

Baha'i very understanding, little understood

Tucked in with the bills and flyers, junkmail and letters, households today in Tiny Township, Penetang and Christian Island will find something a little different when they open their mailboxes.

They'll find a message of peace mailed to them by the Baha'i of the township.

"Peace is inevitable," the message will declare, and in the Baha'i faith, peace starts not with the state - but with the individual.

"The world is sick, and it needs medicine" says Darlene Paterson, a local Baha'i.

"But peace has to start with one's self," she continues. "If you don't have peace within yourself, if you don't have peace within your family, how can you have peace in the world? That's how you establish peace - not internationally or nationally. Most people want to start on a big scale and come down."

Few Canadians really know what the Baha'i religion is all about. And probably not many people in Tiny Township know there is an organization of Baha'i within their bounds.

But there is, a young institution at two years old (compared to the Midland Baha'i which have been organized approximately 20 years).

The group meets regularly every 19 days in what could be compared to a

Christian church service.

But the problem is, it's hard to compare Baha'i to any other religion, explains Al Paterson, a Tiny Township member.

"It's hard to think in those terms," says Paterson, himself a convert from the Anglican faith to Baha'i.

"All the established religions believe in God and believe in a prophet," he explains, citing Moses as the prophet of Jews, Jesus Christ as the Christian prophet and Mohammed, the prophet of the Islamic faith.

"All religions were established by God. And all those religions teach that God will send another prophet when the world needs something to get it on the right track again."

In the Baha'i world, all those religions are right, he says. But the difference is that the Baha'i claim the most recent prophet - Baha'u'llah - has already come and gone with little fanfare.

But that's okay, says Paterson, a history teacher at a local high school. Because it took most of the Western World over 200 years to catch on to Christianity, and the prophet Baha'u'llah died in 1892, less than 100 years ago.

Although the religion was founded in what is now Iran, it is a worldwide faith now and claims to have 21,000 members in

Canada and 3 or 4 million around the globe.

The fact that it was founded in Iran may mislead some people into thinking it is a fanatical,

mystical Eastern religion. But members are, for the most part, average middle class Canadians.

"If you're going to call it the Eastern Baha'i you may

as well call it the Eastern Christians," says Al, "because all the main religions were founded in the East."

"Like any religion, the

knowledge is being spread by word of mouth."

There are about 11 or 12 adult members of the Baha'i spiritual assembly in Tiny. When there are

nine believers in one area, they form the assembly.

About half of the Tiny Baha'is are locals and most of the rest are people who moved here.



A message of peace

Two Tiny Township members of the Baha'i spiritual assembly, Al and Darlene Paterson, look over one of the many volumes of

writings that belong to their faith. The township organization of the Baha'i, a relatively young faith that teaches oneness

of God, religion and mankind, is sending out booklets to Penetang, Tiny and Christian Island with a message of peace today.



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