

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 6

Held on 22 January 2002, 4 – 9 PM
at the Grey Nuns Provincial House, 151 Despins St., St. Boniface, MB

Harold Jantz opened the meeting with a reading from Galatians 2:7–10, noting especially v. 10: “They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.”

He commented that as Christians we cannot do this only through institutions but that it must happen in personal ways to our neighbours; this is a part of our faith. Two excerpts from letters written by his parents while in exile in the Urals illustrated both their extreme conditions and trauma as well as their gratefulness in receiving aid from relatives in North America. He closed with a prayer.

Personal Updates

Michele Sala Pastora shared how a discussion with a Dominican Priest about human cloning had sparked a concern that her community needed to speak to this issue and that despite a shortness of time, looking for contacts, speakers, etc. things have come together. Meetings, including doctors at St. Boniface, will take place. She sees this as evangelizing. In addition she is also preparing for a discussion on non-violence taking place in March.

John Long continues to be involved in the Anglican-Catholic dialogue, which includes considering a paper coming out of the Lutheran-Anglican dialogue. He shared that sometimes there seems to be a lack of focus in these discussions, but they are continuing. Among the books that he is reading are:

God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi, by Julian Green; Harper & Collins

Desire of the Everlasting Hill: The World Before and After Jesus, by Cahill; Thomas 2001

In Defence of Religious Schools and Colleges, by Elmer Thiessen. 2001 Harper & Collins

Elaine Pinto shared on a personal note of her husband's recent heart attack, the ongoing recovery, and the importance of the concerns as well as the support experienced during this time. She noted how a retreat at a monastery had been especially helpful. Engaging in the discipline of silence was most strengthening. She recalled a quote “Silence is God's first language and everything else is a bad translation.”

Michael Radcliffe reported that they sold their home and have moved to a different one and how this experience of moving the many boxes had illustrated the difficulty of “holding the Christ Child” in your hands. “To hold the Christ Child, your hands must be empty,” had been the point of a homily during the Advent series at St. Ignatius. How does one empty one's hands? Participating in a small discussion group with members of

the Jewish community, including input from a Rabbi, was another meaningful experience.

Adolf Ens, while retired, is continuing to teach a course for one semester on Third World Theology at CMU. He noted the challenges faced by students to accept the perspective of writers who live and work in settings so different from ours.

Ardith Frey shared some of her activities during her sabbatical. These included attending a three-day retreat at the Catholic Retreat Centre, attending church services in other Mennonite denominations, and taking a course taught by a Rabbi. He has expressed interest in engaging in a multi-faith dialogue focusing on our response to Sept. 11/01. A recent trip by her husband Marvin to Rome in connection with his work on behalf of the Canadian Food Grains Bank illustrated the ecumenical effort in collaborating with other denominations and faiths.

Elaine Baete is engaged in chaplaincy work, among numerous other activities of the Grey Nuns. While at St. Paul's College, she met Ingrid Cornies, the Mennonite chaplain at U of M. She is also involved with preparations for the young people in connection with the upcoming World Youth Day.

Harold Jantz has been involved with the preparation of the information brochure for the upcoming sessions Feb. 8–10, 2002, of Missionfest to be held at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. (Brochures were handed out at the meeting). He was also involved in the recent Faith and Media meeting which dealt with the topic on how the media reported on the Sept. 11, 2001 event.

Helmut Harder reported on his recent trip together with his wife Irma to Italy, Nov. 20 to Dec. 3, 2001, with one week in Rome and a second week in Assisi for the fourth Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue. The following are **Helmut's** notes:

The Mennonite group took several days in Rome to visit places of interest, and to have discussions with the heads of the Pontifical Councils for Peace and Justice, for Inter-Religious Dialogue, and for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The President of the last-mentioned Pontifical Council, Walter Cardinal Kasper, addressed the Mennonite delegation on November 26. Here are some pertinent excerpts:

“I know that from the start this dialogue has had as one of its aims the hope of contributing to a healing of memories between our two communions. We all know despite the significant ecumenical progress that has been made in recent decades, many issues which are at stake in the tragic divisions of the sixteenth century have not yet been resolved, and reconciliation between separated Christian families has not yet been achieved. Indeed, there still remains in consciousness today, the bitter memories associated with those events of the sixteenth century.”

