

Formation

September 2004, *Equipping*



I am more convinced than ever before of the importance of the local congregation. The spiritual health of the congregation determines its capacity to do God's work in the world. As I work with Formation programs of Mennonite Church Canada, I note that many congregations set aside time, appoint committees and teams, and work diligently to establish priorities, examine the context of their ministry and make plans for their future. A good number of congregations have decided to cultivate an open and expanded vision of doing God's work beyond the local congregation. Some have chosen to form partnerships with congregations in other parts of the world.

Congregations also learn from each other in areas of spiritual formation, nurture and worship. Some of this learning occurs in the context of the area conference. Relationships develop between area conferences, often facilitated by conference ministers. Congregational life is further enhanced by learning from brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. We enrich our worship by singing each other's songs, hearing each other's prayers and experiencing each other's hospitality.

It is significant to relate to and learn from other congregations. God has gifted individuals within the congregation to do God's work. God has gifted congregations to extend and further kingdom work and God has gifted our denomination to help spread the Good News of Jesus. The task of congregational discernment to identify God's gifts is ongoing and essential. The joy of sharing this discernment is a blessing to many.

Several stories of congregational sharing immediately come to my mind.

- The Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg was getting serious about "forgiveness" and how the church enables members to forgive. Their study resulted in a collaborative venture with MCC. A resource was developed that is being shared with Mennonite Church Canada congregations. Your congregation received *Unsettled Weather: How do I forgive?* at the Assembly in Winkler. The learning of one congregation is becoming a blessing to many.
- Leaders of multi-cultural congregations were given an opportunity to learn more about their Anabaptist faith. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) provided their Pastoral Studies Distance Education materials, which were adapted for leadership courses in multi-cultural settings. Participants in several ethnic congregations became excited about their learning and began to translate the AMBS materials into their own language. Now these translations are shared with others, including some that will be used in overseas ministry. Discerning, identifying and sharing gifts become God's blessing to others.

As I complete my work with Mennonite Church Canada, I am overwhelmed with the magnitude of God's gifts to the church. I am encouraged that many congregations are actively identifying and sharing their gifts. May your congregation find encouragement and grace as it uses its gifts in faithfulness to God's calling.

Justina M. Heese
Executive Secretary, Christian Formation