

Christian Formation Council

At a Glance...

Christian Formation Council (2007-2008):

Sue Steiner, Ontario (Chair); Erwin Tiessen, Saskatchewan; Tom Yoder Neufeld, Ontario; Naomi Unger, Saskatchewan; Lisa Carr-Pries, Ontario; Pauline Steinmann, Saskatchewan; Earl Reimer, Manitoba; Coreen Froese, Alberta; Van Hoa Chau, Manitoba; Veronica Dyck, B.C.

Introduction

The theme text for Assembly 2008 – Deut. 4:1-9 – focuses on our identity as a faithful people. Our character is formed by diligent attention to the “statutes and ordinances” given by a gracious God to guide those who choose to live God’s way. The traits of our faithfulness are “wisdom and discernment (understanding).” The writer of Job states that wisdom is found in “fear of the Lord,” and discernment (understanding) in “shun[ning]” evil (Job 28.28). Simply put, God’s people are called to be good, do good and stay away from evil. These marks of character in the community of faith are a reflection of the character of God. Thus we become a powerful living testimony to which others pay attention and by which they are drawn toward God.

The ministry of Christian Formation in Mennonite Church Canada focuses on leading, motivating and offering resources that support God’s work of forming people into God’s character, in the context of our congregations and homes. As partners in this ministry with area churches and congregations, we share in the simple yet profound work of forming a people who are on a lifelong journey of becoming “wise and discerning.”



Sven Eriksson and Erwin Tiessen at a Formation Council Meeting.

Ministerial Leadership

Pastoral Trends Survey: During 2007 we conducted an exciting research project with the goal of increasing our understanding of the dynamics affecting pastoral wellness and retention. This initiative, which surveyed MC Canada pastors from 1975 to the present, is throwing important light on the factors that help pastors thrive. Thus it is providing valuable information to our schools as they recruit students seeking pastoral training, and as they refine and develop pastoral formation programs and courses.

A project Colloquium was held on the Canadian Mennonite University campus April 3-4, 2008, bringing together leaders of our denomination and area churches, presidents and deans of our schools, and representative MC Canada pastors. Dieter Schönwetter, the project director, presented an Executive Report on the findings, and several leaders from the denomination and our schools led in discussion of the implications of the survey findings. The survey results are being used to shape discussions around leadership at the July 2008 People’s Summit in Winnipeg. We anticipate some great synergies between these project results, and a number of conversations already taking place among our schools and in neighbouring Mennonite denominations.

Pastoral placement & support

In calendar year 2007, 63 pastoral placements were facilitated, with an additional 22 between January 1 and March 31, 2008. At time of writing, there were 36 known pastoral openings, with 14 available pastoral candidates listed in the MC Canada pastoral database.

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Financial assistance to 'pastoral leaders in formation' is available through the "Company of 1000." In 2007, \$46,000 was distributed to assist 27 individuals. Support is also provided to leaders and congregations going through a review process (Pastoral Review Resource Packet), guidelines for sabbaticals and times for renewal, and a "Counseling Fund," providing financial support for pastors' wellness needs.

Denominational Minister

With the retirement of Sven Eriksson on April 4, 2008, the office of Denominational Minister is in transition. We are deeply grateful for the wise and steady leadership offered by Sven in the five years he has held this position. His deep wisdom and profound love for the church have been a rich gift to MC Canada in the sometimes challenging years of its infancy and adolescence. We express our appreciation and love to Sven as he and his wife Laura now transition into a retirement/sabbatical time in their lives.

Beginning in fall, 2008, Karen Martens Zimmerly, co-pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Regina, SK will assume the role of Denominational Minister/Director of Leadership Development. We are thankful for the careful discernment that has led to this decision, and look forward to the gifts, vision and energy Karen will bring to this work.



