

Christian Witness Council

We join the Apostle Paul in saying “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.*” (Romans 1:8) Some of you may remember Chilean Baptist Raquel Contreras from the 2008 MC Canada Assembly, and how she ‘blamed’ us as Canadian Mennonites for causing her to change her ways and activities because of our witness to the gospel of peace. *Your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.* An elder in a Muslim community in Southern Mindanao, Philippines said to us this year, that ‘I am like a Mennonite Muslim, because I now know about making peace.’ As a Muslim, he has been profoundly touched and transformed because *your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.* A pastor in Cuba, with emotion in his voice, said that if he and his brother (in the faith) were the only two Mennonites in Cuba, they would still stand firm and witness as radical, faithful Christians. *This because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.* A Lao pastor in Ontario has come asking us to help him spread the gospel through a Mennonite understanding in his home country. *This because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.*

And so we thank you – the delegates, pastors, constituents, volunteers, leaders – for the way that people around you are hearing of your faith, and are being encouraged and transformed as a result. We have tremendous opportunities to be faithful and to witness to a gospel that is truly good news for all people, today and forever.

Witness Highlights

- *Maskipiton* and the *Sacred Tree*, two books commissioned by Native Ministries, are being translated into French and Spanish and will be taken to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Paraguay in July.
- 10 Indigenous people from Canada will travel to Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and join together with a group from the USA on a Learning Tour. They will be hosted by Indigenous Mennonite groups from Paraguay, and together will visit the Chaco region of Paraguay and Argentina.
- The Native Ministry resource box *Reaching up to God our Creator* has been well received by congregations. In fact, it was the most downloaded resource from the Resource Centre in 2008 (1469 downloads)!
- Barb Daniels, from the Riverton Fellowship Circle (Manitoba), was commissioned for leadership in that congregation. She was called from within the congregation.
- A web site has been created to guide congregations through Pandemic Preparedness. A volunteer task force did significant work at preparing this resource. Check out www.churchpandemicresources.ca. This site is gaining broad recognition, and had 6,500 hits in February alone, and 37% of visitors stayed on the site for over 30 minutes,
- Working with Mennonite Voluntary Service Adventure (MVSA) to strengthen our relationship and encourage more voluntary service opportunities for young adults within Canada.
- Radical Journey – we now have an 11 month team internship program for service internationally. This is run in partnership with Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA.
- Our first ever Canadian Native Ministries Learning Tour takes place right after Assembly!
- Ten of sixteen congregations in Alberta have congregational partnerships with

At a Glance...

Council Members

Willard Metzger, chair
Hun Lee
Emily Dueck
Waldimar Neufeld
Lynell Bergen
John David Penner
Irene Crosland
Rudy Dirks
Noe Gonzalia
*Laura Loewen
(completing her term)



Barb Daniels at her commissioning service in February 2009, Riverton Fellowship Circle, Manitoba.

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At a Glance...

Christian Witness Staff:

In 2008 the Christian Witness team included: **Janet Plenert**, Executive Secretary; **Val Pankratz**, Executive Assistant; **Jennifer Rempel**, Executive Assistant (on leave); **Ingrid Miller**, Administrative Assistant; **Tim Froese**, Executive Director for International Ministries and Mission Facilitator for Latin America; **Hippolyto Tshimanga**, Mission Partnership Facilitator for Africa & Europe; **Gordon Janzen**, Mission Partnership Facilitator for Asia; **Edith and Neill von Gunten**, Co-Directors of Native Ministry; **Norm Dyck**, Director of Congregational Partnerships; **Rebecca Yoder Neufeld**, Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada; **Eric Olfert**, Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan; **Jim Shantz**, Interim Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Alberta; **Samson Lo**, Director of Multi-Cultural Ministry.

international Witness workers and ministries.

