

BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST KEEFE

Keefe, Ernest Wilfrid, hockey-player, church-planter and evangelist, pastor, teacher, and writer, born May 25, 1929 and died June 11, 2011. He was the son of Richard Keefe (1882-1949) and Catherine Jane Cook (1880-1971). The former was a coal miner in Timmins, Ontario, and the latter worked at home raising the children. Keefe married Betty Merry in April of 1950, in St. Catharines, Ontario. After Betty's death (April 6, 2007), Keefe married Denise Michaud (June 26, 2010). Ernest and Betty Keefe were buried at a Rideau Gardens Cemetery in the West Island of Montreal.



Early Years in Ontario (1929-1954)

Ernest Keefe was born in Timmins, Ontario in 1929. His mother, Catherine Jane Cook (1880-1971), was raised in Liverpool England. She was a Christian, but not Keefe's father,¹ Richard Keefe (1882-1949). Catherine, along with Keefe's sisters, was baptized at First Baptist Church in Timmins in the 1930s.² Richard was a coal miner in Timmins, while Catherine remained at home raising the children.³

Keefe converted to Christ in 1948 after sustaining a fractured skull in a Major Junior A hockey game.⁴ He recovered and returned to hockey. However, in 1949, when he was 20, Keefe prayed to know God's will about whether to continue acting on an offer of a career in professional hockey in the U.S. He felt God answered his prayer one day while reading his Bible. Keefe understood this to be a call to missions, and that an immediate response was required. Accordingly, he hung up his skates on a nail in the basement and abandoned the offer.⁵

¹ Ernest Keefe, *God in the Midst of the Events that Shook Quebec: Autobiography of Ernest Keefe* (Montreal: Éditions SEMBEQ, 2017), 15-16, 40.

² *Ibid*, 37.

³ Communication with Jeff Keefe, June 2, 2022.

⁴ Ernie Keefe, Betty Keefe, and Ginette Cotnoir, "Fellowship Baptist Churches in French Canada," in *A Glorious Fellowship of Churches: Celebrating the History of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, 1953-2003*, ed. Michael Haykin and Robert Lockey (Guelph: Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, 2003), 65; Keefe, *Autobiography*, 30-31.

⁵ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 35-37. In addition to his hockey career, Keefe received training as an electrician, so as to have a trade to fall back on in case a hockey career did not materialize. Jeff Keefe, June 2, 2022.



where Keefe had school class and in a music group.⁸ Betty's Ernest's, in 1942.⁹ Keefe was "a true jacket on his wedding day."¹⁰ Four children—all boys—resulted from their union: Ernest, Brian, Paul and Jeff.¹¹



In April of the following year (1950), Keefe married Betty Merry, who also felt that God called her to serve in missions. They were married in Bethel Baptist Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, been baptized in 1949,⁶ and taught a Sunday preached his first sermon.⁷ Betty served at Bethel ministry, and with Ernest, led the Young People's association with Bethel began earlier than A colleague in Quebec remarked much later that evangelist; he even kept tracts in his tuxedo

Also in 1950, the Keefes began studies at London Bible Institute and Theological Seminary, shortly after their marriage.¹² Betty earned a major in Christian Education.¹³ Ernest did a B.Th. in Missions, choosing a field of study that would prepare him for his call as a missionary. He would find the training helpful when he worked in Quebec, stating later that "without the missionary courses I took, I would have made some bad mistakes."¹⁴

Initially though, the Keefes, after hearing a speaker from Africa discussing the spiritual need there, thought that their mission field would be Africa. Throughout their time at the school they attended the school's Africa prayer group, of which Ernest became the president.¹⁵ Wilson Ewin, who also became a missionary to Quebec, was also a member of this prayer group and a classmate of the Keefes.¹⁶ In 1954, during the last year of their studies, the Keefes applied to a mission to serve in Africa. They were to go before the mission board in the fall.¹⁷

However, during a school chapel service in 1954, Ernest Tétrault gave a call for workers at the Christian Youth Camp and Daily Vacation Bible Schools sponsored during the summer in

⁶ Letter from the Keefes to Rev. J.C. Wayne Harnden and Missionary Committee of Bethel Baptist Church, April 21, 2003, File on Keefes, Bethel Baptist Church. Henceforth these files are referred to as Bethel files.

⁷ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 36, 40-42.

⁸ *Ibid*, 42.

⁹ Letter from Keefes to Harnden, April 21, 2003, Bethel file.

¹⁰ Jacques Alexanian, "40 Years: SEMBEQ Remembers: The First Decade," in *SEMBEQ: 40 Years: Celebrating the Faithfulness of God*, ed. René Frey (Montreal: SEMBEQ, 2014), 13.

¹¹ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 319-320.

¹² *Ibid*, 42. The London Bible Institute was founded in 1935, renamed London Bible Institute and Theological Seminary in 1951, then London College of Bible and Missions in 1962. In 1968 it merged with Toronto Bible College, and renamed yet again, this time as Ontario Bible College (OBC). After moving to Toronto, OBC established a seminary, which later became Tyndale Seminary. <https://www.tyndale.ca/about/history>. Accessed April 9, 2022.

¹³ Ernie and Betty Keefe, "Background," undated, Bethel files.

¹⁴ Ernest Keefe, "Montréal, "The Desert for Evangelicals": Rosemont and Ahuntsic, 2009, 13.

¹⁵ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁷ Haykin and Lockety, *Glorious Fellowship*, 66.

Quebec by the Canadian Sunday School Mission. Keefe heard a divine call in this, and was compelled to talk to Tétrault about this English program. The Keefes agreed to work with the Mission for the latter part of the summer, while waiting for the meeting with the mission board in the fall.¹⁸

According to Ernest, Bethel supported the Keefes “for fifty years in our missionary work.” He dates their missionary work from 1954, since they retired in 2004.¹⁹ This included prayer and financial support, the latter consisting of \$50 per month in their first year in Quebec.²⁰ Bethel provided support for missionaries prior to the Keefes,²¹ but Ernest states that they were the first missionaries sent out from the church.²² The church would later increase its financial support.²³

Bethel had been part of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches since 1934.²⁴ This group was founded in 1928 by Baptist pastor T.T. Shields and others as the result of a division with the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, related to theologically liberal teaching at McMaster University.²⁵ The Regular Baptists founded Toronto Baptist Seminary (TBS), five graduates of which started a Regular Baptist church-planting movement in French Quebec when they founded mostly bilingual churches from 1944-1953, predominantly in the remote Abitibi region in northwest Quebec.²⁶ A professor at TBS, W.S. Whitcombe, persuaded the board of the seminary to make the study of French compulsory²⁷ and challenged these five future leaders in Quebec to consider that province as a missionary field.²⁸ They were aided by “a steady stream of men and women from Ontario English churches headed north to help as lay missionaries in ‘short term’ commitments.”²⁹

In 1953, the Regular Baptists united with the Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches of Canada to form the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada (FEBCC),³⁰

¹⁸ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 43-44, 319.