Karen Martens Zimmerly

Church-School relationship

Productive conversation continues between MC Canada and its schools, building on the positive momentum of the last few years. A document developed in 2007, entitled "Road Markers on a Journey," sets out some of the understandings which have grown in the dialogue between Mennonite post-secondary schools and the national church. Area churches and post-secondary school leaders are continuing to engage the agenda generated by this paper. This document also outlines a number of potential implications which will be tested and refined as we move forward together in the educational vision of the church. We are especially interested in the creative shaping of new opportunities for the church to participate in visible support for the leadership and disciple-forming ministries of our church schools. We are pleased by the high level of energy as we explore how our schools, area churches and national church might collaborate most effectively in responding to the church's training and pastoral leadership needs.

Resources

Resource Centre

For many constituents of MC Canada, the Resource Centre is the most visible piece of Formation Ministry. Our motto is: *borrow, purchase, download, link – a unique combination*. The initiative to consolidate all our denominational resources, creating a physical and virtual one-stop centre for resourcing the life of the church, continues to grow and bear fruit. Total loan circulation of materials grew by 5% country-wide. The total number of congregations using the Centre has grown correspondingly. Electronic orders grew by a whopping 53% during 2007 over the previous year, suggesting that the shift to online accessing of church resources still has significant potential. Although the bulk of our holdings are in English, we do make some materials available in a number of languages other than English. This is an area of growth for the future, and a response to the changing face of Mennonite Church Canada.

At a Glance...

Staff:

The Christian Formation staff team brings many gifts and much dedication to their work. In 2007 the team included: **Dave Bergen**, Executive Secretary; **Lois Bergen**, Administrative Assistant; **Sven Eriksson**, Denominational Minister (retiring); **Elsie Rempel**, Christian Education & Nurture; **Arlyn Friesen-Epp**, Resource Centre Manager; **Anita Neufeld**, Administrative Assistant, Resource Centre; **Alf Redekopp**, Mennonite Heritage Centre Director; **Conrad Stoesz**, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archivist; **Ray Dirks**, Mennonite Heritage Center Gallery Curator; **Connie Wiebe**, Administrative Assistant, Mennonite Heritage Centre; **Ingrid Janzen Lamp**, Editor, *Der Bote* (ending); **Andrea Dick**, Layout, *Der Bote* (ending); **Anna Rehan**, Youth Ministry Facilitator.

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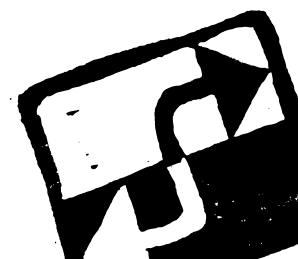
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Partners in Christian Formation

Christian Formation is linked to a variety of partners who bring unique gifts and skills to the formational ministry of the church. These include: Mennonite Publishing Network; Mennonite Camping Association; Mennonite Creation Care Network; Mennonite Post-secondary schools: Canadian Mennonite University, Columbia Bible College, Conrad Grebel University College, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary; Mennonite Elementary & Secondary schools: United Mennonite Educational Institute, Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary Schools, Rosthern Junior College, Menno Simons Christian School, Mennonite Educational Institute; North American Young Adult Fellowship

In 2007, we began tracking our statistics for downloadable resources. Total connections for download numbered 27,431 (about 75/day). We celebrated this milestone by hosting our first annual “Downie Awards” ceremony in January which featured the Downies (award certificates) for the most frequently downloaded files in various categories. The increase in web traffic corresponds to our efforts to centralize MC Canada resources in a searchable catalogue, free service, and a growing variety of materials (e.g. audio and video files). This dovetails with loan and purchase increases as well.

The Resource Centre partners closely with our denominational publisher, Mennonite Publishing Network. We are pleased to be able to list all MPN products for loan or purchase. Electronic sales of MPN products through our site have experienced a significant jump. We also partner with MPN through the Area Church Resource Advocates, who, because of their regional presence, are able to help each area church become better aware of the many wonderful resources available to congregations and individuals.

We added three new partners to our catalogue of Anabaptist resources in 2007: Pandora Press, Mennonite Foundation of Canada, and SmallTall Music. Each of these organizations has supplied us with a complete inventory of their resources which we actively promote in displays, our catalogue and the 10 times per year *Resource Updates*. We hope in the future to add other partners in the Mennonite church family to the list of resource providers for the enrichment and growth of the church.

