



A MODERN DAY TIMOTHY FOLLOWS GOD'S CALL TO TORONTO

By Dianne Swaim

In his homeland of Venezuela, J.D. Fasolino might be called a “Timothy minister.” He was still in his 20s when he served as a worship ministry director, overseeing the church’s music, audiovisual ministry, prayer ministry, and ushers. Serving as a church leader at such a young age was uncommon in Venezuela, yet God placed J.D. in a strategic serving role in preparation for a future in missions.

As the grandson of a preacher, J.D. was baptized at age 13 and immersed in a Southern Baptist church saturated with WMU missions discipleship groups. His experiences in Royal Ambassadors® began his hunger for sharing Christ with others. A missions trip to the Dominican Republic at age 22 further whetted his appetite for missions. Just as Paul supported and encouraged young Timothy in Lystra (see Acts 16:1-2), so faithful Christian men not only attracted J.D. to God but invested their time, efforts, and other resources in him. The stage was set for a missions career.

FROM ONE NORTH TO ANOTHER

J.D.’s home city of Caracas is located in northern Venezuela at the northern tip of South America. He and his wife, Andreina, like to say when God led them to Ontario, Canada, He moved them “from the north of the south to the north of the north.” They moved from an hour away from the Caribbean Sea with year-round tropical weather to the icy cold city of Ajax, part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Almost as extreme as the weather was God’s call to find Hispanics in Toronto and plant a Baptist church there. In the multiethnic and multicultural Toronto area, finding people from China, Pakistan, or Russia was not hard since they tended to stay in their ethnic groups. However, the tens of thousands of Hispanics who lived there were scattered throughout the city, and finding them was not easy. But God knew where they were and who they were, and J.D. and Andreina knew He would lead them to them.

EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH EAST

Diversity in Toronto is found not only in cultural populations but also in religion. Within ten minutes of a mosque, a Greek Orthodox church, Catholic churches, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist churches, Jehovah's Witnesses halls and other places of worship now stands a Hispanic Baptist church. In this Hispanic church, Emmanuel Baptist Church East (EBCE), more than fourteen Latin American countries are represented. Even J.D. was surprised by the diversity of their Hispanic congregation. "I knew we were different, but I never thought there was a big difference. By living here, I have learned," he said.

The need for family is strong among Hispanics who have migrated to Canada to work. They often feel isolated and mourn their loss of the "three Fs"—family, friends, and food. For many, EBCE has become a family to which they belong rather than a place to which they go. As the church practices 1 Corinthians 12:26—suffering with those who suffer and rejoicing with those who rejoice—a strong fellowship becomes a foundation from which they reach out to others.

Since the inception of EBCE, members have prayed for God to do what only He can do. They pray out loud and ask others to join them, and God has certainly answered their prayers time and time again. They have been able to see and experience the church being the church in the community by going outside the building and caring for others. More than fifty people have come to faith in Christ, and they have sent a missionary to plant another church in northern Toronto.

A MUSHROOM FARM MINISTRY

From day one, members of EBCE have reached out to farm workers from a local mushroom farm. For the past three years, they have offered Bible studies in one of the apartments in a complex where the farmers live. These studies have resulted in new believers but have created conflict as well. Not surprisingly, some of the challenges have come from the complex's policies and regulations. Religious groups are denied permission to go door to door or to use common areas of the building to meet. While studies inside an apartment are allowed, outreach evangelism is off limits.

Most of the conflict, however, has come from a surprising source—a local Catholic church. Once they realized the Baptist church was "disturbing the farm workers," they started their own gathering in a different apartment. Hoping competition would prevent the workers from attending the Baptist Bible study, they began to spread untruths among the farmers: "They are against what you believe; they want you to deny your roots, your traditions, who you are." Since many of these Hispanics came from a

strong Catholic background, the accusations were serious. Remember the prayers for God to do what only He could do? He did! Farm workers, both non-Christians and Catholics, began asking for the studies to continue, even fighting for the church's rights to share the gospel. They realized the church was concerned with their well-being and was trying to help them settle, face their daily struggles, and keep them from feeling isolated or alone. Perhaps more amazingly, local business owners, government offices, and other local churches began to join them in various activities too.

J.D.'s faith was tested many times through this struggle. He came to realize the rejection was not against him, his family, or his church—it was against the gospel. These opposers needed true love, the kind that only comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

SPEAKING OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Fernando is a Peruvian man, the nephew of an influential archbishop in Peru. When Fernando's mom died, he began looking for a priest to pray for his mom's soul, believing this would ensure she could be in heaven. Instead, he found J.D., a Baptist minister. J.D. and Fernando began to meet on a weekly basis, and J.D. sensitively explained theological truths at a time when Fernando was grieving the loss of his mother. After three months, Fernando accepted Christ and was baptized. Even now, he calls J.D. "Father José" rather than "Pastor José." But J.D. says he doesn't mind.