¹⁹ Untitled history of Bethel Baptist Church.

²⁰ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 42, 51.

²¹ Untitled history of Bethel.

²² Keefe, *Autobiography*, 42.

²³ Letter from the Keefes to Reverend Bert Birch, Deacon of Missions, Bethel Baptist Church, October 29, 1991.

²⁴ Untitled history of Bethel.

²⁵ Doug Adams, “The Great Contention”: Ontario Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Struggle for McMaster University, 1919-1927,” in *Canadian Baptist Fundamentalism, 1878-1978*, ed. Taylor Murray and Paul Wilson (Hamilton: Pickwick, 2022), 205-206.

²⁶ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 62; Jerry Thomas, “Implantation et croissance des églises des baptistes de l’Association au Québec, 1944-1963,” *Bulletin du Société d’Histoire du Protestantisme Franco-Québécois* no. 61 (Septembre 2018) : 5-6. They were Wilfrid Wellington, Murray and Lorne Heron, Yvon Hurtubise and Tom Carson.

²⁷ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 61-62.

²⁸ William Phillips, *Miracles des Temps Modernes au Québec* (Montreal : l’Oeuvre française de l’Association, 1999), 12.

²⁹ William Phillips, *Modern Day Missionary Miracles* (Montreal: Fellowship French Mission, 1998), 16.

³⁰ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 139, 142.

which Bethel Baptist also joined.³¹ In Quebec, the Keefes soon become missionaries with the FEBCC. Their example illustrates the important historical point that a key factor in the origin and development of a French Fellowship Baptist church-planting movement in Quebec was the support of Ontario churches and Bible schools. The Keefes were supported by Bethel Baptist Church in St. Catharines, studied at LBI, and joined a French Baptist movement led by young missionary pastors originating from, and supported by, Ontario institutions.

Clarification of a Missionary Call: Quebec, 1954-1956

After the Keefes arrived at the Christian Youth Camp (Camp Livingstone) in the Eastern Townships,³² they were exposed to the spiritual situation in Quebec. They concluded that Tétrault's call for workers was actually God's call to respond to the spiritual need of French Quebecers.³³ Thus the call to mission became clarified as a call, not to Africa, but to French Catholic Quebec. According to Keefe, this sense of a divine call sustained him and Betty through many initial years of working hard with little result in terms of conversions, and through the experience of much resistance and opposition.³⁴

As the Keefes entered Quebec for the first time, they experienced a "culture shock" when they drove through a village on the Richelieu River and saw that all the major buildings belonged to the Catholic Church.³⁵ Later, while at Camp Livingstone, Ernest had a discussion about the Bible with a French Canadian lady through an intermediary (Keefe could not yet speak French). Soon after, she died suddenly, provoking Betty and Ernest to ask themselves "what about the masses of French Canadians who never hear the New Testament truths in their churches, and are forbidden to have or read the Bible for themselves?"³⁶

This growing and unanticipated burden for French Catholics led to the Keefes seeking out Wilson Ewin. Ewin had moved to Quebec the previous year with his wife Trudy to study French at l'Institut Biblique Béthel in Lennoxville,³⁷ as preparation for missionary work in a French-speaking colony in Africa. The Keefes had heard that "God showed the Ewins, however,

³¹ Communication with Bethel Baptist Church, April 13, 2022.

³² Camp Livingstone, near Magog. <https://www.camplivingstone.ca/index.php/en/?start=4>. Accessed April 7, 2022.

³³ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 319.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 320.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

³⁷ Béthel was founded in 1948 as an interdenominational institution, though it was closely associated with a second new French evangelical movement in Quebec—the Christian Brethren (Richard Strout, *Ebb and Flow: A History of Christian Brethren Churches in French Canada, 1926-2010* (no place, publisher, or date), 76). The school existed primarily to train indigenous workers for the mission in French Canada, but also served as a centre for language study for missionary candidates assigned to other French-speaking countries. It provided the French Baptists in Quebec with a number of trained workers, as the Baptists did not have their own Bible school until 1974; Jerry Thomas, "The Predominance of Pentecostals, Brethren, and Fellowship Baptists in French Evangelicalism in Quebec, 1921-1963" (M.A. thesis, Briercrest Seminary, June 2015), 87. Strout notes that "over the years, the Brethren and the Baptists always worked closely together with each other in such interdenominational endeavors" (Strout, *Ebb and Flow*, 76).

the need of Quebec and kept them there,” and talked to them about this decision to stay in Quebec.³⁸ This seems to have been a turning point for the Keefes, since they both enrolled at Béthel in 1955 to study French for a year, though Betty had to drop out when their second son, Brian, was born.³⁹ Ewin planted a French Baptist church in Coaticook in 1954,⁴⁰ becoming yet another French Baptist pastor linked to Ontario Baptist institutions.

Keefe’s passion for evangelism found a new outlet as he studied French at Béthel. In January 1956 he began door-to-door visitation in Sherbrooke with two other students, William Curry (also from Keefe’s home church in Ontario), and Ernest Houle, a francophone convert from Catholicism. The intent was to start a French Baptist church in Sherbrooke.⁴¹ Jack and Joyce Cochrane were also part of the group. Jack, newly arrived from the U.S. to serve as professor at Béthel, formed a partnership with the Fellowship Baptists to establish a French Baptist church in Sherbrooke, and provided pastoral leadership for the emerging group.⁴²

Keefe left the work in Sherbrooke because the previous year he had driven through Quebec with Ewin, and while stopping near the town of Asbestos, felt that God wanted him to go there.⁴³ When he told Betty about this, she counseled that they pray about it.⁴⁴ Later, during the Christmas season of the same year (1955), Keefe and Ewin returned to Asbestos to do door-to-door evangelism. They were arrested and briefly put in jail for selling New Testaments without a license, a charge the chief of police determined was applicable as he and a priest searched their material at the police station.⁴⁵

The evangelists called Pastor E.S. Kerr in Montreal, the closest member of the Fellowship Baptist executive, who obtained a lawyer. Keefe and Ewin left that night, after paying bail. The lawyer told them that the police had no case against them. The city dropped the charges, but Keefe and Ewin still had to appear before the judge to have the charge dropped. The judge warned them not to return to Asbestos, to which the evangelists replied “if Jesus Christ wants us to preach the gospel in Asbestos, we will have no choice but to do just that.” Keefe had already determined that this was the case, and moved with his family to Asbestos in June 1956 to start a church.⁴⁶

³⁸Keefe, *Autobiography*, 47; Jean-Louis Lalonde, “Ewin, Wilson (1923-1998),” October 2019, 2.

