



Reflections on change

—Robert J. Suderman, Executive Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada Witness

The coming New Year will again focus our thoughts on the inevitable parade of change that we experience as we discern Christian faithfulness in light of historical events. Let me update you on some of the significant changes that are occurring in our ministry along with an invitation for you to provide insight and counsel about the change we experience.

1) Native Ministry:

Mennonite Church Canada has a long and respected history of ministry and solidarity with Canada's Native population through our Native Ministry department. We need to project staffing needs for the next phase of this ministry. Staffing necessarily needs to be based on priorities for ministry. Priorities identified are:

- a) Resourcing Native congregations and continuing Native leadership training initiatives;
- b) Constituency education about Native issues in our non-Native constituency;
- c) Networking with other organizations working on compatible agenda;
- d) Encouraging and facilitating ministry partnerships between Native and non-Native communities

A questionnaire for your response is on our website: <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/witness/nm/survey/>
We do appreciate your input and appreciate you drawing this to the attention of your congregation for anyone to respond who would like to do so.

2) African Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM):

There are very significant changes in this 92 year old mission structure that has been instrumental for Mennonite involvement in ministry in Africa. The North American decision-making base for this structure is shifting to Africa. The new chairperson of AIMM international is an African church leader from Burkina Faso. Partnership councils have been organized. Mennonite Church Canada Witness is participating in four of these Councils: Burkina Faso, Congo, Botswana, and South Africa. These Councils now are made up of any North American church/organization that is interested in participating in ministry in Africa along with the African churches that are seeking partnership in ministry. These Councils are the locus of decision-making, priority setting, and supervision of ministry. This is an important shift that needs your understanding, support, and prayer.

3) Global Mission Fellowship:

The formation of the GMF is another very significant shift in the way we are partners in mission around the world. This Fellowship is formed by Anabaptist-related churches and organizations from around the world that are interested in ministry partnerships. The GMF was born in Zimbabwe/03. Janet Plenert, the Executive Director for Mennonite Church Canada Witness, is the representative for North America on the GMF steering committee, and Peter Rempel, Witness Program Facilitator for Europe and Africa is the staff person assigned to the GMF. This steering committee met in India in early November/04 to plan for the next event in 2006. Mission partnerships are happening in every direction. Mission is no longer a north to south enterprise, but it is also south to south, south to north, east to west, south to west, etc. This is indeed a very exciting moment in the life of Anabaptist mission in our broken world so needy of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

4) Funding relationships:

Questions about funding ministries that are done on behalf of the denomination continue to be front and centre. On the one hand, you as congregations are quite clear that we should limit the number of fund-raisers that appeal directly to your congregation for support. The centralized and unified budget of Mennonite Church Canada allows us to fund workers without them directly becoming fund-raisers for their ministries. On the other hand, congregations increasingly request that their money be used for ministries that come from appeals that are not centrally planned. Furthermore, congregations and members are willing to respond positively to fund-raising appeals that are direct. The end result is that Witness workers should not appeal directly for congregational funding, but congregational funding is re-directed to direct appeals that we are not a part of. This makes longer-term planning very difficult. A conversation around funding is needed so that we understand each other's ways and that commitments can be met when made. The General Board of Mennonite Church Canada is initiating such conversations. We ask for your participation and support for these important conversations.

We appreciate and are very grateful for the partnership and support we receive from you as congregations.

In Witness we want to represent you well and work on your behalf as well as we can.

We trust that God will continue to guide and direct us as we move into a new year of change and challenge.