

# my friends Intototemak

Winter 2009 Vol. 38, No. 4



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Witness

“The Holy Child is Born” is picture #5 in the “Kisê-manitow Omiyikow-iswin” or “The Creator’s Gift” series depicting the Christmas story. Ovide Bighetty, an artist originally from the Pukatawagan First Nations in northern Manitoba, was commissioned by the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship of Regina, Saskatchewan, to depict several series of Biblical texts and themes, of which this is one. Used with permission.



# Receiving the Gifts God Offers Us

As I write on this beautiful fall day I am thinking more about enjoying the sunshine pouring into the office window than the fact that in a “normal” year we would have begun shovelling snow by now. Somehow, however, knowing that also makes the sunshine seem even brighter today. It makes this day have a special significance – one to be enjoyed as a special gift.

There were some shepherds out on the hillside near Bethlehem tending their sheep the evening that Baby Jesus was born, the Luke 2 passage in the Bible tells us. They were probably experiencing a night very much like every other night before this one – that is, until something quite extraordinary happened. The sky grew much brighter! A choir of angels appeared in the heavens! The message announcing the birth of the Saviour of the world began! These shepherds received a gift that changed their night completely and, we assume, impacted the rest of their days as well.

Gifts are all around us, waiting for us to claim them! They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are wrapped and some are not. Some we notice and some we, unfortunately, take for granted. Some we even scorn or throw away.

I am reminded of this story: Some time ago, a friend of mine punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight, and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree.

Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, “This is for you, Daddy.” He was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, but his anger flared again when he found that the box was empty.

He yelled at her, “Don’t you know that when you give someone a present, there’s supposed to be something inside of it?” The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, “Oh, Daddy it’s not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy.”

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her forgiveness. My friend told me that he kept that gold box by his bed for years. Whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

This Christmas season is a good time for us to ask ourselves: Do we recognize the gifts we receive each day – from God the Creator and His Son Jesus, from our family members, from our friends or even from strangers? It is so easy to take them for granted and wait for something spectacular to grab our attention!

The month of October was a rollercoaster of emotions for us personally. We discovered on October 9<sup>th</sup> that Neill’s much-loved father, Edward von Gunten, had pancreatic cancer and he died at the age of 85 years in the early morning of October 28<sup>th</sup>. In less than three weeks he was released from his illness and his earthly journey was over.

As much as we all miss him, we also recognize the gift Dad was to our family, his extended family, his church and his community. The viewing at the funeral home and the funeral service at First Mennonite Church of Berne, Indiana were occasions to celebrate Dad’s life, hear stories and be grateful for the positive legacy he left behind. Dad loved people and his smile opened many doors and relationships.



L-R Doris Kozub, Edward von Gunten, Barb Daniels

Dad was a great supporter of our ministry as a couple and of Native Ministries. He enjoyed his visits to communities and churches where we lived and worked around Lake Winnipeg over the years and even braved a winter trip that took him out onto the frozen lake in a bombardier to observe commercial ice fishing. In 1997 he and Mom came to Riverton two different times to help with the construction of the Riverton Fellowship Circle building and then returned for the dedication of the building at the end of October. Some of Dad’s woodworking projects are still part of the church furnishings.

May 2010 be a year of strengthening our faith, nurturing our relationships and partnerships, building more bridges and extending the table to the friends that we have not yet met! We are God’s gifts to each other and it is our loss not to recognize that in each other.

That is all we have for now. Migwetch.

*Neill and Edith*

—Neill and Edith von Gunten,  
Co-Directors, Native Ministry

# Intotemak

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Intotemak translates as *my friends* or *my clan* and are people who walk together as friends. Intotemak is a quarterly newsletter featuring news items of interest to friends of Native Ministry, published by Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

*Purpose statement of Mennonite Church Canada Witness...* is to lead, mobilize and resource the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world, thus aligning the being and the doing of the church with God's work.

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## VISION HEALING & HOPE

God calls us to be  
followers of  
Jesus Christ and,  
by the power of  
the Holy Spirit, to grow  
as communities  
of grace, joy and peace,  
so that God's healing and  
hope flow through us  
to the world.



# A Letter to the Churches

*Alumni staff members of Mennonite Pioneer Mission and Native Ministries gathered in Pinawa, Manitoba on the May 1 - 3, 2009 weekend to reflect upon their years of living and working in a variety of Metis and First Nations communities. (See the Summer 2009 issue of INTOTEMAK, pages 4 and 5, for a report of the weekend.) The result of the Sunday morning session was the compilation of a letter to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal churches, written in the encouraging and teaching spirit of the Apostle Paul as he communicated with the churches he had contact with and felt a responsibility to. May this letter in 2009 both encourage and teach us as well as we strive to continue building each other up as spiritual brothers and sisters in the name of Jesus Christ.*

## Letters to the churches

Wisdom gleaned and passed on from the Native Ministry alumni of Mennonite Church Canada

Brothers and sisters,...We, a group of alumni of Native Ministries who have served in various Native communities on Turtle Island, what we call Canada, greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our redeemer and saviour.

