

Delegates Affirm Peace in the Public Square Proposal



Photo by Ryan Roth Bartel

- by *Deborah Froese,*
with files from *Dan Dyck*

Church Matters Hosts Dan Dyck and Janet Plenert interview Gordon Allaby, Pastor Osler Mennonite Church Sask.

Delegates voted in favour of a four part proposal to actively promote the Mennonite peace message in the public square (see **Peace in the Public Square: Proposal Clarified** on page 2).

The proposal was prompted by a resolution presented by Pastor Gordon Allaby on behalf of Osler Mennonite Church (Sask.) at the 2008 delegate assembly in Wpg. (see **July, 2008: A Resolution from the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Body** on page 3).

Allaby, interviewed by hosts Janet Plenert and Dan Dyck for a live recording of Mennonite Church Canada's Church Matters radio program, told stories of how his church has taken out print ads in the local town paper with peace messages. A dual Canadian-American citizen, Allaby is passionate about Jesus' call to non-violent peace building. In 1971, he spent eight hours in a room surrounded by military officials in response to his application for conscientious objector status during the time of the Vietnam war.

"Most people don't realize there is a third way beyond fight or flight," said Allaby.

His church has also marched in the local town parade as the "For Peace Marching Band" ("There's no reason sending a peace message can't be fun," he quipped), and has worked to encourage the local school to reconsider the messages they send students at Nov. 11 Remembrance Day services. The congregation's sign proclaims Osler Mennonite Church as "A Christian community for peace," said Allaby, citing Deuteronomy 6 which instructs God's people to 'put what you know on your forehead.'

In addition to the proposal in the Report Book (Pages 73-77), Dan Dyck, MC Canada Director of Communications, presented information on what an outdoor media campaign could look like: Messages such as "Make a date with peace" and "Give your conscience a workout" on bus boards, transit shelters and billboards, would direct viewers to a web site where they could learn more. Congregations could also sponsor these ads in local print media. Cost sharing arrangements among collaborating clusters of congregations ranged from \$400 to about \$1000 for varying time periods and locations, depending upon the number of congregations pooling funds.

Delegates at floor mics spoke in favour of the proposal, but also offered a few cautions, particularly in regard to the array of positions members hold on peace theology. One made note of a congregation dealing with unfinished business regarding military involvement, while another expressed the desire that our position should not be seen as a put-down of those who choose to serve militarily.

In his interview, Allaby said that reactions to his congregation's activities have not always been affirming. "Publicly proclaiming what we hold dear makes us vulnerable," he said.

Dyck warned that congregations would need to be prepared to respond effectively to the messages, should they receive curious visitors.

Robert J. Suderman, General Secretary, emphasized that acting for peace could mean any simple act, from writing a letter to the editor to meeting with an elected representative. One act per year per congregation over a four year period would result in 1000 acts of peace in the public square, he said.



Photo by Ryan Roth Bartel

Assembly stirs passion for church

- Deborah Froese

A deepening interest in church drew Melanie Kampen to her first national church assembly.

Kampen just completed her second year at Canadian Mennonite University with a double major in theology and peace and conflict transformation. She's part of praise and worship team in her home congregation, Springfield Heights Mennonite Church of Winnipeg. She also preaches and is participating on the Ministerial Search Committee – and “wherever I feel I can use my gifts.”

For Kampen, Assembly highlights included the table discussions surrounding discernment and resolutions, and the willingness of everyone to engage. “It’s interesting for me because I’ve never been to a national gathering of churches... mostly just regional [where] I know everybody. I don’t know everybody here.”

“There is no such thing as individual Christianity,” she goes on to say. “Gathering as a community, especially nationally, is important for reminding us of what our vision is, what our identity is, whose we are and where we’re going. It helps us to realize that we’re part of a global

body, part of a much larger vision for the world than that of our own congregation.”

Kampen says that she found the proposed peace in the public square and advertising campaigns proposal to be interesting, but felt the discussions indicated there was a need to strengthen congregational identity as a peace church. “This is what the gospel tells us. This is part of our commission. What are the actions we can take?”

