

# Christian Witness Council

## At a Glance...

Mennonite Church Canada Witness is accountable to the Christian Witness Council. Members of this Council until July 2008 are:

Willard Metzger (chair)  
\* Andy Ahn  
Lynell Bergen  
Irene Crosland  
Rudy Dirks  
\* Ernest Epp  
Noe Gonzalia  
Laura Loewen (Mennonite World Conference representative)  
John David (JD) Penner  
\* Dori Zerbe Cornelsen

\* The terms of these three CWC members are complete and delegates are being asked to elect 3 new members.

## Introduction

It has been said that unity can only be understood in the presence of diversity. Otherwise, what is there to unify? As the people of God, called to participate with God in the healing and restoration of this world, we are constantly challenged to comprehend how best to understand and use our unique gifts for the building up of the body. And we are called into the tension of being humbly proud in the use of our unique gifts, and respecting the unique gifts of others, different though they may be from ours. For it is in this diversity of gifts all pointed in the same direction and working together for the sake of the body that we have hope of unity. In Mennonite Church Canada Witness we are very grateful, and often very humbled by the unity we experience through the diversity of the gifts of our workers, our staff, our partners, and especially our congregations and members as we work together in the multiplicity of ways, and in the plethora of activities for the unity of the body of Christ and to that which we are together called.

***“Don’t bring Christianity as a potted plant and put it in our soil. Bring it as a seed and plant it in our soil, so it will grow up within us.”*** –Richard Twiss, Lakota elder



### Witness Highlights for your Congregation to know!

- We are the first national church in Canada to work at pandemic preparedness for congregations.
- MC Canada is a member of the Global Mission Fellowship, together with 67 other Anabaptist churches and mission groups from around the world.
- The Christian Witness Council continues to meet with Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA. This is an exciting time and we are continually open to new service opportunities, new partnership opportunities. Let us know of potential mission workers!
- We have been invited by a 100 year old Baptist denomination in Chile to walk with them as they reclaim their Anabaptist heritage and overtly become a peace church.
- MC Canada Witness Learning Tours to Cuba and South Korea have been inspiring and growing experiences for the participants. Plans for 2009 include a Philippines and South America tour.
- “Reaching up to God our Creator,” is a new six-session curriculum for older children and adults. The sessions were developed by Mennonite leaders with Cree, European, Métis and Ojibway roots, in cooperation with MC Canada Formation. The curriculum strives to highlight the common ground between the faith expression of Aboriginal peoples and Mennonites.

general

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finance

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## PROGRAM REPORTING

### International Ministries Highlights

- Our first long term workers to Ethiopia, Dianne and Fanosie Legesse and their two small children, are teaching and providing other services at Meserete Kristos College.
- Jeff and Tany Warkentin in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso celebrated the church's first baptism of four members and the ordination of a church leader.
- Our first interns to Philippines, Christina and Darnell Barkman, began a ten month internship.
- Our first intern to Thailand, Leah Buermeyer, started a five month internship.
- Living Waters Church, Borabu, Thailand dedicated its new church building.
- The first peace and reconciliation team organizer completed training at Peacebuilders Community in Mindanao, Philippines.
- A delegation from Zaporozhzhye Mennonite Church spent several days at the MC Canada offices for reflection and work together.
- The Brazilian International Mennonite Mission Board celebrated 10 years of ministry.
- A 15 country gathering took place in Guatemala for the inaugural "Gathering of Latin American Anabaptist Theological Educators."
- The Colombian Mennonite Biblical seminary has developed an extension program to resource the group of emerging churches and leaders on the Caribbean coast.
- We formalized a relationship with the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile, following their invitation to MC Canada to help them become a peace church. The 35,000 member denomination (with a wider family of 100,000) just celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The church president, Raquel Contreras, will be attending Assembly and Summit as a part of this relationship.
- We are able to have intimate, honest conversations with international church partners in which not only joys and plans are shared, but fears and doubts as well.



Anna Alipova and Ala Syniakova from Zaporozhzhye, Ukraine, spent several days at the MC Canada offices for reflection and work together. Ala is Church Council Chair at the Zaporozhzhye Mennonite Church and a medical doctor. Anna is a Church Council member and Sunday School Director, and a professional interpreter.