First for our Aboriginal churches and communities...We apologize that we have not always lived the faith in ways we should have. We should have been more open with our faith in Jesus Christ and we have been too silent about our faith journey as Mennonite people not sharing our history, particularly our peace position with you. We have often been unaware of your cultures and ceremonies and have acted in inappropriate and hurtful ways. We want to walk along side you as brothers and sisters to seek the will and face of God together with you.

Thank you for the patience and acceptance you showed and continue to show us as Christian sisters and brothers. We affirm that God was with you before we arrived. We learned from your spiritual insights and experiences and want to continue to share our spiritual gifts with one another.

Brothers and sisters,

Go ahead as the spirit leads you. We trust you to indigenize the gospel.

Letter to our non-Native churches of Mennonite Church Canada...Brothers and sisters, Through our time of serving the Native communities, we have been gifted with many things. We want to share with you the gifts we have received, even as we sought to share the Christian faith with our Aboriginal sisters and brothers over the past decades.

We are created equal. Therefore we need to trust our native brothers and sisters.

We encourage you as constituency churches to develop face to face relations with Aboriginal people who are our neighbours. Take the risk, of a trip to a northern community or downtown Winnipeg. Sit on a doorstep and engage in conversation with Aboriginal people. Because we are so independent and comfortable this won't be an easy task but your life can be enriched by interacting with Native people. They have much to teach and the experience can be as life changing for you as it was for each one of us. Come in the spirit of listening and learning.

And to all our Brothers and Sisters, Native and non-Native...Stand firm in your commitment to your maker, saviour, the spirit, and to each other as brothers and sisters of the faith. We need to be true to who we are as Anabaptists, native or non-native, Mennonite or whoever, taking into account and being true to the peace tradition. We need to keep restating our core values, so we know who we are and understand each other. We can respect each other and always acknowledge everyone present. We remember our youth and encourage them to express themselves so they will enter in and read and respond to the expression of the other in our faith communities.

May peace and courage be with us all as we witness to God's desire for the reconciliation of all things in Christ Jesus.

Written at the alumni gathering, Pinawa, MB, May 3, 2009



*Isadore Charters, Sto:lo Nation Elder is receiving a gift of thanks from the Christian Witness Council chair, Willard Metzger.*



*(L to R) Isadore Charters, Darryl Klassen, Norm Dyck, Hugo Neufeld, JD Penner, Janet Plenert, Sharon Dirks, Willard Metzger, and Irene Crosland.*

## Listening and Learning Promote Reconciliation

Sometimes the varied and vast work of the church involves more listening and learning than doing. During fall leadership meetings in Abbotsford October 29 - 31, 2009, Mennonite Church Canada's Christian Witness Council took time out on three different occasions to listen to and learn about First Nations people in Canada through a Native Ministry Tour.

The tour was led by Darryl Klassen of Mennonite Central Committee and included Isadore Charters (Elder Sto:lo Nation), Lynn Ned (Spirit Bear Centre), and Larry Plenert (Indian Residential School Adjudicator), each of whom shared various aspects of their life and culture. The continuing impact of Canadian Residential Schools was introduced at the beginning of the tour with a video, "Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools" and became a recurring theme for the duration.

Isadore Charters, artist, educator, Christian, and Elder, shared stories of how the Sto:lo nation lived and worked prior to the colonization of Canada. The council toured the Sto:lo Nation Interpretive Centre, Botanical Garden, Long House, and saw an art display. By examining traditional items such as canoes, hand woven baskets and cloths, tools used for fishing and masks, tour participants gained insight into the lives of those who created each item.

Charters interspersed reflections on Sto:lo history with stories from his own life, faith, and experience. Growing up as a Residential School survivor in a family of Residential School survivors affected him deeply. He

shared his struggles with alcohol abuse and the challenge he faced in adequately parenting his daughter.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings helped Charters turn his life around and begin healing from the pain of his experiences. Since then, he has made it his mission to educate others and to continue the healing process by breaking down stereotypes that perpetuate misunderstandings and hurt. He uses his art as a tool in this process, with the goal of having a Residential School Art show.

Lynn Ned introduced the council members to the Spirit Bear Centre, a home for Aboriginal girls recovering from substance abuse, life on the streets, and/or abusive situations. The 12 month long program helps girls break addictions, improve their education and health, connect with their heritage, and develop healthy life skills.

After a traditional meal of Salmon and Bannock prepared by the girls and leaders of the Spirit Bear Centre, Witness Council members attended a drumming and singing performance and listened to stories from Ned and some of the girls.

Rudy Dirks, Christian Witness Council member, responded to the evening by saying: "I was encouraged by Lynn's courage and compassion in setting up a home for these young girls who have already experienced such tragedy in their lives. They clearly were responding to the healing power of a caring community."

Residential School survivors did not experience a nurturing family environment and continue to have difficulty in nurturing their

own children. Often, they turn to substance abuse to drown out painful memories, which often perpetuates a painful cycle.

In lieu of adequate local support structures, Lynn Ned is working to set up a support network for girls who complete the Spirit Bear Centre program and return to community life.

