

MISSION

What is Cutting-Edge Mission?



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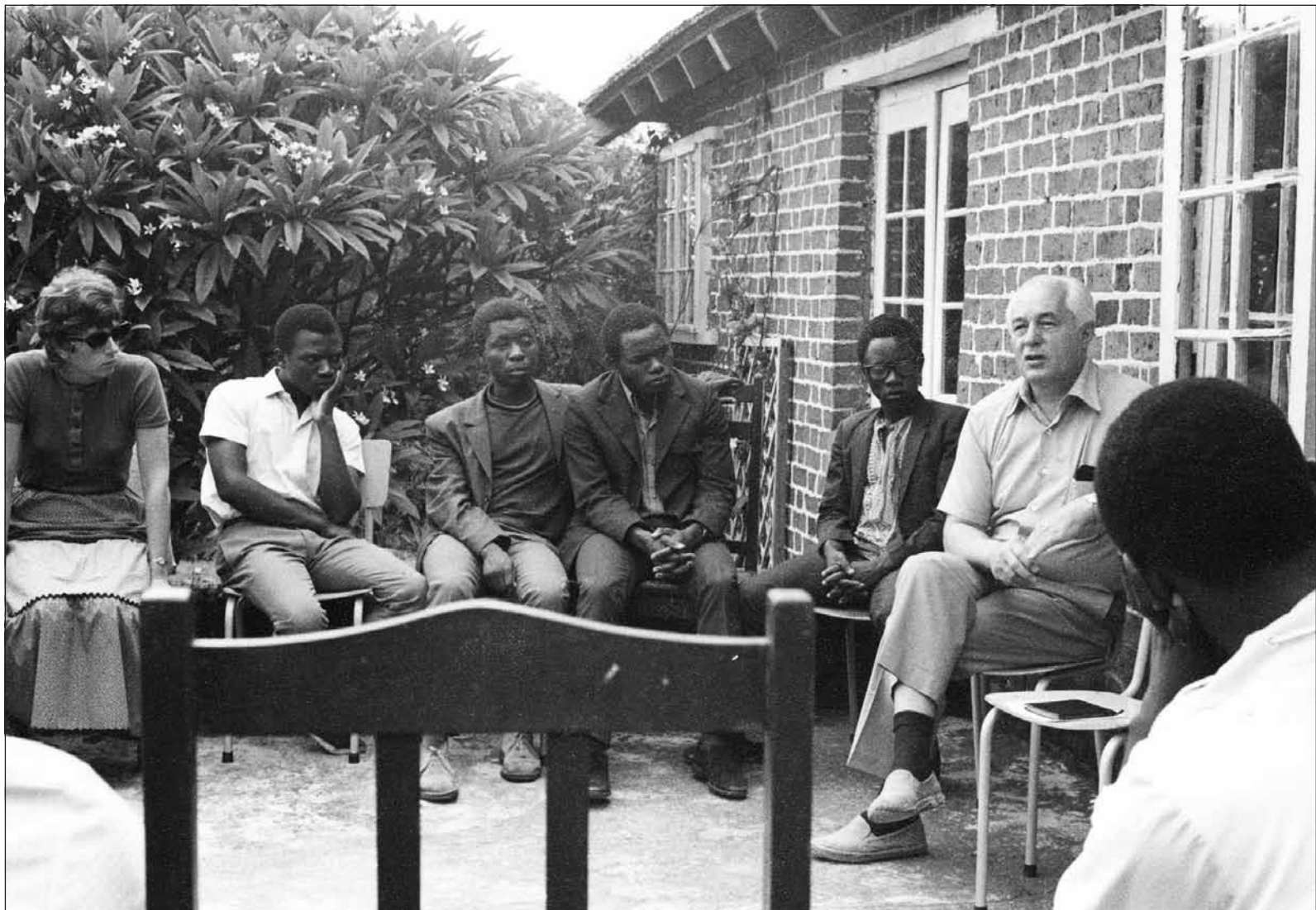
The Dr. E. H. Johnson Memorial Award was established in 1982 to recognize work on “the cutting edge of mission.” For the past 35 years, this award has been presented to an individual or an organization that has exhibited in their work the cutting edge of mission.

Many people live in ways that are faithful to what God is calling them to do. The “cutting edge of mission” award seeks to lift up people and organizations that think and act outside the box. These are the prophetic voices that call for justice and action. These women and men have a vision and passion for what is possible when others see only impossibility. In some cases, they are lone voices, speaking at great personal risk and sacrifice.

