

A Letter From Heaven

What started as a simple sermon illustration at a church in Canada has now become the most widespread example of chain mail in history.

A simple letter dispersing fatherly love is touching the hearts and changing the souls of millions around the world.

"It's really a miracle," says Barry Adams of Father Heart Communications, whose "love letter" has proclaimed, Scripture by Scripture, God's "extravagant love for His children."

From beginning to end, the letter calls out to people: "My child, you may not know Me, but I know everything about you. ... My question is ... will you be My child? I am waiting. Love, Your Dad."

Birthered out of prayer, the Father's Love Letter was first presented in January 1999 at a Mennonite Brethren church in St. Catharines, Ontario. What was intended to be a Sunday-morning sermon illustration has now been viewed by millions of people from more than 125 nations via the Internet and is now available in more than 50 language translations.

"I had no idea this sermon would go so far," Adams says. "People in our own church began coming unglued as God began to speak to them. We began to wonder if it would have more impact than just at a Sunday morning service."

In early 2001, Adams started getting a sense that God was going to blanket cities with this simple discourse. His vision was launched when he got an e-mail from a pastor in Geneva, New York, asking for thousands of copies of the love letter to

be distributed to rescue workers and others at Ground Zero after September 11. The outreach was so well-received that more than 50,000 of the love letters were distributed the following year.

“When the Lord spoke to my heart that entire cities would be blanketed with His love, I had no idea that the first city would be one of the biggest and most influential cities in the world,” he says. “I believe that there will be many more cities that will begin to initiate [the same kind of] city strategies.”

Something's in the Mail

After New York, campaigns were launched in cities in Arizona, British Columbia and Florida, and ones in England and Saskatchewan are currently in the planning stages, Adams says.

“In Hoddeson and Southend-By-Sea in the U.K., ministries in both cities conducted a mass mailing of the Father's Love Letter to their whole communities on Valentine's Day,” Adams told Charisma. “And in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, I'm working with two ambassadors to blanket Dubai and beyond with the love letter in Arabic, English and other languages.”

Pastor Lisa Lannan worked around the clock for three weeks to send 30,000 love letters to residents of Kingman, Arizona, just in time for Father's Day last year. She called the outreach, covered by more than \$140,000 in donations, “phenomenal.”

“The Father's Love Letter is the tool the Lord is using to sow seeds in the lives and hearts of people, and a lot of them have been really blessed by it,” says Lannan, who connected

with Adams and his wife, Anneliese, five years ago following the launch of their ministry online.

Lannan says she and her co-workers are seeing many physical, emotional and spiritual healings in people who read the letter.

“In the women’s prison, many fell to their knees weeping,” she says. “One lady, just out of the hospital, could read her Bible without her glasses after three hours of prayer. We’re encountering many miracles.”

Many men, women and even children are rising above homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and other “attacks of the enemy” to “get on board with what we’re doing,” Lannan says.

Her ministry, Christ First Discipleship Ministries International, also distributes food to Kingman’s hungry, runs a prison ministry, works with local drug addicts, and organizes neighborhood cleanups. She says without “a heart for your city and a commitment to see God’s Father-heart revealed,” such ministry won’t work.

With the help of her home church, Kingman First Assembly of God, and the River of Life Christian Bookstore, Lannan hopes to give away thousands of free Father’s Love Letter resources to Kingman-area residents. Since the project’s launch—which began with a mailing to all area households—billboard, radio, TV and newspaper advertising have carried the simple, concise message: “God loves you. And He is the Father you’ve been looking for all your life.”

Bill and Deborah Fisher of Hot Pursuit Ministries International spread this message three years running to residents of Jacksonville, Florida, with a full-page ad in The Florida Times-Union on Valentine's Day and Father's Day. The couple has rented billboards, flown aerial banners at football games—including the Super Bowl—and over beaches, and entered floats in local parades, among other undertakings.

"The one thing about this effort is it can reach many people in many places in many ways," Deborah Fisher says. "There is no limit with God."

The Fishers are also working alongside MAD DADS national organization that provides mentoring to families at risk—by distributing the letter with other related materials at rallies, men's breakfasts and on prayer sites. The same material was distributed recently to youth and youth pastors at Youth Quake Live, a citywide teen outreach sponsored by area churches and businesses, and to women through the Beauty for Ashes conference held each year by Heaven's Key Ministries International.

The couple give away the love letters to waitresses at local restaurants, place them in magazines at newsstands, even drop them into coat pockets at area clothing stores. No place is out of place for the letter, they agree.

Of the 120,000 letters they personally distribute each year using donations and their own money, only four have been turned down, Deborah says. Two of the four took the letter at a later date, she adds.

"How can we not reach others with the same love He has shown

us?" Deborah questions.

She believes people whose lives are ravaged by drugs, homelessness, divorce and other trials can "find their way home to completeness in Daddy's love."