Larry Plenert is an adjudicator of claims of serious sexual or physical abuse by former students at Indian Residential Schools. He provided a historical background for the government and church partnerships in establishing and running the schools and described the unique hearing process for the claimants. The process is structured to determine appropriate compensation for the abuse and the impacts of the abuse upon the lives of the survivors, but equally importantly, to facilitate reconciliation and healing.

"I had never known the full story of the residential schools for native people's in Canada until I heard Larry Plenert's presentation," reflected Dirks. "As a people which has known suffering in its past, I hope that we as Mennonites can extend the mercy and grace of Christ to others who have been wrongfully treated in our communities. May God open our eyes and hearts."

Mennonite Church Canada Witness Council will further their listening and learning in March 2011 during the Spring Leadership Assembly in Manitoba.

—Jennifer Rempel, Mennonite Church Canada Witness

# Overcoming Hate

*Nanib Waiya Indian Mennonite Church in Mississippi was bombed three times in the mid-1960s. Forty-five years later, worshipers celebrate how it rose above violence and prejudice.*

NESHOBA COUNTY, Mississippi — Amid racial hatred and violence in the 1960s, white and Choctaw people worshiped together at Nanib Waiya Indian Mennonite Church. They saw their buildings bombed three times.

Marking 45 years since the first of the bombings, more than 120 people worshiped September 20, 2009 at the church, near Philadelphia in east central Mississippi.

“Today we still pray for the people who bombed our church,” said Dave Weaver Jr., who now lives in Gulfport. “We pray that in these past 45 years they have had a change of heart and see the light.”

Singing “This Is the Day That the Lord Hath Made” and “How Great Thou Art” in English and Choctaw, the congregation remembered the three events, the second two in 1966. No one was injured by the incidents, for which no one was ever charged.

Harvey Yoder, a current pastor, invited the people to a time of sharing during the service of remembrance. People who were present at the times of the bombings spoke of how they felt. Over and over again worshipers praised God for bringing the Mennonites to Nanib Waiya.

“As some remembered and shared their feelings, they were moved to tears,” Weaver wrote about the September 20 service. “Remembering those violent days brought strong emotions to the surface, which had been kept buried for many years.”

Doug Herring of Louisville, who lived near the church in the 1960s, helped repair the church after one of the bombings and advocated for the church in the wider community, spoke about how God’s love can bring reconciliation.

It is only when we genuinely love our enemies that we can truly forgive, he said.

## Ministry with Choctaws

In the early 1960s Nevin and Esther Bender were in ministry among the Choctaw people in Neshoba County. The Benders’ two daughters, Milli and Emma, with Emma’s husband, Glenn Myers, were assisting them.

At first the fledgling congregation met in homes. In 1963 volunteers helped the congregation build the Nanib Waiya Men-

nonite Church building about a mile from the historic Indian mound by the same name. Nanib Waiya means “leaning hill” in Choctaw.

Then came midnight September 19, 1964, when dynamite exploded the small cement church building.

Glenn Myers remembered coming home from a football game, getting a call about the bombing and going to see it. The church was destroyed. Part of the roof remained, held up by studs.

The next day people from the community and others arrived to view the destruction. They made plans to clean up the mess, to salvage what they could and to rebuild.

The church community felt no hatred or bitterness, according to those who were in the congregation at the time. The incident would not stop their determination to be a church body.

Church members, local volunteers and Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers worked together to clean up and rebuild the church.

Only 23 days after the bombing, the congregation met for the first time in the partially finished building. Fifty-nine people were there to celebrate the belief that love and hope are stronger than violence.

## Further violence

The group continued to meet and grow. They needed more room, so volunteers helped them add to the building. A dedication was held in November 1965.

“It was quite a shock when on February 19, 1966, the building was dynamited again,” Emma Myers wrote in the church’s history, read September 20. “This happened soon after the youth group had a Valentine’s Day banquet in the building. Again the group rallied together to clean up and rebuild. This time it wasn’t completely destroyed, so the annex was saved, and with the help of volunteers the building was rebuilt.”

Ten months later, youth from several Mennonite mission churches were caroling the night of December 23, 1966.

“We were together in a church bus visiting the various homes of church mem-



*Dorothy Thompson was one of the first Choctaw natives who attended Nanib Waiya Indian Mennonite Church as a child. Today she is part of the congregation.*



*Margie Vaughn speaks during the open sharing session at Nanib Waiya Indian Mennonite Church.*

**Overcome** continued on page 11

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# In the Spirit of the Indigenous Heart

*Here are four more significant reflections on the indigenous tour to the indigenous churches of the Chaco of Paraguay and Argentina following the assembly of the Congreso Mundial Menonita (Mennonite World Conference) in Asuncion, Paraguay in July 2009. These follow the ten pages already included in the Fall 2009 issue of INTOTEMAK.*

We had long awaited this day when we could meet face to face with other indigenous from North to South America. It was impressive to be among brothers and sisters, although we had different languages and customs. However, we did find that we all had the same battles and the same faith. It seems there are areas where some have more difficulty with the Christian life.