She plans to share her Assembly experience with Springfield Heights as an afternoon or evening event.

Peace in the Public Square: Proposal Clarified

Some delegates expressed confusion over portions of the formatting and language of the Peace in the Public Square Proposal as presented on page 73 of the Report Book. The Resolutions Committee suggested some helpful clarifications, noted as follows:

A proposal for promoting the peace message in the public square:

Given what is (and is not) viable, what is already being done, and what is needed, we make a simple proposal:

We propose:

- that each part of the Body* within Mennonite Church Canada commit to publicly engage one peace issue (local (regional, national and/or international)

issue per year for the next 4 years;

- that each part of the Body commit to provide the education and resourcing needed (within and beyond the Body) to articulate and explain the public engagement from a Peace Church perspective;
- that each part of the Body commit to provide a written report to Mennonite Church Canada, outlining its engagement and reflecting on the impact of its work;
- that Mennonite Church Canada staff commit to resource the educational needs of these initiatives;
- that Mennonite Church Canada commit to compile these engagements into an annual summary report, providing perspective and analysis as needed and helpful;

*for example: congregations, area churches, and national church.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Extra Special thanks to hosts, volunteers

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and dozens of volunteers from Saskatchewan and area churches pulled together a wonderful Assembly graciously, generously, and with wonderful hospitality. Thank you.

Special thanks to the staff of the University of Saskatchewan for their patience, kindness, and accommodating nature for the multitude of unusual and last minute requests that helped us invade their space for three days. We are grateful.

Correction to Saturday’s Number of the Day

In yesterday’s Bridge City Bulletin we reported that 42 MC Canada congregations reflect languages and cultures other than traditional Russian or Swiss Mennonite. That number should have been 43. We also neglected to mention that two congregations in Quebec worship in French. Thanks to the member from Eglise Evangelique Mennonite de Joliette for pointing out the error of our ways.

Elections

Nominations to various posts were accepted by acclamation at the Saturday evening delegate sessions:

GENERAL BOARD

Don Friesen, Ottawa, ON (Ottawa Mennonite Church)

Nominated as General Board Secretary. Served on the General Board since 2007.

Gordon Peters, Saskatoon, SK (Nutana Park Mennonite Church)

Nominated as Treasurer. Served on the General Board since 2007.

CHRISTIAN FORMATION COUNCIL

Lisa Carr-Pries, Waterloo, ON (Waterloo North Mennonite Church)

Nominated as Chair. Served on the Christian Formation Council since 2006.

Naomi Unger, Rabbit Lake, SK (Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church)

Served on the Christian

Formation Council since 2003.

Coreen Froese, Didsbury, AB (Bergthal Mennonite Church)

Served on the Christian Formation Council since 2006.

Florence Benson-Umpherville, Cross Lake, MB (Living Word Church)

Campbell Nisbet, Stratford, ON (Avon Mennonite Church)

Appointed for one year to complete a term that unexpectedly became vacant.

WITNESS COUNCIL

Irene Crosland, Tofield, AB (Tofield Mennonite Church)

Served on the Christian Witness Council since 2003.

JD Penner, Toronto, ON (Toronto United Mennonite Church)

Served on the Christian Witness Council since 2006.

Hugo Neufeld, Calgary, AB (Trinity Mennonite Church)

Support Services Council:

Gordon Baergen, Sherwood Park, AB (Holyrood Mennonite Church)

Harry Wiens, Altona, MB (Altona Mennonite Church)

Served on the Christian Witness Council since 2006.