³⁹ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 50-51, 12. Brian was three years older than the Keefes’ first son, Ernest James, who had been born in Ontario in 1953; *Ibid*, 44, 319.

⁴⁰ Phillips, *Miracles des Temps Modernes*, 26. The church was l’Église Baptiste Évangélique Canadienne Française.

⁴¹ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 52, 67.

⁴² Paul Wilson, “A Mission Transformed: Fellowship Baptist Outreach in Quebec, 1953-1986,” in *Baptists and Mission*, ed. Ian Randall and Anthony Cross (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 200; Keefe, *Autobiography*, 68. The church became Église Baptiste Évangélique de Sherbrooke.

⁴³ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 53, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 88-90.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 91-98.

Church-Planting Pastor, Asbestos-Danville in French Catholic Quebec (1956-1967)

Keefe's church-plant in Asbestos-Danville (total population of about 15,000 at the time)⁴⁷ was a Fellowship church from the start.⁴⁸ L'Église Baptiste Évangélique was part of an important second phase of Fellowship church-planting in French Quebec from 1954-1963. During this time the movement broke out of its Abitibi beachhead and became a more widespread provincial movement by starting ten new churches.⁴⁹ The Fellowship also started to move away from the previous strategy of planting bilingual and rural churches (four of which were in Abitibi), and towards starting unilingual French and urban churches.⁵⁰ In the previous phase (1944-1953), churches were started in the urban areas of Drummondville and Hull, but they were bilingual churches.⁵¹ In the phase in which Keefe participated, French churches were planted in major urban areas like Sherbrooke, Longueuil, and Montreal, although the others were mostly in small towns like Asbestos.⁵²

Keefe's church-planting strategy was to start a French church where there was no existing French evangelical church and then let francophones assume leadership.⁵³ During his mission studies in London, he had been repeatedly taught that a missionary does not enter a cross-cultural situation to plant a bilingual church, and that missionaries "should have it in view to train leaders among the non-English people to take" their "place as soon as possible."⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ibid, 129.

⁴⁸ Phillips, *Miracles*, 26.

⁴⁹ See Thomas, "Implantation," 6. Only six churches were started in the first phase. Ibid, 5.

⁵⁰ Wilson, "Transformed," 199.

⁵¹ Thomas, "Predominance," 104-105.

⁵² See Thomas, "Implantation," 6.

⁵³ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 87, 11.

⁵⁴ Keefe, "Ottawa Area," 2009, 2.

The Keefes began the church with Marcel and Verna Cotnoir. Marcel had converted with other members of his family, and had just recently moved to Asbestos due to his work.⁵⁵ Keefe's first step was a mass mailing with an offer of a New Testament, which yielded little result.⁵⁶ His next step was door-to-door visitation, which he continued throughout the 11 years



he was in Asbestos. He visited the entire town of 11,000 people, as well as all the homes in the surrounding area.⁵⁷ A later colleague, Stéphane Gagné, writes of this period: "partant de chez lui avec son lunch, comme un ouvrier, il visitait du matin au soir les foyers de la région."⁵⁸

This approach yielded greater result, with some Catholics converting, including Lionel and Jeanne Gosselin, who were among the first converts.⁵⁹ Betty helped in Jeanne's conversion.⁶⁰ As part of the aforementioned church-



planting strategy, Lionel became the francophone leader to whom Ernest turned over the church when he resigned in 1967. Gosselin received some training for ministry from Keefe.⁶¹ In 1962, l'Église Baptiste Évangélique had 24 members, with offerings of \$37 per week. That year, a building was erected.⁶² Five years later the church had about 50 members, with a Sunday attendance of more than 80 people.⁶³

What drove Keefe to this disciplined, ongoing evangelism in the face of much of opposition was the conviction, noted previously, that many Catholics were lost. That is, they were without the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, because they had not been taught key New Testament truths and did not read the Bible for themselves. As Keefe wrote, "there is no greater sadness than to see people live and die without ever hearing the

⁵⁵ Thomas, "Predominance," 107-108.

⁵⁶ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 99-100.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 328.

⁵⁹ Julien Laramée, video interview with Ernest Keefe, "Ernest Keefe (3): Des vies transformées à Asbestos," September 21, 1999. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXbTz2i2cfk>. Accessed May 18, 2022.

⁶⁰ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 116.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 329.

⁶² Phillips, *Miracles des Temps Modernes*, 40.

⁶³ Fred Vaughan, *Fellowship Baptist Trailblazers: Life Stories of Pastors and Missionaries*, Book One (Belleville: Guardian Books, 2001), 163.

gospel. This was our motivation. Every day, as we gave out the gospel, we wished that others would be saved that day.”⁶⁴

The opposition Keefe faced as he evangelized French Catholic Quebeckers was significant, going beyond the arrest in Asbestos. For example, in 1957, he went to help Wilson Ewin and his church in Coaticook to do an open-air meeting, and, along with other Baptists, was thrown into a pool next to a fountain to be “baptized.” The crowd that did this was accompanied by a priest.⁶⁵ While assisting at another open-air meeting the following year, this time at the house-chapel in St. Georges-de-Beauce of fellow Baptist church-planter Ernest Houle, the crowd began throwing stones at the evangelists and forced the meeting to stop.⁶⁶

Given Catholic control over much of Quebec society, potential converts were fearful of abandoning the Catholic Church. For example, the aforementioned Lionel Gosselin, was, for a while, afraid to make a public stand for the gospel after many discussions with Keefe about the Bible. Gosselin explains his hesitation: the Catholic Church “had almost total control over all our lives, our schools, and our hospitals. To become a believer meant to embark on a direction totally opposite to the ruling system. I was very aware that the consequences of renouncing the Church of Rome would label me as “unfrocked,” and invite mockery from my family, my friends, and my colleagues.”⁶⁷

Lougheed notes that the “Christendom model of one race, one faith remained dominant in Quebec” at this time.⁶⁸ In this model, conversion to Protestantism was not only a betrayal of church, but also of nation and family.⁶⁹ Such an environment hostile to conversion helps explain the very limited growth of Keefe’s first church in Quebec, as it does for the many other churches started by evangelicals at this time.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 320. Catholic converts to Protestantism like Lionel Gosselin also felt that they had gone from darkness to light once they read the Bible for themselves and compared biblical teaching to Catholic teaching. See Gosselin’s testimony in Keefe, *Autobiography*, 100-103. Don Carson, in his biography of his father, Tom Carson (one of Keefe’s co-workers), notes that many of the divergences between Catholic and biblical teaching relate to the exclusive sufficiency of Christ; D.A. Carson, *Ordinary Pastor: the Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (Wheaton: Crossroad Books, 2008), 40-41. A root cause of these divergences emerged in a discussion between another Baptist church-planter, Weldon Clark, and a Jesuit. The latter refused to debate with Clark about the Bible, because “we do not count upon the present Bible as our final and only source of revelation. On equal footing with the Bible, and having equal authority, we have tradition, that which has been passed down to us. . . . It is like a continuing source of revelation from God through the Pope and the Archbishops;” cited in Keefe, *Autobiography*, 197-198. Protestants hold to *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone as God’s revelation.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 109-111.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 256.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 101-102.