- CERCAPAZ, a Centre for Christian Peace Resources, was launched in Chile, providing resources and leadership training for congregations throughout the country that are part of UBACH (Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile), our ministry partner, and other churches inspired by the gospel of shalom.
- Numerous short term Special Assignments have given international service opportunities to experienced members from our church with placements in Ethiopia, Mexico, Palestine, South Africa, and Thailand.
- A second Peace and Reconciliation team was commissioned by Peacebuilders Community with which Witness workers Dann and Joji Pantoja work in a conflicted region of Mindanao, Philippines. This team of 15 includes both Christians and Muslims.
- Hinke Loewen-Rudgers is preparing for bridge-building ministry in Palestine-Israel by learning the Arabic language.
- Church partners in Sichuan, China, received support and distributed relief aid in the areas affected by the earthquake of May 2008.
- The Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC) celebrated and formalized its legal status in a government-approved General Assembly held November 15-17, 2008. The VMC represents over 6,000 members in 24 provinces. Mennonites from Canada worked with MC Canada staff to advocate for the VMC during a time of restriction.
- Christina and Darnell Barkman, our first Witness interns in Philippines, concluded a 10-month internship with Peacebuilders Community in Davao City.
- Together with other North American and French Mennonites, we help to fund theological studies for Burkinabe church leaders in neighbouring countries, and for rural Congolese pastors.
- Witness provides scholarships for the theological studies of the two first women theology students of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Congo.
- Together with MCC colleagues, Witness workers in South Africa are working together at developing an Anabaptist Network/Centre.

New Staff – in this past year **Norm Dyck** joined Witness staff as Director of Congregational Partnerships. Norm has brought a pastor's heart to his role, along with a very collaborative working style, good humour, joy, and energy. His love for the church and vision for a healthy, connected, faithful church has made him fit right in. Norm would love to explore with you ways of deepening your congregational life through a congregational partnership. Look for Norm and stop him for a conversation!

IMPACT – (International Mennonite Pastors Coming Together) Along with Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, we are busy planning a fall IMPACT event. Six lucky MC Saskatchewan congregations will host six pastors from other countries for two weeks in October 2009. This bilingual Spanish-English event will allow our pastors and congregations to talk in depth about being a faithful church in the world today. This will be the fourth annual IMPACT, and history has now proven that it is a transformational experience for all involved! Mennonite Church British Columbia has already indicated their desire to host IMPACT 2010. We ask for prayers for the planners, that visas will be granted, and that God will be working in the hearts of all those who will participate.

Who cares about a potential Pandemic? – Mennonite Church Canada does! Because we believe that in crisis and emergency situations the church has a critical role to play in society as a faithful witness of God's love and compassion, we have worked hard to help congregations prepare themselves to respond. The web site www.churchpandemicresources.ca is your first stop in thinking about the church living out its vocation in times of crisis. This site is attracting significant interest from a wide range of church, government, and health care professionals. And here at the Assembly we are proud to launch, together with Mennonite Publishing Network and Mennonite Disaster Service, two resources for congregational use that we have commissioned:

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Don't Be Afraid: Stories of Christians in Times of Trouble by Rebecca Seiling and Cindy Snider. A book of four stories for middler children, based on true accounts of times of crisis in the global church, both contemporary and historical (Bishop Cyprian in the early church, SARS in Toronto, Katrina in the USA and AIDS in Zimbabwe). Includes suggestions for thought and action.

Beyond our Fears: Following Jesus in Times of Crisis by Pamela Driedger. This four part biblical study guides small groups, Sunday School classes, or individuals in thinking about the calling of the church in difficult times. Includes biblical commentary, true stories of crises from history and our own day, and questions for reflection. *Don't Be Afraid* can be used as a companion book or for children's time.

Beyond our Fears: Guide for Leaders. This book includes materials that will help congregations mount a coordinated and creative education and worship series on crisis preparedness. Includes study guides for youth and adult groups, children's activities and worship resources.

We are grateful to the volunteer Pandemic Task Force that helped with the planning, research, and review of the materials, and the many others who consulted and contributed in a variety of ways in the preparation of all these materials!

