



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Witness

600 Shaftesbury Blvd
Winnipeg MB R3P 0M4
Toll free 1-866-888-6785
P: 204-888-6781
F: 204-831-5675
E: office@mennonitechurch.ca
www.mennonitechurch.ca

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Celebration Story

We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Ray Dirks, curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery and an artist who is dedicated to enhancing community and cultural relationships through visual art. 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

Dancing in the Spirit of Humanity



Video images like this photo of children dancing and drumming in Dzogadze, Ghana, were used to inspire Dirks' young refugee students in their own artwork. Photo by Ray Dirks.

All but one of the students in my group were refugees. I greeted them with a visual presentation to inspire confidence and pride about who they are and where they come from. With positive stories and images from various cultures that we in the West tend to stereotype, I affirmed that we can all learn from one another and that they, too, have good things to teach the rest of us.

“They” are a group of Grade six students visiting the Mennonite Heritage Centre Art Gallery from Shaughnessy Park School in Winnipeg’s inner city. Over the years, the Gallery has become much more than an exhibition space. Among its many branches is a growing school program.

Following a brief art lesson, I invited them to create watercolour paintings inspired by their own experiences, artworks that could teach others something about who they are. The students diligently set to work, dipping brushes into trays of colour and washing them across the page. Village scenes emerged, along with depictions of weather that was warm beyond the dreams of any Winnipegger in late winter.

The workshop came to a celebratory end with a video of dancing and drumming from the village of Dzogadze, Ghana – a place where I have spent much time building relationships with villagers and taking photographs. The African students in the group spontaneously leapt from their seats and danced along with the video. A girl from war-ravaged Eastern Congo beamed at me and gleefully proclaimed, “I’m glad I’m black!”

Recognizing the unique and positive role the Mennonite Heritage Centre Art Gallery is playing in local schools, the Winnipeg Foundation has agreed to fund *In the Spirit of Humanity*. This new program will allow us to continue to expand our work within the public school system, helping students from all backgrounds feel good about themselves. The Mennonite Heritage Centre is a ministry of Mennonite Church Canada.

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