⁶⁸ Richard Lougheed, *Menno’s Descendants in Quebec: The Mission Activity of Four Anabaptist Groups 1956-2001* (Pandora Press, 2021), 39.

⁶⁹ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 37.

⁷⁰ See Thomas, “Predominance,” 45-46. Catholic control over education in Quebec meant that the children of converts in the Asbestos church had to attend an English Protestant school, since the only alternative was a French Catholic school (Keefe, *Autobiography*, 212-213). The result of this educational situation, faced by French

During the period in Asbestos, Keefe returned to Bethel Baptist church in 1957 to receive ordination.⁷¹ He also became a representative on the Fellowship Home Missions Board for the workers in French Quebec. In this capacity he immediately urged the creation, given the unique situation in Quebec, of a French Missions Committee, which was duly formed in 1958, and of which Keefe was a founding member.⁷² That same year, Ernest and Betty received financial support from the Committee.⁷³

Pastor, Trois-Rivières and Rosemont, Montreal (1967-1979)

In 1967, Keefe exchanged his role as a church-planting pastor in Asbestos for that of a pastor of a previously existing church in St. Louis-de-France, near Trois-Rivières. The founding pastor, Jan Gazdik, had resigned due to ill-health,⁷⁴ and the church, l'Église Évangélique Baptiste de St. Louis-de-France,⁷⁵ asked Keefe to be pastor. Betty and Ernest accepted the offer, though it was difficult to leave the Asbestos church since the members "had suffered so much persecution with" them.⁷⁶

Even before Keefe moved to the new location he was convinced that the church needed



to be in Trois-Rivières.⁷⁷ By 1972, when the church sold its building in St. Louis-de-France, all church meetings were in Trois-Rivières. The church name had already been changed to l'Église Baptiste Évangélique de Trois-Rivières.⁷⁸ The Keefes left in 1973, so this move was made under Ernest's direction.⁷⁹

evangelical churches in general, was often Anglicization, and the loss of these people to English churches, making French evangelical churches in Quebec perennially first-generation churches (Carson, *Memoirs*, 21-22).

⁷¹ Untitled history of Bethel Baptist Church.

⁷² Keefe, *Autobiography*, 77-78, 253.

⁷³ Phillips, *Miracles des Temps Modernes*, 28. Support of French workers increased after this time, to almost \$45,000 in 1963 for ten missionary couples. The Home Missions Board had provided \$24,000 in 1956 and supported seven missionary couples in 1957; *Ibid*, 28, 40.

⁷⁴ Ernest Keefe, "The Two Oldest Cities in Québec Are Visited by a Revival: Québec and Trois-Rivières," 2009, 15.

⁷⁵ The initial name of the church; Amanda Dreyer, "L'implantation et le Développement de l'Église Baptiste Évangélique de Trois-Rivières : 1966-2006" (Mémoire, Maîtrise en études québécoises, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, 2008), 32. Dreyer states that Gazdik started a daughter church of the St. Louis-de-France church in Shawinigan in 1967; *Ibid*, 31. A Baptist source states that "after one year the congregation separated to form two new churches. Missionary Jan Gazdik went to Shawinigan with believers from that area, while the Keefes relocated to Trois-Rivières with the remaining members." "Working Together with God," Fellowship French Mission, Fall/Winter 2003-2004, Vol. 6 No. 2, Bethel files.

⁷⁶ Keefe, "Trois-Rivières," 15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ Dreyer, "Trois-Rivières," 32.

⁷⁹ H Fines, *Album II du Protestantisme français en Amérique du Nord* (Montreal : L'Aurore, 1988), 28.

Keefe found the work in Trois-Rivières more difficult than in Asbestos: “compared to the work in Asbestos, it was slow going. We tried everything.”⁸⁰ The “everything” included a radio broadcast, telephone ministry, door-to-door visitation (though less extensively than in Asbestos), participation in a local fair, and a presentation in the city’s Concert Hall.⁸¹

There were some converts (the church doubled in membership), but the results, despite Keefe’s continued focus on evangelism, were less than in Asbestos. The church grew from 22 members in 1966 to 44 in 1973. Membership declined after Keefe left in 1973—there were 35 members the following year.⁸² The church seemed reluctant to let Keefe go when he offered his resignation: “c’est avec crainte et incertitude que nous avons appris la démission de notre Pasteur.”⁸³ Keefe did not train a francophone to replace him this time, as he had done in Asbestos. He was replaced by an American, John Malone, who arrived in 1974.⁸⁴

Keefe states that a J-BEQ (Jeunesse baptiste évangélique du Québec) team helped in evangelism when the church participated in the local fair in Trois-Rivières.⁸⁵ The Keefes, along with Yvon and Marion Hurtubise, had formed J-BEQ’s predecessor, Jeunesse en Mouvement (Young People on the Move), in 1972, while Keefe was still pastor in Trois-Rivières. Young francophones in Quebec were now converting in unusual numbers, and their evangelistic zeal was harnessed to help local churches in evangelism.⁸⁶

With J-BEQ, and later as a teacher with SEMBEQ (Séminaire Baptiste Évangélique du Québec), Keefe’s life intersects with a revival among French evangelical churches in Quebec. Loughheed states that the heart of this revival occurred during the years 1976-1982, although there was a more extended period lasting from 1971-1982.⁸⁷ The number of French evangelical churches in Quebec and of church members increased dramatically at this time.⁸⁸ Loughheed notes that “most of the converts were young white singles or newly married couples in their twenties.”⁸⁹ According to Phillips, the majority of the converts in French Fellowship Baptist churches at this time were between the ages of 17 and 30.⁹⁰ Hence the formation of J-BEQ was

⁸⁰ Keefe, “Trois-Rivières,” 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15-17. Dreyer describes the church’s evangelistic activities at this time in more detail; Dreyer “Trois-Rivières,” 42-44.

⁸² Dreyer, “Trois-Rivières,” 45.

⁸³ « Rapport annuel de l’Eglise Baptiste Évangélique de Trois-Rivières pour l’année 1973 (1er février 1973 au 31 janvier 1974, » cited in Dreyer, “Trois-Rivières,” 36, n.63.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁵ Keefe, “Trois-Rivières,” 16.

⁸⁶ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 99.