Discernment: Church Planting

Mennonite Church Canada area churches have asked MC Canada in a variety of ways to help network, encourage, and resource questions of church health, growth and planting.

Towards this end, we have pulled together an ad hoc Church Growth networking body from the area churches. This group meets approximately monthly to share challenges and issues from their area church, and learn from each other. We are hoping to have a good MC Canada representation this fall at the Church Planting Canada conference in Calgary, and plan to use that time to think together about the future growth of our church.



With the impetus of the General Board to have church growth/health/planting as one of the Assembly 2009 discernment topics, we have asked the Church Growth networking body to be a resource in planning and shaping the Delegate Discernment session.

Peace in the Public Square – 1,000 Mennonites for Peace

As a part of Mennonite Church Canada's emphasis on peace in the public square, Witness has launched a *1000 Mennonites for Peace* campaign this spring. By sending information to every congregation and a column in the *Canadian Mennonite*, we encouraged MC Canada members to file a Peace Tax Return together with their income taxes. This return gave the opportunity to witness to our government that we oppose the use of our taxes to pay for war.

God is a god of peace, and as followers of Jesus we seek to promote peace in all aspects of our lives – including our finances and our payment of taxes. At the time of writing we are in the midst of tax season, and don't know how broad a participation this effort will have. We encourage people to look beyond this tax year and continue to add to the 1,000 Mennonites for Peace initiative in future tax years. This is one more small effort to be a visible witness in the public square.

Hun Lee, Noe Gonzalia, Laura Loewen and Rudy Dirks – all members of the Witness Council, at the 2009 Spring Leadership Assembly.

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Compliance with Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)

While other MC Canada ministry areas may also mention this topic, we feel it important to note in the Witness report. As a charity operating within Canada, CRA requires that we pay close attention to proving 'end use control' of the funds we send outside of Canada. MC Canada has always sought to be in compliance with CRA regulations. However, the interpretation and application of CRA regulations continue to become more stringent, requiring us to exercise increasing levels of control. We operate with a clear paradigm of ministry in partnership: we want to be good partners, empowering national churches and partners in other countries to discern and act on the ministry to which God is calling them. The tightening of CRA requirements can be in conflict with our missiology and our ecclesiology. Our commitment to continue working to be in compliance with CRA regulations has caused rigorous, healthy debate concerning our responsibility as a people of God. Will it become necessary to challenge CRA compliance in order to remain aligned with our missiological calling? Witness Council and the General Board have grappled with these implications as we keep seeking compliance with CRA. Staff have been directed to give urgent attention to CRA compliance questions in this year.



Janet Plenert (Executive Secretary, Christian Witness) at the 2009 Spring Leadership Assembly

Participating in the Global Church

Mennonite Church Canada is a charter member of the Global Mission Fellowship. This network was formed in 2003 to encourage Anabaptist churches and mission agencies from around the world to share, collaborate, vision, and dream together for more effective global mission. There are 65 members from 40 countries in the GMF. Support from MC Canada allows delegates from Africa, Latin America, and Asia to come to Paraguay this summer for a 3 day gathering prior to the MWC Assembly.

Mennonite World Conference – While not structurally an official program relationship of Witness, MWC is an important partner body of MC Canada, and one of the key vehicles for working towards our priority of becoming a global church. With the MWC Assembly in the final stage of preparations before the July event, we want to note the important contributions Witness staff are making, often over and above their Witness roles:

- **Rebecca Yoder Neufeld** – is the overall translation coordinator – a task of monumental proportions.
- **Tim Froese** – will be co-leading a Learning Tour prior to Assembly.
- **Neill and Edith von Gunten** – are keenly involved in networking and coordinating the first of its kind Indigenous peoples gathering and Learning Tour, which will include Indigenous people from 6 countries.
- **Janet Plenert** – North American representative to the Global Mission Fellowship (2003-09), chair of the Global Mission Fellowship (2006-09) and chair of MWC's new Mission Commission (2008-09).
- **Eric Olfert** – Planning Assistant for the GMF, and the Mission Commission, Eric works with Janet in attending to the details of planning an international gathering, and conceptualizing MWC's new Mission Commission.

