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Celebration Story

We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Ray Dirks, artist and curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg, Man. The story should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.

—Deborah Froese, PrayerNet Coordinator

Art links Gandhi and Mennonites



When Ray Dirks was invited to exhibit his work at the Jawahar Kala Kendra Art Centre (JKK) in Jaipur, Rajasthan this past January, he was told “don’t be religious in your art.” He brought an exhibit linking the great Indian pacifist, Gandhi, with Mennonites.

The exhibit consisted of nine portraits of Gandhi, several paintings of outcasts from different countries, and manipulated photos of Dirks’ own heritage. He noticed that as people toured his exhibit, they were at first pleasantly surprised by the portraits of Gandhi and then became intrigued by the

other paintings. They asked questions about how the images were connected, which in turn raised questions about being Mennonite.

In response, Dirks shared some of the ways Mennonite organizations work for peace among all people regardless of religion or culture. He found his audience receptive to this idea. “On the level of individuals, there is a yearning for non-violent solutions. Many Hindus believe that this is at the core of who they are and who they want to be.”

Dirks, who travels often and lives within the communities of those whom he wishes to paint, has become accustomed to relating to individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds with respect and curiosity. “You can’t go in with an ulterior motive,” he says. He doesn’t meet people with the intent of converting them to Christianity. “Just the way I am with them is an example, and that’s the best way I can be a witness in those situations.”

A broader project under the same name as the exhibition in India, *In the Spirit of Humanity*, has been awarded a grant by the Winnipeg Foundation to set up three exhibits, present school workshops and offer churches cross cultural, multi-faith presentations in Winnipeg.

Glory be to God, who provides opportunities for all of God’s people to minister through whatever gifts they have been given, and in whatever circumstances they find themselves!