

***CCC Greeting to Mennonite Church Canada
Delivered by Rev. Paul N. Johnson, 8 July 2008***

Dear friends in Christ, sisters and brothers all, *may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* It's my privilege to greet you on behalf of the whole Canadian Council of Churches, including my own church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, with offices here in Winnipeg also. I greet you from the Executive, the President, the Rev. Dr. Jim Christie, Dean of Theology at the University of Winnipeg, the tiny but wonderful staff, and the General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton. It's my great joy to be here with you today, as one of three Vice-Presidents of the Council, where your church provides a significant and needed voice.

The Canadian Council of Churches, founded in 1944, is one of the broadest and most diverse ecumenical councils in the world, including 21 member denominations within the body of Christ: Evangelical, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Eastern and Oriental Orthodox traditions. In all decision-making, except for budget matters, where the law **requires** us to vote, we use the forum model, where every voice has equal weight, no matter the size of the church represented, and moving ahead only when consensus is reached. Every member of the body is important, as the apostle says in first Corinthians chapter twelve, and the forum model recognizes this gift in a very real way.

I've been involved with the council now for over five years, and give thanks to God regularly for this gift in my life. I was privileged to know and appreciate Dan Nighswander, as he facilitated first the observer status of the Mennonite Church Canada, and then its full membership, when you voted in favour in December 2004 in Winkler. After Dan left we were delighted to welcome Jack Suderman, who has made important contributions to the life of the council, and, I believe to the life of the church in Canada.

At our most recent governing board meeting in Ottawa, just a couple of months ago, Jack had substantial time on the agenda to present a paper, "Faith and the Public Square: the Church's Witness to Peace." The very title of Jack's paper – I believe you were all given – is visionary in itself, and displays his commitment to the whole Church of Christ, not just this important part of it called 'Mennonite Church Canada.' Jack didn't call it 'the Mennonite Church's witness to peace,' or even the *churches*, plural, witness to peace; he referred to the witness of *the* church. But, prophetically, this important part of the body called 'Mennonite Church Canada' continues to discuss the urgent choice of being a peace church. Jack's paper led to serious conversation around this vital issue, and there is a strong desire on the part of the governing board to continue the conversation.

We appreciate also the fact that Jack met with Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Diane Finely, to discuss, as he put it, very generously, “the increased complexities of getting visas for invited partners to enter Canada...” He also acknowledged that this was a common problem for many churches. His leadership is clear and it is vital, representing your Church, and often speaking for many. His presence, and through him, your presence, is a gift to the whole Canadian Council of Churches, and I thank God for it. Your man in Ottawa, widely known and highly respected, Bill Janzen, will continue to make sure that these concerns are taken forward.

The ongoing work of the council, supported and carried out by the staff, is done through two commissions, The Commission for Justice and Peace, and the Commission for Faith and Fitness, and through the Biotech Reference Group. There is much more than I can possibly tell you in the time remaining (which is probably none), so ***please pick up one of the newsletters at the back***, and by all means check out the council website, www.ccc-cce.ca, where, among other things, you can subscribe to the council e-news, the latest issue of which includes Jack’s letter to the Minister, printed in full.

To conclude, I’d like to put on my Lutheran hat for just a moment; Naomi Unger made reference just a few minutes ago to dialogue between the Mennonite World Conference and the Lutheran World Federation. At its recent meeting in Tanzania the LWF council voted to provide for preparation of a statement that will, on behalf of the LWF, all 68 million of us who are members, ask forgiveness for Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists in centuries past, in which many died as a result of violence which was justified by appealing to some of the Lutheran Reformers’ statements. This forgiveness will be sought officially by the LWF in assembly, two years from now, in Stuttgart, Germany. I hope that our two Churches here in this country may find a way to share in this experience on a Canadian level.

Thanks again for your time, for your interest, and most especially, for your partnership in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Richest blessings on the rest of your time together. May our Lord bless you with joy in your life together and in your service.

in the name of Christ.