We of the Paraguayan Chaco had expected to meet fellow aboriginals from other countries, with skin like ours. For example, one came from North America whose skin was very different from ours. The Nivacle here didn't think his face looked at all like an indigenous. But when he talked and sang in his language, it showed us that he really was indigenous.

Before we hadn't really thought that there were indigenous in other countries. But this encounter will never be erased from our memory. Our people said these were happy moments, talking together, eating together, and seeing brothers and sisters that come from different countries. The most important thing is to know that there are other indigenous that have the same faith in God as we do.

We greet you with the peace of our Lord.  
—Victor Perez (Nivacle tribe), Campo Alegre, Chaco, Paraguay

Our trip to South America, to Paraguay and Argentina, this summer to attend the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Asuncion, and to visit some of our Native brothers and sisters in the indigenous villages after the conference, is not something we will soon forget. It tugged at the very spiritual strings of each of our indigenous hearts, young and old alike. But at the same time, it braided those strings as if we were always one nation in the eyes of our Creator God. We felt very welcomed in all of the villages we visited. It was exciting to say the least.

As it turned out, the North American contingent was comprised of ten from Canada and eighteen from the USA. We also met up with, and traveled with, indigenous folks from Central America, namely, from Guate-

mala, Panama, and Peru.

It was interesting that we learned as much or more about ourselves as we did about those whom we traveled and visited with. We found the Indigenous people of South and Central America to be very spiritual in nature. It seems they are strong spiritually because, for the most part, those who live in the villages live on or near the land (very close to nature). It is similar to the way our ancestors lived here in North America long ago. In fact, our elders still tell us that if we are going to regain our spirituality that we must return to the land.

Conversely speaking, those that made the move to the cities, some by personal choice, others in search of a better lifestyle but did not always find it, seemingly broke their spiritual cycle and ended up poverty stricken.

We noticed too, how close the families are. The children, the parents (including the grandparents) appear to have very strong family bonds. As Dennis Sinclair from the Hollow Water First Nation of Manitoba observed, "the children are very close to the parents and the adults of the communities, and are very respectful toward them". His added comment was, "We here in North America have lost our family unity (in some cases even our children) and the respect of our children. We must work hard to regain it".

The MWC Assembly was so huge, at approximately 6000 people, it was in some ways overwhelming. We were amazed at the singing and sharing of spiritual expression that took place throughout the conference by people from around the world.

We did notice, however, the effects that colonization has had on the indigenous folks of Central and South America. Some of the more apparent effects would be the loss of lifestyle, land, and language. It was "ear catching" when one non-indigenous person in the conference asked if it would be possible for the Natives to go back to "hunting and gathering" lifestyles. One of the indigenous men stood up and replied (in his language), "I don't think so, because there are too many 'no trespassing' signs

posted everywhere". What a sound practical answer to a very complex question rooted in colonialistic thinking.

I also liked Sara's (our 15 year old granddaughter) response when asked, "How did the trip impact your thinking?" Her comment being, "when I see what these young people don't have (in way of material goods), I know that I am spoiled. I have a way too much and don't always appreciate it." As with all of us, including us adults, we could not agree more with that statement. As we traveled back home, I heard comments like, "when I get home, I am going to start giving away some of the material goods I have and never use".

My concluding remarks (and I think I speak for all of us Native Canadians who went on this trip) would be this: We are thankful for what we have and are also very thankful for those that helped make this trip possible, especially those responsible for the Stella Devenpeck fund and others who contributed to our trip. God has been good to us and so have you. But, too, we must never forget what colonialistic thinking has done to our Indigenous nations around the world.

—Norman Meade, Winnipeg, MB

Something that impressed me was the way of life of the brothers and sisters. I saw their area as a desert where a strong wind lifts up sand; I couldn't open my eyes well, yet I saw how in the midst of this, they struggle to live. How significant it is not to have water! Water for us is life. Their faith is strong through it all; the Lord works with people with needs. Comparing their lives with ours is like thinking that we live in a place of luxury. Our land produces; we have water; the children enjoy the rivers a lot. I didn't see any rivers there. As indigenous people and Christians, we need to continue protecting nature.

The brothers and sisters work hard, but they can't grow some plants because of the lack of water. They produce what their land will give. Our land gives a lot. I want to continue talking about these themes in the churches. We need to preserve water and nature.



*Ronetta Horse of Montana and Adeas Old Crow of Oklahoma learn the art of drawing water from a cistern in Yalve Sanga, Paraguay.*



*Some of the Efeso congregation in the Chaco of Paraguay.*

I was impressed by their physical characteristics. When I showed my video of the trip in Panama, many of the brothers and sisters became emotional saying, “this person looks like such a person in my community.” It doesn’t matter where we are from, as indigenous people we have a lot that unites us. After a week among Latinos, arriving in the Paraguayan Chaco, I felt I had arrived home because of their hospitality, language, etc.