Dr. E. H. Johnson (Ted), in whose memory this award was established, was one such person. In his position as Secretary of Overseas Mission of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Ted Johnson had oversight of international mission staff and partnerships around the world. Ted was ahead of the curve. He saw what was possible and what was needed, and acted.

Emerging from the colonial era of missions, he recognized the need for international partners to have responsibility and authority for their own programs. With the backing of the Presbyterian Church, he led peace initiatives and relief aid in Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War. There are many accounts of his work in Manchuria, and his leadership is known for renewing ties with the Chinese Church under Communist rule. In the 1950s, Ted Johnson developed an interest in theological education, believing strongly that mission should be an integral part of the curriculum. This was not well received and his passionate persistence was required. In 2017, it is inconceivable that mission would be excluded from today’s curricula.

Some E. H. Johnson Award recipients are now famous names, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1993), whose voice lifted up the scandal of apartheid in South Africa. In 1986, the Rev. Dr. C. M. Kao of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) was the award recipient. Dr. Kao was PCT General Secretary and in 1980, along with nine others, was imprisoned by the Taiwanese government for advocating for the human rights of the Taiwanese people. In 1997, the Rev. John Fife of the Presbyterian



Dr. E. H. Johnson visited Malawi in February 1972 following visits to India, Bangladesh and Kenya. He is pictured here with students from the Polytechnic Institute, which trains people for degrees as engineers and technicians but also provides non-degree training for industrial apprentices. He shared with the students many insights into developing the political, social and religious consciousness of developing countries

Church U.S.A. received the award for his work in the Sanctuary Movement, sheltering Central American refugees. Two decades later, he remains active in refugee/migration issues and his 1997 address remains relevant today. In 2006, Ms. Karuna Roy of the Church of North India, received the award for her work in HIV/AIDS in India. Battling ignorance and prejudice, she understood her education work as God’s call, serving people who were living with the disease. In 2011, Boarding Homes Ministries, initiated by the Rev. Rodger Hunter received the award for its ministry with marginalized people in Canada.

The 2017 award marks a shift in the thinking of the E. H. Johnson Award Committee. To date, all the recipients were members of diverse Christian backgrounds and faith. The award honoured people who had links to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The recipients might have been on the margins of their churches, not always understood by their co-religionists.

In 2017, Dr. Cindy Blackstock received the award on behalf of the

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, where she is the Executive Director. In January 2016, at great personal cost, Dr. Blackstock, along with the Assembly of First Nations, won a landmark victory on behalf of Indigenous children. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that successive Canadian governments have racially discriminated against First Nations children by providing less funding for child welfare services on reserves than is provided for other children living in Canada. The Canadian government has yet to follow the Tribunal’s direction to “cease the discriminatory practice and take measures to redress and prevent it.” In her powerful address to the General Assembly, Dr. Blackstock issued a challenge to all of us present to “make a difference,” to tell our federal MP that this matters to us, so that our children don’t have to apologize for our silence and inaction.

She spoke of one of her heroes, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, a Presbyterian elder in Ottawa. Dr. Bryce was a whistleblower who raised the alarm

about the preventable deaths of children in residential schools in 1907. His survey of the health conditions of children in the schools found a startling death rate of close to 50% when he tracked the children for three years. An expert in public health, Bryce called on the federal government to provide equitable funding for tuberculosis treatment for First Nations and implement practical measures like improving ventilation in the schools. The cost of Bryce’s reforms was \$10,000 to \$15,000—a paltry sum when even then, federal budgets exceeded \$100 million per year. The government refused to pay. Bryce acted and his report appeared on the front page of the “Evening Citizen” in 1907. He hoped citizens would react with outrage and demand the government act. A few of them did but most people remained silent, while thousands of children died needlessly.

In offering the award to Dr. Blackstock, Annemarie Klassen, convener of the E. H. Johnson Committee stated that we are mindful of the church’s complicity in the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and par-

ticularly in the legacy of residential schools. The Presbyterian Church’s 1994 Confession to God and Indigenous peoples says, in part, “With God’s guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness. The presentation of this Award affirms the church’s desire to honour this commitment.”

One of the treasures of the church is this award for the Cutting Edge of Mission. It provides us with a window into the challenges faced by people around the world, and the few who respond with courage and creativity. The award includes a \$7,000 gift as an encouragement.

In 2018, we look forward to welcoming Dr. George Sabra, President of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon. Dr. Sabra will speak on the rise and acceptance of extremism, both political and religious, as one of the more urgent matters before the church today.

For more information about Award recipients or to donate, go to presbyterian.ca/ehjohnson