way for them to do just that. It takes

them into their communities and into people’s lives. Will you consider how God might have you partner with Village Missions so that more small towns and rural areas across North America have a missionary pastor who comes alongside people during the dark times?



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