⁸⁷ Loughheed, *Menno’s Descendants*, 99. There was some variation in the dates according to denominations. For the Mennonite Brethren, the revival began in 1970 and lasted into the late 1980s. *Ibid.*, 99-100. The Fellowship Baptists experienced especially rapid growth during the period 1975-1985; Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 111.

⁸⁸ See the figures in Loughheed, *Menno’s Descendants*, 97-98.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁹⁰ Phillips, *Miracles des Temps Modernes*, 48.

part of a broader historical phenomenon that affected many French evangelical denominations in Quebec.

The revival occurred in the context of dramatic changes, including in education, which were connected with the Quiet Revolution that began in 1960. At this time francophone identity broke its link with Catholicism and was refashioned around the vision of a secular francophone state and society. Thus, as Lewis notes, rejection of the Catholic Church no longer served to “isolate one from the mainstream of French Canadian culture.”⁹¹ This rapid abandonment of the Christendom model meant that potential converts to Protestantism faced less risk than predecessors like Lionel Gosselin.

Also, Vatican II (1962-1965) led to an increased openness on the part of the Catholic Church towards Protestants. Keefe benefited from the latter development, as well as from the widening horizons of young people, when he was invited by two high school students to speak at the Petit Séminaire in Trois-Rivières on the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism.⁹²

In June 1973, Keefe accepted a call to the pastorate of l'Église Baptiste Évangélique Centrale in Mile End, Montreal. He served in this capacity until the summer of 1979.⁹³

According to his successor at Centrale, René Frey, Keefe led the church out of an ethnic



neighbourhood around St. Urbain street to a more francophone area, Rosemont, in order to better reach francophones.⁹⁴ Thus in Montreal Keefe continued to act as a missionary to francophone Quebeckers, as he had in Asbestos and Trois-Rivières. Frey also remembers Keefe “tearing up when talking about the salvation of Québécois.”⁹⁵ The church sold its building and moved to Rosemont in 1976, renting facilities until a building was purchased after Keefe left.⁹⁶

Around the time of the move, the church had 77 members, 78% of whom lived “in the direction of Rosemont”

⁹¹ Don Lewis, “Evangelical Renewal in French Canada,” *His Dominion*, May 1983, 9.

⁹² Keefe, “Trois-Rivières,” 17-19.

⁹³ <https://eglisederosemont.ca/historique/>. Accessed April 7, 2022.

⁹⁴ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 8. Keefe himself confirms this as the motivation behind the move; Keefe, “Montreal, the Desert for Evangelicals: Rosemont and Ahuntsic,” 2009, 11. Centrale started as a church-plant in Verdun in 1956, led by René’s father, the Swiss William Henry. It was the first French Fellowship Baptist church in Montreal. Centrale purchased and moved into a synagogue on St. Urbain street in 1964. When in Verdun, the church pioneered a new method of church planting for the French Fellowship Baptists by starting a daughter church in Longueuil. By 2014, Centrale had started five other daughter churches. <https://eglisederosemont.ca/historique/>. Accessed April 7, 2022.

⁹⁵ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 7.

⁹⁶ <https://eglisederosemont.ca/historique/>. Accessed May 9, 2022.

and 22% in or close to Verdun.⁹⁷ Keefe continued to engage in evangelism, including through open-air meetings on Sunday nights during one summer. The outreach, which involved testimonies, singing and preaching, resulted in some conversions.⁹⁸ Also, Frey notes that he joined Keefe in a student outreach that involved door-to-door evangelism. He describes Keefe as “a super-evangelist.”⁹⁹ The aforementioned revival impacted the church with greater results, but only while the Keefes were gone from 1979-1982. When they returned, they found so many new converts in the church that they felt like strangers.¹⁰⁰ Frey became assistant pastor of the church in 1978,¹⁰¹ and was coached by Keefe for a year before Keefe left to pursue graduate studies at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary in Michigan in 1979.¹⁰² Frey then replaced him as pastor.

TEACHER, INTERIM PASTOR, WRITER (1979-2004)

As noted, Keefe’s life was impacted by the establishment of SEMBEQ in 1974. With the growth in churches and converts, the need for ministerial training in French for a francophone leadership became acute. Keefe’s deep involvement in SEMBEQ marked not only a major change in his role among French Fellowship Baptists, but a contribution to the indigenization of the movement in Quebec. SEMBEQ helped greatly in transferring leadership of the movement to francophones.¹⁰³ In 1970 there were ten English Canadian and five French Canadian pastors of French Fellowship Baptist churches. In 1980 the figures were seven and fifty-two respectively, reflecting in part the impact of SEMBEQ.¹⁰⁴

Keefe taught at SEMBEQ from the beginning, as Frey remembers taking an early course with him on Inductive Bible Study.¹⁰⁵ As a SEMBEQ board member, Keefe suggested adding intensive courses.¹⁰⁶ Around 1978 he was teaching a course on evangelism. It was then that the secretary of the French Fellowship Baptist churches, William Phillips, advised Keefe that SEMBEQ wanted him to teach courses on theology and on different books of the Bible.¹⁰⁷ Keefe, now forty-nine, felt that his B.Th in Missions was insufficient preparation for the task.

⁹⁷ Keefe, “Montreal,” 11-12.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 9-10.

⁹⁹ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Keefe, “Montreal,” 15.

¹⁰¹ <https://eglisederosemont.ca/historique/>. Accessed May 9, 2022.

¹⁰² Keefe, *Autobiography*, 7; Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 104. The seminary is now Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

¹⁰³ Wilson, “Mission Transformed,” 201.

¹⁰⁴ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 100-101.

¹⁰⁵ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 102.

¹⁰⁷ Keefe, “Montreal,” 13.

Accordingly, after prayer and discussion with Betty,¹⁰⁸ they moved to Grand Rapids in 1979, bringing only their youngest son, Jeff.¹⁰⁹ The other three children were independent adults by then. Unfortunately, Paul died in 1981 at a young age, while the Keefes were in Grand Rapids. This great loss made Keefe's period of study particularly difficult for both parents.¹¹⁰ The finances for Keefe's studies and living expenses for three years came from the sale of their duplex in Quebec.¹¹¹

Keefe completed both his M.Th and M.Div by 1982. The former degree was for those who were planning to teach, and, according to Keefe, the course "consisted entirely of research of the history of theology with an emphasis upon Roman Catholicism." His thesis for this degree was entitled *From Trent to Vatican II, a Study in Change*.¹¹² Betty helped him complete two theses, by correcting grammar and typing.¹¹³

Throughout the time at seminary, the Keefes attended West Cannon Baptist Church of Belmont, Michigan. During his studies, Keefe filled the pulpit of that church for almost a year while it was without a pastor. West Cannon became another anglophone Baptist church that supported the Keefes as missionaries, beginning in 1983. This financial support was long-lasting. In 2001 the Keefes attended a celebration at the church held in their honour, and received \$3000 to assist a church in Matane, Quebec, where Keefe then served as interim pastor, with the purchase of a building.¹¹⁴

Upon returning to Quebec in 1982, Keefe was asked to "devote half his time to SEMBEQ, and the remaining half to helping churches in transition."¹¹⁵ The intention was to keep him rooted in the local church.¹¹⁶ Keefe travelled to local churches throughout the province (SEMBEQ offered courses in the local church), teaching on Anthropology, Hamartiology, Eschatology, and Hermeneutics, as well as on specific books of the Bible such as the Epistle to the Romans, and the Pastoral Epistles.¹¹⁷ In this capacity as teacher Keefe met many of the workers and leaders in the French Fellowship Baptist movement.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 104; Keefe, *Autobiography*, 320. There was thirteen years difference between Jeff and the next oldest son, Paul; Keefe, *Autobiography*, 320.

