

Holly Creek pastor goes global on BBC program

By JEFFREY V. SMITH

CENTENNIAL—Thanks to Google and the BBC, radio listeners around the world now know of Pastor Jim Kok's steadfast commitment to the spiritual care of seniors. The Director of Chaplin Services for Christian Living Communities was recently highlighted as part of a segment on the weekly BBC feature Reporting Religion. It first aired at the end of August.

The pastor, who is assigned to the Holly Creek Retirement Community in Centennial, was singled out from everyone in the world to provide the only Christian perspective for the program. He admits, however, most of the credit goes to the Web search engine Google for his being included.

According to Kok, the radio program was putting together a segment on care for the aging, and how different communities and cultures care for them spiritually. The BBC had contacted a Jewish Rabbi in England who had written a book about caring for the aging and a Hindu man from India who runs a program called Senior Age, an all-inclusive program trying to meet spiritual needs of seniors.

"They were looking for someone with a Christian perspective, and I believe they were trying to find someone from the States," Kok said. "The story that I heard is that they actually Googled 'seniors, community and Christian' and our Web site came up."

A BBC representative got in touch Holly Creek's communications department and ultimately was directed to Kok. After a pre-interview phone conversation, it became clear Kok would be a perfect choice for the program.

Kok explained he performs the functions of a pastor for the community by leading worship services and Bible studies, as well as many extended duties.

"I do educational sessions that have to do with world religions, for instance, and I do a current events group — current events from a spiritual perspective," he said. "The services I do are mostly Christian in nature because I come from a Protestant Christian orientation, but as a Chaplin, of course, I work for everyone here. There is no test to take to get in here. You don't have to be a Christian or profess any certain faith. You don't have to have a faith at all. In my training and background as a chaplain helps me to meet people where they are in their spiritual life whatever that might be."

In addition to the customary services provided by a pastor, Kok said he is also "sort of a listening ear for



Pastor Jim Kok

Photo by Jeffrey V. Smith

people in time of crises and times of difficulty in their lives." He also spends a great deal of time establishing relationships with the residents.

The pastor began working for Christian Living Communities 23 years ago, soon after graduating from college.

"I always wanted to work with seniors, those who were aging. It seemed to be a very good fit for me," Kok said. "Most of my experience in pasturing, however, comes from my father who was a minister. I grew up as a son of a minister and I have two brothers who are also in the ministry. It's kind of the family business. I got into it simply because I love working with seniors, I love working with those who are aging."

Once they knew they had their man, the BBC sent a local reporter from radio station KCFR to interview Kok and Holly Creek residents and record a weekly Hymn Sing gathering. As he told the BBC, the Holly Creek residents love the old hymns and have been really excited about the Hymn Sing.

"Those things speak to people's spirits in ways words can not," Kok said.

The BBC program presented the issue with the idea that population aging is a global challenge and that in the next 50 years the age composition of most countries will include much more old than young," as he stated in the program, "religious traditions can be an important part of how communities look after its older populations."

Kok said, "Questions were directed toward what's it like to live in this type of community, what my job is here and more specific questions about the spiritual needs of seniors as they age."

They also inquired about the kinds of things Kok encounters at the retirement home and how he deals with people who don't have a specific religious orientation.

"I'm really here for everybody. My desire is not to change anybody's opinion, but to work with them where they are and sort of extend that love of Christ that comes from my own specific orientation," Kok said.

During the program, Kok explained what makes Holly Creek stand apart from any other retirement community.

"We have a specific and intentional focus on spiritual care," he said. "We do a good job caring for people's physical beings and emotional beings, to some extent, but often that spiritual care is neglected or not even noticed. If we really are intending to bring ministry of healing care into people's lives it has to include the spiritual piece."

He also pointed out that people, as they get older, do not respond well to being "pushed or urged to believe something."

"There is much more of a sense of bringing their life to a resolution, to answer some of the bigger questions such as who am I, what has my life been for and what is my purpose now," Kok said.

In the end, the reporter was there for close to two hours, but on the show it ended up being about three minutes.

"I didn't get everything on there, but it was a great experience, obviously, and being on an international radio program was pretty cool," Kok said.

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