

# Multi-cultural Ministry Newsletter

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**Working towards integration of people groups within Mennonite congregations and cooperation among people of different ethnic, social, national, political and religious backgrounds.**

## From the director – Samson Lo



In this vast land of Canada, just as different provinces and regions are going through significantly different climatic changes in the same period of time, so are the various ethnic groups of the Mennonite Church dispersed all over Canada experiencing diverse situations and circumstances. It is in appreciation of this that this newsletter has come to be, in the hope that it may bring about

better understanding and knowledge between the different groups and bridge the gap which is an almost inevitable result of the diversity we are facing.

I still remember the first multi-cultural consultation in Saskatoon two years ago. It was a huge success. With over 70 participants representing all the regions, area conferences and congregations, we had many opportunities to share our diverse ethnic ministries and to explore the future direction and development of our ministry together. In particular, we stressed the need for a newsletter as a tool of communication between the various multi-cultural groups, to enable us to share news, experiences, testimonies and prayer concerns, and to be a means of learning from each other. During the past two years we have published an average of four newsletters per year. Thank you all for your unceasing support and encouragement, which is such an important source of strength for the continuation of this ministry. Please also remember to continue to provide us with updated information: news from your ministries, personal testimonies, stories and reflections on faith, etc. Our joy will indeed be fulfilled if you circulate this newsletter among your friends, and, in sharing our thanksgiving to God, find this to be helpful in strengthening your spiritual growth and church ministry.

In April, I attended the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Spring Conference in Leamington, Ontario, and was privileged to meet some old and new friends. We enjoyed our fellowship together and had meaningful and fruitful discussions regarding our ministries. I also took the opportunity to worship with Valleyview Korean Mennonite Fellowship in London, Ontario, on Sunday morning.

In early May, I went to Grande Prairie in Northern Alberta to visit Hillcrest Mennonite Church and its affiliate Hillcrest Christian School. I met with some church leaders and we had a heart to heart talk about the concept of multi-cultural ministry. Hillcrest is growing rapidly, in terms of both population and economy. Many people of diverse ethnicity have moved there to make a living and we can foresee a tremendous opportunity for ministry of a multi-cultural nature.

In early June, I attended the Mennonite Church British Columbia Annual Sessions in Chilliwack, B.C. The theme this year was "Faithful Past, Hopeful Future!...Continuing the Journey." This is a very fitting theme for our times and participants all found this session to be fully enjoyable and meaningful.

The most significant and noteworthy thing I have noticed in attending all these different area conference sessions, is the increasing role that ethnic minorities are beginning to play in the ministries of all the different area conferences. Many ethnic leaders have been appointed to various committees at different levels. I give thanks to God for their active participation in ministries beyond their individual congregations and the affirmation of their value and significance by area conferences and Mennonite Church Canada in general.

Multi-cultural Leadership Training courses continue to be held in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Mennonite Church Manitoba with good participation and positive feedback from church leaders. Mennonite Church British Columbia has recently purchased the five textbooks for the course and is seriously planning to offer this course to its constituents. We need God's guidance in this.

# Sharing & prayer concerns

( h i g h l i g h t s f r o m a c r o s s t h e c o u n t r y )

## Mennonite Church Alberta

**Trinity Mennonite Church** celebrated the retirement of its pastors, Hugo and Doreen Neufeld in April. Hugo is one of the co-authors of *THE DIVERSITY PROJECT, A CANADIAN EDITION* for Mennonite Church Canada (2001). He was instrumental in the establishment of the Office of Multi-cultural Ministry, Mennonite Church Canada. We thank Hugo for his continuous support and encouragement. Hugo and Doreen plan to travel this summer, visiting family across Canada and in Japan. Please remember them in your prayers.

**Don Pham**, the 21 year old nephew of Thomas Pham, pastor of the Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite Church, was stabbed and murdered outside a restaurant after attending a friend's birthday party on May 2. Don just finished his studies at university and was a fine young Christian. Please pray that God's peace and comfort be with Don's parents and members of Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite Church. The church is holding a retreat on August 14-15 and has invited Luc Tran, pastor of Winnipeg Vietnamese Mennonite Church MB, as their speaker. Please pray for God's renewed strength and blessing.