–Submitted by Willard Metzger, Chair, Christian Witness Council, and Janet Plenert, Executive Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada Witness

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Canadian Women in Mission (CWM)

"As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." 1 Peter 4:10

Our CWM **Executive** includes Ruth Jantzi, Secretary-Treasurer, 4 regional Presidents, Evelyn Buhr, AB, Ruby Harder, SK, Betty Ann Hildebrand, MB, Shirley Redekop, WMCEC, and myself. In addition, I have the pleasure of introducing Trudy Gortzen who is joining our executive as the Chair of Women's Ministries for Mennonite Church British Columbia (MC BC). We are delighted to have Trudy participating in our meetings.

Updates on Regular Activities

1. Bible Study Guide (BSG)

We continue sharing the production of an annual Bible Study Guide with our USA Mennonite sisters. The 2009 Guide, ***For the Beauty of the Earth: Women, Faith and Creation Care***, has been written by Patty Friesen, Saskatoon, SK.

2. Spiritual Growth Assistance Fund

It is of special interest to us when we hear of women pursuing theological education. This year we are pleased to provide financial assistance to 3 women for the 2008/09 school year: Carrie Martens, Winnipeg, MB, Kara Carter, Milverton, ON, and Virginia Gerbrandt, Leamington, ON.

A recent recipient said, "I wish to express my deepest thanks for your financial support. I so appreciate your commitment to support the training of pastors, especially women, for congregations of Mennonite Church Canada through such tangible and practical means. I accept your gift with gratitude and commit myself to be a good steward of it as I study and prepare for further pastoral ministry."

3. Pennies and Prayer Inheritance Fund (PIF)

The PIF provides opportunity for honouring, recognizing, and remembering women by way of a donation. For example, this past year women from Grace Mennonite Church in St. Catharines made a donation in honour of Lydia Willms, recognizing the many hours of work she has put into gardening at their church and senior's residence. Other women's groups have also made contributions. In 2008/09, \$868 was donated.

In 2003, PIF started with \$70,341. In the past 3 years we have distributed \$15,000 in support of women in ministry with MC Canada. Currently the Fund stands at \$75,104.

4. Connecting Through the Internet

While changes in women's lifestyles are making it more difficult to attend face-to-face meetings, connecting through the Internet is very convenient. Our first venture into this area is a blog at mennowomencanada.blogspot.com/.

—Respectfully submitted by Erna Neufeldt, President



CWM, left to right: Shirley Redekop, Ruth Jantzi, Betty Ann Hildebrand, Ev Buhr, Trudy Gortzen, Erna Neufeldt and Ruby Harder. Far right: Leona Dueck Penner.

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Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT)



"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4:18 -19 NRSV

The Spirit of the Lord has surely been with members of Christian Peacemaker Teams as we have engaged in the past year's initiatives:

