

2009 Assembly Discernment

A proposal for promoting peace in the public square

1 Peace in the Public Square
2 Proposal for Mennonite Church Canada Assembly 2009, Saskatoon

3 4 **A proposal for promoting the peace message in the public square:**

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6 Given what is (and is not) viable, what is already being done, and what is needed, we make a
7 simple proposal:

- 8 • We propose:
- 9 • that *each* part of the Body within Mennonite Church Canada commit to publicly engage
10 *one* local (regional, national, international) issue per year for the next 4 years;
 - 11 • that *each* part of the Body commit to provide the education and resourcing needed
12 (within and beyond the Body) to articulate and explain the public engagement from a
13 Peace Church perspective;
 - 14 • that *each* part of the Body commit to provide a written report to Mennonite Church
15 Canada, outlining its engagement and reflecting on the impact of its work;
 - 16 • that Mennonite Church Canada staff commit to resource the educational needs of these
17 initiatives;
 - 18 • that Mennonite Church Canada commit to compile these engagements into an annual
19 summary report, providing perspective and analysis as needed and helpful;
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21 Framework:

22 *Being a witness for peace in the public square is the vocation of the entire Body of Christ, that*
23 *includes the congregations and its members, Area Churches, related institutions and*
24 *denominational ministries. Each part of Mennonite Church Canada is strongly urged to seek*
25 *out and act on opportunities to be a peace witness in the public square on an ongoing basis.*
26 *These opportunities include but are not limited to: an ongoing commitment to educating,*
27 *nurturing, and living a spirit of non-violent peacemaking, and public peace advocacy in our*
28 *own congregations.*

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30 **Background**

31 At the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly 2008, a resolution on Peace in the Public Square was
32 brought by the Osler Mennonite Church (Sask.) and passed by the delegates. The resolution was
33 in response to increasing militarization of Canadian society as evidenced by efforts of military
34 recruitment in Canada, and Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan.

53 July, 2008: A Resolution from the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Body

54 **BE IT RESOLVED:**

55 Our nation is at war and we are becoming a more militaristic culture. The principles of
56 “redemptive violence” are being aggressively promoted to justify the increase in military
57 spending and the shedding of blood by and of Canadian soldiers. Christ’s message of peace,
58 reconciliation, and grace needs to be heard in our country.

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60 Realizing that we are called to bear witness for Christ and his message, we request that the staff
61 of MC Canada develop a proposal for promoting the peace message in the “public square”, and
62 that it is presented at the 2009 annual delegate assembly.

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64 **EXPLANATORY NOTE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

65 We are very concerned about the increased militaristic propaganda in the mass media, such as
66 recruiting commercials and military presence at televised sports events, and we strongly feel that
67 we must counter this by getting the peace message out to the general public. What we envision
68 might include the use of mass media like newspaper, radio, T.V., and internet. Since we
69 understand the cost involved in this, we suggest MC Canada may want to combine resources with
70 other peace organizations (independent and those that are branches of other denominations). We
71 feel a positive message, such as using the Golden Rule, would be most effective.

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73 **MC Canada staff response:**

74 We affirm the intent of this resolution in that it underscores the conviction that the vocation of the
75 church, in all its expressions, is that of being an active agent for peace in our world. This
76 includes, but is not limited to, the life and witness of congregations. In order to do together what,
77 in this case, each congregation also does alone, we are organized into Congregations, Area
78 Churches, a national church, and Mennonite World Conference.

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80 The basis for the gospel of peace is found in scripture (cf: Article 22 *Confession of Faith in a*
81 *Mennonite Perspective*). Other resources enrich our understanding, some of which are our Vision:
82 Healing and Hope, our Statement of Identity and Purpose, as well as the work of many authors.

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84 Tasks can be divided, but the vocation of peace is for all. One constituent summarized it this way:
85 “MC Canada was encouraged to make the voice of peace be heard in Ottawa as well [by] making
86 the local faithful church the primary peace agency for both proclamation and practice” (Edna
87 Peters, *The Grapevine*, Summer, 2008, newsletter of Charleswood MC, Wpg.).

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89 We believe that we, as one part of the ecumenical Body of Christ, need to witness more overtly
90 and effectively to peace as being at the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that
91 Mennonite Church Canada (members, congregations, and others) can do far more than we
92 sometimes think we can.

