

Mennonite Church Canada: our nationwide community of faith

2018 Annual Report

January 9, 2019

Mennonite Church Canada continues to adjust to its new structure of being a regionally centered, covenanted partnership between the five Regional Churches:

- Mennonite Church British Columbia
- Mennonite Church Alberta
- Mennonite Church Saskatchewan
- Mennonite Church Manitoba and
- Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

That covenant, made following the restructuring approved by delegates in October 2017 and renewed on October 21, 2018 by the Regional Churches, also reaffirms the overall mission and vision of this partnership as expressed in the 1995 statement, *Vision: Healing and Hope*.

God calls us to be followers of the Jesus Christ and,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace
so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

We understand this to mean that we:

- a. Keep Jesus at the centre of our faith and test our decisions against what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus;
- b. Rely on the Spirit to guide us in our discernment and to empower us to work together;
- c. Seek in all our work and decision-making to strengthen congregations and Regional Churches to be communities of grace, joy and peace; and
- d. Assist congregations and Regional Churches to be agents of God's healing and hope in the world.

After the 2017 delegate assembly in Winnipeg, MC Canada began restructuring and released the majority of its communications staff. In 2018, work began on developing a new communications strategy together with the five Regional Churches and their Communicators. To this end, a communications survey developed collectively and distributed widely across the nationwide Church, garnered well over 500 responses. MC Canada is currently reviewing the results with Regional Churches.

In November, MC Canada hired Katie Doke Sawatzky as part-time Communications Officer. Working from her home in Regina, Saskatchewan, her primary role is to assist with communication for **Gathering 2019** being held in Abbotsford, B.C., from June 28 to July 1. The theme for this first nationwide Gathering is *"Igniting the Imagination of the Church."*

International Witness

Submitted by Jason Martin, Director

The significant transition that took place this past year was the completion of faithful ministry by four of our Witness worker families: the Barkman family in Manila, Philippines, after 6 years; the Nicolson family in Tin, Burkina Faso, after 20 years; the Otto-Rabus family in Mannheim and Ludwigshafen, Germany, after 6 years, and the Tshimanga family in Bloemfontein, South Africa, after 2 years.

All four families returned to Canada and are transitioning through the "re-entry" phase. It is never easy when workers return to their birth home after significant time involved in ministry in an international context. Continued prayer for each family is greatly appreciated.

Dann and Joji Pantoja have invested heart, mind, body and soul into their peacebuilding work in the Philippines. This ministry of God's "shalom" is manifested through their leadership of Coffee for Peace and Peace Builders Community Inc.

Dann and Joji build relationships through their conversations with many Indigenous people. One of those conversations was with the elders of the Banao First Nations tribe, who expressed their desire to partner Coffee for Peace and Peace Builders to plant, farm and process Arabica coffee. The Pantojas and their team listened and emphasized the need for Peace and Reconciliation (PAR) principles and practices. They said, "We want (the) coffee business to be a cohesive and uniting factor, rather than a source of conflict and division, among the inclusive development endeavours of the First Nations."

Besides peacebuilding, the MC Canada Witness continues to support equipping ministry initiatives internationally. For example, we partner with Meserete Kristos College, which equips pastors, evangelists and mission workers of the world's largest Mennonite Church, Meserete Kristos Church of Ethiopia. This fall's student enrollment exceeded 500.

MC Canada Witness also continues to support the emergence of new faith communities through the work of Tom and Christine Poovong. The Poovongs are gifted in building relationship networks and ministry connections across Thailand. Collaborating with other

leaders, they are currently envisioning a Mennonite Church plant in each of the 20 Issan provinces.

MC Canada currently has 6 Witness worker units serving in 5 countries:

- Bock Ki Kim & Sook Kyoung Park (South Korea)
- Jeanette Hanson (Canada & China)
- Mike & Cheryl Nimz (United Kingdom)
- Dann & Joji Pantoja (Philippines)
- Tom & Christine Poovong (Thailand)
- George & Tobia Veith (China)

Indigenous-Settler Relations

Submitted by Steve Heinrichs, Director

In June 2015, I was in Ottawa with hundreds of other Christians from across Canada when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its “94 Calls to Action.” I can remember how we all sensed that this was a “kairos” moment—a liminal space when settler Canadians were being offered a gift that could shift our relationship with Indigenous peoples, if only we seized it. Yet I also remember feeling daunted. These “Calls to Action” were going to challenge our Christian communities. Yes, they had the power to bring much life, but they were going to unsettle us, bring conflict, and invite us to lean, with all our strength, into the grace and cruciform way of Christ.