- Hiring of an Undoing Racism Coordinator, using Mennonite Central Committee's anti-racism program to increase awareness within Christian Peacemaker Teams. Undoing Racism and Strategic Planning workshops, and an ongoing Undoing Racism Working Group declare that CPT will have an anti-racism identity.
- Locating a CPT team in Iraqi Kurdistan, along the border where villages are regularly bombed and shelled, forcing farmers, shepherds, and their families to flee and live in deplorable conditions in camps.
- The Aboriginal Justice Team which has maintained relationships with the Grassy Narrows First Nations community in Northwestern Ontario, and with the Algonquins in Eastern Ontario, who oppose uranium exploration on their unceded land. CPT has also stood in solidarity with additional First Nations communities in Quebec and Ontario in the quest for Federal and Provincial governments to respect Aboriginal land rights.
- An ongoing presence in Colombia in Barranca and in the Narina province. Violence, disappearances, killings, human rights violations, and internal displacement of 3.8 million citizens persist in spite of assurances from the Uribe government that the situation is improving. The inclusion in the North American Free Trade Agreement has increased the hardships of the people.
- December 6, 2008 marked the beginning of a three month CPT project in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo city of Goma, where they joined the Groupe Martin Luther King in promoting non-violence and conflict resolution, monitoring human rights, and providing a peaceful presence.
- After a refocusing effort, the former Tuwani and Hebron teams have been consolidated into the Palestine Team in order to be more effective in working with West Bank villages and supporting Palestinian-led non-violent resistance to the occupation. A presence will be maintained in Tuwani, Hebron, and in a project office.
- Summer and winter training sessions in Chicago continue. This coming year marks two additional sessions, in Colombia and the United Kingdom. CPT is becoming more international, multicultural, and ecumenical in nature, although there is still a strong Mennonite component.
- Delegations to the USA/Mexico Borderlands, Iraq, Colombia, Israel/Palestine, and Aboriginal communities continue with participants gaining experience of active peacemaking grounded in the transforming power of the gospel of non-violence.

In retrospect, the members of Christian Peacemaker Teams have been busy, "living inside out", in faithful obedience to Christ's call to radical peacemaking. This has been made possible through the generous prayer and financial support of Mennonite Church Canada and constituents. For this we are truly grateful!

—Respectfully submitted by Esther Kern, Administrative Coordinator, CPT Canada

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Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC)

In his book *The End of the River*, Canadian scientist and author Brian Harvey focuses on a proposed massive diversion project on the Rio São Francisco in Brazil. Over the past decade the project has affected elections and led to demonstrations, hunger strikes and endless debate over both the potential and lunacy of the mega-project. Supporters claim it will allow people in the dry, northeastern part of the country to irrigate their crops and grow more food. Detractors claim it will be the end of one of South America's signature rivers. Who is right? And how will the issue be resolved?

Harvey is struck by the hopelessness of the debate and wonders if there isn't a reasonable alternative to the diversion. One day he meets Beth Szilassy, an MCC worker. Beth travels to communities in the region on her motorcycle, helping people build cisterns that will hold rainwater. These cisterns change lives. Families no longer have to spend hours each day hauling heavy containers of water. People are healthier because the rainwater is safe to drink.

'By her actions Beth was saying to me, 'Let the technocrats and the zealots and the saints fight this one out to its – probably foregone – conclusion. I'm going to pour some concrete of my own,' says Harvey, adding that the cisterns are a graphic demonstration of how a simple technology can profoundly affect lives. Because of the steadfast support of congregations and individuals, more than 100,000 cisterns have been built over the years.

Beth, who is from Ontario, has worked with MCC in Brazil since 1983. Her faith and dedication have helped transform the lives of thousands of people. It is but one example of how MCC workers around the world seek to reflect Christ's compassion and respond to His call.

MCC Highlights:

* This past year MCC embarked on a process – along with MCC stakeholders – to explore questions of vision and structure for MCC. More information can be found at www.mcc.org/newwineskins. This discernment process is scheduled for completion by the end of 2009.

* MCC has been affected by the global economic turbulence. The sudden, steep drop in the value of the Canadian dollar in the fall of 2008 meant there was less money available for international programs, which are funded in U.S. dollars. To help meet MCC's commitments, MCC in Canada is dipping into its reserves, reducing expenses and encouraging people to give generously to those who have less.

* MCC Canada is part of a fledgling consortium that is exploring ways to work together in Cuba. Other Canadian members of the consortium are Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University.

* Peace is at the heart of MCC's identity and ministry. Yet many people find themselves struggling to understand what this means. MCC is updating *Pursuing Peace*, a booklet written by staff, that offers some answers and aims to stimulate people's thinking about peace. The booklet is available from your nearest MCC office.