FAITH AND LIFE COMMITTEE

Sharon Shultz, Eyebrow, SK (Eyebrow Mennonite Church)

Resolutions:

No resolutions were brought by delegates – other than one from the Resolutions Committee itself (Hilda Hildebrand, Al Rempel, Don Rempel Boschman):

Be it resolved that we have been privileged to be the



Photo by Dan Dyck

Donning a Kazakh hat, Janet Plenert, MC Canada Witness Executive Secretary, stepped into her role as Chair of Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) to report on GMF's activities and extend greetings on behalf of brothers and sisters from 40 countries around the globe. Plenert referred to MC Canada's priority of becoming a global church: "The Global Mission Fellowship is one endeavour that Mennonite Church Canada has chosen to get involved in as part of this priority." The GMF, a collection of representatives from 20 agencies and conferences was created in August, 2003, at the Mennonite World Conference gathering in Zimbabwe. This July at the MWC gathering in Paraguay, GMF will transition into the Mission Commission of MWC. Plenert thanked congregations for their support of her work with GMF. Her term will end in one year.

July, 2008:

A Resolution from the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Body

Our nation is at war and we are becoming a more militaristic culture. The principles of "redemptive violence" are being aggressively promoted to justify the increase in military spending and the shedding of blood by and of Canadian soldiers. Christ's message of peace, reconciliation, and grace needs to be heard in our country.

Church – listening, speaking and engaging the gifts of God, at this 2009 Annual Assembly.

There are many people who have shared their gifts:

- 1) The gift of hospitality from our hosts in Saskatchewan is much appreciated. We are grateful for the many tasks graciously and joyfully performed by people from the local congregations and area church.
- 2) We value the staff of Mennonite Church Canada, who organized and resourced the church in coming, being and acting together.
- 3) We appreciate the members of our church who volunteer in service on the General

Board, Ministry Councils, and working groups.

And as we have gathered here these past days, we are thankful for the many individuals who shared their gifts in various roles to facilitate our time of discernment – from prayer, worship, reporting and table dialogue --- to listening, visual worship and refreshment.

We are grateful for the attendance and participation of all those who have gathered from across the country – sharing our thoughts and holding the work of what we do together, as a church, in prayerful attention.

We have been blessed!

-carried by applause

Church health, growth presenters reveal unique stories

- Deborah Froese

Church health and growth has been absent from the formal denominational agenda for a while, but that doesn't mean an absence of activity. Representatives from Mennonite Church British Columbia, Mennonite Church Manitoba, and Mennonite Church

Eastern Canada each told unique church development stories – mostly involving the attraction of new Canadians.

"To be the church is to be a multiplying organism," said Brian Bauman, Missions Minister at MCEC, who facilitated the discussion with Janet Plenert, Executive Secretary Witness.

The Little Flowers Community in Winnipeg's West End began as a small group of inspired people sharing homes and meals – that grew into a missional minded church with a passion for service to an economically challenged neighbourhood with a strong gang culture. They started the Dusty Cover, a used bookstore as a place of refuge for neighbours and after school activities for kids. Before Sunday worship, members move through the neighbourhood, gathering up people and whatever food they can contribute for a potluck meal. The gathering can end as late as 11 pm, said Norm Voth of MCM, which partners with Youth With A Mission in the Little Flowers Community.

Lucy Roca came to Canada from Colombia in 2006 with her husband and two daughters to start new church – because God called her to do so. The resulting church, Iglesia Minonita Refugio de Paz in Sherbrook, Quebec, also works with cell groups of newcomers from Latin America in Montreal. It continues to grow and has evolved into several small house congregations.

Pastor Jim Leopp Thiessen of the now five-year-old The Gathering Church in Kitchener says, "When we think about dreaming in our church, we often say we can't afford it – but that isn't the first question to ask. The first question is 'What is God calling us to do?' Our church is walking with Lucy's church. It's God's work and God provides the funding."

In MCBC, Lee Dyck says they have a motto, "Churches planting churches." She refers to the advice of Pastor Nhiem Pham of Vancouver Vietnamese Mennonite Church, who says "do not plant a church unless people are praying for a church there." He's planting his third church now. There's plenty of church growth activity in MCBC, primarily among new Canadians from Asia.

Voth warned that a Mennonite Church identity as a "family" can make newcomers feel excluded when the "who are you related to" game is played out.