Despite significant growth in circulation the potential of the Resource Centre is much greater. We are aware that 66 (29%) of our congregations have not used the Centre in the last three years, and another 75 (33%) only rarely (less than 15 items). Together with our partners, we are the Resource Centre for all of Mennonite Church Canada, and we wish to serve the whole church and continue to work toward making this a reality.

Resource Creation

Annually the Formation department generates a number of resource pieces. These include Seasonal At-Home resources, children’s stories for Sunday worship, Special Sunday worship resources and Season of Prayer materials which are offered to the church for study and spiritual enrichment. In addition to these regular pieces, we are able to produce a limited array of other resource materials, e.g. last year’s Stewardship study materials, produced in partnership with Mennonite Foundation of Canada.

We are also committed to serving the resource needs of our multi-cultural churches. Current initiatives involving other than English materials include the publication of a Vietnamese version of *From Anabaptist Seed*, an updated Confession of Faith in Laotian, and a Chinese version of the *What makes a Mennonite* brochure. With the Multi-Cultural Ministries Intercouncil, we continue to discern a list of core materials to support Christian faith and Anabaptist identity for the various language groups of Mennonite Church Canada. This involves close networking with Samson Lo, Director of Multi-cultural Ministries, and the International Ministries department. These translation projects rely heavily on volunteer time and often have an indefinite completion schedule. We depend on the missional passion and generosity of our congregations to help support the translation of core faith materials into other-than-English languages.

Der Bote

This German language paper has formed the people of God through spiritual nurture and a sense of connection to many people since its inception in Rosthern, Saskatchewan in 1924 as *Der Mennonitische Immigrantenbote*. In 2006, due to declining subscribership and shrinking funds, a decision was made to cease publication of *Der Bote*. In keeping

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Dave Bergen thanks Ingrid Janzen Lamp for her work as editor of *Der Bote*.

with this decision, *Der Bote* published its closing issue in March 2008, thus bringing to an end 84+ years of ministry in the Mennonite church.

The long-standing ministry of the paper was celebrated in a variety of ways in the months leading up to its closure. A number of regional Celebration Teas were held, a closing series of special articles was published, and there will be a special *Bote* recognition at Assembly 2008. We acknowledge the sadness and disappointment felt by the faithful readers of *Der Bote* and encourage the congregations of MC Canada to continue in their faithful support and nurture of these sisters and brothers in this transition and into the future. Much gratitude is due *Der Bote* staff (Ingrid Janzen Lamp, Editor; Lois Bergen, Administrative Assistant; Andrea Dick, Layout & Design) for their continuing leadership and to all who have contributed to the strong legacy of *Der Bote*. Their hard work, gifts and dedicated prayers have brought blessing to many.

Youth Ministry

Youth Ministry in Mennonite Church Canada supports the growth and nurture of young women and men in our churches and invites them to choose the way of Jesus. This ministry is expressed primarily through the planning of a biennial Canadian Youth Assembly, but also through networking with and supporting Area Church youth ministry leaders and events.

The Abbotsford Youth Assembly 2007 was strong and successful with 430 youth and sponsor participants from across Canada. Evaluations were positive with participants noting particular appreciation for the range and quality of seminars, the worship experiences, and the many new friendships that were made.

Plans are already underway for Youth Assembly July 6-10, 2009 in Caronport, Saskatchewan. The assembly theme will be "Living inside out," based on Colossians 3:12-17. Unlike other years, this youth gathering will be held separately from the adult delegate assembly. Due to scheduling conflicts with the Mennonite World Conference gathering, the MC Canada delegate assembly will take place in June, 2009.

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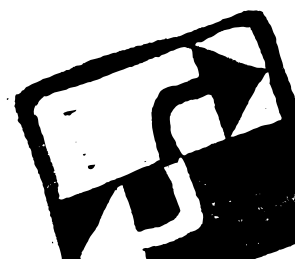
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Books from the Reaching up to God our Creator curriculum

Christian Education and Nurture

An area of particular focus in 2007 has come from Elsie Rempel's Master's thesis work on "Mennonites, Children and Communion." Elsie has been invited to give numerous presentations and workshops on this topic at area church gatherings and in congregational settings, as the church discerns theology and practice in relation to children in congregational life and in worship around the Communion table. Given the groundswell of congregational interest in this matter, it is clear this is a timely discussion which bears further serious exploration and discussion by the theological and spiritual leaders of our church.