"The testimony of changed lives is the fuel that carries us onward," she says.

Linda Chaney agrees. She heads the Father Loves Tampa Bay outreach through her church, Praise Cathedral Renewal Center, in Pinellas Park. She says dozens of people in the congregation have distributed the Father's Love Letter since attending a Restoring the Father's Embrace conference led by Jack Frost, author of the book *Experiencing the Father's Embrace* (Charisma House).

They hand them out "anywhere and everywhere the Spirit of God leads us," she says. "Each time, people have thanked us, and when they begin to read them, a smile usually starts to form. Some tear up."

Chaney says she hopes that through the letter "people would come to know the truth that our heavenly Father is just crazy about us just the way we are."

It's a lesson that, once learned, spurred Cliff Dirksen, a former addict and founder of Extreme Outreach Society, to blanket Victoria, British Columbia, with the love letter.

On April 23, Dirksen and several intercessors envisioned "a wind that was being caused by the movement of the wings of

thousands of angels that were over the city to prepare the way for the Lord to descend." On July 3, with the help of about 30 participating churches and ministries, the team kicked off their love letter campaign with the first Celebration of Life carnival and concert at a local church.

Dirksen continues to meet the needs of youngsters through Superkids, a Saturday "come for lunch, music, games, drama, teaching and prayer" outreach that for some is the only "dose of father" they get.

"The 'Father Loves Victoria' outreach is not just words," Dirksen says. "We all get out there and show the Father's love in action."

The Father's Love Is Free

Adams launched as the gateway for all of the city strategies functioning worldwide.

Materials, including the love letter, can be downloaded free from the ministry's Web site, . A devotional book that paraphrases the series of Scriptures recounting God's love for His children, as well as other resources, such as CDs, DVDs and posters, can also be received free by mail or purchased to help support the ministry.

"One of the foundational things God spoke to us about is to give materials away via the Internet," says Adams, who is amazed that Web sales are keeping the ministry going financially while thousands of people still receive free resources.

The ministry now offers the generic Father Loves Our City CD and DVD for participating cities to use as a master to make their own giveaway copies, Adams says. Meanwhile, ministry leaders already on board the campaign remain connected and continue to blanket their cities with their message, planting seeds that will be harvested “one person at a time.”

“We are getting organized to reach another 100 cities,” Lannan says. “We are praying for God to send others to sow financially into these outreaches.”

The Fishers hope to see more churches and organizations join in their city outreach.

“The people of Jacksonville ... will come to the revelation knowledge of the Father’s love,” Deborah Fisher says. “Accepting this love will transform us and bring revival to this land.”

Referring to the letter, Adams cites Proverbs 11:11: “Through the blessing of the upright, a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked, it is destroyed.”

“May the upright in the land begin to rise up and bless their cities,” he says, challenging people to come on board.

Adams believes it might take months, perhaps years, for some fruits of the city campaigns to be realized.

“Meanwhile, what if the local church began to walk in a new revelation of the Father’s love?” he proposes. “Before God’s love can be effectively shared with the lost in our cities,

the church needs to grasp this message first.”

Adams challenges local churches to come together and demonstrate the Father’s love.

“Practical acts of kindness by a local church will communicate a tangible message that God loves people and cares for their most basic needs,” he says. “I believe that these expressions of kindness will cause communities to be more open to what we have to say.”

Churches should pool their resources to communicate the message through the media and invite the “spiritual orphans and prodigals home,” he believes.

“More than 24 million children live without their biological father,” Adams recounts from reports by the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), a Gaithersburg, Maryland, ministry founded to confront the issue of absentee fathers.

NFI statistics show that nearly 20 million children live in single-parent households, either because of births out of wedlock or divorce. More than 3.3 million children live with an unmarried parent and the parent’s cohabiting partner, a number that has risen from 891,000 in 1990 to 1.7 million today, NFI claims.

“Fatherless children are more likely to be poor, use drugs or become victims of child abuse,” Adams notes.

Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school and have healthy self-esteem and

are less likely to get into trouble, he says.

Adams believes the Father's Love Letter is a bridge between the hurting child and the Heavenly Father who will provide what the child's earthly father cannot.

Adams recalls a young girl whose father told her when she was 5 that she was unwanted. She cried for days. At age 12, she discovered the Father's Love Letter Web site and after reading the letter, turned her life around, he says.

"We've heard all kinds of stories—suicides being averted, people falling off their chairs while reading the letter," he says. "This isn't rocket science. It's just paraphrasing Scriptures."

Although often surprised by the impact the love letter is making, he thinks the message has just scratched surface.

"We feel God's written us a letter, and we've been called to be the mailmen and deliver it," Adams says. "He's doing a really big work and we're just along for the ride."

My Child...

You may not know me, but I know everything about you ... Psalm 139:1