

# SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

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Valuable work



## Breaking the cycle of disability and poverty

*Cbm Canada calls the world to act*

Rob Horsley  
ChristianWeek Staff

Cbm Canada estimates that roughly 520 million people are affected by disabilities around the world. Recognizing a need for immediate attention, the organization is seeking to raise awareness and make an impact in the lives of those with special needs.

“One of the messages that we’ve been trying to get out in Canada, to the Canadian government, to other NGOs, and to churches is that disability should be a cross-cutting theme,” says executive director Ed Epp.

Every organization, church and program should be asking whether its services are available to people with disabilities, he says. “If the answer is no, I don’t think they’re doing their job.”

Cbm Canada stands in the gap for people with disabilities. While



Photos courtesy of cbm Canada

providing health and medical care continues to be a big concern, needs like education, livelihood, human rights, and community engagement also register among the action items being pursued by cbm.

This means assessing how they

are able to “call others to do their job,” in partnership programs with other organizations looking to help those with disabilities.

“One of the temptations is for organizations like cbm [Canada] is to do everything ourselves,” says

Epp. “I think that’s wrong because you have to develop all those areas of expertise as you go.”

Cbm Canada actively encourages other organizations to pursue inclusive measures within their programs. If other organizations are able to provide inclusion for disabled people within their communities, Epp notes, it alleviates the pressure of cbm Canada having to provide in areas beyond its expertise.

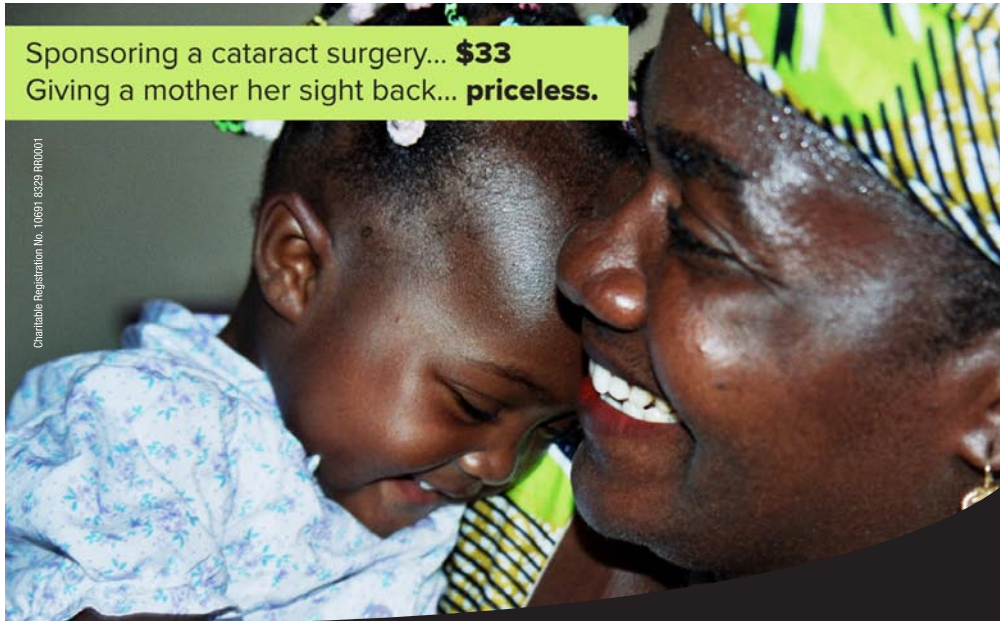
The World Health Organization has also noted the need to care for those with disabilities on a global scale, noting the cyclical relationship between the poverty and disability.

Poverty causes disability. People who are poorer have less access to medical facilities and nutrition, which in turn leads to a greater chance of being born with a disability or becoming disabled in later life.

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## Spots

- The exact number of disabled persons worldwide is estimated differently depending on the source. The World Health Organization suggests approximately one billion people worldwide face some form of disability, while the World Bank offers no guess at all.
- People with disabilities make up the largest minority people group in the world, and the only group that anyone could become a member of at any time.
- Cbm strives for a world in which people living with or affected by disability are valued as Jesus values them, accepted as equals, able to achieve their God-given potential, as outlined in the vision statement of the organization.
- Cbm Canada has existed since 1974. The international organization exists in 80 countries worldwide. Founded by a Lutheran pastor in what is now Iran, cbm was created in recognition of a need to care for disabled people in the community.



Disability causes poverty. In every community in the world, families with disabilities are poorer by comparison than those without. Even in comparatively impoverished places, those with disabilities are without exception the poorest of the poor.