## Mennonite Church British Columbia

Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia (**MCCBC**) runs the Refugee Food Bank at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church, Vancouver. Newcomers to this country find this program to be a real lifeline. Many of these refugees come from Latin American countries. At this church they are not only being fed physically, but are spiritually nurtured as well. Most of them had knowledge of the Catholic Church before but never had a personal relationship with Jesus. Through interacting with Food Bank volunteers, some of them have now come to know Jesus as their personal Saviour. Eleven people were baptized in First United Spanish Mennonite Church, Vancouver in April, four of whom received assistance through the program.

Another example of the value of the Refugee Food Bank is a man called John who speaks the Azerbaijani language. He was recently baptized in Sherbrooke Church. In Canada for 11 months, he has found a safe haven at Sherbrooke from a difficult life in Iran where he had been imprisoned and tortured because his resistance to Arabic was considered opposition to Islam. In prison, John had a recurring dream in which he saw a church far away. Therefore, John committed his life to following Jesus long before he arrived in Vancouver. The church is trying to help John bring his wife and two children to Canada.

**Iglesia Centro de Fe Y Esperanza** (The Spanish Mennonite Church of Faith & Hope) is a new church planting project in East Vancouver. The first service took place on May 1, 2004, and John Melendez from Colombia was installed as the pastor on the same day. Many leaders from various Mennonite congregations in the Greater Vancouver Area

attended and celebrated this joyful occasion together. A Fundraising Event for this project was successfully held at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond on May 30. More than 300 people showed up for this event and about \$5,000 was raised.

Iglesia Centro de Fe Y Esperanza meets at the facility of Grace Chinese Mennonite Church, Vancouver every Saturday. John, and Nora, his wife, are working hard to reach out to the Spanish speaking community in and around the area where the church is located. A reference council consisting of members of various supporting congregations has been set up to assist and to provide advice and guidance to John in these ministries.

We are happy to learn that **Sung-rok Cho** was installed as associate pastor of Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship in Surrey on May 30. Sung-rok is a retired pastor from Korea and is fluent in Korean and Japanese. Both Sung-rok and Eun-pil, his wife, have a burden to serve the Japanese community in Canada. Their participation in this ministry will be a great help to Takahiko Yoshiyuki, the lead pastor and his wife Mari. Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship began an extended ministry in North Vancouver in May 2003. The new church just celebrated their anniversary and is now named North Shore Japanese Church; they worship every Saturday evening.

We mourn the death of **Samuel Chui**, the 19-year-old son of Adrian & Irene Chui who are longstanding leaders of Grace Chinese Mennonite Church, Vancouver. Samuel died in a car accident on May 29. The funeral was overcrowded with more than 500 guests, most of them young people. Please remember the Chui family and the members of Grace Chinese Mennonite Church, Vancouver, as they go through the sorrow of this deep loss.

## Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

We welcome **Trakoon (Yoel) Masyawong** who became pastor of Grace Lao Mennonite Church, Kitchener ON, in January. Yoel and his wife came from Thailand where he had graduated from Bangkok Bible College and Seminary in 2001. He had served as a youth pastor in Bangkok, Thailand for a couple of years before coming to Canada for the first time under the International Visitor Exchange Program of Mennonite Central Committee. At that time Yoel took a pastoral internship at both Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden ON and House of Friendship, Kitchener ON. After that he returned to Thailand and ministered among students in Chiangmai University for another two years before accepting this call for the pastoral position with Grace Lao Mennonite Church.

Yoel's wife, Matha Opaskiatikul, was born in Northeast Thailand. Before coming to Canada she had worked with World Vision as a correspondence analyst officer and guest

visit staff for three years. She has just obtained her work authorization here and is seeking a job. They have been in Canada for several months now and are still acclimatizing to life here. Please pray for them for strength and providence from God.