In the baptism, I observed the whole process. It was very different. We go to a river and afterwards to our homes. I saw it different there. After the baptism, they continue with something important yet. They accompany the baptized one as they give a blanket. That is good. I was reflecting on what it meant to return to the church after the baptism and sit among the congregation. It moved me and made me think about Matthew 28:20, to continue teaching after baptism.

This trip for me leads to a lot of reflection in the process of developing ministry. As a Wounaan indigenous woman, it has inspired me in the first place to serve others with the blessings that the Lord gives us. It challenges us to continue working with a lot of responsibility in developing our ministry, and gives us insight regarding ecology and how the Lord has entrusted us to administer creation.

The word of God, the Bible, goes beyond cultures. We have to be wise to preserve cultures, traditions and customs that edify our faith and our lives, and to understand the message of the word through them. Our call is to be an indigenous church in the light of the word because we are created in God’s image as Wounaan people.

Our non-indigenous brothers and sisters need to know and understand our customs,

traditions and beliefs about God the creator because we are a very different culture with a worldview different from that of the western world. There will always be differences between indigenous and non-indigenous people, no matter how Christian we all are.

Many times I see in non-indigenous Christians that when they come to share the word of God, they want the indigenous people to adapt to their ways, their culture. I want to share a clear example from my family. My husband’s mother is not Mennonite. The church she is a part of required that she dress as a Latina with long skirts and long-sleeved blouses. Her husband wasn’t a Christian, and so they were told they had to sleep separately until they decided to get married by a judge, which he did because he loved his wife. In our culture it is not by a judge’s order that a man and woman become a true husband and wife. For us when we get together as a man and a woman it is until death that we separate.

We have Christ as a model. He divested himself of his divine prerogatives to be incarnated among people, eating, living and walking together with them, learning and teaching. This teaches us that we need to adapt to the communities where we arrive to share or visit, in order that there can be a good understanding of the word of God.

Here there is an important role for the communication media in order to spread information in this respect. Mennonite World Conference, the mission agencies and other organizations of service in Christian fellowship help open spaces for indigenous brothers and sisters to express ourselves as a people and as followers of Christ. In this way we can extend ourselves further in our

relationships as people of God.

I give thanks to God for the opportunity that was given me to get to know and to learn from brothers and sisters in the visit and during the MWC assembly. I give thanks also to the brothers and sisters who helped achieve this purpose. May the Lord bless them.

*Alina Itucama, Panama,  
(English translation by Linda Shelly,  
Mennonite Mission Network)*

Indigenous gathering shares problems common to all. “Historically, American Indians have been the most lied-about subset of our population,” according to historian James W. Loewen. The late American Indian author, Michael Dorris, explains that in learning about American Indians, “One does not start from point zero, but from minus ten.”

As an American Indian, whether living in Indian Country (a geographic area in which a large Indian population lives) or in America, issues of the politics of spirituality and the injustices perpetrated and perpetuated in the name of a foreign belief system are issues I have dealt with on a daily basis. I have been exploring the political and spiritual relationships between non-violence and justice for most of my life. The question of whether non-violent social action can create the changes required to effect justice for Indians is, for me, a separate question. Yet, there is no question that Indians are the poorest of the poor among populations of United States, Canadian, Paraguayan, and Argentinean citizens, including those in living in US territories such as the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Helen Hunt Jackson pointed out in 1881, the US government’s “repeated violations of



*Alina Itucama of Panama (middle) visiting with two Paraguayan elders in the church.*



*Two Paraguayan women (on left) meet a sister from Panama.*

faith with the Indians thus convicts us, as a nation, not only of having outraged the principles of justice, which are the basis of international law [...] but of having made ourselves liable [...]”. The practices of deception, deadly disease, massacres, removal from land, loss of dignity, and loss of land are still true in the Chaco of Paraguay and Argentina, and to some extent in North America, too, from my perspective as a participant in the North American indigenous delegation.

Following the Mennonite World Conference Assembly, I was part of the North American indigenous delegation visiting indigenous communities and churches in both Paraguay and Argentina. We also visited one Mennonite colony in Paraguay. This was an interesting learning experience. I was the only journalist who was invited to attend the Women’s Theologians gathering for two days before the Mennonite World Conference Assembly as well as the North American Indigenous Delegation for ten days following the MWC assembly. While the diversity, music, and sheer size of the MWC were impressive, it was the Women’s Theologians gathering and the indigenous communities in the Chaco of Paraguay and Argentina that were truly life-changing events.

The indigenous gathering after the MWC Assembly was a learning experience I will never forget. We stayed most of the time in the Paraguayan Chaco in Yalve Sanga, a sort of reservation set aside by the Paraguayan Mennonites for the indigenous people. The facility where we stayed was a residential girl’s school with Spartan facilities. There was no running water. We drew our water from a shallow well, filled buckets and carried them to a bath house, and filled a container in a shower stall

to take our cold showers.

Likewise, we drew and hauled cold water to wash our hands and to wash clothes. We used outhouses and we had no heat in the facility. There was a cook who prepared two meals a day for us without running water for preparing or cleaning up after the meals for 30 people. The meals were delicious and the cook’s dedication was remarkable.

