



**Mennonite
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Farewell

This is my last opportunity to write to you as Mennonite Church Canada's Executive Secretary of Support Services. On February 1, 2009 I will leave my position with MC Canada for a new appointment as Executive Director of the Eastman Education Centre in Steinbach, Manitoba. This transition will mark the first time in my adult life that I will work for an institution outside the Mennonite Church Canada system. Such a change invites reflection, and I share some of my reflections here with you.

I was invited to my first leadership job in the church as a relatively new Christian and as a young adult with high ideals and a tendency to act first and think later. This was a risk for the church. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was also a risk for me. I have stayed in leadership in the church because it has been willing to keep taking risks for me, and so I have been willing to keep taking risks for it. These risks have not been without costs – for me and for the church. There have been many times that I – and others, no doubt – have felt that it would be safer for the church to have someone more experienced than I to carry my responsibilities.

Our General Secretary, Jack Suderman, reminds me often that our actions as a church (and, therefore, as people within the church) need to be driven by a vision of what the church was meant to be, not by acquiescence to what the church is or has become. And when we in the church strive to act as though we already are that which we want to become, we will draw closer to becoming that which we want to be.

I learned at Canadian Mennonite Bible College that the Anabaptist church is (among other things) a place of risk-taking, mutual accountability, forgiveness and support. I have been willing to take risks because I have trusted the church to respond with support and accountability. And the fact that the church has done that for me is at least in part because I have expected it – probably even demanded it. I have done my best to refuse to believe that the church can only be what it now is or what I may despair that it has become. And my persistence in holding to such a high vision of the church has been at least in part because the church has shown me that it *is* capable of being what it is meant to be. I have been enormously privileged to be surrounded by a community of accountability – helping me to understand the reasons for and the consequences of my errors – by a community of forgiveness – offering grace and opportunities to try again – and by a community of support – reassuring me that mistakes or failure do not mean that my gifts are unwelcome or un-useful.

I know that not every person who has chosen to or been invited by the church to take such risks would share my experience. I don't fully understand why my experience has been so largely positive, when other individuals and churches who have held tenaciously to the same high vision of the church have been bitterly disappointed. That is a mystery that I will need to entrust to God. But I offer my deep, deep gratitude to the Mennonite Church Canada system for walking with me and allowing me to walk with you as we have pursued the vocation that God has given to us – to live as though we already are what God wants us to be, and thus to be restored to God's vision for us. Thank you so much.

Pam Peters-Pries
Executive Secretary, Support Services

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11