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94 **Possibilities for Action**

95 The Assembly 2008 resolutions calls for “a proposal for promoting the peace message in the
96 “public square.” What are some options?

- 97 - A full-page advertisement in the Toronto Globe and Mail costs \$70,000;
- 98 - A 30 second commercial on Hockey Night in Canada costs \$30,000 (plus production
99 costs);
- 100 - A bill-board campaign is also very costly; For \$250,000, an organization could launch a
101 two-month billboard campaign covering Canada’s five or six biggest markets;
- 102 - Advertising on bus benches in cities: In the Winnipeg market, a bus bench ad costs about
103 \$275 for 12 months.

- 104 - When the “Support our Troops” decals appeared on public vehicles in Southern Ontario,
 105 Pastor Don Penner wrote a sensitive letter of concern to the editor of the *Kitchener-*
 106 *Waterloo Record*. Thousands read it.
- 107 - When the Dept. of Defence send out recruitment postcards directly to homes, Sargent
 108 MC responded by re-purposing the recruitment message into protest postcards that
 109 members could send to political leaders. These were shared at the Assembly in
 110 Abbotsford (2007) where delegates and congregations were also invited to participate.
- 111 - When the town of Winkler, Manitoba, prepared a welcome home parade for a soldier
 112 who had served in Afghanistan, Pastor John Klassen wondered why a church member
 113 serving five terms in the Middle East with Christian Peacemaker Teams had not received
 114 similar recognition. Klassen wrote a column in the *Winkler Times* that was read by
 115 thousands.
- 116 - In 2007, when a Southwestern Ontario School Board approved a military co-op program
 117 designed to enhance recruitment, a group of Mennonite pastors from five congregations
 118 in the area expressed their opposition at a public meeting. This ignited debate in the
 119 public media. Many heard and read about their action, which later generated a story in
 120 *Canadian Mennonite*.
- 121 - A mother wrote a column in the *Winnipeg Free Press* about how the military had
 122 recruited her 12 year old daughter into Cadets – all expenses paid, and how good that
 123 was. An MC Canada staff member wrote a response letter to the editor challenging the
 124 idea that children should be militarized; it was published as the “Letter of the Day.”
- 125 - The Fraser Valley Peace and Arts Festival began in 1992 as an alternative to the
 126 Abbotsford Air Show. It has since evolved into a multi-day event scheduled around
 127 Remembrance Day and is now sponsored by a collaborative group of partners. Over the
 128 years, tens of thousands have been exposed to this event and its message.
- 129 - Mennonite Church Canada, with the expertise of constituent lawyer Jake Harms, drafted
 130 a Private Members Bill C-460 proposing that legal provision be made for Conscientious
 131 Objection to the payment of income taxes for military purposes. This draft was approved
 132 by Conscience Canada and was introduced into Parliament by MP Bill Siksay of British
 133 Columbia. Individuals can follow up with action via www.consciencecanada.ca where
 134 they can find letter templates, talking points for visits with political leaders, and other
 135 tools for advocacy on this issue.
- 136 - Mennonite Church Canada was asked to provide input into the Canadian Council of
 137 Churches conversation about all Canadian churches becoming peace churches. This
 138 generated much debate and an invitation for a full conference to look at this issue.
- 139 - Mennonite Church Canada representatives have participated in the ongoing meetings
 140 with President Ahmadinijad of Iran and his diplomatic corps. These conversations have
 141 generated significant amounts of attention in the public square.
- 142 - The ongoing theological educators interchange that has included our post-secondary
 143 schools has generated much public attention and press.

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 145 These initiatives are ways in which ordinary people, congregations, pastors, and leaders are
 146 agents of peace in the public square. More ideas are possible when we engage our God-given
 147 imaginations.

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 150 **Appendix I:**

151 **Some more ideas:**

- 152 • A renewed and ongoing emphasis on peace education among ourselves. Create a peace
 153 trainee program in your congregation: ex. six weeks for Peace – a unified time for
 154 congregations to work specifically at creating/developing/strengthening a culture of
 155 peace in their churches/communities timed with Peace Sunday/Remembrance Day;