Our delegation received the gracious hospitality indigenous people are known for at each location we visited. It was moving to see such abject poverty in the midst of the Mennonite affluence and to see the respect and complete lack of resentment on the part of the indigenous people toward the Mennonites. The indigenous people of the Argentinean Chaco were somewhat better off in terms of their living standards than those in Paraguay, but this was partly due to Argentina being a more progressive and economically developed nation than Paraguay. The indigenous people of the Chaco in Argentina lived at an extreme level of poverty compared to others in the country, although they were not as poor as those in Paraguay.

It was evident that there was a difference in how the indigenous people lived compared to the Mennonite staff that ran the girls’ school and the men’s agriculture school. We saw the living quarters where students at the agriculture school lived: an approximately 8 foot x 8 foot building for four men; at the girls’ school a 12 foot x 12 foot room housed eight teen-aged girls. One 96-year-old Paraguayan indigenous man said there were “two worlds”: “The rich is in the ‘other world,’” he said. “We saw them at the [Mennonite World] Conference.”

At the girls’ school, women are trained to

be domestics, and at the agriculture school the men are trained to be farm hands. This is like the training the residential schools in the US and Canada gave to their indigenous men and women in the early 1900s. It appeared that the Paraguayan Mennonites’ “help” had helped the Mennonites more than the indigenous people by creating a cheap labor force for domestic and farm work.

While it was an honor to represent Mennonite Women USA at the Women’s Theological Congress, the Mennonite World Conference Assembly, and the indigenous gatherings, and I will always be grateful for having had this opportunity and am thankful to those whose contributions made my experience and the experiences of so many others possible, it was difficult to see the extremely poor living conditions and the extremely poor land of the indigenous people in the Chaco. But, as one of the members of the North American indigenous delegation who visited some indigenous groups in the Paraguayan and Argentinean Chaco, I saw how little most people, even other indigenous people, know about one another’s history.

Yet in the end, the North American indigenous people agreed in their conclusion, like Helen Hunt Jackson over 100 years ago, that the story of one indigenous group, no matter where they are located, is the story of all indigenous groups — just in different time frames. One North American indigenous woman concluded, “They are going through what our people went through in the early 1900’s.” Forgiveness is a powerful force, however, and we will all return to our Mennonite churches enriched for what we have learned.

*Patricia Burdette, Elkhart, IN*



# Deconstructing the Myths

What most Canadians understand about Indigenous Peoples within Canada is steeped in myths and stereotypes. Pictures pop into our heads and scripts form that tell us what we expect and affect how we respond to people of Metis, Innu, Inuit, and First Nation descent. Even though there might be a grain of truth to them, the danger of myths and stereotypes is that they are often the ONLY story that we hear about Indigenous Peoples.

A danger in knowing only a little about a subject is that your actions toward the issue are extremely limited, thus the action has the potential to be short sighted, limiting or even offensive.

Take the Prime Minister's Residential School apology and compensations as a case in point. By limiting the residential school experience to only a past, historical era, we will fail to see that the effects of the era surround us today. Indigenous Peoples in Canada still live with the dreadful effects of communities torn apart by the forced assimilation process. The cycle of substance abuse and its effects on Indigenous individuals, families and communities, in many cases can be linked directly to the trauma of living in residential schools. Justice Murray Sinclair, chairperson of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when asked what he would say to those that advise people to, "Just get over it. Residential schools were in the past, why don't you move on?" stated, "it is not over. We are still in the era of residential schools, because of their lingering effects."

It is a myth that financial compensation for, and the apology for, residential schools by Prime Minister Harper has brought an end to this chapter in Canadian history. This is one of many myths that need to be dispelled.

There are many others that face First Nation, Innu, Inuit and Metis Peoples, including the myth that Indig-

enous Peoples get a free education. Education is a treaty right. One part of the federal government's responsibility, according to the treaties, was to provide education for the signers and their descendants. In turn, Canadians received the benefit of the use of vast tracts of land for themselves and their descendants.

At present, the federal government is funding First Nations schools, on average, about a quarter less than the provinces fund schools for Canadians who live off reserve. This means fewer services for children – especially in the areas of technology, libraries and sports. Post secondary education government funding is extremely limited, meaning that not all get funding. Many people wait for years for funding to attend college and university, or pay for it themselves.

Mennonite Central Committee Canada's Indigenous Work attempts to de-construct myths, stereotypes and untruths surrounding Indigenous Peoples. A new website, [www.mythperceptions.ca](http://www.mythperceptions.ca), is set to launch in late November 2009 to do just that. At this website one can find out about untold truths, why stereotyping is hurtful, and hear Indigenous Peoples, in their own voice, speak to the realities that they face. Check it out!

—Harley and Sue Eagle, Co-Coordinator of Indigenous Work for Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Winnipeg, MB

Visit [www.mythperceptions.ca](http://www.mythperceptions.ca) to learn more.



## Events Calendar

### March 4 – 6, 2010

Spring Leadership Assembly, Mennonite Church Canada.

### April 9 and 10, 2010

Manitoba Partnership Circle spring meeting.

