

2019 Year in Review

What then did you go out to see? Matthew 11:8

John the Baptist is so in tune with the Holy Spirit that he leaps in his mother's womb when pregnant Mary enters the house. Before Jesus begins his ministry and long before the cross or its meaning was in view, John proclaims, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." But in Matthew 11:2-11 he sits in prison, feeling as though the walls are closing in on him, and he wonders if Jesus really is "the One."

These days it feels like the walls of the Western Church are closing in on themselves. Sometimes we are captives to despair. Seeing our denomination go through restructuring and downsizing can lead us to doubt the One whom we follow. Yet Jesus is at work in the margins,

presence in my work over the past six months:

- I sensed God's healing hand in each one of the nine congregations I preached in this past fall (Springstein, Vineland United Mennonite, Langham, Carman, Altona, Springridge, Lethbridge and Orodara and Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso). In each church I experienced a genuine invitation to faith in Jesus Christ and the offer of joining the community as it lives into what God is calling it to be. Making these visits is one of the most meaningful parts of my work. I do them with the Joint Council's encouragement and blessing. In several cases I was asked to share during the adult education hour and have received valuable feedback through these interactions. I sincerely look forward to the churches I will be visiting in the New



on the edges, among the unclean (lepers), the sinners ("is this man blind because of his parent's sin?") and in the low places like the Samaritan well in the heat of the day. The poor are coming awake to the mystery, the dead are coming back to life.

In this passage, Jesus asks the crowd an interesting question: "What did you go out to the wilderness to see... someone dressed in soft robes? Those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces." In the churches I visited over the last six months, I found so many people who seek the prophet, who are walking with the One amid the shrill rancor and inane blare of our culture's messaging.

Here are some examples of where I have seen God's

Year.

- I attended the Continuing Education Event and Equipping Day hosted by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan in mid-October. It was an excellent time of learning with Tom Yoder Neufeld, visits with retired pastors and conference supporters at Bethany Manor and worship with the faithful at Langham Mennonite Fellowship. I hope to take in events like these in every region in the coming year.
- "Caterpillars for snack, anyone?" That was the call that came during a break in the Partnership Council meetings with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. Mennonite Church

Canada has had a relationship with AIMM (formerly Congo Inland Mission) since its inception over 100 years ago. Work has expanded to Benin, Burkina Faso and several more countries. My primary purpose was to re-establish Mennonite Church Canada's presence and support with this historic ministry. I brought forward several new joint-project ideas thanks to generous donors who wish to see our ministry continue. I was welcomed with open arms, and caterpillars!

- The Executive Staff Group (myself and the executive ministers from each regional church) and Joint Council continue to draft, revise and complete policies and procedures that guide Mennonite Church Canada's new structure. We continue to work together and are excited to see the vision emerging

of who we are becoming as a nationwide church. Comprised of faithful local congregations, gathered into regional church bodies, we come together as Mennonite Church Canada to form a people of God through relationship-building, partnership and resourcing.

May the God of peace envelop your congregations this New Year. I look forward to another year of witnessing the Spirit at work in our congregations, regional churches and nationwide Body.

Submitted by Doug Klassen
Executive Minister
Mennonite Church Canada

CommonWord

Bookstore and Resource Centre

CommonWord is the resourcing arm of our nationwide church. As the national bookstore and resource centre, we are privileged to have daily interactions with avid readers, small-group leaders, librarians, Cheaper by the Dozen organizers, pastors and others within our Mennonite Church Canada family and across the ecumenical church. We also serve the needs of Canadian Mennonite University on the Shaftesbury campus in Winnipeg, Man. Our unique services give each customer the choice to buy, borrow or access materials online, making Anabaptist and related resources easily accessible – in addition to the cards and Ten Thousand Villages crafts and foods we also offer instore.