Members of **Lao Christian Fellowship** in St. Catharines ON will be hosting the North American Laotian Mennonite Annual Conference from July 2-4. On exactly the same days the North American Hmong Mennonite Churches Mission will be holding their first committee meeting in St. Paul MN, to plan for the first Hmong Conference next year. They will also take this opportunity to celebrate the grand opening of a new Hmong Mennonite Church in St. Paul. Daniel Yang, pastor of First Hmong Mennonite Church, Kitchener ON will be attending this meeting. Please pray that all these meetings and conferences may have a significant impact on the lives of many.

### **Mennonite Church Manitoba**

The leaders of various ethnic Mennonite congregations in Manitoba have been working together in preparation for the **Friday Festival** during Mennonite Church Canada Annual Assembly in Winkler on July 9. They will participate in some stations along with staff members of International Ministries, interacting with visitors about their overseas locations and describing the contexts within which they minister.

### **Mennonite Church Saskatchewan**

We are happy to report that on average there are about 10 - 15 Colombian Mennonites attending Sunday morning service at **Mount Royal Mennonite Church**, Saskatoon.

They do not require a Spanish language service at Mt. Royal, as they attend the Saskatoon Hispanic Mennonite Church which is affiliated with Northwest Mennonite Conference on Saturday nights. They come to Mount Royal partly for encouragement and help in learning English and for assistance in learning Canadian culture. Mt. Royal also has a Sunday School class where songs and Bible concepts are used to teach and practice members' language skills (learning English or Spanish as the case may be). They regularly read the Scripture in Spanish as well as English, and the congregation is learning the Lord's Prayer in Spanish by repeating it every Sunday as part of their service. Please pray for the ministry among this group and for the work of the pastor, Jack Dyck, who opened his heart and church in generous support to us when we held our First Multi-cultural Ministry Consultation at his church two years ago.

### **Ethnic Participation on MCC Board**

Iris Leung, a member of Peace Chinese Mennonite Church, Richmond BC, feels privileged to serve on the Bi-national Board of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). She writes, "I attended my first MCC Annual General Meeting in Akron, PA on June 11 and 12. Other than routine business discussion, I heard a lot of stories about people around the world. It was a great experience for me. A lot of volunteers are working hard and serving in the name of the Lord. Many service workers are facing all kinds of adversities and difficulties, including

wars, political instability, natural disaster, or health problems. May God guide and protect them as they serve far away from their home countries and families."

Iris continues, "While the worker is one issue, money is another. We need financial support to launch more international projects in our fight against poverty, disasters, and injustice, which are still prevalent in many countries. May we be 'Listening with our hearts' as we respond to God's call to address these needs. If you want to know more about MCC projects, you may visit the web site at [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org)".

### **Overseas**

There is a report from **Vietnam** that members of Mennonite churches in various places there have been harassed by security police. Church leaders have been arrested and are still in custody. Believers have been stopped on the way to church, or interrogated after being there. Worship services have been interrupted and some churches are closely watched by the police. Pastors have been forbidden from traveling beyond their local areas.

In response to this dire situation Mennonite Church Canada has already written a letter to the **Prime Minister of Vietnam**, requesting that he looks into these matters so that the imprisoned Mennonite leaders in Ho Chi Minh City, including Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, executive director of Mennonite Church Vietnam, may be released and all Mennonites elsewhere in Vietnam may have freedom to practice their religious beliefs. We also requested his assistance to do whatever he could to put a stop to this harassment of Mennonites in the various provinces and cities.

A letter was also addressed to the **Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam** asking him to present our concerns to the Vietnamese government by sending them our letter. We would appreciate his assistance in securing the release of Quang and other church leaders. We also seek the return of church property, such as documents and computers, confiscated when Quang was arrested.

**Mennonite World Conference** has also written a letter addressing the same concern to the Vietnamese government. There has been a plea from leaders of North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship for prayers for the uncertain and perilous situation in Vietnam. They are also working hard to give support and encouragement to leaders and members of Mennonite Church Vietnam.

### **Core Anabaptist Resources**

We thank God that over the year significant progress has been made in the production of the Chinese translation of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. This will prove to be a valuable tool in enhancing the ministries of ethnic Chinese Mennonite congregations in Canada and beyond.

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