### June 10 - 12, 2010

The 7th NAIITS (North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies) Symposium is being held at George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon. Theme: "In the Beginning: Our Chapter(s) in the Story."

### June 30 – July 3, 2010

Mennonite Church Canada Annual Delegate Assembly, Ambrose University College, Calgary, Alberta. Theme: "Reclaiming Jesus™ Gladly Bear the Name." The Minister's Conference will be held on June 29th. (Note the earlier than usual date to avoid conflict with the Calgary Stampede.)

### July 19 - 22, 2010

Native Assembly 2010 is being held in Ashland, Montana. The Northern Cheyenne Mennonite Churches are hosting the week's gathering at the St. Labre Indian School. Theme: "I am the Potter; You are the Clay", taken from Isaiah 45:9 and Jeremiah 18:6.



Several people have asked if we will take a bus from Winnipeg to Montana for Native Assembly. We will arrange for a bus if enough people are interested in travelling that way.

Do you want a ride from Winnipeg to Native Assembly 2010 in Montana? If so, please notify the Native Ministry office as soon as possible to reserve a seat -- e-mail to [nativeministry@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:nativeministry@mennonitechurch.ca), or telephone us at 204-888-6781 or toll-free at 1-866-888-6785.

For more events visit [mennonitechurch.ca/events](http://mennonitechurch.ca/events). Native Ministry related events can be submitted for the calendar. Submit events in writing to the mailing address on page 2, or email to [imiller@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:imiller@mennonitechurch.ca).



## Community News and Notes



Presenting an honour blanket to Alvin Lepp during the Bridging the Gap weekend; L-R: Alvin Lepp, John Munro, Todd Munro and Phil Wahl.

Greetings in the precious name of Jesus. At this year's Bridging the Gap meetings at Siksika God's blessings were flowing to all of us through the various speakers, musicians, special gospel songs, testimonies and sharing around meals, etc. One surprise was a call for me to come forward to receive a beautiful blanket. It was a very great honour for Helen and I to be honoured in this way for nearly thirty years of walking alongside our greatly loved Blackfoot neighbours.

Alvin Lepp, Rosemary, AB

**Menno Wiebe** of Winnipeg, Manitoba was presented a Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa) by the University of Manitoba on Sunday, November 1, 2009. The afternoon Convocation Ceremony and reception that followed were held at the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist, St. John's College, on the university campus.

Menno has had a long involvement in Native Ministry work with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

Congratulations, Menno, on receiving this honour!

**Henry Neufeld's** family planned an 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party in his honour on Saturday, November 7, 2009 in the dining area of the

Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. There was much reminiscing about the path that led a young Henry and his family to Canada from Russia, and later led Henry from the Leamington, Ontario area to Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg and on to northern Manitoba as a teacher and pastor for many years.

Congratulations, Henry, on reaching this milestone!

### Obituaries

**Raymond James Young** of Pauingassi, Manitoba passed away on October 26, 2009 in his home at the age of 51 years. He was originally from Bloodvein River but had lived in Pauingassi a good number of years. Raymond leaves to mourn his wife Vanessa, six children, five siblings and many friends and relatives. One wake service was held in Winnipeg and the rest were in Pauingassi. Interment took place at Pauingassi on November 2, Allan Owen officiating.



On Tuesday (November 3) I attended the funeral of my good friend **Ernie Jacobson**. Some of you may remember him as one of our guides and hosts during our annual Mennonite Central Committee summer camping trips to

Vancouver Island. Others may recognize Ernie as the guitar player on "The Jacobsons: 'A Kwagu'l Family" DVD. Ernie struggled with addictions all of his life, but was winning battles at the end. He was praying with his sister on the phone when he tripped and fell down a flight of stairs. He never regained consciousness.

I first met Ernie through his dad Larry who lived with us in our home for a number of years. Sometimes Larry and I would travel together ... the 'Lone Ranger and Tonto' he called us! One thing about people who struggle with life and addictions I've learned. They often have a wonderful sense of humour, and yet when either Larry or Ernie picked up the guitar and sang "Amazing Grace", they sang it with more sincerity, conviction and emotion than I've ever heard in church. The nice thing about sinners is that they know they need grace.

Ernie was a popular musician, soccer player, fisherman and artist. Many spoke of how he encouraged them even when he was down. There were over 400 people in attendance at his funeral.

We had a favourite book, Ernie and I. The "Ragamuffin Gospel", by Brennan Manning. Jesus hung out with the ragamuffins of his day, the lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and probably the odd alcoholic. When Jesus went to church (the synagogue), he usually ended up in an argument with the preachers!

Ernie's life and passing was a testimony to the grace of a God who loves us just as we are and who can use anyone who is willing to be used. Ernie will be missed by his family, his friends, and his community.

Darryl Klassen, Langley, BC

**George Howard Keeper** of Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba passed away at the age of 84 years on November 15, 2009. He passed away at the Fisher River Personal Care Home, Fisher River First Nation, where he moved when he was no longer able to take care of himself. George was predeceased by his wife but leaves four children, his grandchildren, two sisters, and many relatives and friends to grieve his passing. A wake service was held in Winnipeg before the funeral service in Little Grand Rapids. Interment took place at Little Grand Rapids with Allan Owen officiating.



