

November 2004, *Equipping*



When we find ourselves in unfamiliar circumstances our first instinct is to look for familiar landmarks, points by which we can orient ourselves and chart our course. Paths taken by those who've gone before us are often helpful. There are other travelers on the way who can offer useful direction. Sometimes in our search for clarity we are gifted with an unexpected cache of resources that encourage and strengthen us. Always, we rely on our God who does not abandon us, no matter where we may travel.

As I've begun in my new work as Executive Secretary for Christian Formation I have been blessed with an abundance of resources for the journey. Week by week I am gaining a better understanding of the ministry that is Christian Formation and the many gifts and opportunities it offers the church. My predecessor, Justina Heese provided useful orientation as I got started. The church people I have met, and other Mennonite Church Canada staff have given valuable wisdom and support. My questions have been graciously received and patiently answered. Various written resources have filled in information gaps and increased my understanding. And yet, I know I have a distance to go before I will feel properly oriented. Eight weeks is a very short time. My journey of learning, leading and growing in this role has only begun. I trust God to continue to provide what is needed.

My experience in finding my way in my job is not unlike the path of Christian formation generally. Each of us travels a spiritual path in which we will sometimes feel disoriented, sometimes centred; sometimes rich in resources, other times bereft; sometimes secure and comfortable, other times bewildered, stretched near the breaking point. Just as my job orientation depends on many people and a variety of resources, so the ministry of Christian Formation exists in partnership with the rich networks of gifts, people and resources God has given the church. We are called, as partners, to encourage and nurture the development of disciples of Jesus, that all might grow toward maturity and be enabled to participate in God's reconciling work in the world.

On a recent visit to several of our secondary schools and colleges in Ontario and Manitoba I was impressed by the way they embody this commitment to forming faithful disciples for God's work in the world. Our schools see themselves very much as part of the church, and hold high their calling to train and equip children and youth for witness and leadership through the church, in the world. We are stronger together as a national church when we are able to see the valuable place our educational institutions hold in the formation of "a people belonging to God." (1 Peter 2.9)

I want to draw your attention to a new resource about to be released in print and on the web. *Praying over the broken body of Christ* is the title of the 2005 Prayer Week material, written by Dan Nighswander. With study material drawn from 1 Corinthians, it focuses on the church's call to unity in body and spirit, so that we might invite those who are strangers, to join the fellowship of the diverse and beautiful family that is the church of Jesus Christ.

May the peace of Christ be yours in the Fall season.

—Dave Bergen, Executive Secretary, Formation