

The MENNONITE CHURCH BRITISH COLUMBIA (MCBC) Story for 2019 **Submitted by Garry Janzen**

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12

The primary role of MCBC is to partner with and provide resources for our local MCBC congregations in order that they may thrive. Mennonite Church British Columbia exists to help congregations be *Anabaptist, Missional, and Connected*.

As an initiative to develop our capacity in being a missional Anabaptist church, eight representatives from MCBC participated in a Nationwide Mennonite Church Mission Consultation in Calgary at the end of March. A piece that we took home to remember and work on in MCBC is that *we are a people who are the dearly loved of God*. Betty Pries, a speaker at the consultation, said that we are in a season of reknitting our relationship with God. A sobering reflection shared by Jared Siebert, another one of the resource people, is that while we are planting and watering, God is not giving the growth - God is not giving an increase to our efforts. It is not because we are unfaithful that we are not seeing the growth in our churches that we would hope for. In fact, this could be a time when we are most ready to see God working.

A 2019 highlight for MCBC was to host the first Mennonite Church Canada Nationwide Gathering since restructuring in 2017. This was held on the July long weekend in Abbotsford. Fire starters were a great feature of the Gathering. These were brief stories of how God is igniting the imagination of the church in different ways and in many places across the country – as pointers to the local congregation as the place where the real life of the church happens.

In our International Witness connection, we are growing a relationship with Evangelical Mennonite Church Vietnam and Mennonite Cambodia Church. In late March, I spent five days in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, teaching the Mennonite Cambodia Church congregation what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian. I spent five more days doing the same teaching in Ho Chi Minh City with 45 pastors, representing 40 congregations of the Evangelical Mennonite Church Vietnam. Five of these pastors from Vietnam attended the closing service of the Nationwide Gathering in Abbotsford. We now have one MCBC congregation exploring a relationship with the Vietnam church.

The proposal is to sell the property of the former Clearbrook Mennonite Church. Our delegates called for MCBC to put forward a plan as to how the resulting funds would be used before voting positively on the proposal to sell. The Funds Discernment Task Group has been testing ideas with the MCBC constituency; they will be bringing a plan for the funds to the MCBC Annual Gathering in February of 2020.

Five years ago, MCBC went through a reimagining process that came up with three key themes that represent our values: Anabaptist Identity, Missional Community and Building Connections. A task group has been working at restructuring MCBC's ministries to reflect these themes. There is also an emphasis to be more efficient with our call for volunteers and to make each position more meaningful. Our aim is to have a more functional structure.

We said goodbye to Church of the Way in Granisle, as they have joined another denomination. We are also bringing forward an application from a new Vietnamese congregation seeking to join MCBC.

We are in the midst of many pastoral transitions in our congregations, and we are walking with them in discerning new leadership. With this comes much valuable time spent in prayer, interviews and installation services. We are also working with our congregations towards having all our pastors credentialed. We have two credentials: Ordination and Licencing for Specific Ministry.

We had a wonderful time with Meghan Larissa Good, author of The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today as our resource person at our annual Pastor/Spouse Retreat.

Our key theme of building connections with and among our congregations happened through: our Symphony of Hymns fundraising concerts with Calvin Dyck, gatherings with our congregational chairs, a Peace Sunday Service that brought together five Vancouver area congregations, and building relationships with our Indigenous neighbours through the work of Bridget Findlay in our partnership with Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia (MCC BC). We are also seeking to be meaningfully present where there have been strained relationships.

It makes sense that there would be an Anabaptist presence in every community in BC. We are not quite there yet. In our exploration of a potential church plant in Powell River, we learned that they aren't looking to have a Mennonite congregation, but there is an Anabaptist presence through those who are involved with the MCC BC Thrift Shop.

I just want to close with a word of appreciation for Ken Ha. He is the chair of our Church Health Committee. He has been working hard at recruiting new committee members. He is always available for a new pastor or credentialing interview. He has travelled with me to many church visits around BC; he has gone to worship with congregations on his own, and he is always willing to help out where he can. Thanks Ken.

In 2020, we are looking forward to learning about Mental Health at our LEAD Conference on February 28th. We are also looking forward to providing a taste of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Abbotsford on March 28–29, 2020. This is part of a series of annual events around the world in preparation for the Mennonite World Conference Renewal 2027 gathering. Hopefully many of you can join in these opportunities.