

REVEREND T. ELDON - Airport Interfaith Ministry

INTERVIEWED: January 21, 1975

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Was an airline pilot living in Richmond; decided to enter ministry; for some years studied theology in Vancouver while flying for airline.

People came to him with problems, he began to realize there was opportunity for service there (at airport). Airport is a rather "isolated" community -- geographically and in terms of people an "in" group in a particular industry, having its own language, life-style and patterns of work; flight people away from home a great deal and working irregular hours find it difficult to establish "roots" in residential or civic community or church, as is also the case of many who work night shifts, etc.

Was ordained in 1968. After taking up with the "powers that be" and his own church (United), it was decided to have an exploratory committee work for two years on the whole concept of Airport Ministry, realizing it must be at least ecumenical within the Christian churches and open to other religious bodies.

During the exploratory period, representatives of various churches began to get together to discuss it, also airport personnel. This led to the registering of Airport Interfaith Ministry, under the Societies Act of B. C., in March 1970, with appropriate constitution.

Obtained use of a room in Terminal Building, paying full rent. Seven different Christian communions have been involved

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from the beginning: Roman Catholic, Babtist Union of Western Canada, Anglican, Presbyterian, Mennonite Brethern, Salvation Army and United Church. It is run by a Board of Directors made up of 2/3 airport personnel and 1/3 representatives of the church communities; is called AIM for short. Application is being made to change the name to "Aviation Faith Ministry" so people will understand it is for everybody in aviation -- not just those working there or using the terminal building.

Financing: 1/3 of budget covered by participating churches; 2/3 comes from airport personnel all around the airport and all levels -- both management and labour.

To what extent is it "Interfaith"? In addition to Christian churches involved (using the term "Christian" in the broad sense) the Ministry is open to participation of the Jewish Faith or any other religious faith. So far, others have not responded to an invitation to participate. However, on the service end they work with people of any faith -- or no faith at all. Has counselled people of many faiths and from many countries.

This is the first Aviation Ministry in Canada and one of approximately 25 in the world; number is growing rapidly; there is an international organization -- Civil Aviation Chaplains International, which hosted an international conference here in 1974, only the second time it has been hosted outside of Europe and the first time in Canada.

It is one of a number of Industrial Missions in the world; relatively new in North America. Came out of the desire on the part of church people to get involved in the community specifically the "work" community. Here at airport, involved in Aviation -- not with idea of putting religious things on the community but to be a serving community within the total airport community; to relate to the people; care about them; find out their needs and how to meet them. This has led to counselling of people with all kinds of

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problems, including job relations problems. Does a lot of human relations training and organizational consulting.

Municipality of Richmond is well represented. First President was Gordon Redmond, who formerly lived in Steveston; and approximately half of the twenty-one Board Memebbers are Richmond residents. Recently elected first woman President, Mrs. Sandy Haslin of Richmond.

AIM is heavily involved in the International scene, since aviation is international. Prepared to work in a number of ways internationally, through the Civil Aviation Chaplains International Group. Must have contacts with the headquarters of churches on a world level and has direct contacts with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and with the Vatican in Rome.

H.V. ACKLAND