- 156 Access the many resources available through Mennonite Church Canada’s Resource
 157 Centre and our publisher, Mennonite Publishing Network.
- 158 • Elected leaders say there are few things more effective than personal visits. Make
 159 ongoing and repetitive visits to your local MP and state a position for non-violent peace
 160 building in the world.
 - 161 • Continuously promote Conscience Canada in your church. Using existing Conscience
 162 Canada forms, encourage church members to withhold military taxes and/or declare
 163 yourselves/themselves as Conscientious Objectors to military taxation.
 - 164 • Congregational clusters could partner together to host an annual “Peace Media Blitz.”
 - 165 • Local TV/radio stations often give a platform for community leaders. Encourage access
 166 of those opportunities at any time, and repetitively.
 - 167 • Spread the Peace Church Movement: Engage actively with other Christian traditions to
 168 be the conscience of the church in matters related to peace. Commit to establish a
 169 relationship with another non-Mennonite congregation or other faith group in your
 170 community. Relate to a local mosque or synagogue. Collaborate on peace initiatives.
 171 Have a plan to keep these relationships alive over time.
 - 172 • Challenge youth to produce YouTube videos on what you as a church or individuals
 173 within your congregation are doing for peace. Post the videos and alert MC Canada so
 174 these videos can be “favoriteed” on www.youtube.com/mennonitechurchca. Or create a
 175 short viral video promoting a message of peace and see how far it can ‘infect’ others.
 - 176 • Each Remembrance Day, host an alternative memorial service that also remembers and
 177 honours those who have died by acting for peace in non-violent ways (e.g. Tom Fox, who
 178 was killed in Iraq while working with CPT). At your discretion, invite local media to this
 179 service. Film it for YouTube or other video sharing sites.
 - 180 • Join the Facebook page “Coffee for Peace” created by Witness worker Dann Pantoja, or
 181 join another of several peace pages on Facebook – or create your own page for peace.
 182 Engage other social media with peace movements. See how many ‘fans’ you can collect.
 183 Invite the merger of other peace pages into one giant peace page.
 - 184 • Create events that are attractive to media as a very cost-effective way of getting a
 185 message into the public square. Create an annual Peace Festival in your own community.
 - 186 • Engage Sunday School children in sending peace letters and drawings to the Prime
 187 Minister and your local MP once a year.
 - 188 • Promote www.alternativeservice.ca to local elementary and middle schools and school
 189 divisions to help create awareness among teachers and students that not everyone fought
 190 and that conscientious objection is a legitimate position. This web site has been designed
 191 to complement the history studies curriculum in many schools.
 - 192 • Help raise awareness of the 2010 G8 meeting in Canada and its leaders’ commitment to
 193 the UN’s Millennium Development Goals.
 - 194 • Check out resources at the World Conference of Religions for Peace (www.wcrp.org).

197 **Appendix II:**

198 **What is already being done through Mennonite Church Canada**

- 199 • Working with the Canadian Council of Churches in promoting an understanding of what
 200 it means to be a Peace Church to its member denominations. This is an important
 201 initiative when many denominations subscribe to just war theology, making Christian
 202 unity on peace a difficult issue to overcome. See a paper presented to the CCC at
 203 www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/960. The National Council of Churches in the USA has
 204 asked to use this paper for its 100th anniversary in 2010.
- 205 • The Christian Reformed Church has asked MC Canada to resource a Peace Day in their
 206 denomination.

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- Witness workers in places like the Philippines and Israel/Gaza are engaged in direct peace ministries. International Witness workers in 30 countries model peace to their ministry partners and communities.
 - Sponsoring and/or supporting partners in the peace ministries of CPT, MCC, Project Ploughshares, KAIROS, Conscience Canada, Project Peacemakers, and MCC.
 - MC Canada’s Speakers Bureau is available to any congregation seeking input and guidance on peace issues.
 - MC Canada Resource Centre has one of the most unique collections of books, videos, and other resources on peace building in Canada: www.mennonitechurch.ca/resources.
 - Our post-secondary Mennonite Schools offer numerous peace studies options.
 - A web site (www.alternativeservice.ca) offers resources on Conscientious Objection during World War II that is designed to complement elementary and middle school history curriculums.
 - *Church Matters*, a radio program and free podcast produced by Mennonite Church Canada has released 5 episodes (out of 28) focused on peace.
 - Selected videos from the Mennonite Church Canada YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/mennonitechurchca.
 - Mennonite Media will provide, free of charge, professionally produced Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for churches who wish to urge their local radio broadcasters to air these short promos. Preview these at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/900.

- Prepared by Dan Dyck at the request of MC Canada Executive Staff