* MCC is launching a 10-year, multimillion-dollar campaign to help people in southern Sudan recover from years of conflict. The campaign, "Coming Home: Sudan," is focused on building schools, supporting education, assisting farmers, and promoting peace in southern Sudan.

–Respectfully submitted by Donald Peters, Executive Director, MCC Canada



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Mennonite Disaster Service Region V Inc. (MDS)



**Co-Directors of Region V
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The work of MDS gets hands dirty and eyes opened as seeds of service are sown and people are helped to come back home. The summer of 2008 brought floods to the Interlake region of Manitoba and widespread flooding across the U.S. Midwest where some places reached 100-year levels. During late summer of 2008 one of the most active Atlantic hurricane seasons in recorded history saw 6 consecutive named storms making U.S. landfall. In California, wildfires occurred once again. The winter months brought ice storms across the U.S. Midwest and flooding to the Chilliwack area in British Columbia.

MDS 2008 blessings include:

- 4,817 volunteers serving at 13 bi-national project sites equaling 26,316 volunteer days approximating \$4.1 million value
- 900+ of the above were from Canada with 50% of project leadership from Canada
- 52 cleanups, 35 houses built, 17 major home repairs, 92 minor home repairs
- 61 volunteers participated in the RV (recreational vehicle) program
- 540 volunteers participated in the summer youth program
- 113 volunteers cleaned up for 65 families after flooding in Chilliwack, BC
- 27 farmers donated 25 semi loads of hay & straw to 18 farm families in Manitoba's Interlake (as of end of Jan/09)
- 3 churches each built a house for one family (providing materials, funding & volunteers) under the new Partnership Home Program
- 13 students in the Disaster Management Program at Hesston College
- 23 students taking the first Disaster Recovery Studies class at Canadian Mennonite University
- 4,414 different individuals, churches, and businesses donated funds

View from an MDS client:

"It's very, very exciting. And honey, I thank God for the Mennonites" exclaims Teria Samuel. "Every time I walk through these doors, I will never ever forget them. Never. They will always be in my heart and in my mind. Always." Teria and her husband and children live in Newton, Texas, 100 miles from the Gulf coast. Hurricane Rita swept through in 2005 ripping off roofs and damaging homes. MDS continues to repair and rebuild in this overlooked community deep in east Texas.

View from an MDS volunteer:

When the youngest volunteer for the week met the homeowner of the house she was working on, she said, "I was so encouraged to actually meet the client. After meeting her, the work was more real to me. I saw the difference I was making with only one week of volunteering."

"For every little nail pounded in her house a little more hope and healing were brought into her life. For me, as a volunteer, to be part of that healing process was priceless."

"We knew that communication would be a challenge for us and we do not have special knowledge or ability concerning house building – all this made us anxious. Rapidly all my fears went away because everybody made us feel welcome and a true part of the team. Sharing work and meals, prayers and devotions, laughter and play all contributed to transform unknown people to friends, individuals into a team." (new MDSers from Quebec on an RV project site)

–Submitted by Lois Nickel, Director Region Relations & Programs

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Mennonite Men (MM)

Twenty-five years ago Mennonite Men caught the vision for assisting the Mennonite Church in being a missional church. Goals had been set by the denomination to plant many new churches, often in urban areas where the cost of real estate was often prohibitive. Mennonite Men decided to raise money to assist these young churches to acquire their first church building. Now 25 years later, Mennonite Men has provided more than \$1.5 million to assist 54 congregations in Canada, USA, and overseas acquire their first church building.

Both in Canada and the US, the first grants were received by Chinese congregations. San Francisco Chinese, San Francisco, Calif. was the recipient of the first JoinHands grant to be given in fulfillment of the missional vision of Mennonite Men. The first two Canadian grants were received by Calgary Chinese, Calgary, Alta. and Saskatoon Chinese, Saskatoon, Sask. With the increased denominational growth in MC Canada among multi-cultural congregations and in Mennonite Church USA among racial/ethnic congregations, these groups are becoming primary recipients of JoinHands grants.