Consider these three Calls:

- All faith groups are “to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)” (**Call to Action #48**);
- All faith groups are “to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*” (**Call to Action #49**); and
- All faith groups are to transform their theological/clergy training so that it “respects Indigenous spirituality in its own right” (**Call to Action #60**).

This is nothing less than a radical reformation summons.

For the last four years, Mennonite Church Canada’s Indigenous-Settler Relations Program has intentionally worked on each of these Calls to Action. This year, we took some significant and difficult steps forward:

- In response to **Call #60**, we published *Unsettling the Word* (May 2018), a courageous anthology which helps Christians grow in respect for Indigenous spiritualities through a re-reading and decolonization of classic Biblical texts (see www.commonword.ca/go/1505). Mennonite Church Canada has distributed over 1,800 copies of this text, and we are happy to announce that the renowned Catholic press, Orbis Books, is publishing a U.S. version this February.
- In response to **Call #48**, we advocated hard for Bill C-262, *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Through a combination of ecumenical letter writing, a postcard campaign, public teach-ins and faith-based organizing, we helped get Bill C-262 passed in the House of Commons. Most didn't think this private members bill—affirming the application of the UNDRIP in Canadian law—had any chance of getting this far. Now it sits in the Senate and we continue to pray and mobilize so that it will receive royal assent by June 2019.
- In April 2018, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) put forth a “Declaration in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples,” in which the General Council repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, affirmed the UNDRIP and called Mennonites to see Indigenous struggles against resource-extraction projects that do not have Indigenous consent as “our struggle.” That same month, I (Steve Heinrichs) said yes to an invitation from elders of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation to participate in an ecumenical prayer-witness against the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline that was (and is) taking place in their unceded territories without consent (Article 32, UNDRIP, **Call #49**), let alone the consultation mandated under Canadian law. On April 20, I was arrested by the RCMP for criminal contempt of court while blocking the gates of the Trans Mountain facility. I could have walked away, but I chose not to because I believe the Church must stand with the suffering and oppressed. As the MWC Declaration puts it, “Their pain is also our pain; their cry, our cry.” The consequence of my arrest was a week in jail.

My action encouraged many in our Mennonite church, but it also unsettled many. We are wrestling with core questions of the gospel: What does solidarity with the poor and suffering truly look like? What should we do here in Canada? What are we willing to risk to be reconciled?

Together, may God help us to count the cost (Luke 14:28), and follow Christ's call.

CommonWord

Submitted by Arlyn Epp-Friesen, Director

CommonWord is a unique and growing hybrid ministry embracing the resourcing needs of

- church, university and neighbourhood,
- local and national communities,
- Mennonite and ecumenical conversations
by providing a fusion of services:
- carefully chosen resources to buy, borrow, or download
- availability of staff for resource consultation

We are here to make it easy for you to find Anabaptist and related resources for home and congregational use – in addition to the cards, crafts and foods we also offer in-store.

We are grateful to report strong numbers in 2018 that reflect our growing ministry:

- This year we served over 10,000 retail customers (up 9.8%), over 500 borrowers (par), over 1,000 online and phone/email customers (up 69%), and over 92,000 website users (up 24%).
- Sales revenue, for the first 10 months of our current fiscal year, is up 8.1%. Online sales revenue has doubled. This includes significant sales of Mennonite Church Canada Indigenous-Settler Relations titles (2,850 items).
- In 2018, 49% of items borrowed by congregations circulated outside Manitoba, including increases in MCBC, MC Sask, and MCEC.
- 95 borrowers in 2018 were from outside Mennonite Church Canada and CMU, the highest number ever.

Significant emphases this past year included:

- Hiring additional staff in the area of administrative support/shipping (0.5 FTE) and communications/marketing (0.5 FTE).
- Enlarging our retail reach within the United States.
- Continuing to offer discounted, competitive pricing of Herald Press and other book titles.
- Making CommonWord available off-site (68 displays and Cheaper by the Dozen orders across Canada).
- Managing an increased level of Ten Thousand Villages inventory, CMU student materials, and various niche food and other in-store products

We look forward to connecting with you in 2019. 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* email.
- Certainly visit us if you're ever in Winnipeg.

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!

**On behalf of Mennonite Church Canada
Henry Paetkau, Interim Executive Minister**