Photo by Ryan Roth Bartel

Jim Shantz, Area Church Minister, Mennonite Church Alberta, and Ryan Siemens, Pastor, Grace Mennonite Church Prince Albert, Sask. engage in the Church Health and Growth table discussion

Shifting numbers

The 2001 Canadian census reported that 72% of the Canadian population was either Roman Catholic or Protestant, compared with 80% a decade earlier. But only about 27% of those claiming to be Catholic attended church regularly. Within mainline Protestant congregations, that figure fell to 12%.

Mennonite churches were listed as "evangelical" in the same survey. Evangelical groups statistics demonstrated a higher participation rate of 48%.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Mennonite congregations are declining more slowly than other mainstream churches.

For Mennonite Brethren Churches, membership has doubled over the past 40 years. However, this growth only became evident after its members took steps to welcome new Canadians into their fold, thus becoming more multi-cultural.

There is a multi-cultural shift presently happening within Mennonite Church Canada. Currently 45 churches reflect languages and culture other than those of historical Russian or Swiss Mennonite background. They include Chinese (10), Laos (7), Spanish (7), Vietnamese (5), Japanese (3), Korean (4), French (2), Hmong (2), Ethiopian and Eritrean (2), Karen (1), Tamil (1), and Chin (1).

Ministers Conference:

Nurturing a vision for engaged congregations



Photo by Dan Dyck

- by Deborah Froese

"How can we, gathered here, move our congregations toward becoming more vibrant congregations?" asked Dan Epp Thiessen at the Assembly's Ministers Conference on June 4.

Epp Thiessen, keynote speaker for the event, emphasized that in most congregations, people are so busy there is little time left for church involvement.

"Why do people have other priorities? Why do the cares and wants of the world interfere with commitment to church? Maybe we're not on fire."

"We need to infect people with a full-blown case of the Christian faith."

Epp Thiessen said that if we accept the fact that we will never have enough volunteers to "go and make disciples of ALL nations" (Matthew 28:19), we might be able to relax enough to appreciate what we do have. He noted the giftedness of church members – from Sunday School teachers to mission

workers – and referred to the loaves of bread and fish that multiplied exponentially in Christ's hands.

"That's what God does with our gifts," he said, inferring that God will do the same with those who offer their giftedness to the church.

Epp Thiessen said that the first step to igniting congregations is to proclaim the Gospel – but not through the typical Mennonite approach of hands-on discipleship. "[We] need to remember that it doesn't begin with our efforts, but God's redemption. More talk of God and the gospel are needed in our preaching."

As an example, he referred to funerals, where the personality and virtues of the deceased are often central. "We should focus on the bedrock of our faith. Death has lost its sting. Power and new life are bestowed by God."

Preaching should nurture a passion for

Christian discipleship, Epp Thiessen noted, while recognizing that we are not saved by our own efforts. He described our current approach to discipleship as one motivated by a "we must try harder theology." With humour, he compared ineffectual faith to a virus – something to which people develop antibodies.

"We need to infect people with a full-blown case of the Christian faith. We are not empowered by focussing on our gifts, but by focussing on the Spirit. We become what we honour and worship, thus breaking down walls, inviting hope and healing and we will become more like God and be empowered to create Shalom and be inspired to contribute our gifts to this calling."

He illustrated the importance of focus with a tale of three men working in a rock quarry. When the first man was asked what he was doing, he responded, "I'm chipping rocks." The second man answered the question in the same way. But the third man had a different perspective. "I'm building a cathedral," he said.



Photo by Dan Dyck

Peace in the Public Square must also include First Nations

- from a report by Edith von Gunten, Co-director, MC Canada Native Ministry

Maria Campbell, a Métis elder from Gabriel's Crossing, Sask. is an author and storyteller. She recalls vividly how a Mennonite woman would often come to her mother's home when Maria was a child and the two women would sit together over a cup of tea, sometimes shelling peas in the yard or working on some other project together.

