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Note:

The Final (Sunday) Edition of *Assembled News* will be available online via

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Church is not dying

Dan Dyck

The most encouraging sign of a healthy church future is the strong, vibrant, and gracious presence of the young adults from the Emerging Voices Initiative (EVI). If you have not yet taken a moment to meet one of them – do it. You’ll be glad you did.

Listening to any of them, one can’t help but be filled with joy over their love for the church and their communities. They communicate with an inspiring tone of graciousness.

Laura Carr Pries pointed the assembly to positive aspects of change, emphasizing that the church is a vibrant body of people seeking to follow Christ. Challenging and pushing one another beyond our anxiety and frustration about polity shows we care and think deeply.

“I hope that as MC Canada enters this new stage we will trust God in whatever lies ahead. Remember that God is working with and beyond the institutional church, God will continue to speak,” she told delegates.

Area Church moderators went off-script to share their dreams for the future of the church. In heartfelt voice, Lee Dyck (MCBC) said, “My hope for the church I have loved since childhood is that we can be a family of love that God demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus; where all are welcome, where covenant binds us to God and each other.”

Questions from the floor included concerns about meeting together as a national body in the future, reduction or losses of programs and staff, what approval “in principle” means, what a no vote would mean, financing the proposed new directions, and more.

Willard Metzger, executive director, responded to financial concerns noting that he and the board are fiscally responsible to the delegate body. An alternative to the staff reductions made in 2015, “would be to borrow money on your behalf. We have to deal with reality – it will be critical for congregations to give strong financial support in the transition time. If we don’t have that, we can’t continue,” he said.

In speaking for her table group, Lori Guenther Reesor named three challenges moving into the future: post-Christendom, confusion, connection. The future church may not always have the same charitable privileges and benefits; many congregations are quite distant from structures; if people are not connected to our stories, structures don’t matter.

One such story surfaced when EVI member Jonas Cornelsen spoke at a floor mic on Thursday. He represents two congregations – one in Manitoba and one in BC – and has drawn close to both during times he’s lived in each province. Though very different communities, he feels equally comfortable in either one. It is this feeling of “being at home” in the wider church family that he treasures.

It may be this sense of “home” for everyone that will be the greatest gift and the greatest challenge of a nation-wide community of faith in the future.

From left to right: Gerald Gerbrandt, Joe Heikman, Laura Carr Pries, Ken Warkentin and Chad Miller at the Friday morning plenary session of Assembly 2016. Photo by Lisa Carr Pries.

Confessions

Barb Draper
Canadian Mennonite editorial assistant

In his seminar “Confessions of faith: Sources of Unity or Division,” Karl Koop told the story of 3,000 Mennonites who gathered for a five-hour meeting in Amsterdam in 1639. The event brought together three Mennonite groups who had been severely divided. The most contentious issue was how congregations should practice discipline. Koop said that in the early years of the seventeenth century, many disagreements among these Mennonite groups were resolved and their confessions of faith became a unifying tool.

Within a few decades, however, there was new controversy over confessions of faith and ministers were being asked to sign a form showing their agreement to a particular confession. Some ministers refused, saying that a confession of faith should not be a tool to determine who belonged and who did not. They said that Scripture and the Spirit of God were more important than confessions of faith. It took another 150 years before these Mennonite groups were able to be united.

Confessions of faith are important, said Koop. They help us to teach what we believe and to talk to other denominations about our theology. The temptation is to regard them as key or to say they are irrelevant, depending on whether or not we agree with them.

The introduction to our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) says that confessions serve the church because they “provide guidelines for the

interpretation of Scripture,” but the confession is “itself subject to the authority of the Bible.” Secondly, confessions “provide guidance for belief and practice,” but “a written statement should support but not replace the lived witness of faith.” Koop pointed out that these introductory statements are important in understanding how to use the confession of faith.