Here are several key developments from 2019:

CommonWord's new partnership with MennoMedia

MennoMedia and CommonWord offer complimentary services to help put Anabaptist materials into your hands. This past year we signed a new agreement. With our new partnership, Canadian congregations and individuals:

- buy their periodicals (e.g. *Leader*) and curriculum (e.g. *Shine*) from MennoMedia's new Canadian-dedicated website, www.mennomedia.ca or by calling

1-800-245-7894.

- buy or borrow Herald Press titles from us at discounted prices via www.commonword.ca, info@commonword.ca or 1-877-846-1593.
- pre-order *Voices Together* hymnal products from MennoMedia at 1-800-245-7894.

CommonRead

As an extension of our partnership with MennoMedia, we started a "nationwide book club," encouraging congregations to read our first selected title, *The Bible Unwrapped* by Meghan Good. We offer a larger discount on this title when quantity orders are placed. Have you joined? For more information, visit www.commonword.ca/go/1807.

CommonWord's upcoming website

We have focused our efforts this past year on a complete overhaul and redesign of our website. The revised site, targeted to be launched in May 2020, will have much better navigation tools, greater search intelligence and a reframed customer interface with better visual cues and images. It will also be mobile friendly.

Since 2016 we have seen our online customer traffic increase by 36 per cent. We expect an enhanced online presence to extend our services even further – nationally, globally and ecumenically.

CommonWord's partnership with Together in Worship

Our website renewal is allowing greater partnerships to emerge. CommonWord was selected to host digital materials curated by Together in Worship, a new bi-national Mennonite steering group committed to providing free online, Anabaptist worship materials. These resources will work in tandem with the *Voices Together* hymnal products we are eagerly anticipating.

CommonWord's partnership with Mennonite Central Committee

A further online partnership with Mennonite Central Committee allows us to share "Abuse Response and Prevention" resources on their recently revised website. Visit <https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/> if you or your congregation seek resources on abuse, family violence or clergy sexual misconduct.

Overall, we are grateful to report strong numbers in the first three quarters of our current fiscal year which reflect our growing ministry:

- Our sales revenue has grown by 8.2 per cent, including a significant 24 per cent increase in general book sales.
- We expect to again serve over 10,000 retail customers this year (up one per cent from last year's third quarter).
- The number of borrowers has remained the same. The quantity of items borrowed has increased by seven per cent.
- Of items borrowed by Mennonite Church Canada congregations, a record 56 per cent circulated outside Manitoba (up from 49 per cent last year), including increases in MCBC, MCA and MC Sask.

Our staff – Anita Neufeld, AnaSara Rojas, Josh Paetkau and I, together with five volunteers and three CMU students – look forward to connecting with you in 2020. Please stay in touch – there are resources for just about everyone:

- Visit us at www.commonword.ca to view the 12,000 items we currently have online.

- Follow us on social media (Facebook and Instagram).
- Sign up for our electronic *Curator* e-mail.
- Certainly visit us if you are ever in Winnipeg, Man.

And, help bring CommonWord to your congregation:

- We'd be glad to send a loan display for an event, or a Cheaper by the Dozen order to supplement your library or worship/study series. For more details, see www.commonword.ca/go/1584.
- Support your pastor's continuing education fund (or gift a friend/family member) by opening an account at CommonWord. We offer in-store credit for individuals.
- Make your own purchase through CommonWord. We special order most titles we don't regularly stock, and we discount most items.

May you experience the love, peace, joy and hope that we celebrated at Christmas and seek all year long. Blessings to your congregation this New Year!