***"For a church as small as ours, I believe we exercise a disproportionate influence around us. For a church as big as ours, I believe we still manage to live and act knowing that each person is important and uniquely gifted and needed as a part of the body, for the sake of the kingdom. To God be the glory." –Janet Plenert, to the Christian Witness Council in March, 2008***

## At a Glance...

**Staffing:** Some of the faces changed in the Witness offices this year, including several temporary changes. Staff is highly motivated and energetic, and I am grateful for their teamwork and dedication.

- Jennifer Rempel (Executive Assistant) has been on a 1 year Maternity leave and Val Pankratz has been filling in.
- Rebecca Yoder-Neufeld (Missional Formation & Partnership Facilitator - MCEC) took 5 months leave and James Watson filled in.
- Marvin Baergen (Missional Formation & Partnership Facilitator – MCA) has retired and Jim Shantz has taken on a part-time interim role in MCA.
- Hinke Loewen-Rudgers will be moving from her role as Congregational Partnerships Facilitator to a Witness International Volunteer position in Israel/Palestine as of August 1, 2008.
- Al Rempel has concluded his role as Director of Congregational Partnerships, and a new person has not yet been named (at time of printing).

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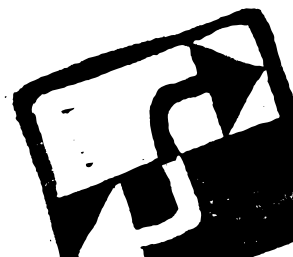
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### **Church Matters!**

Whether you tune in by podcast (via a front page link on the web site), or on the radio (the third Sunday of the month on Golden West radio stations in Manitoba), you will find us talking about how the Church Matters! This 15 minute radio slot is co-hosted by Dan Dyck and Janet Plener and explores many ways that the church matters today. In our first year of broadcast we covered topics such as ethical investing, peace building in Philippines, creation care, unity of the church, militarization in Canada, kids and communion and others. Check it out!  
[www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca)

### **In Memoriam**

This year we mourned the passing of Walter Franz. Walter served in many capacities in the church – as pastor, moderator, and director of Native Ministry, among other things. He is most remembered not for his titles, but for his great and gentle way, his positive outlook, his quiet wisdom and faithful dedication to the church. He was a great man, and he is greatly missed.

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finance

discernment

### **Congregational Partnership Highlights**

- The Vietnamese Mennonite Church in Calgary is connecting with Jeff and Tany Warkentin's ministry in Burkina Faso.
- Learning Tours: 2007 – Colombia and South Africa. 2008 – Cuba and South Korea. Plans for 2009 include a Philippines tour and a tour partnered with TourMagination to Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay prior to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly.
- Ten Witness worker families will be itinerating in North America in 2008.
- Following the retirement of Marv Baergen in Alberta, Jim Shantz has taken up a part-time Congregational Partnerships role in Alberta for this year.

### **Native Ministry Highlights**

- Visits have been made to encourage and resource First Nations communities, including to a Cree pastor in Saskatchewan, a Blackfoot pastor in Alberta, and a mixed congregation of European and Carrier people in British Columbia. We are relating across Canada in a variety of circumstances and situations.
- We partner with MCBC to assist the Church of the Way in Granisle prepare an outreach ministry into their neighbouring First Nations communities.
- Four Ministry Circles are active within the Manitoba Partnership Circle. MC Canada Native Ministry and MCM help facilitate two meetings per year of the Partnership Circle. This year Richard Twiss, a Lakota church leader, was the special guest at this event. (Visit [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/598](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/598) to hear an interview with Richard Twiss.)
- We work closely with a variety of partners, such as MCM, MCC Manitoba's Aboriginal Neighbours, and MCC Canada's Aboriginal Neighbours.
- We partner with MCC Alberta in their desire to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues within their province and Canada. We co-sponsored an event that brought entertainer Tom Jackson and former Grand Chief of Canada, Ovide Mercredi, to Calgary.
- We partner with the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS) in their efforts to provide symposiums on various topics of theological significance to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians alike.
- We encourage and send Native people to attend theological symposiums and other gatherings where they will grow in their own personal faith and strengthen their leadership skills.
- Publishing INTOTEMAK magazine continues to be an important part of building bridges and community among cultures and informing people of the exciting things that are happening within our constituency and beyond.
- We facilitated the translation of the official statements of Mennonite Church Canada, including the Confession of Faith, into the Ojibway language (the Cree version is in process).
- We have worked with the MC Canada Resource Centre to increase the types of Aboriginal-related materials for loan across Canada (for free – check it out at [www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre)).
- MC Canada turned over the ownership of three properties to the local communities. In each case an event of blessing was held to recognize the transition.