“One of the significant events during the Jubilee year 2000 has particular meaning for ecumenical endeavours in general, and also for Mennonite-Catholic relations a ‘Universal Prayer for Forgiveness’ led by the Pope in the name of our Church...a prayer

asking God's forgiveness for sins committed by Catholics during the second millennium [including] sins against the unity of Christians. Indeed, should not all Christians search their consciences, asking whether they need God's forgiveness for sins against unity? "

"Mennonites have suffered greatlyat the hands of both Protestants and Catholics, and have a keen sense of the martyrology We too [as Catholics] have our experience of persecution, and our martyrs from the religious wars in Europe."

"Is it not the case, Catholics and Mennonites, have mutually condemned one another?...I surely regret those instances when this took place on the Catholic side."

"It is my conviction that Mennonites and Catholics today, can offer together, a strong witness to peace and reconciliation in our troubled world. It is my hope that our dialogue will assist us in giving this witness."

At the dialogue in Assisi, four papers were featured. The first, by **Neal Blough**, was entitled, "From the Edict of Milan to Vatican II, via Theodosius, Clovis, Charlemagne and the Fourth Lateran Council of why some Mennonites can't quite trust the 'Declaration on Religious Freedom.'" Blough casts doubt on the assertion in the Declaration that the Catholic Church has always taught that faith may not be imposed by political means, that no one is to be coerced into faith. Blough presented examples from medieval times that appear to contradict what is said in the "Declaration." He suggests it may be more honest to admit that the church was in error at times, if it judges itself by its own current stance as reflected in the "Declaration."

The second, presented by **Peter Nissen**, was entitled, "Church and Secular Power(s) in the Middle Ages." **Helmut** quoted Nissen's conclusion: "The narrative of medieval Christianity is a story with many strata, characterized by multiplicity and diversity. It is a story of light and dark, of faithfulness and sin. An ecumenical re-reading of this story, articulating its multiple meanings, should enable us to re-create Christian tradition without passing simple judgments. Both Catholics and Mennonites should be able to recognize their own genealogy in the story of medieval Christianity, perhaps in stressing other accents or in following other trajectories. But none of them needs have the idea that the continuity of Christian tradition has been interrupted or that the Gospel has been betrayed completely during more than a millennium. As the Church is a community of saints and of sinners, so her pilgrimage through history can be no more than one of sainthood and of sin."

James F. Puglisi's theological paper was entitled, "Contemporary Theology of the Sacraments with Particular Attention to Christian Initiation (Baptism and Eucharist)." He observed that in the New Testament and in early Christianity, baptism and the Lord's Supper were not referred to as sacraments; nor was there a sacramental theology at the time. Sacramental theology was a later development. Further, baptism and the Eucharist did not stand alone in their own rite, but were seen as contributing to Christian identity and to the mission of the church. As for the elements of water, bread, and wine, their significance lies not in these objects, but in that they are elements of the mystery of

creation. Encounter with God is miraculous, but the mediums of miracle are not the objects of the sacraments, but Christ and the body of Christ, the Church. Puglisi sees adult baptism eventually becoming the normative rite, with infant baptism taking a subsidiary role. This would be in keeping with the New Testament and early Christianity.

Helmut Harder's paper was entitled, "What Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith say about Baptism and the Lord's Supper." He reviewed the teachings on baptism and the Lord's supper via the historic confessions of faith as they emerged in the several traditions of Anabaptist-Mennonite history. He noted that there is more sacramental emphasis in the confessions than Mennonites have sometimes wanted to admit.

Discussion on: "The Church and the World: Mission and Service"

Catholic Perspectives

Richard Lebrun presented his paper entitled, "Service and Mission in the Catholic tradition," followed by **Elaine Baete's** paper, "The Church and the World: Mission and Service." Both papers were distributed at the meeting. Some of the questions and comments in the following discussion included:

Grey Nuns are not only in Canada, (there are 120 in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta) but also abroad, i.e. United States, Argentina, Congo; some 650 women worldwide.