Our faith evolves over time, said Koop. Our thinking is shaped by our experiences and our confession of faith is based on the best discernment in a particular time and place, but eventually we end up thinking about our beliefs in new ways. Just because we have differences of opinion we should not assume that those who disagree with us are unfaithful. Nor should we assume that Mennonites of the past were strongly unified.

When asked about how we can know when a confession of faith still represents who we are and at what point it becomes a historical document, Koop responded that this challenge is what makes assemblies so important. We need to gather periodically to gather wisdom from across the country to determine what the Spirit of God is saying to the church.

Koop teaches history and theology at Canadian Mennonite University.

Document Quick links:

Discernment Guide:
commonword.ca/go/654

Full Schedule:
commonword.ca/go/656

Report Book:
commonword.ca/go/655

Assembly Homepage:
home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016

See the latest issues of the
the **Assembled** News



online at:

home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016

Generosity Wall Update



We're almost there! As of Friday, 4 pm, the kind folks attending Assembly 2016 have given \$3375 at the Generosity Wall. That leaves only \$1675 left to go. And with several matching donors already in place, it could mean a total of \$10,100 for ministry in Canada and around the world! There are still some lonely envelopes left that could be calling out your name. ☺

Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies

Donita Wiebe-Neufeld
Canadian Mennonite correspondent

The seminar Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies presented by Ryan Siemens, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Area Church Minister, was an eye-opening and encouraging information session based on a 32-minute documentary of the same name. The film was produced through the collaboration of Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan, St. John's Lutheran Church, and Rebel Sky Media, with the support of Mennonite Church Canada. It's a story of historic land ownership, tragic loss, and an amazing restorative partnership that is currently shaping the future for the displaced Young Chippewyan people together with the Mennonites and Lutherans currently living on their ancestral land.

Treaty 6, a large swath of land cutting across central areas of Alberta and Saskatchewan, was signed by various First Nations and the Government of Canada at Fort Carleton between 1876-78. But in the 1880s, the Canadian government betrayed the Young Chippewyan nation, signatories to the treaty. They were purposely starved out of the Hague, Osler, and Laird area.

To survive, the people moved south and then scattered as squatters amongst other First Nations. In 1897, the government took the reserve 107 land back without consent from treaty signatories.

The following year, the land was given to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers as the "Hague-Osler" reserve, but the history of the dispersed Young Chippewyan band was never shared, and the new settlers were left to assume they were moving onto empty land.

The co-operation evident between First Nation and Settler treaty people in the documentary may make it appear that warm relationships and working partnerships are a model of reconciliation that came easily. The full truth, however, is more complicated than a 32 minute film can convey. In this case, the work of reconciliation is already 40 years along.

In 1976, members of the Young Chippewyan band began visiting farms in the Laird area to engage land owners in impromptu discussions about the tragic history and to say the land was theirs. This news shocked and disturbed many farmers. Albeit innocently, Mennonite and Lutheran farmers, descendants of the first settlers, had benefitted from the historic violation of the treaty and the displacement of First Nations people.

The difficult conversations and claims made by the Young Chippewyan First Nation were noted by then Conference of Mennonites in Canada executive director, Ike Froese. In 1977, Froese asked Leonard Doell to undertake a 3-6 month research project to examine the history behind the Young Chippewyan claim. Doell, who was present at the workshop on Wednesday, commented that, "39 years later, I'm still at the same thing!"

Through his research and discussions with the involved parties, Doell uncovered and documented the history, communicating the legitimacy of Chippewyan land claims. He fostered trust that helped build a foundation for the healthy relationships and co-operation shown in the documentary.

In a conversation after the workshop, Doell said; "This is covenant building, we build on what others have done. Part of it is acknowledging the good efforts of those who have gone before us. The foresight of Ike Froese being willing to be part of different conversations and to invite the church to be a part of these conversations is covenant building."



Left to right: Leonard Doell, Eric Olfert, and Ryan Siemens chat after the Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies. Photo by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld.