The 8th Annual  
Health Sciences Centre  
“Angels of Light” Gospel  
Jamboree  
will be held from  
3 p.m. - 12:00 nightly  
December 19 and 20, 2009  
at 700 Mc Dermot Avenue,  
Winnipeg, MB

Guest singers -- Ken & Milly  
Jackson, Roy Fiddler, David  
Mamakwa & Band,  
the Touchwood Hills Gospel  
group,  
Guest Speaker -- Cliff Bird of  
Northern Canada Evangelical  
Mission (NCEM)

The Jamboree will be aired on  
live radio -- NCI and Wawatay  
For further information, contact  
Rita Flett at 204-787-5196  
Everybody welcome!

## Overcome...

bers and singing Christmas carols,” wrote Weaver, who was 17 at the time and living in Mashulaville. “We planned to go back to the church for a party. There were food and drinks waiting for us there. When we returned to the church, we found a pile of rubble with the dust still settling.”

He saw fear in the eyes of his friends. Some were crying.

“As I recall, I was the only Anglo kid there,” Weaver wrote in September. “There was a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach.”

That time most of the annex was saved, but the main part of the church needed to be rebuilt.

“What words of comfort could the pastor give to the young people?” said Glenn Myers,

**Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tab: Let us walk together** is a new resource developed by the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) of the Canadian Council of Churches, 2009. To order this resource, contact Peter Noteboom at the following e-mail address: noteboom@ccc.cce.ca. This new resource is designed to help Canadians engage with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools and better understand the legacies of colonization that Aboriginal peoples live with today. Beside the essays, testimonies and reflections by an all-indigenous roster of authors, there is a DVD interview with Anglican Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald to help bring this resource to life.

**“North, Meet South”,** a DVD produced by Mennonite Church Canada, 2009. This picture DVD strives to capture the meeting together of North, South and Central American indigenous people in July 2009 after the Mennonite World Conference Assembly Gathered in Asuncion, Paraguay. The pictures and statements presented are from the time spent together in the Chaco of Paraguay and Argentina. This DVD can be found on Mennonite Church Canada’s website YouTube Channel [www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca) or <http://www.youtube.com/mennonitechurch.ca>.

**Maskipiton: Chef de la Paix des Cris and Les Enseignements de l’Arbre Sacré.** These two books from the REACHING UP TO GOD OUR CREATOR resource box have been translated into French and are available for loan or purchase from the Resource Centre of Mennonite Church Canada.

**Maskipiton: Cacique de la paz del pueblo Cree and Las Enseñanzas del Árbol Sagrado.** These two books from the REACHING UP TO GOD OUR CREATOR resource box have been translated into Spanish and are available for loan or purchase from the Resource Centre of Mennonite Church Canada.

Check out the Native Ministry webpage at <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/899>. Read back issues of Intotemak, find materials available for loan from the Resource Centre and preveiw Reaching up to God Our Creator.

All of these resources can be borrowed from the Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre – phone 204-888-6781 or toll-free 1-866-888-6785. Check out the Resource Centre website at <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre> for more resources that are available for loan.

former pastor, from Philadelphia.

The young people at the time said that bombers had destroyed the building, but not the church.

The first bombing was known to be racially motivated in the context of that time, Weaver said in a phone interview October 15.

“There was a very strict separation of the races,” Weaver said. “The fact that there were white people in that community working with Native American people crossed the lines.” Civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner had been murdered by the Ku Klux Klan June 21, 1964, in Neshoba County. They had gone to the area to investigate a church burning.

Many people in the community and

church heard that the first bombing was committed by the Klan, Emma Myers said in an interview.

The FBI told the church that the second and third bombings were done by one person who disliked the the church’s work among the Choctaw, she said.

“A number of Choctaw people who came out to the meeting said they weren’t angry,” Myers said. “That was an important part of the meeting.”

*By Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Weekly Review staff  
Taken from the October 26, 2009 issue of Mennonite Weekly Review. Used with permission.*

### The Birth of Jesus Foretold

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**Genesis 3:15** I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies.

ᑭᑦᑦᑦ 3:15 ᑭᑦ ᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑎᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ. ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ.

**Isaiah 7:14** Well then, the Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him Immanuel.

ᑯᑯᑯᑦ 7:14 ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ: ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ. ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ.

**Jeremiah 23:5** The Lord says, The time is coming when I will choose as king a righteous descendant of David. That king will rule wisely and do what is right and just throughout the land.

ᑯᑯᑯᑦ 23:5 ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ. ᑯ ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ.

**Zechariah 9:9a** Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you!

ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ 9:9 ᑯᑯᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ. ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ!

**Luke 2:11** This very day in David’s town your Savior was born – Christ the Lord!

ᑯᑯᑯᑦ 2:11 ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯ ᑯᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ, ᑯ ᑯᑯᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ ᑯᑯᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦᑯᑦ.