Submitted by Arlyn Friesen Epp

Director of CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre
Mennonite Church Canada

International Witness

Together as five regional churches and a nationwide body we participate in ministry around the world. Jointly we have given the following parameters for our ministry. Along with each of these is an example of current International Witness ministry that aligns with this focus and is facilitated by Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers. The primary purpose for any initiative will be related to the creation, resourcing or strengthening of Anabaptist/Mennonite faith communities and our shared commitment to witness to God's work in the world. Initiatives will support:

a. the emergence of new faith communities

Churches have been present in Thailand for over 500 years yet the Christian percentage is less than 1 per cent. Witness workers Tom and Christine Poovong find that people are searching for spiritual meaning and transformed lives. Together with Thai church planters and pastors they are forming a network of "new believers, new disciples, new churches," where lives are transformed and communities are built to bless their neighbours.

b. foster the vitality of existing faith communities

The local church in the northern Chinese city where Witness workers George and Tobia Veith live values the Veiths' input in lay leadership training and Anabaptist teaching. This congregation experienced rapid growth in the 80s and 90s and still struggles to find leaders to walk alongside many growing disciples. Training for young pastors and lay leaders is vital to the health of congregations like this in China.

c. equip leadership for these communities

International Witness ministry partner Mennonite Church South Korea holds regular conferences and workshops. Witness worker Bock Ki Kim works together with pastors and leaders to equip them with needed Anabaptist resources, not only for congregations but for the extended community. Kim's recent work is in training educators to use restorative circles in family and school settings to promote healing and effective ways of communication.

d. enrich disciple-making ministries

Dann and Joji Pantoja are developing communities of peace builders in Mindanao, Philippines. This involves working with Indigenous leaders in programs of community development. Peace and reconciliation

permeate their work of training in sustainable agricultural development. Dann and Joji give leadership to a growing team working for their organization, PeaceBuilders Community Inc., who work for just peace.

f. supports communication between the congregations of the regional churches and the wider church, whether nationwide or global.

For many years St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in Ontario has walked with leaders of the Benin Bible College to support and encourage higher levels of seminary education for congregations in the region. They do this together with Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., bringing believers together from three countries to learn together and support each other.

IW Staff change

Jason Martin stepped down as director at the end of July 2019. We are thankful for his faithful service during difficult years of transition.

Witness Support Teams to transition to Witness Support Networks

Using feedback gained through the formation of the Witness Support Team (WST) model, International Witness is currently transforming WSTs into Networks of sustainable support for our Witness programs. These will build upon many years of faithful giving to international ministry from congregations. Instead of relying on individual members, these networks will be congregationally based. Congregations will be invited into closer relationship with Witness workers and their international ministries. This is a wonderful expression of our Canadian congregations working together in relationship with fellow followers of Jesus across the world.

More info on the new Mennonite Church Canada website in 2020

Comprehensive descriptions of the Mennonite Church Canada International Witness ministries will be available on a new web platform launching in the New Year for the nationwide and regional churches. Watch for this!

Submitted by Jeanette Hanson
Interim International Witness Director
Mennonite Church Canada

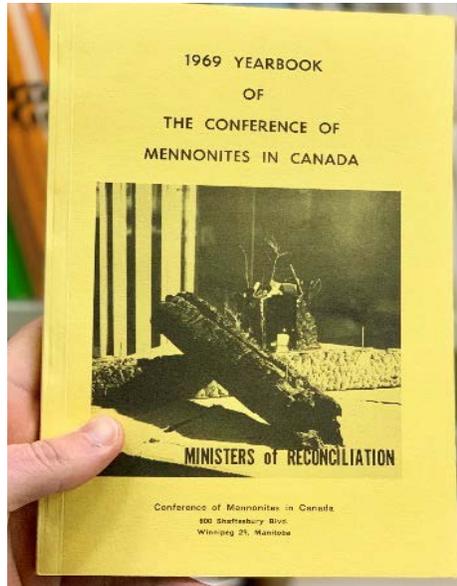
Indigenous-Settler Relations

Fifty years ago, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada gathered in Saskatoon and passed a resolution addressing the White Paper, an Indian policy crafted under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that sought not only to eliminate the Indian Act, but also Treaty and Aboriginal rights, all in the name of “the just society.” Moved by the cries and protests of Indigenous people, the delegate body of Canadian Mennonites gently called on the federal government “to listen sensitively to the Indian people, [and] to allow them ample time to voice their concerns and alternatives.”