On August 6, 2006, representatives of the Young Chippewyan First Nation, the Mennonites, and the Lutherans came together at Stony Knoll, a site sacred to both the First Nation and the settlers. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding, a covenant that committed all 3 parties to working together toward harmony and justice with and for each other.

In 2010, while he was pastor of Grace Mennonite Church, Ryan Siemens was one of the organizers of the first Spruce River Folk Festival to raise funds for the Young Chippewyan First Nation Genealogy project. The project searches for descendants of the Young Chippewyan people who signed treaty 6 and received reserve lands in the Laird area, 1876-78.

In 1994, the Government of Canada admitted to inappropriately reclaiming reserve 107, however, the land claim was denied because the government considered the Young Chippewyan Nation to be "dissolved." The genealogy project establishes the existence of the Young Chippewyan people in order support their claim and to seek justice.

To learn more about *Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies*, see <http://www.commonword.ca/go/584>.



You are invited

to the 7th annual Spruce River Folk Festival! The event, co-sponsored by Grace Mennonite Church and Mennonite Central Committee, will be held on August 6 from 10am-8pm at the Spruce River Farm 20 km North of Prince Albert, Sask., on HWY 2. The documentary, Reserve 107, will show throughout the day.

For more information, please call Ryan Siemens at 306-764-4342 or Leonard Doell at 306-665-2555.

From the Archives

Affirming Our Covenantal Relationship

The topic of human sexuality may bring a variety of views and heated discussion, but throughout related debates held over the years among Mennonite churches in Canada, a strong common thread remains: there has been a strong desire to remain committed to each other in covenantal relationship. Note the wall plaque at a 1973 workshop on marriage led by Howard Clinebell (left): it affirms the need for communion to fully understand each other.

In 1986-87, statements resulting from discussions among the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church included the following foci on relationship: "We covenant with each other to mutually bear the burden of remaining in loving



Photo courtesy Mennonite Heritage Center Archives

dialogue with each other in the body of Christ... We covenant compassion and prayer for each other that distrustful, broken, and sinful relationships may experience God's healing. We covenant with each other to take part in the ongoing search for discernment and for openness to each other."

Volunteer focus

Belinda Redekopp



"I like people, and I like making connections across the country," says Belinda, a first-time Assembly volunteer. "I took time off from helping my husband start a new underground inspection business." Photo by Dan Dyck.



My Grandma's Ukelele Band

Randall Neudorf of The Commons church in Hamilton, Ont., was brought to tears as the Glowing Embers Ukelele Band from Bethany Manor in Saskatoon led singing at worship today. His Grandmother of Bethany Manor was in the band and passed away just one month ago. He was unable to attend the funeral. "I suddenly remembered that back in the winter before she was sick that she had told me very excitedly that her Ukulele Band was going to be playing at the Assembly," he wrote in the church's blog. "Although I was sad that my Grandma wasn't up there with her friends I was happy to be reminded of her and our shared love of ukuleles and twangy old hymns... when the band sang Amazing Grace and I'll Fly Away that was it, I started sobbing, I felt like these songs were for my Grandma and me."

Photo by Lisa Carr Priest



MHC Archives and Gallery: a vision for the future

Aaron Epp
Canadian Mennonite
Young Voices Editor

Did you know that if you stacked all of the textual records and photographs in Winnipeg's Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and Gallery on top of each other, the stack would be taller than the CN Tower?

That was one of the facts Corey Dyck shared during a seminar he led yesterday afternoon at Assembly titled, "History Matters: A New Vision for the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC)."

Dyck, who works as the centre's director, said there's something for everyone in the archives.

"We can find stories that everyone will appreciate," he said.

He outlined six strategies MHC staff have created to ensure the centre's future viability and to help it carry out its mission to facilitate "respectful community dialogues so that faith perspectives engage current events through the collection, preservation and exhibition of curated art and heritage projects."

Those strategies include establishing a national presence through things like travelling art exhibits and digitizing archival material; engaging new audiences by developing the MHC's online presence as well as hosting diverse public events; and institutional collaboration, like the Mennonite Archival Image Database, which



Corey Dyck is the director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and Gallery in Winnipeg. Photo by Irma Sulistyorini.

includes material from the MHC as well as more than five other archival partners.

