

Christian Witness Council Report 2009 Assembly

Selected Stories

Building bridges with our first Nations people

Edith Von Gunten

Maria Campbell, a Metis elder of Gabriel's Crossing, SK, is an author and storyteller. She recalls vividly how a Mennonite woman would often come to her mother's home when Maria was a child and the two women would sit together over a cup of tea, sometimes shelling peas in the yard or working on some other project together. The two women did not speak each other's language – and yet they were comfortable being together and looked forward to their times together.

Relationships begin as we spend time together, and listen to each other's stories. In the two days following this Assembly, we are honoured to be given the opportunity to visit Maria Campbell and other Aboriginal leaders in the Saskatchewan River Valley north of Saskatoon, an area where Mennonite and Aboriginal people have lived in close proximity for over 100 years. We Mennonites on the Aboriginal Learning Tour will hear the stories and visit the important sites of the First Nations and Metis people in the Valley. It will be a time of learning and building bridges for the present -- and the future. This is the first national Learning Tour Mennonite Church Canada has led.

The opportunity to build bridges between indigenous people is also happening internationally. In August 2007 a letter of invitation arrived at the MC Canada Witness Native Ministry office from the presidents of three Mennonite indigenous conferences in Paraguay. It read in part:

*“Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
... we warmly welcome you into our homes. ... We are eager to introduce you to our families, our congregations and our way of life. We anticipate hearing about your walk with the Lord and also about traditions, your stories and your experiences within the Mennonite family of faith. We genuinely believe this interchange will be good for both of us.*”

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Your brothers and sisters in Christ “

As Mennonite Church Canada we were thrilled to accept this invitation for a visit after the Mennonite World Conference in Asuncion along with 10 Ojibway, Cree and Metis Christians from Canada. Included in the tour will be Cheyenne Christians from the United States and representatives from the indigenous congregations in Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Guatemala. In spite of the challenge of language differences, we know that the working of God's Spirit in our midst will open our hearts to each other and build bridges beyond any expectations we might envision for the future! Keep tuned for future reports of this visit!

1000 Mennonites for Peace

Janet Plenert

Mennonite Church Canada is proud to be part of a movement calling Canadians to consider non-violent responses to conflict in the world. One aspect of doing this has been to launch the **1000 Mennonites for Peace** effort this year. Through articles in *Equipping* and the *Canadian Mennonite*, we encouraged congregations to discuss and inform themselves about military taxation. We see this as a question of stewardship to ensure all of our money is used for purposes that are consistent with our faith beliefs. We invited Mennonites across the country to submit a Peace Tax Return with your income tax form this year. This form, produced by Conscience Canada, is one way to petition the government to allow a legal option for those of us who oppose our money being used for weapons and violence. The form also encourages our Members of Parliament to support Bill C-390 *An Act respecting conscientious objection to the use of taxes for military purposes*. This bill had been introduced in to parliament in the last session, and was reintroduced on May 15 of this year. According to Bill Siksay, the member who introduced the bill,

“A particular feature of the bill is that regulations should be developed in consultation with the Quakers), the Mennonite Church Canada, Conscience Canada, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, and Nos impots pour la paix”.

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Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile

Tim Froese

We rejoice with the story of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile, a family of 12 congregations, 15 pastors and 900 members that is requesting membership with the global family of Anabaptists – Mennonite World Conference. Through relationships, stories and personal accompaniment of mission workers, they hope to join MWC as members in July 2009. In their description of who they are, they note that they are not confined to Chile, but have member congregations in Uruguay and Argentina. Nor are they limited to latinos, having 2 congregations comprised mainly of Mapuche (indigenous people). They have developed a significant set of ministries in their 19 years of history: biblical and vocational training of their youth, ministry to drug addicts and those who live in poor neighbourhoods, pastoral ministry to the sick and imprisoned, ministry to street children, and sharing a “kilo of love” (care package of food items) with poor homes. We are grateful that we can accompany them in exploring their Anabaptist identity and for the gifts of ministry they bring to MC Canada and now the wider Anabaptist family.

Abbotsford Vietnamese Ministry – A church planting project

Samson Lo

“I am really happy now.” That was the words that Lan Le often shares with others. Lan is a single mother with two daughters. She has no other relative that lives in British Columbia. Nevertheless she has been very faithful in attending worship services at a local church. However, owing to her limited English and the cultural gap, it was hard for her to find satisfaction in her church life.

When Lan heard about the Vietnamese ministry at the Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford B.C., she eagerly wanted to participate. Since joining the Vietnamese service, she learns more about the Bible and enjoys meaningful Christian fellowship within her own cultural setting. Now Lan loves going to church.

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This is only one of the many stories we heard from Pastor Nhien Pham. In the summer of 2008 Nhien found over 100 Vietnamese names in local telephone directory of Abbotsford. Therefore the Vietnamese population there could be roughly estimated to be about 500. Since there is no Vietnamese congregation in Abbotsford, it is believed that a Vietnamese ministry would be best meet the spiritual needs of the Vietnamese people who live in and around the region. With the help and support of Mennonite Church BC, Emmanuel Mennonite Church and Vancouver Vietnamese Mennonite Church, a Vietnamese service was launched. We at Mennonite Church Canada Witness network with, encourage and relate to this newly forming congregation.