



Executive Minister's report

"I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18); I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

With the recent release of the *Voices Together* hymnal, my familiarity with *Hymnal: A Worship Book* will soon fade. Like many of you, I have turned to that book weekly for worship planning. As a result, lyrics and tunes often come to mind during the blessings and challenges of my day. One hymn that has remained close since the middle of March is hymn #570 "We walk by faith." Centered around Jesus's post-resurrection encounter with his disciples in John 20:19ff, the hymn speaks of abounding hope. Though we cannot "touch his hands and side, nor follow where he trod, yet in his promise we rejoice, and cry, 'My Lord and God!'"



Since mid-March I have been repeatedly asked if I worry what COVID-19 will do to the Church. I respond that I'm not worried about the future of the capital "C" church because it is sustained by the promises of Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says he will build the church and that he is always with us.

I am concerned, however, about denominational ecclesiology, leadership structures and the expressions of the church in our localities (church with a small "c"). Indeed our larger, nationwide church has sensed shifts for some time and even acted in response to some of them, with the Future Directions Task Force. COVID-19 is accelerating further change at a pace we didn't predict or

plan for. Many of you are experiencing this in your local church setting. You know that, when the pandemic is over, we won't return to church as normal. In these uncertain times, "we walk by faith, and not by sight," just as Jesus's disciples did.

A sincere and heartfelt thank you to the hundreds of people serving in our nationwide church with your time, talents and abilities. For some it has been a very difficult summer and fall, yet we press on in faith and hope. May we all continue to draw strength from each other and from the One who "we believe (is) near."

I'm excited to share with you the formation of three new groups giving leadership to our denomination in the coming year. While given a nationwide focus, these groups will also have expressions at regional church and congregational levels:

- **Community of Spiritual Leaders (COSL)**
Recommended by the Future Directions Task Force, the development of a COSL is now underway. The group will assist our denomination in nurturing a strong Anabaptist identity, discern issues facing the church, provide encouragement and support for spiritual leaders, help develop leadership and support credentialing and mutual accountability. The first COSL meeting is in December 2020.
- **Sustainability Leadership Group (SLG)**
This group will consider ways in which our denomination can improve its environmental, social and economic sustainability, in the present and in the long-term.
- **Intercultural Church Steering Committee (ICSC)**
This steering committee will work as a group of "ecclesial cartographers" – church map-makers, charting a path for Mennonite Church Canada to become an intercultural church that embraces cultural diversity and learns from our BIPOC brothers and sisters. Initial work may include exploring and arranging training sessions on intercultural awareness and hosting a symposium where BIPOC participants meet to make recommendations for our nationwide church.

Submitted by
Doug Klassen
Executive Minister
dklassen@mennonitechurch.ca

CommonWord

Bookstore and Resource Centre

As the nationwide bookstore and resource centre, CommonWord is privileged to have regular interactions with avid readers, small group leaders, pastors and others within our Mennonite Church Canada family and across the ecumenical church. We also serve the needs of the Canadian Mennonite University community on the Shaftesbury campus in Winnipeg, Man. In all we do, we strive to make Anabaptist and related resources easily available to buy, borrow or access online. Here are our 2020 highlights:

Three new website resources available to congregations

- On May 5, CommonWord helped launch Mennonite Central Committee's revised website, abuseresponseandprevention.ca. This collaborative project hosts resources on abuse, family violence, clergy sexual misconduct and more.
- On June 1 we launched our new website at commonword.ca. This more robust and user-friendly web platform makes it simpler to buy, borrow or access Anabaptist resources online.



Together in Worship leadership team.

- In November, CommonWord helped launch togetherinworship.net with Together in Worship. Together, we curated over 1,500 digital, Anabaptist worship materials, including visual art, music, videos and words for worship, with more to come. All are available for free from Together in Worship or CommonWord.

Resource promotions

- This fall's [CommonRead](#) title was *Signs of Life*.

Beginning in January, we encourage congregations to read *I Am Not Your Enemy*, a collection of sacred stories about reconciliation and justice.

- *Wrongs to Rights*, a Mennonite Church Canada study resource on the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, is now [free through CommonWord](#). This work is relevant even more now that the federal government has tabled Bill C-15.



