

November 2003, *Equipping*



At various times in my life, I have been a teacher, and it's a job I have really enjoyed. Whether teaching New Testament courses at university or seminary, teaching leadership skills to youth leaders, teaching youth and adult Sunday school classes (or even once teaching a cooking class for seniors!), I have found the interaction to be richly rewarding for me.

The teaching function of pastoral ministry and of the church is very important. Several items in this month's *Equipping* package – most notably the new edition of *Vision*, which focuses on catechesis – address this vital responsibility. I hope you will find them inspiring and helpful in fulfilling your calling.

Congregations put a lot of energy and resources into teaching. Mennonite Church Canada has identified the teaching ministry as essential to the vision of the church. Our Christian Formation programs provide resources to help Sunday school teachers, pastors, youth leaders and German-speaking seniors.

God's mission, scriptures tell us, is to call people to faith ("God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ..."), and also to help those who are called to become the people God wants them to be ("...and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace..."). The early church gave energy both to *kerygma* (preaching) and *didache* (teaching). Our mission is to do likewise.

Mennonites have invested heavily in education in order to pass on the values and convictions that we hold. Tuition fees and donations to elementary and secondary schools, colleges and seminaries add up to a tremendous commitment to teaching children and youth (and sometimes older folks through continuing education) what we believe is important. At our General Board meeting on November 6-8 we will again be talking about ways to build strong connections between the church and the institutions it has founded to attend to this ministry.

In seminaries, classes in Christian Education are typically small. Some pastors don't enjoy their teaching mandate, but I hope you are able to echo the words of Isaiah 54:4:

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens— awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.*

If you need further inspiration for teaching the important convictions of faith, I commend for your reading A. James Reimer's recent book, *The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief* (Herald Press and Pandora Press, 2003). It will give you words, ideas and courage to share faith and to aid in the formation of your own Christian belief and character as well as those whom God has entrusted into your care.

May God's Holy Spirit sustain you and "teach you everything" (John 14:26).

Sincerely,



Dan Nighswander, General Secretary