Because there had previously been no Hispanic church on the east side of Toronto, there were strong Christians there who were unchurched. Mario's family was one of those. Mario was diagnosed with cancer at age nine, but God did what only He could do and healed him. With a new church plant, Mario's family became active, serving in leadership positions.

Mario ran from God as a college student, but his parents and their church never stopped praying for him. J.D. and others prayed for Mario long before they met him. Indeed, Mario only came to church in pursuit of a girl who went there. When that relationship ended, Mario began to meet with J.D. for lunch and tea. He soon recommitted his life to Christ and now serves as the church's communications director. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church's website, social media, and live streaming have become crucial. No doubt God had prepared Mario for such a time as this.

These are only two of the many personal stories of Hispanic people who have found a home at EBCE. One of J.D.'s pastor friends said, "We don't go out to evangelize. We evangelize when we go out." Emmanuel Baptist Church East is living proof of that. For a visual of this church's sweet fellowship, visit Annie Armstrong Easter Offering: Heart

for unreached drives missionary's work in Toronto | Baptist Resource Network (brnunited.org). Be sure to watch the video at the end.

When J.D.'s faith is under pressure, he goes to a verse which reminds him of why God has led them to Toronto: "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1). That sounds a lot like Paul telling Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

PRAYER REQUESTS

- J.D. and Andreina have two handsome boys, 7-year-old Daniel and 3-year-old David. Pray for the Fasolinos to be able to manage their time well to be able to balance ministry and family.
- Andreina works a part-time job, but with a growing family comes growing expenses. Please pray for their health to continue to allow them to serve God and support their family.
- Ministerially, J.D. asks God for wisdom to continue shepherding God's flock the way He wants. He asks for

prayer for leadership development to continue raising up leaders who will continue to make an impact in the community where they live. J.D. bases these prayers on 2 Timothy 2:2 and Ephesians 4:11-12.

ANSWERED PRAYERS

- The Fasolinos now have a permanent place to live after five moves in less than eight years.
- Andreina's widowed mother has come to live with them. This is not only a great help to them but also gives them a sense of relief that she is away from the current political unrest in Venezuela.
- J.D. is continuing to learn and grow in God's Word through work on a master's degree in theological studies.
- The pandemic has allowed them much-needed family time. They have been able to enjoy being with one another, as well as communicating online with family in Venezuela, the US, Portugal, and Spain.

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Toronto: A Modern-Day Timothy Follows God's Call

By Diana C. Derringer



FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

1. Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 2 Timothy 1:7.
2. Ask the group to summarize the mission study introduction's description of J. D. Fasolino as a "Timothy minister."
3. Invite someone to portray J. D. Fasolino and to describe his ministry to the group based on the mission study article.
4. Ask participants how closely the desire for the "three Fs — family, friends, and food" reflects the desires of the people they know. Talk together about how that might influence outreach efforts and events.
5. Discuss the implications of the two quotes, "Emmanuel Baptist East has become a family to which they belong rather than a place to which they go," and, "We don't go out to evangelize. We evangelize when we go out." Brainstorm ways to implement these same principles locally.
6. Watch the two-minute video of J. D. Fasolino at Annie Armstrong Easter Offering: Heart for unreached drives missionary's work in Toronto | Baptist Resource Network (brnunited.org).
7. Pray for the Fasolino family and their ministry using the prayer requests and answered prayers guide at the end of the mission study.



FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Write a one- or two-word description of yourself as a believer (similar to the "Timothy minister" of J. D. Fasolino in the mission study introduction).
2. Explore the mission study article to discover why J. D. might be called a "Timothy minister" and how he uses his background in his mission work. Consider why you chose the word(s) you used for your personal description. List ways to use your background in what God calls you to be and do.
3. Study J. D.'s experience in a "mushroom farm ministry." Under your personal description and background information, add ways to remain faithful to God's call on your life in spite of negative feedback you may receive.
4. Read "Speaking of personal relationships." List the names of three people with whom you can initiate or strengthen a personal relationship to reach them for Jesus.
5. Memorize 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 2 Timothy 1:7.
6. Focus on one of the Fasolinos' seven prayer requests or answered prayers each day for the next week.



FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Assign roles from the mission study to each family member. Present that person's information to the rest of the family as a monologue, detailed description, reading, or imagine-a-day-in-the-life story. As opportunities arise, share the information you learn with friends or extended family.
2. Talk about how the Fasolinos must have felt when they left family and culture to serve where God called them. Discuss how their faith eased that transition.
3. Talk about different ways you can reach family, friends, and community members, including individuals from other cultures, for Jesus.
4. Pray, asking God's guidance for the Fasolinos and for personal family ministry.