Ongoing work includes the editing and oversight of the weekly children's time on the lectionary gospel text. As of August 2007, we have a full three year cycle of stories available through the Resource Centre online. Annual KidsPak materials available in Equipping engage children in the work of the church around the world. In addition, the oversight and editing of worship resources for Special Sundays in the church calendar has been both challenging and rewarding.

A unique and rewarding challenge this year has been partnering with Native Ministries in the editing and production of "Reaching Up to God Our Creator," a resource bridging the teachings of Christianity with aboriginal sacred teachings.

Mennonite Heritage Centre

Archives

The Archives hosts a variety of visitors, including Canadian Mennonite University students engaged in completing a practicum or others getting work experience, to volunteers from the broader constituency who are able to assist with processing of materials, translation, special projects and so on. We are thankful that individuals and congregations continue to forward archival materials which enrich awareness of our story and make access to these records possible for many people.

The past year was noteworthy for the unusual amount of new acquisitions. Receipts include: a large and well managed family-based collection of materials (A.A. Vogt) from Mennonite Genealogy Inc. in Winnipeg; the Jake Peters research files on the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church; Alexander Rempel papers on the Russian Mennonite experience; congregational records from Canadian Mennonite congregations de-accessioned by Mennonite Church USA archives, Bethel College; Conference of Mennonites in Canada records de-accessioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia; Molotschna Fire Insurance Records (Kleinegemeinde) – 1875-193?; Native Ministries Administrative files – 1980-2005; Helen Martens collection of Felix Mendelssohn correspondence.

The 2nd level storage area of the archives' building was renovated into two secure storage spaces and one large multi-purpose studio/presentation room with funding from The Winnipeg Foundation. The project included new tables and chairs as well as multi-media equipment. This space is being used extensively by the MHC Gallery for presentations, meetings and as an artist's studio.

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Gallery

Gallery Curator Ray Dirks has become a recognized global ambassador to students in Winnipeg schools. By building relationships with students and teachers in English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs, Ray works through art and personal experience to bring global perspectives to local people and instills confidence and pride in the gifts represented by the gifts and experience of diverse cultures. In February 2008 Dirks was awarded the 2008 TEAL (Teachers of English as an Additional Language) award for his work in teaching students the importance of caring for people, respecting cultures, and learning from different countries.



Ray Dirks received the 2008 TEAL (Teachers of English as an Additional Language) award.

In addition to his work with schools, Ray prepared a number of exciting and engaging art exhibits in 2007. These included:

- Playgrounds by Rhian Brynjolson & children from Wellington Elementary School
- Ken Loewen/James Patterson
- Side by Side: spiritual & cultural coexistence by Manju Lodha
- Carol Mills – Ancestral Search: Places, Spaces and Faces, and Jean Wiens: Circus – Plus.
- Unveiling Mystery: the invisible dignity exhibition
- Invisible Dignity Project juried group exhibition

The MHC Gallery held its second annual fundraiser October 4, 2007, marking the 10th anniversary of the MHC Gallery.

Looking ahead...

In 2007 the Christian Formation Council identified a number of issues which it believes are calling for attention in the church. Three areas in particular rose to the top:

- A continued focus on effective pastoral leadership training and support. The results of the Pastoral Trends Survey promise to be a rich resource in this respect.
- A growing need to address ministry with the existing and increasingly expanding population of seniors in the church, given that Baby Boomers are now entering this demographic. We want to draw on the resources and gifts of seniors for the church, as well as offering resources to seniors.
- Honouring young adults by inviting their real participation in the shaping and implementation of the church’s ministries.

We invite the prayers, support and counsel of the church as we engage these important matters in the time to come.

–Sue Steiner, Christian Formation Council Chair, and Dave Bergen, Executive Secretary, Christian Formation

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