

November-December 2004, *Equipping*



As I reflect on God's desire for MC Canada I find my spirit drawn repeatedly to Isaiah 49, especially verses 1-6.

Isaiah was working hard at his ministry. Listen to his despair: *"I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity...."* What was it that he was working at so hard, and with such little success? He writes that God had called him *"to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him"* – that is, to keep the people of Israel faithful to God. Transplanted to our situation he would have been busy teaching Sunday School, leading worship, organizing youth activities, visiting the sick, going to committee meetings – all the activities we do in our congregational ministries. Isaiah felt his task was very heavy; perhaps some of you can identify with him.

But what did God say? *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel."* Translated for the church, *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servants to nurture your own children and your church members alone. I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* Do you hear echoes of our vision statement, *"...so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world?"*

These days I am inspired and challenged by people who carry stories of what God is doing in other places. Barbara Nkala from Zimbabwe visited our offices recently, as did Larry Miller from Mennonite World Conference. Of our staff members, Peter Rempel just returned from three weeks of visiting our workers and partners in Africa, Jack Suderman and Janet Plenert recently spent a week teaching pastors in Cuba, Janet is working for almost four months from Colombia and regularly sends reports. We continue to hear stories from Vietnam about the persecution of church leaders there and stories of church growth and witness from many countries. Byron Rempel-Burkholder, who works for Mennonite Publishing Network from our offices, spent four months this summer in Ethiopia relating to the Meserete Kristos church.

From all of these quarters I am reminded that God's work far exceeds our congregation, our region, our country, our continent, our denomination. God's vision extends "to the end of the earth." As a follower of Jesus Christ, and the more so as a person called to leadership responsibility in the church, I cannot do less than to align the scope of my vision to the scope of God's vision.

I urge all leaders and all members of our churches to join me in imagining the extent of the call that we have received from God, not for ourselves alone, but to be a light to all nations, for the salvation of all people.

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