- For many months we have actively promoted materials that relate directly to current issues such as the pandemic and racial injustice. We encourage you to engage these important conversations.

New resources

- This fall, Mennonite Church Canada and MCC released *Be It Resolved*, a 450-page anthology of over 90 documents detailing commitments Anabaptists have made to Indigenous justice and decolonization.
- In late November, the long-awaited *Voices Together* hymnal editions arrived. Individual or small orders of the pew, accompaniment and large-print editions, and CDs, can be placed with [CommonWord](#). Bulk copies and digital recordings can be purchased directly through [MennoMedia](#).
- We stock all Herald Press titles (to buy or borrow), including *The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith*. Curricula and periodicals continue to be available directly through [MennoMedia](#).

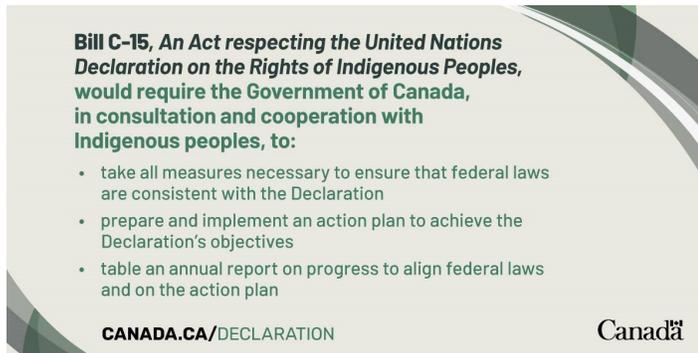
CommonWord has been directly impacted by COVID-19. I am grateful for church and university support as we guided our ministry through various levels of pandemic restriction; for our staff who weathered temporary layoffs, worked from home and adapted to greater online customer service; and for your continued trust as we advance resources that seek to strengthen the church – even, or perhaps especially, in these strange times.

Submitted by Arlyn Friesen Epp
Director of CommonWord
afriesenepp@commonword.ca

Indigenous-Settler Relations

Highlights from 2020:

Federal government tables Declaration legislation



Bill C-15, An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, would require the Government of Canada, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, to:

- take all measures necessary to ensure that federal laws are consistent with the Declaration
- prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the Declaration's objectives
- table an annual report on progress to align federal laws and on the action plan

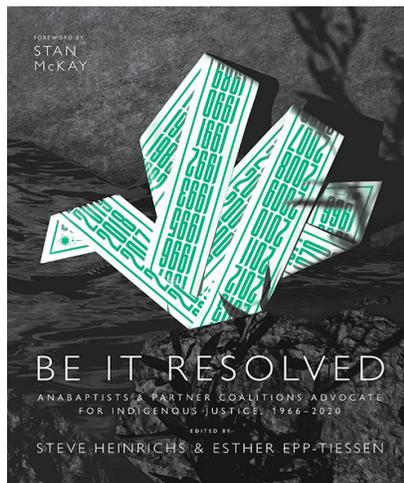
CANADA.CA/DECLARATION

Canada

For the past five years, Indigenous-Settler Relations (ISR) has worked tirelessly alongside Indigenous organizations and faith communities advocating for federal legislation to implement the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in Canada. On Dec. 3, we realized a significant step toward that goal when the federal government tabled Bill C-15, An Act Respecting the *UN Declaration*. "It is a good day!" said Chief Wilton Littlechild, former Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. If Bill C-15 reaches Royal Assent, it will affirm the *Declaration's* application in Canadian law and provide a framework to align law and policy with the minimum standards and rights affirmed in the *Declaration*. To read the full text of the legislation, [see Bill C-15](#). To read the *Declaration* Coalition's statement of support (ISR is a signatory to this Coalition) and resources for further learning, visit declarationcoalition.com.

