

## **Integrated Executive Staff Report 2009 MC Canada Assembly**

### ***Jack: Introduction***

Our theme text for this Assembly gives us the framework for this first block of reporting.

The text:

- begins by acknowledging that we are God's people; and
- it ends by expressing our gratitude for this initiative of God.

Interesting. "Being God's people" is the foundation that under-girds all of our efforts and the platform from which we launch our efforts. No exceptions.

And we work at this with the humble recognition that it is God's grace, and that alone, that makes our participation possible. No exceptions.

And we indeed are grateful and thankful for this opportunity to minister in God's name, from across the street to around the world. No exceptions.

This text ends with the welcome challenge:

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In the next number of minutes we want to begin to share some glimpses of how we work together, gratefully, to strengthen and grow our vocation of being God's people.

To help focus this vocation for our time, you, the delegates of Mennonite Church Canada have previously discussed, discerned, and approved three priorities that need to guide our energies:

- To Form a People of God;
- To Grow Leaders for the Church;
- To Become a Global Church.

So:

What's happening?

How are we doing?

What are the challenges and obstacles?

Where do we see things taking root and growing?

**Janet:**  
***Growing Leaders***

**Radical Journey** – is a year long journey of discovering what God is doing in the world. It is also a journey of revealing the gifts and callings of the participants. When Mennonite Church Canada decided to offer a “Radical Journey” to young adults in our congregations, it was our hope that it would be a global church voyage that would show where roots of God’s love and transformation are taking hold. Scott Bergen, one of our first participants describes his new church community in Paraguay:

*“There’s not a lot of money to go around, but there’s plenty of zeal and an incredible amount of love and hospitality extended to all those in the church and the neighbouring communities. They are the people who invited six strangers from North America into their homes and churches last October and have embraced us with love so real that we can’t help but feel welcomed and at home with them. They are the Convencion Evangelica Menonita de Paraguay. After being part of the Emmaus congregation for five months, I am convinced that they are an important and incredible part of the body of Christ.”*

Witness also helps pastors take a Radical Journey, though we call it **Special Assignments**. We have discovered that pastors need sabbaticals occasionally! And sometimes they ask us to help them take a meaningful journey of self discovery, renewal and service.

Rouge Valley Pastor Pieter Niemeyer, his wife Susie and their children are doing their sabbatical on a Special Assignment with Witness in Philipstown, South Africa. Pieter is teaching Anabaptism at Grace Community churches. Susie is doing her ministry with women.

Pastor of Abbotsford’s Level Ground church, Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen, her husband Richard and their children are doing their sabbatical serving with Witness in Ethiopia. Richard will be acting as consultant Librarian at Meserete Kristos College and Karen will be serving at a local orphanage. You can see these families highlighted in your program book.

**Karen:**  
***Leadership Development Story***

Where do leaders come from? How do individuals hear God’s call to ministry?

Leaders grow in congregations. To help strengthen our ability to nurture and call out the leadership gifts of all ages, every Mennonite Church Canada congregation will receive a new gift discernment resource entitled this summer, entitled *Many Gifts, Calling and Growing Congregational Leaders*.

This summer we are helping to support 5 young adults from Canadian Mennonite University and Conrad Grebel University College who are in these schools' respective Ministry Inquiry Programs, where they will explore leadership ministry in a local congregation. We are thankful for partnerships with our schools, Area Churches and local congregations.

Leaders are refined by the church. Our area churches pay close attention to the critical first 3-5 years of ministry in shaping successful long-term pastors. Through initiatives like MCEC's Transition into Ministry Program and AMBS' bi-national "Clarifying the Call" events the whole church is learning to help new pastors grow and thrive in healthy ways.

Leaders are supported by the church. In March 2009, 7 new Canadian pastors and 8 MC USA pastors along with Denominational Ministers and AMBS faculty met for a weekend of professional learning. I was privileged to witness holy moments of insight and self discovery as pastors heard and shared the ministry joys and struggles of their peers. I also saw great joy, encouragement and renewed commitment to their vocation as these new pastors received a letter of affirmation from a local congregational leader and their Area Church Minister.

Pray for our pastors and for the ongoing work of our schools, Area Churches and congregations who work together to grow leaders who engage the world with the reconciling gospel of Jesus Christ.

