

October 24

“Three moves are as good as a fire.” That’s a piece of Maritime wisdom, but Maritime hospitality trumped it. We made 3 moves in 15 months and with each our possessions increased. We left Kenya with only suitcases, but now the rooms of our-new-to-us home are full of furniture, the closets full of clothes and the cupboards full of food.

Forgive my materialism – stuff has only been a small part of our welcome. Invitations, visits, drives, words of appreciation, opportunities to serve, questions about our past, affirmation about our future, care for our kids, etc. – these have all convinced us that right now we belong in Atlantic Canada.

This is the type of reception my family experienced when we first came to Canada in 1975. Amidst that hospitality we found Christ. This is the type of embrace all newcomers dream of. Few receive it. Over 80% of newcomers to Saint John leave in their first year and are not missed, I’m afraid.

Actually, let’s not be afraid. Fear has to do with condemnation and there is none in Christ. Instead, let’s be convinced that we are loved and welcomed by God and that we will hear this commendation: “Come, you blessed by my Father, take your inheritance... For I was a stranger and you took me in.” (Mt.25:34,35)

Inter-cultural Ministries – this new endeavour of Canadian Baptist Ministries and the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches – envisions a Christian-led movement of hospitality that will transform the social and spiritual landscape of Atlantic Canada (probably the economic landscape, too), making us destination provinces once again. It envisions life-giving hospitality between First Nations, Acadians, historic black and white populations, immigrants, migrant workers and refugees.

I’m presently most familiar with the flight and plight of refugees. Their last three moves have each been as good as several devastating fires. They’ve lost their possessions and peace, their homes, health and hope. In Africa, it takes a community to raise a child. Here it will take a community of communities – kingdom-minded churches, Christians, and citizens - to raise the hopes of these traumatized newcomers.

It will take more than Maritime hospitality (which has actually let our original

hosts and later new arrivals down in the past). It will take supernatural hospitality. “Hospitality” in scripture literally means the “love of strangers” – the love of people who don’t expect it, who don’t “belong”, who can’t pay back. This is Christ’s love - love that trumped our sin and separation, our enmity and emptiness, our backwardness and bashfulness towards God.

Such hospitality trumps all. God bless you all. Paul

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