

Wilf Wight (2013)

**My Memories of Louis Germain**

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In the spring of 1961, while a student at London College of Bible and Missions (Ontario) the Lord spoke to me of the great need for the Gospel in the Province of Quebec. That summer, on a student mission, I joined a team for door-to-door literature distribution. Bill Learoyd teamed me with Fernand St-Louis for several weeks in the St-Sauveur region.

At summer's end we drove to Frontier Lodge to enjoy the Labour Day young adult weekend and then help close the camp. My home was near London (Ontario) and I had been advised to meet with Dr. Arthur Hill (originally from London) while in the Province. This worked out well since the Hill's cottage was next door to Frontier and I was able to benefit from his advice. He had two strong recommendations: Learn the French language well and come to the Province with a profession to support myself. My French was limited to high-school grammar but I had made application to Teacher's College. Oh yes - and during that week-end I met Constance Landry, a beautiful Quebecoise whose family had come to Christ in the late 1940's. The Lord has ways of increasing motivation for evangelism!

One year later, in the fall of 1962 I moved as a single man to Ottawa to teach elementary school. It wasn't long before I learned of a little assembly on the east side of town – Evangel Chapel - that had a heart for evangelism amongst the French-speaking population. It was here that I first met Louis Germain.

Monsieur Germain was from France and had spent some years in Puerto Rico with his Canadian wife. While there, they lost a young child and returned to Canada. I never met Mrs. Germain but Louis told me that his wife had remained bitter after the death of their child and insisted on staying in Toronto. After WW11 Mr. Germain moved to Deseronto on his own for the purpose of evangelism. There is an Indian reservation there but I do not know if that was his field. There was also a conservative Brethren assembly at Deseronto.

About 1950, Mr. Germain came to Ottawa on the invitation of a Mr. Leonard C. Thomas. This Ottawa lawyer had come to faith in Christ in the 1930's – though his wife remained opposed to the Gospel. Mr. Thomas had a heart for evangelism and initiated an outreach in Ottawa East – then known as Cyrville. A lot was purchased from the Fournier family at 968 St-Laurent Blvd. Several members of that family came to faith. A building was constructed which included a small apartment on the second level to house a Christian worker. The work was incorporated as "Mission Evangelique Libre" in 1949 and the building was completed within a year or two.

Louis Germain arrived in Ottawa before the building was finished and for some time he lived in part of the Scripture Truth Book Store, owned by Jacob Martin, who attended Grace & Truth Assembly (now Rideauview Bible Chapel). When the chapel was ready on St-Laurent, Louis moved into it but never into the lovely apartment. Typical of him, he insisted on living very simply. He set up a cot in the prayer room behind the piano and used the bathroom and kitchen common to the church. Our brother had a heart for the Gospel but also possessed a very odd personality. The fact that he was "estranged" from his wife in Toronto added to the strangeness of the situation.

Over the decade of the 1950's there was a growing congregation (about forty) of French speakers gathering at Evangel Chapel. When I arrived in Ottawa in 1962 I visited a businessman Generet Lacombe. He was a brother to Alphonse Lacombe of the early days of the work in Cap-de-la-Madeleine. Generet told me that the French assembly had recently fallen apart because of deep division due to the insistent, traditional viewpoint of Mr. Germain. The folks were scattered and were not interested in another assembly of "Les Frères". The little chapel was now the gathering place for a few English speakers and a large number of children from the rather poor area.

By 1965 the radio program "La Foi Vivifiante" by Fernand St-Louis was attracting inquirers from the Ottawa-Hull area. No doubt Vatican 11 (1964) gave some Roman Catholics more freedom to contact an evangelical program. Contacts also came from Gaston Jolin's "L'heure de la bonne nouvelle". My French was improving and along with two other brothers (both Quebecois) I began follow-up of these inquirers. Monday evenings were given to evangelism since I was still teaching school full-time. Within a few months we had a growing gathering of believers: Emma Fournier and the Dumouchel family (only ones from the original assembly), Lillianne Huntington, the large Cousineau family (recent converts), Margaret Pilon and her children, Sylvia Cloutier (from Drummondville), Derek and Phyllis Ann McCormick (teachers recently moved from Montreal), the Plante-Baron family (from the Cap assembly), Gaetan Morency (recently converted), the Beauchemin family (from Shawinigan), Connie and myself. Mr. Louis Germain joined us when able but by now he was perhaps sixty and in poor health.

Since many of our folks lived on the Quebec side, we rented a building at 103 rue Frontenac, Hull where we met for two years. In 1971 the brothers at "Evangel" invited "the French meeting" to return to the Chapel. We met separately for the Lord's Supper and then joined together for the teaching service in English. By 1975 the elders asked me to resign from teaching to pastor the growing bilingual assembly. We continued healthy growth through the next decade until I moved on to serve with the Canadian Bible Society in 1987. One key factor in our growth was the establishment of a counselling office (in the very room that Mr. Germain had used as a bedroom). Equipment to record and duplicate resulted in the distribution of thousands of cassettes in English and French. The little chapel was eventually sold to be replaced by a larger building where today a healthy assembly meets as "Pine Grove Bible Church" on East Acres Rd.