Ten years ago, Mennonite Men began tithing grant monies available for helping to build churches internationally. Now 10 years later, Mennonite Men has assisted churches to acquire their first church building in Ukraine, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, India, Thailand, and Ivory Coast. In 1999, Evangelica in Zaporozhye, Ukraine was the first international church to receive a tithe grant. A more recent recipient was Living Water, Borabu, Thailand. The Living Water Church in Borabu, Thailand realized its dream of building a new meeting place with the help of JoinHands. Pat and Rad Houmphan, Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in Borabur, have helped Living Water Church achieve its dream of worshipping in its own Christian temple.

Mennonite Men, with annual receipts in excess of \$150,000, relates to Mennonite Church Canada Witness and in Mennonite Church USA is a Constituency Group relating to the Constituency Leaders Council.

In addition to the JoinHands Mennonite Church Building Program, Mennonite Men provides resources for men's groups in local congregations, encourages formation of men's groups and develops men's study resources. A recent resource, *Wrestling with God: Devotions for Men*, provides 52 devotions for men written by Mennonite men for men who are seeking greater spiritual depth in their lives. As a result of our involvement in Denominational Men's Ministry Network of North America, the ecumenical organization of men's ministry leaders, we were able to assist Mennonite Publishing Network in marketing 6,500 copies of *Wrestling with God* to United Methodist Men.

Three major challenges that face Mennonite Men as we attempt to help our denomination in its effort to be missional are: 1) In creative and innovative new ways to resource and minister to men, particularly younger men.

2) A real challenge is to provide grants to young Mennonite congregations needing help in acquiring their first church building. Grant commitments in excess of \$300,000 have been made to 10 congregations with 5 additional applications being processed. 3) Develop networks across Canada and the US to maintain the grassroots nature of Mennonite Men.

—Submitted by Jim Gingerich

(Canadian Coordinator: Marv Baergen)



Living Water Church in Borabu, Thailand



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Conference of Mennonites in Mexico (CMM)

The “**Conferencia Menonita de México**” (CMM) was founded in 1990, and is now formed by four local churches, Blumenau 351, Burwalde 245, Steinreich 60, and La Salada, Ascencion, 30 members. The first three churches have grown out of the ministry of the missionaries from the former General Conference (GC), beginning in 1963, after the Hoffnungsauer Mennoniten Gemeinde in Cuauhtémoc was dissolved.

CMM Activity Program: Formal Education, annual budget US \$450,000; Bible School annual budget US \$130,000 (together with EMC and EMMC), and for Mission among the Mexican people, our annual budget is US \$95,000.

Ministry goals and objectives:

1. Education: Since the very beginning in 1963, our newly formed congregations, together with the GC Mission workers, were very much concerned about Christian Instruction and formal Education for their children, and they always tried to offer just that to their own congregation and to the Mennonites in the larger Mennonite area.

One highlight last year was that our incorporated bilingual (Spanish and German) Mennonite private school, from Nursery, through Primary, Secondary and Bachillerato-Prepa (Grade 12), after having made many efforts with help from the German Goethe Institute and DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch-Dienst), through special German language classes for our Mennonite teachers for several years, has become recognized as “Deutsche Auslandsschule” by Germany.

And another very important point has been reached, that from now on, teachers from the “Universidad Pedagógica Nacional” (UPN) will come to our school one day a week, to teach and instruct several of our presently uncertified teachers, so that in four years from now, 21 of our own plus two other school teachers in the Colonies will be able to become certified teachers, so that with the help of UPN our school indirectly is becoming a teachers’ college.