Begun in 1933 and housed in a facility built in 1978, the MHC is an inter-Mennonite facility that holds extensive Prussian and Russian Mennonite community documents, as well as individual, family, congregational and organizational records relating to the Mennonite community.

The centre aims to provide national leadership and subject expertise through professional services in archival processes, curated exhibits and digital collections, educational programming, and public presentations.

Archival material is important, Dyck said, because it allows people today to learn from those that came before them.

"If we collect the material and it's available in an archive, it's just waiting for people to learn from," he said.

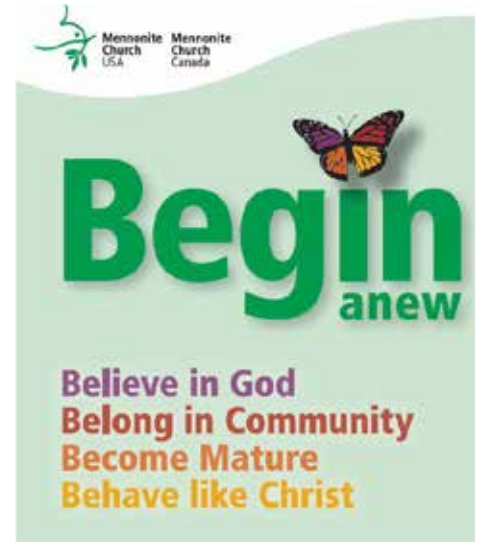
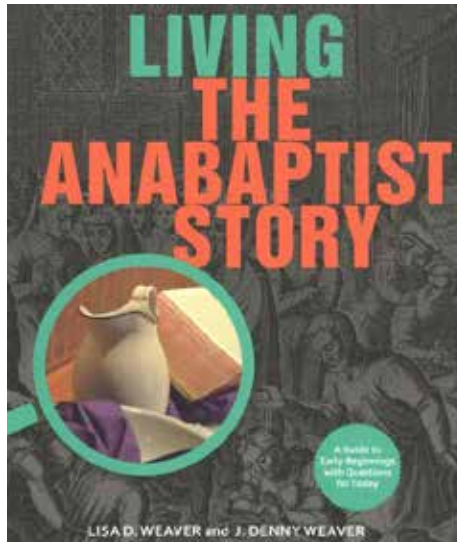
Further strategies MHC staff hope to implement to ensure the centre's future viability include revenue growth through grant writing and promoting legacy gifts and bequests; maximizing operational efficiency by developing a technology replacement strategy and simplifying the intake process; and exploring archival growth opportunities, such as creating an art bank and developing educational programming.

In addition to serving Christians, Dyck said, the MHC serves many people who have never stepped foot in a church.

"[The MHC] is a way to host people... so they can understand who Mennonites are [and] why faith is important to [us]," he said.

Visit archives.mennonitechurch.ca.





RESERVE 107: Whose land is it anyway?

Indigenous rights and title to the land remains a taboo topic for many across Canada. But in the small town of Laird, Saskatchewan, an old injustice is providing new opportunities for dialogue, friendship and a fierce determination to right the wrongs of the past. Access the film and study guide at www.commonword.ca/go/584 and watch for the film, which will be made available at a later date.

More than martyrs

This accessible history tells the story of how adult Christians of the 1500s first shaped the Anabaptist believers church tradition and of how it lives on today and can be joined by any who identify with Anabaptist understandings of following Christ. Includes study guide.

Available at the CommonWord resource table onsite and at www.commonword.ca/go/491.

Make a fresh start

Whether you are looking to re-boot your faith or you are a brand new Christian, Begin Anew offers a rich re-discovery of Christianity that shows how believing, belonging, becoming, and behaving will reward individuals and congregations with a strong faith foundation.

Available at the CommonWord resource table onsite and at www.commonword.ca/go/99.

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