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## Celebration Story

*We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Robert J. Suderman, General Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada. It should take no more than two minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.*

*–Deborah Froese, PrayerNet Coordinator*

## Anabaptism births new church in Cuba



On August 19, 2008, the Mennonite Church in Cuba – Iglesia Menonita en Cuba – was officially born. From a Mennonite Church Canada perspective, it was an unexpected birth.

When MC Canada first began walking with Cubans through various types of ministry some twenty years ago, there was no intention to create a new church. Cuba already had numerous denominations.

“We knew there was a lot of interest in Cuba for the Anabaptist vision and our strategy was to nurture that interest,” says MC Canada General Secretary Robert J. Suderman. “It was clear to us that we were not there to start another church.”

But a strong desire for peace enhanced the appeal of an Anabaptist theological vision. With the conviction of Pastor Alexander Reyna, whom Suderman describes as “the motor behind the movement,” and Pastor Eugenio, the new church’s treasurer, Iglesia Menonita en Cuba has grown to include ten cell groups with a total of about 120 people.

Reyna said, “Our vision has been to start groups with a Mennonite identity and this can have a bigger impact in society... God doesn’t need reformers, but people who will practice a living faith that isn’t just theoretical. I think that the Mennonite Church, from what I have been able to see, is able to do this. I have had a new birth, a new baptism in a sense.” (translation by Linda Shelley).

It may be a long time before the Mennonite Church in Cuba is officially recognized by the government. This limits membership to small cell groups which are not eligible for real estate assignments or building authorization. As a result, members worship in private homes with the permission of local authorities.

Without official status, Iglesia Menonita en Cuba cannot arrange for visas for people such as Suderman to teach. The new church must rely on the support of proven, officially recognized organizations that will request visas on their behalf. So far, the Martin Luther King Memorial Center (CMMLK) and the Cuban Council of Churches have been willing to assist the new church in this way.

Despite these challenges, the church is empowered by an Anabaptist vision of peace, equality and social justice. Mennonite Church Canada continues to nurture the relationship, seeking ways to assist in leadership development and more.

*“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11*