¹¹⁰ Jeff Keefe, June 1, 2022; Newsletter from the Keefes, December 2003, Bethel files.

¹¹¹ Letter from Keefes to Harnden, April 21, 2003, Bethel files.

¹¹² Keefe, *Autobiography*, 126.

¹¹³ Keefe, "Montreal," 13. In Quebec, Betty also worked as William Phillips secretary, and as a reporter for the French News of the periodical *The Evangelical Baptist*. Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Pastor Dan Boehning, West Cannon Baptist Church, "A Celebration of the Faithful Ministry of Ernie and Betty Keefe," French Missions, 2001, Bethel file.

¹¹⁵ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 104.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *SEMBEQ: 40 Years*, 38. Keefe even taught a course in Sept-Iles; Keefe, "Churches of the Northern Light: Saguenay and Sept-Iles," 2009, 1.

Keefe also did a conference for SEMBEQ on Catholicism.¹¹⁸ Later, while at West Cannon Baptist in 2001, he gave a three-hour seminar on Catholicism, and a Sunday morning adult class on “How to witness to our Catholic friends.”¹¹⁹ Keefe’s preoccupation with Catholicism, formed as he invested heavily in evangelizing French Roman Catholics in 1950s and 60s, is also evident in his graduate studies and in his autobiography. Both indicate that he was well informed about this subject. His colleague Frey accurately describes Keefe’s autobiography as in part an apologetic or defense that provides the “Biblical rationale for the Evangelical Baptist position when facing a great number of Roman Catholic practices and beliefs.”¹²⁰

This theological anti-Catholicism was also shared by the French Fellowship Baptist movement, even after Vatican II (as seen in the welcome reception of Keefe’s conference on Catholicism).¹²¹ Keefe rightly notes that key Catholic doctrines not truly reflective of biblical teaching continued to be taught after Vatican II. He provides the example of the doctrine of transubstantiation (the bread and the wine in the mass became the body and blood of Christ), and the teaching that, in the mass, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is perpetuated in a non-bloody manner.¹²²

However, by the 1980s when Keefe had completed his studies, Quebec society had moved sharply away from Catholicism. Loughheed notes that almost all the converts in the revival “had, along with their parents, long ago given up Catholic religious attendance.”¹²³ Consequently, the need dramatically waned for the kind of apologetics required in evangelism in Keefe’s earlier years.

As noted, beginning in 1982 Keefe also served in another new role--that of interim pastor, or helping churches in pastoral transition. He served as interim pastor in different churches (Repentigny, Chomedey, Chateauguay, St. Jean d’Iberville, Longueuil, Casselman, and Ahuntsic)¹²⁴ and as teacher at SEMBEQ until 1999. Then there was another change of role for Keefe. With the exception of Casselman in Ontario, all the churches were in or around Montreal.

David Dobson, Director of Deputation for the Fellowship French Mission, stressed in a letter to Keefe’s financial supporters just how important a role the Keefes played in helping French Baptist churches in transition during this period. According to Dobson, the Keefes fulfilled “a vital role that has made a tremendous difference in the successful recovery from crisis, of a number of key francophone churches. Their role has been one of strategic intervention, reconciliation and healing, and in some instances has been literally used by God to

¹¹⁸ Communication with Julien Laramée, April 14, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Boehning, “Celebration,” 2001, Bethel files.

¹²⁰ Keefe, *Autobiography*, 8.

¹²¹ Julien Laramée, April 14, 2022.

¹²² Keefe, “The Quebec Revival, 1970-1986,” 2009, 17.

¹²³ Loughheed, *Menno’s Descendants*, 99.

¹²⁴ Letter from David Dobson, Director of Deputation, Fellowship French Mission, to friends of the Keefes, December 1999, Bethel files

keep the church from ‘going under.’”¹²⁵ This repeated exposure to long-lasting situations of crisis would eventually take a toll on Keefe’s health.

While serving as interim pastor at the first two churches in this period, about half of Keefe’s financial support came from churches like Bethel and West Cannon which forwarded money to the French Canada Mission Board. The remainder at this time came from the two churches Keefe pastored.¹²⁶ The first church was a church in Repentigny (l’Église Baptiste Évangélique de Repentigny), where the Keefes served from 1982-1984.¹²⁷

The second church was l’Église Baptiste Évangélique de Chomedey (Laval), where they served from 1986 to the end of 1992.¹²⁸ Just prior to working in Chomedey, Keefe taught for six weeks in Chad, Africa.¹²⁹ He also mentored Julien Laramée, pastor of a franco-Ontarian church near Casselman.¹³⁰ At Chomedey Keefe was a “full-time pastor on a part-time basis,” so he had to reduce his involvement with SEMBEQ.¹³¹ According to the Keefes, they had two goals in Chomedey: finding and training a young Quebecois pastor who could eventually become senior pastor, and lead the church in a building program.¹³² The Keefes saw themselves as missionaries in all the roles they undertook in Quebec. After accomplishing these goals in Chomedey, they wrote in a newsletter to their supporters, “as missionaries we must move on.”¹³³ When Betty finished her work at the French Fellowship office, she became more involved in ministry in the Chomedey church, giving more time to visitation, discipling, and a music ministry.¹³⁴

The young Quebecois pastor Keefe trained in Chomedey was Daniel Marcoux, who, along with his Marie, became Christians through the church in Asbestos-Danville. As with Lionel Gosselin at the latter church, and René Frey in Rosemont, Keefe trained francophones to lead churches. The Keefes defined part of their task as being the “formation of new Quebecois pastors,”¹³⁵ in part by working with potential leaders in the local church. This strategy also facilitated the indigenization of the Fellowship Baptist movement in Quebec.

Beginning in January 1993, Keefe’s work, under the direction of the Fellowship’s French Canada Mission Board, was to give half-time to SEMBEQ and half-time to being a pastor-at-large. The latter position entailed much the same work as he had done previously as interim

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Newsletter from the Keefes, December 1995, Bethel files.