Harry Lafond, the Executive Director of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatchewan, welcomed MC Canada Delegates to the ancestral lands of the First Nations people, at the University of Saskatchewan campus. Lafond and Edith von Gunten join voices in hymns of praise.

The two women did not speak each other's language – and yet they were comfortable being together and looked forward to their times together.

Relationships begin as we spend time together, and listen to each other's stories. In the two days following this Assembly, we will be honoured to visit Maria Campbell and other Aboriginal leaders in the Saskatchewan River Valley north of Saskatoon, an area where Mennonite and Aboriginal people have lived in close proximity for over 100 years. The Mennonites on the Aboriginal Learning Tour will hear the stories and visit the important sites of the First Nations and Métis people in the Valley. It will be a time of learning and building bridges for the present – and the future. This is the first national Learning Tour Mennonite Church Canada has led.

The opportunity to build bridges between indigenous people is also happening internationally. In August 2007, three Mennonite indigenous conferences in Paraguay invited a delegation of First Nations people from Canada to visit during Mennonite World Conference gathering this coming July. MC Canada is delighted to be facilitating and participating in this special event.

A group of ten Ojibway, Cree and Métis Christians from Canada, plus Cheyenne Christians from the United States and representatives from the indigenous congregations in Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Guatemala willgather together.

In spite of the challenge of language differences, we know that the working of God's Spirit in our midst will open our hearts to each other and build bridges beyond any expectations we might envision for the future.



Photo by Ryan Roth Bartel

Photo of the Week

can you find this dedicated deligate in any other images in this issue of the Bridge City Bulletin?

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Forty year ago at Saskatoon 1969. The committee responsible for all the local arrangements. Not only has the dress code changed in 40 years!!! Who's doing the work today? Take a moment to thank one of the many volunteers that is assisting today.

NOTE: If you can identify any of these men, please send an e-mail to archives@mennonitechurch.ca.



Photo supplied by Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives Collection

Forty years ago (1969) a Mennonite researcher at the National Archives of Canada uncovered documents that uncovered the fact that the first Anabaptists to come to Canada may have arrived in the Maritimes (New Brunswick) and not Ontario, as commonly believed. (See Canadian Mennonite, Vol. 17, no 31, p. 1 (29 Aug. 1969). This research was started at the initiative of the newly founded Mennonite Historical Society of Canada who commissioned the late Frank H. Epp to write the History of Mennonites in Canada. This year the Society is sending a complimentary copy of Volume 3 to each congregation as a thank you for their support over the years.

Thank you to Alf Redekopp for this research.

Church Transitions

After a long period of spiritual discernment, Warden Woods Mennonite Church in Southwest Scarborough has determined that their call to ministry should conclude after 72 years of faithful service. Although this was a carefully determined decision, the process is one of sorrow. Their last worship service will take place on June 28, 2009.

Emerging churches:

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

- Members of Chin Christian Church in Kitchener Ontario come from Burma, also known as Myanmar.
- Church of the Living Word in Ottawa is an Amheric speaking congregation, predominantly from Ethiopia and Eritrea, who began meeting in 2005.

- Another Amharic speaking congregation in Ottawa, Rehaboth Evangelical, rents space from the Danforth Baptist church.
- Most members of Markham Christian Worship Centre are Tamil from Sri Lanka with a Hindu background. They began meeting in 2001.

Mennonite Church British Columbia

- Level Ground Mennonite Church was born from the union of West Abbotsford Mennonite Church and Wellspring Christian Fellowship in fall of 2008.
- Western Hmong Mennonite Church meets in Maple Ridge.

Mennonite Church Manitoba

- Niverville Community Fellowship emerged from the union of Niverville Mennonite Church and Elim Mennonite Church, a member of the Mennonite Mission Conference. The new church was formed after a year long process of prayer and discussion and is seeking connections with MCM and MC Canada.
- Winnipeg Mennonite Liturgical Service meets monthly, with liturgical services based upon historical research and developed into new liturgy in keeping with Mennonite theology.
- Little Flowers Community resulted from a partnership with Youth with Mission in the West End of Winnipeg and is acting on what it understands to be a missional vision for an inner city community struggling with poverty and gang culture.