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***Janet:  
Pandemic Preparedness***

We often felt a bit like Noah, standing in the sun, on dry land, building an arc. Except we weren't building an arc, we were calling together a task force to write materials for congregational preparedness for a pandemic, and building a web site so everyone could access the resources. People thought that was VERY strange! The scepticism stopped when H1N1 became common household terminology in the third week of April. Our website page hits jumped: in April there were 26,000 page hits on the web site, and over 60,000 in May!

We also partnered with MDS and Mennonite Publishing Network to prepare two small book help congregations study and prepare for emergencies. You can find them at the MPN stand, but the ink may still be damp!

We encourage you to check out these resources. An editor of Christianity Today International looked at our stuff, and wrote us saying, "We are assembling a

downloadable packet of pandemic resources for churches in the U.S. Your site contains some of the best resources I have encountered on this topic.”

***Louie:***

***Communicating the word***

A century ago we only had to deal with communication in print. Then came telephones, radios, television, the internet – and many more communications challenges.

Today we’re asking questions like: should we more heavily use social networking technologies like Facebook and Twitter? If so, how much effort should we invest? How do we best balance face-to-face relationships and electronic communication? What will be next month’s or next year’s new media trend? Can we keep up with this uneven and rapidly shifting technological ground? These are just a few of the questions we struggle with as a staff.

Through the activities of our Communications Department, Mennonite Church Canada co-sponsored a Christian, ecumenical communicators event on May 15, called Going Barefoot II. A study on the media consumption habits of the Facebook Generation was completed. Over 1200 young people from Mennonite schools and churches responded to the survey. MC Canada is proud to have been part of that study. We hope this study will help us answer some of our questions.

Dan Dyck is on the Communications Committee of the Canadian Council of Churches. This has led to a further involvement: Dan is also chairing the Communications Team of the 2010 World Religions Summit: Interfaith Leaders in the G8 Nations. This event will be held at the University of Winnipeg, June 21-23, next year.

You should know that your church denomination is playing a major role in an event that calls the church to be present in civic society by holding leaders of the G8 nations accountable to the Millennium Development Goals – 8 goals they pledged to work for in 2000. This is missional work.

***Dave:***

***Forming God’s people***

Staff of MC Canada have numerous opportunities to visit congregations. As they are present with a congregation they are privileged to bear witness to some of the wonderful things the Spirit of God is doing in the lives of congregations:

Arlyn Friesen Epp, Director of the Resource Centre, helped lead worship at the Lethbridge Mennonite Church during Holy Week and Easter. While staying at the home of 2 Alberta pastors, he caught a ‘birds eye’ view of both the grittiness and glory of day to day pastoral ministry. Their reflections on congregational life and the chance to meet

key church leaders was a gift whose benefits extend to other congregations in MC Canada with whom Arlyn has opportunity to connect—especially through the daily work of the Resource Centre. The fact Arlyn was able to spend several consecutive worship services in one congregation provided a rare glimpse into the rich life of a faith community that eagerly welcomes the chance to be in fellowship with each other, and longs to deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. And when, on Easter Sunday morning, the congregation received the sad news of a young member's death, Arlyn sensed the deep presence of God's healing Spirit at work in God's people, even as he led them in worship through the Easter sermon. We are thankful for the movement of the Spirit, inspiring faith and building community.

Conrad Stoesz, Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre several years ago helped developed a website that tells the Conscientious Objector story. It highlights a little known Canadian story about World War Two. The award winning web site at [www.alternativeservice.ca](http://www.alternativeservice.ca) offers helpful information as well as learning tools for elementary and secondary school students and teachers, in public or private school settings. Because of this work, Conrad is invited to be with congregations who want to become better acquainted with our peace making history and what it means today. Recently, he visited the Osler Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan and witnessed the work of the Spirit. He reports:

*“At Osler they have revamped their Sunday School program. Over many years they experienced a steady decline in student enrolment. It was also getting harder to find teachers. They decided to try something different. Adults in their 30s took the lead and developed their own curriculum that works in a rotational system. For 3 consecutive Sundays, they focus on a single Bible passage using drama, art or story telling. Now kids are bringing their parents to church so that they can attend Sunday school at Osler Mennonite Church. And, it is easier to find teachers who will commit to a 3 week teaching block with a single theme, where they only need to adjust the lesson to make it age appropriate. (See also Canadian Mennonite March 2, 2009, p. 17)*

When Elsie Rempel visited the small, rural congregation in Lowe Farm, Manitoba last winter, she was surprised and inspired. The weekend theme was faith formation. In many settings, a topic like this draws little more than a small group of Sunday school teachers. But in this small rural church not only Sunday school teachers participated. The pastor and every member of the Church Council pitched right in. Older leaders and youth worked side by side to imagine how the whole church could relate to the theme of the Sunday school lesson for the following week. The atmosphere was infectious. As they worked together, the Bible text sprang to life proving once again that the God who multiplied the 'loaves and fishes' is still able to provide enough for all. Everyone offered what they had and the result was a weekend of great encouragement and empowerment for all, even the presenter. God is still at work bringing new life to rural churches, forming a people of God.

