

Inspired by the Word: Being the church in the world

Part IV of V

God's word inspires us to embrace God's people at home and around the globe, actively engaging with and learning from our brothers and sisters of all ethnicities and cultures. Mennonite Church Canada Witness facilitates encounters that help us develop a greater awareness of the richness and diversity of God's church.

—Deborah Froese

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Flipping through Mennonite Church Canada's World of Witness prayer directory (WOW) reveals the intricacy of denominational connections — from Native Ministry and Multi-Cultural ministries in Canada to mission workers and partnerships abroad.

Linda Brnjas, pastor at Bethel MC in Elora, Ont., uses WOW to show her congregation some of the many ways in which they are participating in global mission through MC Canada. At least twice monthly, she introduces Witness workers during worship by sharing WOW information, recent prayer requests, and projected images.

Bethel members, Dianne and Fanosie Legesse, serve with MC Canada Witness at Meserete Kristos College in Ethiopia, and Bethel has a support team for them and their two young children.

"Dianne and Fanosie are a real part of our congregation and took our good will with them," says Art Byer, chair of the Legesse Support Team. Congregational members have travelled to Ethiopia to show support through activities like organizing library books, helping Ethiopian students with English and participating in a building project.

"It's more of a heart response than a strategic plan to be a part of the global church," Brnjas muses. Her comment emphasizes the significance relationship plays in the global church.

A newly covenanted relationship between Trinity MC in Calgary and the Korea Anabaptist Center (KAC) in Seoul, South Korea, was

sparked by interactions during a MC Canada Witness assignment to Korea from 2002-2005. Before coming to Trinity, Pastor Erwin Wiens and his wife Marian were Witness workers building relationships with Jesus Village Church and KAC. They brought these associations with them to Trinity in 2005, and in 2006, three Korean families joined the congregation. In 2007, the congregation hosted a Korean participant in Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP). At the end of his term, Yoen-seo Park returned to Korea and eventually joined the staff of KAC.

"[All of] These relationships increased the level of contact and appreciation for things Korean," Wiens reports. In 2008, he and his wife led an MC Canada Learning Tour to South Korea. Ten of twelve participants were from Trinity.

A 2004 MC Canada Columbia Learning Tour introduced Sharon Friesen and her husband John of Altona Bergthaler MC (Altona, Man.) to the people of Madrid MC. Friesen's interest in the people of a Madrid and a request by their pastor for a Canadian connection sparked a relationship that continues to grow. It also led to another tour in 2007 with several Bergthaler members, including Friesen and Pastor Dan Kehler.

Kehler emphasizes the fact that the relationship between the two congregations is not a financial one. "It's about learning from each other's context and praying for one another, learning about the political situation in Colombia." He adds that information about the global situation can be overwhelming. "But if we can focus on Colombia, it gives us a centering point."

Recently, Bergthaler and Madrid have begun using Skype (voice over internet) conversations, bridging the distance and helping to sustain more intimate connections.

Friesen notes that one member of the Madrid congregation travels to Toronto frequently for her work with Christian Peacemaker Teams, and usually comes to Altona too. They are looking forward to a visit from the Madrid pastor and her husband this fall. "The relationship is personal," Friesen says.

For more information on Congregational Relationships, contact Norm Dyck, Director of Congregational Partnerships and Missional Formation at ndyck@mennonitechurch.ca.