

## **Mennonite Church Canada Report to Area Churches and congregations**

*December 15, 2008*

Our Assembly/Summit theme in 2008 was “At the Crossroads: Promise & Peril (Deut. 4: 1-9). In this text, God’s children stand on the brink of entering the land promised to them. Before they enter, they are challenged to live in obedience to God, so that all nations might witness and learn from the wisdom of their ways.

The General Board of Mennonite Church Canada has established three priorities that help bring the Deuteronomy text into focus for us: forming a people of God; growing leaders for the church; becoming a global church. In our efforts to strengthen these priorities, the church faces both promise and peril. The God-given task of discerning faithfulness is ever with us. I will highlight some of the opportunities and challenges of 2008.

- 1) All the Area Churches and MC Canada have signed a [Partnership Covenant](#) that identifies the values within which we, as a Body, are committed to work. We are grateful for the excellent spirit in which this document was created.
- 2) In 2008 the results of an MC Canada-wide [Pastoral Trends](#) survey were analyzed and shared with the wider church. Pastors, assembly delegates, and schools are providing valuable input into how best to meet the needs that became apparent in this survey.
- 3) Mennonite Church Canada Witness offered several Learning Tours in 2008. These tours are unique opportunities to connect more directly with the ministries that you are supporting in other parts of the world, and to learn from our global Body. We want to encourage your participation in future Learning Tours ([www.mennonitechurch.ca/getinvolved/](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/getinvolved/)).
- 4) Together with Mennonite Church Saskatchewan we will again be hosting IMPaCT – International Mennonite Pastors Coming Together. Pastors from various parts of the world will engage pastors in MC Saskatchewan in what it means to be an Anabaptist church leader in today’s world. Past IMPaCT events have been hosted by MCM, MCA, and MCEC.
- 5) Raquel Contreras, President of the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile, spoke passionately at our Assembly 2008 about their determination to recover their Anabaptist roots and identity. At their request, we are partnering with them in this journey of changing identities.
- 6) Via meetings among the Moderators, Secretaries, and Area Church ministers, we are responding to some of the pain and struggle in our Body. Together we are developing guidelines for pastors as they minister to gay and lesbian persons and to the related circles of friends, family, and congregations. We are grateful for this collaborative approach in the Body.
- 7) We are encouraged by the financial support of our churches, individuals, and corporate members, in spite of global economic decline. We are aware of and grateful for the sacrifices that make this possible. We are anticipating a significant reduction of individual/corporate gifts. We ask each congregation to respond according to its potential to off-set this anticipated short-fall. We are grateful to all of you for your support.
- 8) Our 15-minute radio program, *Church Matters*, is filling a radio-broadcasting niche. This program focuses on the central role of the Church in God’s plan to reconcile the world. Although this program is aired in Manitoba, it is available to everyone via down-loadable pod casts on our website. We encourage you all to use these as educational options in your congregation ([www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/206](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/206)).
- 9) We continue to witness for peace and against the militarization of our society. A significant “Peace in the Public Square” resolution was passed at the assembly in 2008. A discussion paper

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has been presented to the General Board, and a proposal will be presented to the delegate body at the 2009 Assembly in Saskatoon.

- 10) Our paper entitled *The Church's Witness to Peace* has had two rounds of discussion in the Canadian Council of Churches (May and November/2008). One result of this discussion is a request from the Christian Reformed Church in North America to jointly plan and host a consultation on "War and Peace" in the fall of 2009. We are working with them to make this happen.
- 11) We are taking seriously the concern of the Assembly delegates in July/07 to become a "greener" organization. At our Assembly 2008, we composted food waste and eating utensils, and intensified recycling efforts. In 2009 we will meet at the University of Saskatchewan. Preparations for greening this gathering, within the realistic limits of the facility, are underway.
- 12) The theme for our Assembly in 2009 is *Living inside out* (Col. 3: 12-17). We will meet earlier than usual this year (June 5-7/09 in Saskatoon) to avoid a conflict for those wishing to attend Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay in July. We URGE each Area Church, each congregation, and each member, and people of all ages to participate in the MC Canada assembly. Watch *Equipping, Canadian Mennonite*, and our web site for forthcoming information ([www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca)).
- 13) After seven years of working in Borabu, Thailand, Witness workers Pat and Rad Houmphan, with church members and Witness administrative staff, celebrated the dedication of a new church building. The Thailand ministry continues with efforts to plant another church in a neighbouring district.
- 14) MC Canada Witness is excited to send three Canadian young adults to Paraguay as participants with Radical Journey, a year long young adult service program of MC Canada and its partner, Mennonite Mission Network.
- 15) The brochure entitled *What Makes a Mennonite* will be available early in 2009. It will also be available in Chinese. The production of this was a collaborative effort and will be well used both in Canadian Chinese congregations, as well as in Asia.
- 16) In a recent visit to Cuba, key leaders informed us that on August 19, 2008 they gave "birth" to *La Iglesia Menonita en Cuba* (The Mennonite Church in Cuba). One of them stated: "It was inevitable that the seeds of Anabaptist ferment sown in Cuba would birth a new church. We decided that now was the time for that."
- 17) Our Native Ministries department is coordinating a group of eleven indigenous leaders from Canada to attend the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Paraguay. There are special events set up there to engage indigenous realities in Paraguay and in other parts of the world.
- 18) A new Sunday-school curriculum, coordinated and produced by our Native Ministries and Christian Education departments, is now available for use. It is called *Reaching up to God our Creator*. This resource highlights the common ground of Aboriginal Sacred Teachings and the Bible, in the hope of fostering respect and understanding among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

The church is God's intended instrument for the reconciliation of the world. We trust that as we respond to both the promise and peril of being a church, the world around us will be able to say that "surely this is a wise and discerning people." May God bless us all.

Robert J. Suderman.  
General Secretary