Novices, none in Manitoba at present, some in Alberta. In reflecting on this, **Elaine Baete** commented on the increased opportunity for women to serve in the Catholic Church today. **Michael Radcliffe** mentioned that both the Grey Nuns and the Hutterites see Acts 2 as foundational in their formation, and that the explorer LaVerendrye was a nephew to Marguerite d'Youville. The question of whether the Catholic Orders fulfill the mandate of mission and service for the Church included the following responses:

- Explanations on how Orders arise, are constituted and operate. These included that they need approval from Rome, have their own ministry, and while working together with local parishes, develop and conduct their own programs and ministries. Further to the drop off of Novices, **Elaine** mentioned that there are highs and lows in religious life and orders. Today women in the Catholic Church have more opportunities to serve in a variety of ways. Women can have access to ministry without ordination. There are many who serve as volunteers for a specific time and task. These are critical in the operation of the various ministries.

- Vatican II emphasized and promoted the full range of responsibilities for all members not just the members of Orders.

- there is a continued effort to remove the perceived concept that Orders are "more perfect" and underscore the important service rendered by lay people.

Following a refreshing lunch break, the Mennonite perspectives were presented. **Adolf Ens** presented his paper entitled "Anabaptist-Mennonite Mission and Service – Some

Historical and Theological Reflections.” **Ardith Frey** and **Harold Jantz** presented information about Mennonite Central Committee. This included **Harold’s** paper, ‘Mennonite Central Committee’, and several pages and notes, facts and information about MCC programs as compiled by **Ardith**. These again were distributed at the meeting

Discussion:

- **Ardith** commented in more detail about MCC’s programs in Manitoba & Canada.

- Is volunteering mandatory for Mennonites? An oxymoron – no, but it is seen as an expression of our faith. MCC’s statement, “In the name of Christ” underscores the motivation for our service.

- Can the volunteer base be sustained? How is volunteerism nurtured, promoted? The experience of the previous generation both in giving and receiving aid in response to the events surrounding the Russian revolution, famine, persecution etc. are seen as a major influence in fostering a spirit of volunteering, helping, serving in previous generations

The following persons shared personal perspectives re. The Church and the World: Mission and Service:

Michelle Sala Pastora told of her initial term of service sponsored by VICS in Nicaragua, how it had been influenced by her dialogue with a priest, and reflected her initial understanding namely that service was “out there.” She went with minimal training; a couple of days in VICS offices. VICS tried as best they could to match people’s gifts with the needs as requested by the country. **Michelle** shared that she had always had and continues to have a strong desire to help. Her initial assignment was shortened by coming home to take care of her ailing mother. Since then there has been no end of opportunities to serve. People from the church came (and continue to come) and asked her to serve in various tasks. Her previous work with Habitat and her present work with refugees gives her the confidence that she is doing what she is supposed to be doing.

John Long noted how his membership in a lay Franciscan order gives him the opportunity to serve. Together with ten others, they talk about the gospel, involve themselves in the lives of others, develop local projects, challenge each other to live a life of some detachment from the material world, help in the community, i.e. serve at the Agape Table, support a project in India. He was encouraged, invited, and challenged by a friend to join the order and sees this involvement as a form of witness. Conversion is a daily turning towards God. In response to questions, he noted that both men and women can be members and that in terms of organization, authority, etc. their particular service is characterized more by informality than formality.

Michael Radcliffe recalled how his exposure to St. Ignatius’ spirituality in a ten-month period under the guidance of a spiritual advisor had been significant in his journey. This was also during the time of his involvement in politics. The introduction to the Christian

Life Community was a further step in his appreciation of service and mission.

The future of our meetings

After some discussion, it was agreed that we should have at least one more meeting and that we:

- write a summary report about our experience in our past meetings,
- invite our respective leaders from the Mennonite and Catholic Communities to this meeting where they can hear what we have discussed and discovered and help us to decide what our future direction might be.
- members of this group should all participate in our summing up process.

A sincere “thank you” was expressed to **Elaine** and the Grey Nuns for the gracious hospitality. The next meeting date, pending consultation with our respective leaders, was set for June 19, 2002 at Canadian Mennonite University, 4:00 to 9:00 PM.

John Long led us in our closing thoughts with a prayer for unity among all Christians. A copy of the reading was distributed at the meeting.

Recorded by **Henry Loewen**