The Resource Centre travels. In 2008, we hosted 20 off-site displays across the country and Arlyn Friesen Epp, Resource Centre Director, offered various worship, Sunday School, and workshop presentations. Check www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/777 on how to host a display yourself and view www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/970 to request a presentation from our Speakers' Bureau list.

DID YOU KNOW?  **Resource Centre Facts**

NUMBER ^{OF THE} DAY

62

Extending our reach to the global church means sending people forth. Currently, Mennonite Church Canada Witness has 62 people situated in various countries around the world; 57 Witness workers, and 5 people on short term Special Assignments.

WHEN PEOPLE HURT, CHRIST RESPONDED

...and that's what God calls the church to do.



Medical experts warn that pandemic influenza is coming. The recent spread of virus H1N1 has raised concerns about how churches and other organizations can respond. MC Canada has partnered with Mennonite Disaster Service and Mennonite Publishing Network (MPN) to create two books that will help congregations prepare for times of crisis, including pandemic.

Beyond our Fears: Following Jesus in Times of Crisis, shares the attitude and actions that will allow the church to respond to such situations with God's light of hope and healing. A Leader's Guide is also available.

Don't be Afraid: Stories of Christians in Times of Trouble, for ages 9 to 12, shares inspirational stories of Christians who responded faithfully in times of emergency.

For further resources to equip your church to respond to pandemic or other emergencies, see: www.churchpandemicresources.ca/

For a Church Matters podcast about healing and hope in the midst of a pandemic, see: www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/569

MC Canada Projects a \$4.6 million budget

-by Dick Benner, Canadian Mennonite

Adopting a Winnipeg billboard message that "we have chosen not to participate in the recession," Randy Wiebe, Chief Financial Officer for MC Canada, projected a \$4.6 million operations budget for the fiscal year ending (FYE) 2010 to the delegate session Saturday morning that was only \$1,000 less than figures for the FYE 2009.

Wiebe had just reported a \$200,000 deficit from FYE 2009 operations, but said that while he and Treasurer Gordon Peters' assumptions were "challenged" in a down turned economy, they decided, in their new projections "not to over-react" and to continue to have confidence in church and individual giving.

"We will assume that this is not a permanent change in our giving patterns," he said, referring to the \$522,475 drop in all revenues in 2009 over 2008, or 9 percent less from all sources-- donations and bequests, investment income (\$60,548 less), sales, services and fees, and grants from partner agencies.

"It would undercut staff morale, diminish our vision for witness, cut

into our national, indigenous and international ministries and abort leadership development if we would suddenly cut everything back to fit into a 'fear the future' perspective that is so prevalent in the wider society," said Peters.

While working under constraints of a MC Canada policy of "no deficit budgeting," these planners said they will adapt their ongoing numbers to contribution income. Wiebe noted that while they are \$53,000 ahead of projections in June, they are about \$20,000 behind 2008 giving. He said a more sound approach is to watch the numbers over a three year period rather than one year or less.

"But of course, no one knows for certain what the future holds," he cautioned, "and so we are prepared to ask for cuts in the program, if and when that becomes necessary."

In light of the deficit, some \$153,835 was set aside as "deferred expenses" a significant portion of which represents the delayed filling of some currently vacant staff positions.

Delegates gave unanimous support to the proposed budget; it was passed with no discussion.

Church Matters Live! Tune in monthly

Each episode of *Church Matters* features a guest or guests who tell stories from their own experiences about why the church matters in the world today.

To view a list of past episodes, click on Church Matters in the right-hand margin of the Mennonite Church Canada website (www.mennonitechurch.ca/) or subscribe to the podcast at www.mennonitechurch.ca/cm/

Residents of Southern Manitoba can turn their dials to the Golden West radio network on CFAM 950 Altona, AM 1250 Steinbach, and CJRB 1220 Boissevain for *Church Matters* at 8:45 am CST on the third Sunday of each month.