2: Bible School. The former CMM Steinreich Bible School has been operated together with EMC and EMMC for more than six years, with studies during Jan., Feb., and March every year. Most of the 12 teachers come from EMC and EMMC, but we are happy to have at least one teacher (Mrs. Helen Dueck) from MC Canada this year and we are thankful for that. There are 95 full time students and around 180 more study selective subjects. The new two story residence for girls and some married couples has been finished this year. Three men from the Winkler, Man. area came and did voluntary carpenter work for a couple of weeks.

3. Mission: The mission church in Colonia Reforma in Cuauhtémoc City pastored by Missionaries Isaac and Maria Bergen is growing fast, with many children attending. There are two kitchens, one in Samachique in the mountains where 60 Tarahumara children have their meal before they go to school, and another in Col. Reforma where 115 children receive a hot meal every day. Twenty handicapped people are working every weekday in the workshop, and 12 persons are studying in the Spanish Bible School preparing themselves to work in the Church. Many people are seeking Isaac and Maria Bergen for spiritual counselling and conflict resolution.

- Peter Rempel, Chairman of the “Conferencia Menonita de México”

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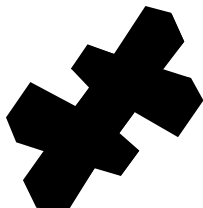
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Mennonite Voluntary Service Adventure (MVSA)



Mennonite Voluntary Service Adventure, or MVSA, is the Christian Voluntary Services program of four congregations within Mennonite Church Canada membership with similar outreach programs, cooperating and supporting each other to offer a consistent Christian Voluntary Services program for young adults in Canada.

It is a real privilege to report another very good year of Christian Voluntary Service experiences for the 15 young adults participating in the program in Canada this year. (These included 5 participants in Lethbridge, 6 participants in Winnipeg, 3 in Toronto, and 1 in Montreal.) It is a pleasure to participate in this program and experience the dedication and excitement of the volunteers. For some this is a first time opportunity to live in an intentional community away from family. It is an opportunity for young adults to experience new ideas, new situations, and new understandings with their peers, in a safe environment, while dedicating their time and expressing their faith in action and service to those in need. For many young men from Germany, the time of service is also an alternative to military service.

During the past several years we have seen a drop in applicants from our own Canadian congregations, and an increase in the number of applicants from Germany. MVSA works with three German organizations: Christliche Dienste, Eirene, and LOGOS, who have strong mission programs and provide opportunities for young adults to serve in various countries.

How can you truly evaluate the success of this program? We see the value being multifold:

- value to the individual volunteers (now and possibly for a lifetime)
- value to the life in the sponsoring congregation
- value to the agencies of placement
- value to the many people they touch in their everyday work
- value to the home congregations when the volunteers complete their terms

Some of the value mentioned above can be determined immediately, in the faces of those who are in contact with the volunteers or who benefit from the services provided, or in the congregations where the volunteers participate. Some values will not be evident until much later, when the influences of the Christian Service experience in future life choices or shifts in personal values become clear.

—Submitted by the MVSA Management Committee.

At a Glance...

Structure of MVSA: MVSA is not incorporated as an organization. Each congregation's MVSA program operates independently, adhering to a common purpose statement and guided by a common Operating Handbook and a Lifestyle Expectations statement. A Management Committee consisting of representatives from each Unit, as well as a representative from Mennonite Church Canada, from Mennonite Church Manitoba, and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, meets periodically via conference call, to share information, for support, and to make decisions ensuring the consistent operation of the programs. Funding is provided through a stipend paid monthly by the agency of employment, to the individual Support Committee. A common Sharing Fund to which Units contribute as they are able, provides assistance as needed and funds activities such as advertising and promotion, that benefit the whole.

If your congregation would like more information, or would like to consider opening an MVSA Unit, please contact any of the above mentioned congregations via the MVSA web site at www.mvsa.net

For more information, see www.mvsa.net

GENERAL

FORMATION

WITNESS

SUPPORT SERVICES

FINANCE

DISCERNMENT