

July/August 2003, *Equipping*

Summer Reading for Pastors



Every day on my way to my place of work at the offices of Mennonite Church Canada, I pass the “Red River Oxcart,” at the entry of Assiniboine Park. It is a large sculpture of an ox pulling a Red River cart. This is a memorial to the settlers of the Red River valley.

This morning, as I looked at the ox, I became aware that there was something familiar about him. His head is down, his eyes straight ahead, his body is straining as he pulls mightily on his enormous load.

I have seen that look before, the head down, the earnest straining; I have seen it in pastors and I have more than once, caught that look in the mirror. It comes from pulling a heavy load for a long time without stopping for rest.

This is the time of year when the deeper sources of energy have been used up, and most of us need a break. This is why God gives us the gift of Sabbath rest; time out of the harness, when we stop being pastors for a while; when we get to enjoy some “being time,” rather than more “doing.”

I would like to recommend some summer reading options, as resources for renewal and enjoyment. Yes, most of these books relate to our ministry, but they do so in an enjoyable and stimulating way, conducive to reading on a porch overlooking the lake.

1. Theological reading: “**Mennonite and Classical Theology**” by **A. James Reimer, Pandora Press, 2001**. This is a collection of chapter-length theological reflections, bridging Anabaptism, Trinitarian orthodoxy and questions of our time.
2. Reading to encourage the weary pastor: “**The Contemplative Pastor**” by **Eugene Peterson, Word Publishing, 1989**. In this book a great mentor to pastors calls us to return to spiritual direction as the central call for the pastoral vocation. A great book to find your bearings again.
3. “**The Power of Loving Your Church**” by **David Hansen, Bethany, 1998**. I found this book to be one of the most realistic and motivating books about being a pastor for the long haul. Hansen has a way at getting at the most difficult thing to talk about, let alone do, which is loving our church.
4. Reading to give fresh thinking about the church: “**The Essence of the Church**” by **Craig Van Gelder, Baker, 2000**. This book offers the biblical and theological base for the missional church. Jack Suderman puts this at the top of the list of books about the missional church. I can’t wait to read it; it’s on my summer reading list.
5. A novel for sheer enjoyment: “**Jayber Crow**” by **Wendell Berry, Counterpoint, Washington D.C. 2000**. A philosopher-theologian-poet writes a great novel about the life of a barber in Kentucky. This novel is full of life and light, and a great delight to read.

If you don’t find my list compelling, make your own. But do find time for some leisurely grazing in some soul-expanding reading.

Have a great summer vacation!
Sven Eriksson
Denominational Minister