Around the world, many people with disabilities are often hidden within communities, making it difficult to assess the exact needs for any given population. Even so, it is important not to let those assessments label individuals as simply “disabled persons.”

Epp recalls visiting a boy in Uganda with cerebral palsy. He only had limited contact with his community, having been kept in a back room for most days while his mother worked. Epp sat down with the boy, glibly asking, “How are you?” in English. To great surprise, the boy responded with “I’m fine, thank you.”

“It was a good reminder that behind the lack of control he had in his body and his muscles, here was a human being with the ability to love, hate, have a relationship with people, God and all of those things,” says Epp.

Recently there was a large amount of buzz regarding Im

Dong Hyun of South Korea and Oscar Pistorius from South Africa, two athletes with disabilities who competed at the 2012 Olympics in London. Though the mainstream media cast both athletes in a positive light, some are concerned that the two men are celebrated more for overcoming disability than for their athletic achievements.

“I think it’s problematic because you don’t see them as people... I also think it lets us off the hook in that we say, ‘look what this person has overcome, and that’s great,’ and then we ignore the fact that we don’t see the person with a disability down the street as a human being,” says Epp. “We only put the extra special cases on pedestals and we don’t address the issues that are in front of us every day.”

For Canadians, Epp stresses the importance in seeing people with disabilities the way Jesus sees them, and caring for them in a way that reflects that.

“These are human beings, and we have to see that first. They need relationships—they need friends, they need people around them.”

For more information about cbm, visit [www.cbmcanada.org](http://www.cbmcanada.org).



## Big win astonishes debut novelist

*Alberta author Deb Elkink awarded prestigious writing prize*

Aaron Epp  
Senior Correspondent

MEDICINE HAT, AB—Despite the fact that she was wearing four-and-a-half inch heels, Deb Elkink ran to the podium when she won a \$5,000 prize for her debut novel in June.

“When I ran to the front, I actually leapt into the air and shouted, like I was chasing cattle on horseback, and I punched the air,” the 58-year-old author says with a laugh on the phone from her home near Medicine Hat. “It was very undignified and very satisfying!”

Elkink won the Grace Irwin Award at the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Canadian Christian Writing Awards gala in Mississauga, Ontario for her novel, *The Third Grace*.

Published in November 2011 by Greenbrier Book Company, the novel tells the tale of Mary Grace, a big-city costume designer who grew up as a Mennonite farm girl and is now on her way to Paris in search of an old French boyfriend and her own misplaced identity.

The Grace Irwin Award is

Canada’s largest literary prize for writers who are Christian. *The Third Grace* beat out 52 other novels submitted for consideration.

Elkink says she was astonished when she was announced as the winner.

“It was one of the best moments of my life,” she says. “There’s a kind of validation you get when your peers recognize your work.”

That Elkink calls it one of the best moments of her life is interesting, given the range of experiences she’s had since growing up in Winnipeg.

With a love for writing that began in grade school, Elkink sold around a dozen short stories and magazine articles after graduating with a B.A. in communications from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

After marrying her husband, Gerrit, Elkink immersed herself fully in a rural life of marriage, ranching and child rearing in Saskatchewan’s Great Sand Hills.

She cooked for branding crews of 100, earned her private pilot’s license, helped round up the

family’s 1,000-head cattle herd and homeschooled her three children until they completed Grade 9.

Later, she earned a Master’s in theology from Briercrest Seminary in Caronport, Saskatchewan.

Elkink has visited 30 countries on five continents, and says the idea for *The Third Grace* originated during a visit to Paris in 1989.

She says her writing is about telling timeless truths. Rather than tell a moral tale and hit people over the head with a Christian message, Elkink believes that what makes literature truly Christian is if it is written by someone who understands the basic underlying back story of Christianity and the Word of God.

“The book isn’t meant to evangelize,” Elkink says. “It’s meant to express a condition of the human heart, and especially women’s hearts.”

While it took nearly 22 years to complete *The Third Grace* from the time she had the idea for the novel to the time it was published, Elkink is hoping to finish her second novel in one year from now.



Deb Elkink won the Grace Irwin Award for her debut novel, *The Third Grace*.

Photo courtesy Deb Elkink

She doesn’t worry about being prolific and takes comfort in knowing the output of author Grace Irwin, for whom the award Elkink received is named after. Irwin published seven books during her career.

“That was very calming for me to read,” Elkink says. “She didn’t think she needed to write 50 books in 50 years and they [are] a valued contribution to the literary scene in Canada. That’s an encouragement for me.”