

June 24, 2025

A Pastoral Letter to the Congregations of Mennonite Church Canada

Beloved Pastors, Leaders and Members of our Church Family.

Grace and peace to you in Jesus Christ.

In this season of profound global unrest, we write with both a heavy heart for the suffering in the world and an unshakable hope grounded in the Gospel. The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together." As the body of Christ, we are intricately connected to the joys and sorrows of our siblings in faith throughout the world.

In Switzerland, on May 29, 2025, we witnessed a profound moment in the 500 years of the Anabaptist movement. In a spirit of humility and openness, global leaders from churches that have historically opposed each other washed each other's feet. In a gesture of ecumenical solidarity, Pope Leo XIV sent a letter expressing a shared desire to courageously love. Choirs from around the world sang their praises to celebrate God's faithfulness. At the conclusion of the service, the bells of the Grossmuenster Cathedral rang out in celebration of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This celebration was preceded by the Mennonite World Conference General Council sessions. Interwoven with the discernment and deliberation were testimonies from national church leaders. Some recounted stories of congregational growth and renewal in contexts of relative stability; others bore witness to new life emerging amid severe oppression and suffering.

We heard from church leaders in India, who face increasing pressure from fundamentalist groups intent on transforming their nation into a theocracy. Church buildings have been seized, pastors arrested, and the desire for baptisms denied - persecution that echoes early Anabaptist history.

Our long-standing partners in the Democratic Republic of Congo shared the harrowing reality of over seven million displaced persons, many of whom struggle daily without adequate shelter, food, or clean water.

We listened to the heartfelt plea of a brother from the Mennonite Brethren Church in Ukraine, one of the newest members of Mennonite World Conference. Through tears he described the relentless suffering inflicted by Russia's war upon his people.

Pastor Amos Chin, leader of Bible Missionary Church (Mennonite) in Myanmar, reported that conditions in parts of his country resemble those in Gaza, and have since 2021. "The western media, the western church has forgotten us," he lamented.

Since returning from these global gatherings, we have heard a call to prayer for Gaza and the West Bank from our partners at Bethlehem Bible College, and we have witnessed further escalation of violence and instability, particularly in Gaza, Ukraine, Iran and other regions ensnared by the ambitions of global power struggles. The human cost continues to mount.

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

As disciples of Jesus, we cannot turn away, nor can we allow our hearts to grow numb. Instead, we are summoned to solidarity—to weep with those who weep, to pray without ceasing, to give sacrificially, and to speak prophetically for peace and justice.

Our Anabaptist heritage compels us to be peacemakers, bearing witness to Christ's reconciling love even in the face of violence and oppression. The cross, for us, is not only a symbol of suffering but the very pathway to resurrection and enduring hope.

May our prayers ascend like incense on behalf of those ensnared in these cycles of conflict. May our generosity sustain those in need. May our voices challenge the structures of injustice, as we advocate for peace in Gaza, Ukraine and elsewhere. And may our congregations serve as sanctuaries of refuge, hospitality, and healing.

In all of this, we cling to the assurance that God is present, even in the shadowed valleys. The Spirit intercedes with groans too deep for words. Christ, the Prince of Peace, still reigns and will have the final word.

Let us not be overcome by anxious thoughts. Let us not grow weary in doing good. Let us continue to be salt and light in a world yearning for redemption. And let us steadfastly uphold one another as the body of Christ, knowing that when one member suffers, we all suffer; yet together, we testify to the hope that does not disappoint.

May the peace of Christ guard your hearts and minds.

In Christ's abiding love,

Doug Klassen, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Canada

Anthony Siegrist, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

Michael Pahl, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Manitoba

Len Rempel, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan

Tim Wiebe Neufeld, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Alberta

Shelby Boese, Executive Minister, Mennonite Church British Columbia