Be It Resolved: remembering our covenant promises

After a year of research, editing and design-work, ISR released our latest resource, *Be It Resolved: Anabaptists & Partner Coalitions Advocate for Indigenous Justice*. This anthology, co-produced by Mennonite Church Canada and MCC, brings together over 90 documents



that trace the history of Anabaptist commitments to Indigenous justice and decolonization since the mid-1960s. With an eight-session study guide, our prayer is that congregations, small groups and the regional ISR working groups will find *Be It Resolved* an empowering resource that nurtures joy and courage. Joy as we grow in awareness of the covenants we have made to right historic wrongs, and courage to "flesh" these sacred promises into the present with collective action. May it be! Read an [interview](#) and [article](#) about this resource. Order through [CommonWord](#).

Evangelical Fellowship of Canada makes seven commitments for right relations

In 2019, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC)



formed an ISR Working Group in response to a call from Indigenous Christian leaders for the EFC to look back at its history of engagement

EFC ISR Working Group.

with Indigenous peoples and identify barriers to meaningful and sustained evangelical work that moves toward reconciliation. ISR, on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada, was invited to participate in this group, along with reps from other denominations. Through online meetings over many months the group drafted a set of seven commitments (together with [a background paper](#)) that the EFC is now taking up in pursuit of right relations. [These commitments were publicly released in June](#). These significant promises could, over time, have a real impact on the larger evangelical community. EFC is now creating (based on the guidance of the EFC ISR working group) an Indigenous Advisory Council that will inform EFC's work on the implementation of the seven commitments. Read an [interview](#) with EFC.

Good things are happening. Stay tuned for more in the months ahead!

Submitted by Steve Heinrichs
Director of Indigenous-Settler Relations
sheinrichs@mennonitechurch.ca
mennonitechurch.ca/indigenous

International Witness

This year I learned gratitude as I witnessed individuals and congregations across Canada, despite many changes and challenges, reach out to brothers and sisters around the world with gifts of prayer, encouragement and financial support. It is a true testament to God’s Spirit moving among us that we chose to open our hearts even as we were forced to close our doors. Here are some stories about the work of International Witness (IW) in 2020. Click on the links throughout to read the full stories.

International Witness invites congregations to participate in Witness Support Networks

In 2020 five groups of congregational representatives met online with Witness workers and international partners forming Witness Support Networks. Each Network supports one specific ministry, and receives updates and information about that ministry from Witness workers. Witness Support Networks provide a way for congregations in our nationwide family of faith to connect more closely with international ministries and partners. We have much to learn from each other. For more information, visit mennonitechurch.ca/witness-support-networks.

Support shown for Witness workers and ministries through COVID-19 shutdown



International Witness Workers



China
George and Tobia Veith



Thailand
Tom and Christine Poovong



Philippines
Dann and Joji Pantoja



South Korea
Bock Ki Kim and Sook Kyoung Park

Experiences around the world varied and yet were strangely the same while COVID-19 drastically changed plans for everyone.

All our Witness workers were able to stay in their places of ministry and continue working during various levels of shutdowns. The Witness Support Network for ministry in the Philippines provided extra funding to help support the program there as local income from coffee sales dried up.

New initiatives supported by IW include:

- a focus on Anabaptist training through [a resourcing network in Asia](#),
- [social enterprise in Burkina Faso](#),
- literacy classes in Congo,
- [income generation in Thailand](#) and
- an agreement to learn together with Bethlehem Bible College.

Walking alongside our global brothers and sisters in times of crises



Pastors serving in Tigray region.

We prayed for and with brothers and sisters in the Philippines and Vietnam as typhoons hit their countries. We stood beside Mennonite Church

Colombia as they [issued a strong, public call for peace](#) amid violence and displacement in experienced in rural communities. We learned from the Palestinian Christian community through conversations with Bethlehem Bible College staff. We [contacted leaders and prayed for peace](#) in the war-torn Tigray region of Ethiopia.

International Witness Sunday strengthens relationships across nationwide community of faith



Congregations across our nationwide community of faith took part in International Witness Sunday

in October. This will be an annual event that not only celebrates the work of IW but invites participation and mutual learning, giving and sharing between our Canadian congregations and our global brothers and sisters. Videos, worship resources and more are available at mennonitechurch.ca/IW-Sunday.

Submitted by Jeanette Hanson
 Director of International Witness
jhanson@mennonitechurch.ca
mennonitechurch.ca/international-witness