¹²⁸ Newsletter from Keefes, December 1992, Bethel files; Letter from Marcel Cotnoir, Deputation Director, French Mission Board, to fellow workers, November 10, 1992, Bethel files.

¹²⁹ Jeff Keefe, June 1, 2022.

¹³⁰ Laramée, April 14, 2022; Keefe, “Ottawa Area,” 5; Keefes, Newsletter December 1991, Bethel files.

¹³¹ Letter, Cotnoir, November 10, 1992.

¹³² Keefes, Newsletter, December 1992.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Newsletter from Keefes, May 1992, Bethel files.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

pastor.¹³⁶ That many pastors and members of French Fellowship Baptist churches in Quebec were relatively recent converts (the fruit of the revival) created a need for Keefe's role. As the Keefes wrote in a newsletter around this time, many of these pastors "are young, are from non-Christian homes, and have been Christians themselves for ten to fifteen years. Most of our church members are first generation Christians. These churches and pastors welcome the help, experience and counsel of an experienced worker, of whom we have precious few in Quebec."¹³⁷

From Chomedey, the Keefes went to Chateauguay for a short time in 1993.¹³⁸ Betty was heavily involved in ministry there.¹³⁹ While at Chateauguay, Keefe also helped two other churches, one in St. Jean d'Iberville, another in Longueuil.¹⁴⁰ Keefe became interim pastor at l'Église Baptiste Évangélique de Longueuil in 1993, and served there until 1995. The church experienced a major crisis at this time. According to the Keefes, it was one of the French Fellowship's largest churches.¹⁴¹ Just a few years earlier it was described by the French Fellowship as a very solid church that impacted the entire movement: "cette Eglise se trouve parmi les Eglises les plus solides de notre Association et s'intéresse financièrement à tous les moyens d'action de l'Association."¹⁴²

According to the Keefes, the church was "wracked by a doctrinal conflict which led to the loss of about 150 people and had created tension and division among those who remained." Such loss engendered a financial crisis and the church was in danger of losing a new building. When the Keefes left in August 1995, the church had a new pastor and was doing better.¹⁴³ Dobson's fulsome evaluation of Keefe's ministry to churches does not seem to be exaggerated.

Keefe turned 65 while at Longueuil, in May 1994. Despite this, the Fellowship French Canada Mission Board and SEMBEQ both asked him to continue to serve full-time¹⁴⁴—an indication of the value of Keefe's ministry. Bethel Baptist Church continued to support the Keefes, waiving their policy of withdrawing support from missionaries at retirement age. The church told the Keefes that they did this "because of the special circumstances surrounding

¹³⁶ Cotnoir, Letter, November 10, 1992.

¹³⁷ Keefes, Newsletter, December 1992.

¹³⁸ Newsletter from Keefes, April 1993, Bethel files; *Evangelical Baptist*, April 1994, Bethel files.

¹³⁹ Newsletter from Keefes, December 1993, Bethel files.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Keefes, Newsletter to praying friends at Bethel Baptist church, October 15, 1995, Bethel files.

¹⁴² Fines, *Album II*, 24.

¹⁴³ Keefes, Newsletter, October 15, 1995, Bethel files.

¹⁴⁴ Newsletter from the Keefes to Missionary Committee, Bethel Baptist Church, August 1994, Bethel files.

your ongoing work with the Mission and your personal relationship with Bethel.”¹⁴⁵ At this time, two-thirds of the Keefe’s financial support came from supporting churches.¹⁴⁶

After Longueuil, the Keefes returned to the Repentigny church for the period 1995-1997. This was another church in crisis, having lost about 50% of its membership in the preceding three years. The pastor had resigned.¹⁴⁷ After Repentigny, the Keefes served in Ahuntsic from January 1998 to the end of 1999. There they dealt with yet another crisis. Keefe intended, as part of his response, to get the church involved in one year of intensive evangelism.¹⁴⁸ Evangelism remained a key theme in his ministry, and part of his strategy of returning churches to health.

Many French evangelical denominations in Quebec, including the Fellowship Baptists, experienced decline in some ways after the revival, starting in the latter part of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s. For example, the number of baptisms in French Fellowship Baptist churches fell from 556 in 1982 to 314 in 1987, and again to 278 in 1999.¹⁴⁹ The Mennonite Brethren in Quebec also experienced decline in the post-revival period, and identified “many church crises with pastors” as one of the reasons for this decline.¹⁵⁰ Church members became “more demanding and less encouraging.”¹⁵¹ The numerous church crises that Keefe faced during the 1990s could not but contribute to the experience of some elements of decline by French Fellowship Baptist churches.

As noted, prolonged exposure to crisis situations eventually affected Keefe’s health, provoking a final change in his role in the French Fellowship. David Dobson wrote to Keefe’s supporters at the end of 1999, explaining that Keefe’s ministry to churches in crisis had produced much stress for him, resulting, that year, in a “severe ‘stress attack,’ with symptoms that resembled those of a heart attack.” By now Keefe was 70 years old.

As a result, the Mission Board changed Keefe’s tasks somewhat, beginning in January 2000. Keefe would continue to teach at SEMBEQ, but would no longer be sent into crisis church situations for long periods of time. Rather, this aspect of his ministry would be for short periods only. Also, he was given a new, less stressful task—that of becoming involved in “strategic writing projects.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Reverend J.C. Wayne Harnden for Bethel Mission Committee to the Keefes, March 24, 2003, Bethel files.

¹⁴⁶ Keefes, Newsletter to Missionary Committee, August 1994.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid; Letter from Keefes to Reverend Bill Curry, Bethel Baptist Church, April 22, 1997, Bethel files.

¹⁴⁸ Keefes, Newsletter, February 1999; Dobson, Letter, December 1999.

¹⁴⁹ Haykin and Lockey, *Glorious Fellowship*, 111-112.

¹⁵⁰ Loughheed, *Menno’s Descendants*, 135.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 133.

¹⁵² Dobson, Letter, December 1999.