## Multi-Cultural Ministries Highlights

- The Confession of Faith translation into Laotian by Chinda Kommala is nearly complete, Winfred Soong's translation of "What makes a Mennonite?" brochure will soon be published.
- We are increasing networking and collaboration with area churches.
- A departmental review was conducted, and resulted in affirmation of the work of the department and more focused priority statements.
- Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite Church sent a group to visit the Vietnamese Mennonite communities in Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia. Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church includes the work of Witness in Thailand in their mission budget.
- Luc Tran, the pastor of Vietnamese Mennonite Church in Winnipeg visited B.C. and shared organizing tips for planning activities such as multi-cultural worship, game times and picnics. Fifteen leaders from different ethnic groups came for this gathering at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver.

## Being a Faithful Witness beyond ourselves

Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) – Mennonite Church Canada is helpfully positioned to work together with Anabaptist churches and mission agencies around the world to think about a collaborative future of faithful witness. The next GMF Gathering will happen just prior to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in July 2009. At that time a decision will be made about reshaping the structure of the GMF to make it a part of the new Mission Commission of MWC. Bringing the GMF into the structure of MWC ensures that global Anabaptist mission will be integral to, rather than parallel to, the global church. Given how critically important this has been for MC Canada to structure our international mission as part of the denominational structure, we consider it a significant stride forward for the global church as well. Janet Plenert is both the North American representative and the chair of this global body.

IMPACT – (International Mennonite Pastors Coming Together) Bring together 12-16 Anabaptist pastors from 4-6 different countries, who speak several different languages and ask them to live together and talk about the life and challenges of the church for 2 weeks. What do you get? Chaos to be sure! Visa headaches guaranteed. And brilliant insights into the kingdom of God, lasting bridges of understanding, reshaped perceptions, dismantled stereotypes, a keen sense of being part of one church bound together by the power of the Spirit – IMPACT. Witness staff together with the denominational minister and the co-hosting area church designates work together with volunteers to make this kind of IMPACT a possibility each year. IMPACT 2008 was in MCEC and was a bilingual French English program, drawing guest pastors from England, Ukraine, Burkina Faso, Congo and South Africa. The Canadian government denied visas to 3 Congolese church leaders. IMPACT 2008 was the third year of this program. The 2009 program will be co-hosted by MC Saskatchewan.

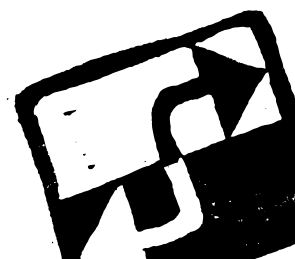
***“Our future, if we are to have one together, will be found in personal relationships. We need to quit talking and meeting among ourselves and get out there and invite Native People into our friendship circles. Then we will develop respect, understanding and appreciation for each other.” –Walter Franz***

## Did you know?

- There are 48 Multi-Cultural congregations associated with Mennonite Church Canada, worshipping in 9 different languages.
- In Calgary it is possible to worship in Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao and Spanish churches all on the same Sunday, since these churches worship at different times.

**Overheard:** A candidate for an international placement with Witness exclaimed that the position being considered is “something I have been waiting for all my life!”

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*Dori Zerbe Cornelsen at the 2008 Spring Leadership Assembly.*

**Partners in Christian Witness:**

- Canadian Women in Mission
- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
- Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT)
- Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)
- Mennonite Men

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finance

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**Pandemic Planning** – How will the church respond when a pandemic (or other major community emergency) happens? We believe the people of God – the church – is to be the presence of God here on earth in every context and time. For the early church, a pandemic proved to be a defining factor in its growth and credibility in society.