**Janet:**  
**Partnering and Ministering**

“재세례신앙의 씨앗으  
로 부터” (*From Anabaptist Seed*)... “메노나이트 신앙고백” (*Confession of Faith*) – these were among the titles shown to the children of Calgary’s Trinity Mennonite Church, with the question, “can you read this?” Most of the children shook their heads confused that Pastor Erv would ask such a strange question. When suddenly first in a quiet, shy voice, but then with increasing boldness, a young Korean boy began to read the words that were familiar to him and a few others in the congregation. In March of this year Trinity Mennonite Church signed a 5 year partnership covenant with Korea Anabaptist Center, focused particularly on partnering with the ministry of Korea Anabaptist Press in their efforts to provide Anabaptist Resources in the Korean language. These 2 books symbolize the significant ministry of Mennonite Church Canada, AND of the Korea Anabaptist Press and their new partner, Trinity Mennonite Church.

**Louie:**  
**Pension Plan**

Many people and organizations have been affected by the recession. People have lost jobs, and those on fixed incomes are at risk. This includes Pastors and church workers within the Mennonite Church Canada pension plan.

A pension plan is an important aspect of caring for our Pastors and church leadership. It provides peace of mind during a working career and some financial security at the time of retirement. Fortunately, the core investment option in our plan is the Socially Responsible fund, which weathered the economic storm fairly well as you can see in the Report Book.

But more importantly, when the financial world begins to crumble, all of us are moved to review the value we place on financial security, and test our faith in our bountiful plentiful God, who sustains us.

**Janet:**

**Macau** – As church leaders we rejoice when we see others rising up, prepared to step into leadership. Such is the case in Macau, where the Macau Mennonite Church has decided to ordain Treasure Chow. Having Treasure as the “team leader” and first local Chinese leader of the church is a real good news story. The ordination is planned for this Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>.

In **Burkina Faso** we are helping to construct the “Burkina Mennonite Bible Training Centre.” For the on-going preparation of leaders for the church.

We are blessed with a vision of a missional church. For over 20 years, we as a church have sent and supported mission workers to South Africa. We were there during, and now after the apartheid era. With the apostle Paul we understand that some plant seeds, some water, but the One who matters is God, for only He “makes things grow.” (1 Cor. 3:7) Working at God’s agenda affirms, and also challenges, our commitments to radical discipleship, covenant community and whole life shalom. Dan and Yvonne Snyder Nighswander have served us as a church and also the church in southern Africa. They report that:

*“A particularly satisfying part of our work has been to build a network of relationships between churches, ministries and individuals who are interested in applying contemporary Anabaptist convictions and values in South(ern) Africa.”*

Dan & Yvonne helped to facilitate the vision for an Anabaptist Network in Southern Africa. To do so they engaged African church leaders from various traditions – mainline churches, Pentecostal and African Initiated churches, other African Anabaptists in the region, including Brethren in Christ immigrants from Zimbabwe and Mennonite Brethren immigrants from Congo. The vision is large and ambitious but we are confident in God, who “makes things grow.” We are pleased that Andrew and Karen Suderman have been appointed to continue this ministry and we thank partner congregations, like Erb Street and Niagara for affirming this vision and for supporting our workers as they arrive in South Africa in August .

Yvonne & Dan are here with us at this Assembly. WOULD YOU PLEASE STAND? I am sure they would be happy to share more of their experiences with you. We are also pleased that Dan will continue to share his pastoral gifts within our body. As of August 1, Dan will be the lead pastor of the Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

**Jack:**  
**Conclusion**

Let us be encouraged by the example of the church around the world, as we together participate in this great calling to which we have been called. From Cuba, Pastor Alexander has insisted that we thank you, the people of Mennonite Church Canada. He said, and I quote:

*“What you have done for the last number of years has not been in vain. Many have identified with the Anabaptist vision. For us this is not just way of thinking, it is how we live our life. Please tell this to the people of Canada.”*

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:17)*