The last two churches Keefe served as interim pastor were in Matane (January 2000-August 2002) and Vaudreuil-Dorion (2003-2004).¹⁵³ The Keefes travelled to Matane at least once a month, for periods of five to ten days,¹⁵⁴ and rented a small apartment in order to do this.¹⁵⁵ According to Dobson, the Keefes at this time continued to have “a very fruitful ministry,” helping to turn around the church in Matane (l’Église Évangélique Baptiste du Phare). They also helped the church get its own building. Dobson noted how the Keefes and other French Fellowship Baptist workers had served for many years in Quebec “oftentimes with low pay, great sacrifice and little prospect of a large retirement fund.”¹⁵⁶

The Keefes were not spared difficult situations, even as Ernest approached 75. They wrote of their last church, l’Église Évangélique de Vaudreuil, that “of all the churches in crisis which we have been involved, this has proved to be one of the most difficult.”¹⁵⁷ According to Keefe’s son Jeff, part of the issue was divergent views on homosexuality held by the older and younger generations in the church.¹⁵⁸

The Keefes retired in 2004, after they completed their ministry in Vaudreuil-Dorion, having served for 50 years in Quebec. Bethel Baptist Church, faithful in support throughout the Keefes ministry, withdrew this support in March 2003, citing the need to respond to the needs of younger missionaries.¹⁵⁹

As noted, while serving these two churches, Keefe continued to teach at SEMBEQ, and also worked on writing projects for the Fellowship. During 2002 and 2003, Keefe focused on three writing projects in particular. The first was a course for seekers and new believers, *La Rencontre avec le Maître*. He had also been asked by Baptist church historian Michael Haykin to head up a committee involved in writing the section on the French Fellowship Baptist work in Quebec that was included in Haykin and Robert Lockey’s *A Glorious Fellowship of Churches*. The book was published in 2003. The chapter was written by Ernie and Betty Keefe and edited by Ginette Cotnoir. Julien Laramée, the pastor in Casselman, also helped.¹⁶⁰



The final project Keefe worked on at this time was his autobiography. He described this project in a newsletter written in December 2002 in the following terms: “this will give a

¹⁵³ Newsletter from the Keefes, December 2002, Bethel files; Keefes, Newsletter, December 2003.

¹⁵⁴ Newsletter from the Keefes, December 2000, Bethel files. Matane is about a six-and-a-half hour drive from Montreal.

¹⁵⁵ Jeff Keefe, June 1, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Dave Dobson, Director of Fellowship French Mission, to Doreen Wright, Bethel Baptist Church, February 1, 2002, Bethel files.

¹⁵⁷ Newsletter from the Keefes, December 2003, Bethel files.

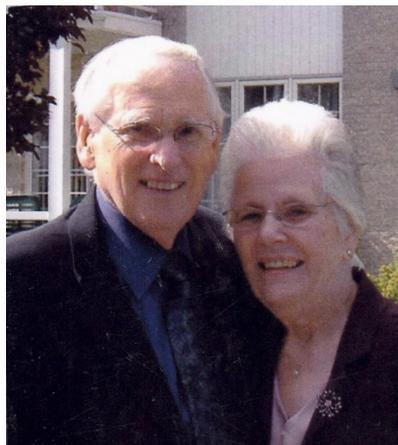
¹⁵⁸ Communication with Jeff Keefe, July 19, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Bethel Mission Committee, March 24, 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Keefes, Newsletter, December 2002.

general flow of our Fellowship French work in Quebec with anecdotes from many workers and churches, as well as from ourselves. An important part of this book is not only to mention conversions of Catholics from the errors of Rome to the Gospel but to describe these conversions.”¹⁶¹ Published in English posthumously only in 2017, it was entitled *God in the Midst of the Events that Shook Quebec: Autobiography of Ernest Keefe*. Frey notes that the work was woven of three strands—historical, apologetic, and autobiographical.¹⁶²

The book only covered the period from Keefe’s early years to 1970. It was based on a longer manuscript that included work for a second volume, covering the years of revival in the 1970s and 1980s, and a third, covering French Baptist parachurch ministries.¹⁶³ The latter volumes were never published. Keefe continued to work on this project in his retirement. Julien



Laramée provided extensive help in editing the published and unpublished parts of the manuscript, in part during the period 2008-2009.¹⁶⁴

LAST YEARS (2004-2011)

Things began to unravel for the Keefes immediately after their retirement in December 2004. The following month (January 2005), Betty was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She received chemotherapy, and continued to live for another two years.¹⁶⁵ True to form, the Keefes witnessed to different doctors during Betty’s treatments.¹⁶⁶ Betty died on April 6, 2007 and was interned at Rideau Gardens Cemetery in Dollard des Ormeaux on the island of Montreal.¹⁶⁷ Prior to her death, Betty had requested that those who wanted to make donations do so to SEMBEQ. That way people would give to “what she cherished over the years, the training of workers for the Lord’s work in the province of Quebec.”¹⁶⁸

Ernest later wrote with empathy, in reference to a Baptist worker in Quebec City in a comparable situation, of the emptiness one feels if one has married and lost a spouse.¹⁶⁹ He married again on June 26, 2010, this time to Denise Michaud.¹⁷⁰ The union was short-lived. Keefe noted in a letter to Bethel, dated March 12, 2011, that his ability both to speak and to

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Keefe, *Autobiography*, 8.

¹⁶³ Communication with Julien Laramée, April 14, 2022.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from David Dobson, Director of Fellowship French Mission, to Bethel Baptist Church, December 8, 2006, Bethel files.

¹⁶⁶ Newsletter from the Keefes to praying friends, April 2005, Bethel files.

¹⁶⁷ Email from Harvey Kellar to Bethel Baptist Church, April 6, 2007, Bethel files.

¹⁶⁸ François Picard, President of Sembeq, p.5, Bethel files (no further information about the document).

¹⁶⁹ Keefe, “Trois-Rivières,” 4.

¹⁷⁰ Avis de décès de Ernest Keefe. Bleuciel, QC, 2011-06-29; Wedding invitation, Bethel files.

write was becoming impaired. He attributed this to the effects of the fractured skull he had incurred as a young hockey player “now showing up.”¹⁷¹

In late May of the same year, Keefe was diagnosed with bowel and liver cancer. He died two weeks later, on June 11, 2011,¹⁷² in Gatineau, Quebec, at age 82. He was buried in the same cemetery as Betty and his son Paul.¹⁷³ Apart from his remaining three children, Keefe’s posterity at the time of his death included four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.¹⁷⁴ Jeff currently lives in the Montreal area, and Brian in Amherst, Nova Scotia (the eldest son, Ernest James, or Ernie, Keefe, died December 9, 2018).¹⁷⁵

This biographical essay on Ernest Keefe is based in part on his published autobiography, which only covers the period up to 1970. The details of the remainder of his life are largely derived from three sources: an unpublished longer manuscript upon which the autobiography was based, which contained much helpful biographical information for the 1970s and early 1980s; two telephone interviews with people close to Keefe; and files on the Keefes kept by their home church in Ontario, Bethel Baptist Church. This last source was rich in material for the late 1980s until the end of Keefe’s life.

Jerry Thomas

¹⁷¹ Letter from Ernie and Denise Keefe to Bethel Baptist Church, March 12, 2011, Bethel files.

¹⁷² Email from Harvey Kellar to Bethel Baptist Church, June 12, 2011, Bethel files.

¹⁷³ Jeff Keefe, June 1, 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Avis de décès.

¹⁷⁵ Jeff Keefe, June 1, 2022.