Witness has called together a Task Force to address this topic and help congregations be prepared. A web site with basic information will be up by July, as well as a YouTube video for congregational use, and a Learning Track session in the MC Canada/MC USA Summit will also address this topic.

**Challenges we Face**

As we have been growing into our identity as a church that is both Anabaptist and Canadian, we find ourselves constantly asking what it is that we are not called to do, and what it is that we must do. Questions of church planting, peace related issues, and short term service ministries seem frequently to capture our attention, and demand more resources and energy. Each of these areas is a part of the Witness mandate as outlined in our MC Canada bylaws. None of them have dedicated staff time.

1) Peace issues – Recently, questions directed to Witness connected to peace issues have included questions of militarization and fiscal Conscientious Objector status, response to the Canadian government’s position on Afghanistan, invitation to join the movement advocating for a national Department of Peace, seeking a response to the Muslim scholars calling for common ground with Christians, questions from the Historic Peace Church Committee about the direction for their future, questions about collaboration with MCC on peacemaking and constituency advocacy regarding militarism, a question from a CBC reporter on the follow-up from our Assembly sessions on militarism, ongoing connections to Conscience Canada, how we are following up from 2006 and 2007 Assembly discernment times on increasing militarism, and a hugely significant invitation from the Canadian Council of Churches to give a presentation at their May 2008 gathering to help their denominational members think about being a peace church. This is in addition to all the peace related activities in which Witness departments routinely engage.

2) Short term service opportunities – The only formal shorter term service opportunities we have are Special Assignments and Internships, both led via the International Ministries department. There is significant staff interest in being more proactive in shaping and offering shorter term ministry opportunities for our constituency.

3) Church Planting – while we understand church planting to be primarily the responsibility of the area church, we continue to be asked how we can network, or resource, or facilitate or encourage efforts in the area churches.



### ***In response...***

We are able to respond at some level to all of these key areas. This year we will engage in another 90 minute discernment time on being a peace church. There will be a Summit Learning Track slot on related issues. We have blessed our General Secretary in preparing and presenting a paper to the Canadian Council of Churches. We have had a significant time of exploration and negotiating with Mennonite Mission Network about potential short term program collaboration, the first of which is a partnership in a program called Radical Journey. We have followed, encouraged, and networked our area churches at specific times and in unique ways in their church planting initiatives. Even so, each of these areas remains a challenge to adequately respond to in healthy and appropriate ways.

It is at the same time gratifying, rewarding, and frightening to feel the energy in our constituency imploring us to consider more actively these three areas of ministry opportunity. They are all part of being a faithful church and relevant and transformative for those in, and beyond, the church. Those of you who have been around for a while will be hearing an echo bouncing back to you from 6 years ago. At that time we had an Outreach and Church Planting department, a Peace desk, and a Christian Service Ministry department with 5 staff people. These are not new or novel ideas. They are echoes of the vision we had when we dreamed MC Canada Witness into being. Will our future include such program ministries again? Or can we actively embrace such activities within current program? Is this best accomplished now via partnership relationships with area churches and other agencies within the church system?

We invite your conversation and counsel.

*–Willard Metzger, Christian Witness Council chair and Janet Plenert, Executive Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada Witness*

### **Christian Witness Staff:**

In 2007 the Christian Witness team included: **Janet Plenert**, Executive Secretary; **Val Pankratz**, Executive Assistant; **Jennifer Rempel**, Executive Assistant (currently on maternity 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; **Rebecca Yoder Neufeld**, Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada; **James Watson**, Interim Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada); **Eric Olfert**, Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan; **Marvin Baergen**, Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Alberta; **Jim Shantz**, Interim Missional Formation & Partnerships Facilitator for Mennonite Church Alberta; **Hinke Loewen-Rudgers**, Congregational Partnership Facilitator; **Al Rempel**, Director of Congregational Partnerships; **Samson Lo**, Director of Multi-Cultural Ministry.

general

formation

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finance

discernment