Delegates also “whole-heartedly” endorsed interchurch efforts to address larger social and economic issues impacting Indigenous people, and invited congregations to get involved.

That was in 1969. Today, in 2019, Indigenous-Settler Relations (ISR) continues this work of solidarity. Through advocacy, education, prayer and movement organizing, we champion—alongside Indigenous organizations, human rights bodies, and other faith communities—the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation in Canada.

For the last five years, Mennonite Church Canada has supported Bill C-262, a private member’s bill crafted by Romeo Saganash (Cree former MP for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou) that set out to harmonize Canada’s laws with the *Declaration*. Congregations hosted teach-ins on Indigenous rights; Sunday schools sent postcards to the Senate; youth and student groups participated in long walks; and Indigenous-Settler Relations organized rallies, hunger fasts, ecumenical



missives and more in support of the bill. Miraculously (only a few of us thought it could happen), 262 was passed by the House of Commons in May 2018. But on June 21, 2019,—Indigenous Peoples Day—the bill was struck down in the Senate by Conservative senators. It was heartbreaking. We were so close. Yet hope was not gone. Things changed. So many Canadians and so many Christians came to know how important and life-giving the *Declaration* is, and so did The Powers That Be. From that point on, the Liberals, NDP and Green Party knew that the right thing to do was to champion policy that supported Indigenous Peoples’ basic human rights.

On Nov. 27, 2019, the government of British Columbia took an incredible step for right relations by passing Bill 41—legislation based explicitly on C-262 that affirms



the application of the Declaration as a legal framework. Then, on Dec. 5, the Governor General announced that the federal government will put forth legislation to implement the Declaration by the end of 2020. Such good news! But, following the wisdom of Indigenous colleagues, we will not celebrate until federal legislation is actually

drafted and passed in the Senate. Like our Mennonite grandparents from 50 years ago, we will gently and boldly encourage the government to do right by Indigenous Peoples. We will continue to pray, write letters, create learning opportunities and organize committed action until the *Declaration* is fully adopted and

implemented for the well-being of all nations and all people in these lands.

As director of Indigenous-Settler Relations, I am so proud



to continue Mennonite Church Canada’s tradition of solidarity work with, and on behalf of, our community. We are making a difference, and I lift my hands to you, my church family, in honour of your faithfulness.

Here are some encouraging highlights from our 2019 ISR journey:

- The Treaty Walk, co-created by the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Indigenous-Settler Relations, and Dr. Pat Makokis, was a two-week-long walk from Edmonton to Calgary to raise awareness of Treaty relationships. Folks on the walk facilitated conversation circles in a dozen churches and community centres by bringing together Indigenous people, union workers and members of faith communities in intercultural and international friendship. A big thank you to Allegra Friesen Epp who, through her Canadian Mennonite University practicum, served as student intern in the ISR office and was a key organizer for this initiative.



- Three new video resources were created in partnership with ISR: Treaty Walk, This Fight Continues: 262 & The Declaration, and Demand 1: Adopt the Declaration.
- ISR facilitated a delegation of 15 Mennonites from across the country to participate in NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community’s Symposium on “Land and Place” at Tyndale University College in Toronto, Ont.
- Steve serves as sponsoring body representative for Mennonite Church Canada on the Christian Peacemaker Teams Steering Committee, and is currently vice-chair of CPT.
- Steve served as week-long Bible and decolonization teacher at the Quakers’ Canadian Yearly Meeting in Winnipeg at Canadian Mennonite University in August.



- In support of the Global Climate Strike on Sept. 27, ISR coordinated two interfaith prayer gatherings and helped mobilize Christian



- communities for participation. Indigenous reconciliation is a key component to these ecological grassroots movements; the implementation of UNDRIP is understood to be step one toward a sustainable and just economy.
- ISR issued another print run of *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*. Paperback editions are now available through CommonWord. This resource continues to be used in a variety of congregational and class contexts, both settler and Indigenous.

Submitted by Steve Heinrichs
 Director of Indigenous-Settler Relations
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