

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 17

Meeting held on 23 February 2006
at Christ the King Church

Present: Elaine Baete, Adolf Ens, Irma Fast Dueck, Harold Jantz, Helmut Harder, Richard Lebrun, John Long, Luis Melo, and Lynda Trenholm. Guest: Claire McKay, *Prairie Messenger*, Editor/Writer.

Regrets: Mike Radcliffe and Henry Loewen

1. We were welcomed by our host, **Lynda Trenholm**, and reminded that most of us had been at Christ the King to make a presentation in an Adult Education Program in January 2004.
2. **Luis Melo** welcomed out guest, Claire McKay, who, in addition to her present role as an editor/writer for the *Prairie Messenger*, has been much involved in the Catholic Women's League.
3. Sharing recent ecumenical experiences.
 - a) **Lynda Trenholm** reported that on 18 January she had attended the Chancery Staff (St. Boniface) luncheon that preceded the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
 - b) **Harold Jantz** reported his continuing involvement in New Directions for Life, where he was involved in efforts to create a national board, a body that it is hoped will allow the group to have a stronger national presence. He also has been participating at a course at CMU that has involved learning more about Baptists, Presbyterians, and Evangelicals.
 - c) **John Long** expressed his regrets for missing our last meeting, and reported:
 - i) That his son was dating a Mennonite girl, which has led to some interesting discussions at home.
 - ii) That his fellow parishioners were asking him interesting questions, that might lead to some sort of adult education initiative.
 - iii) That, following the election of a new federal government, colleagues at work were raising interesting questions about religion in the public square.
 - iv) That he had participated in an invitational conference at the Faculty of Education, which explored issues that would be involved in expanding the circle with respect to the study of religion in public educational institutions. It seems that what openings that exist under current provincial regulations make it hard for small groups to accomplish much. There may be more possibilities, however, for a group-based approach to school boards.

- d) **Irma Fast Dueck** reported
- i) That she had been to Kenya over Christmas, and had, among other things, met an eighty-year old nun there who is working for the rights of refugees, and worshiped at a large flourishing Anglican church.
 - ii) That she had been involved in hosting the visiting head of a Catholic college from India who came to CMU to learn more about that institution's structure.
 - iii) That she has been involved in a congregational peace-building initiative aimed at resolving conflicts occurring within congregations.
 - iv) That she had acquired her latest "Mary," a black wooden statue made from "good wood" for her in Kenya.
- e) **Richard Lebrun** reported:
- i) That through involvement in an Environmental Stewardship initiative at St. Ignatius Parish that he had come into contact with project Sacred Spaces, an environmental awareness program now getting underway in a number of churches of various denominations in Winnipeg.
 - ii) That following up on a discussion list offer by an author of a paper relating to the role of religion in multi-religious societies, he had entered into an internet dialogue with an American Mennonite (with a Muslim wife) now teaching at a Catholic university in Lebanon.
- f) **Adolf Ens** reported a funeral experience.
- g) **Elaine Baete** reported:
- i) That, in Chaplaincy, she had several meetings with the University Chaplains Association.
 - ii) That she had accompanied a group of students to a Shabbot worship service and dinner at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue.
 - iii) That she had arranged an annual student weekend retreat on the theme "call to holiness. On the Saturday morning, Rabbi Michael Levanson spoke about the call to holiness in the Torah.
 - iv) That she had recently read Gregory Baum's *Amazing Church* (2005), and had been especially fascinated by what he had to say about the evolution of ecumenism and interfaith relations.
- h) **Helmut Harder** reported:
- i) That some 80 Mennonite conferences have been asked to study the five-year report of the International Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, and asked to report the results to a meeting scheduled for March in Pasadena, CA.
 - ii) That the Evangelical Mennonite Church (Canada, Ardith's denomination) has taken the five-year report to heart, and that he had recently attended a cross-Canada meeting of that group, where had heard some excellent and serious discussions and three papers on the Roman Catholic understanding of Church, sacraments, and peace (by H. Plett).

- iii) That the Historic Peace Churches Continuation Committee (which dates back to 1935 as a kind of parallel organization to the World Council of Churches) had undertaken a book project, but that book was withdrawn after initial publication (because of faults). It is expected that the book will be republished in 2006. This group will be meeting in Washington, DC, in March. Helmut plans to attend this gathering.
 - iv) That he had been following news from the current meeting of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where Mennonite Marilyn Stahl spoke to the role of historic peace churches in the WWC's Decade to Overcome Violence.
 - v) That he had been much involved (as the chief author) of a CMU submission for membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.
 - vi) That he was preparing to present the Menno Simons lectures at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas. He will be reporting on Mennonite-Catholic dialogues.
 - vii) That progress was being made towards an ecumenical "cloud of witnesses" document (a common martyrology), a project of the Bose ecumenical monastery in northern Italy. This is being prepared for the March 2007 meeting of the WCC.
- i) **Luis Melo** reported:
- i) That he had been involved in the preparation of the Ad Limina Archdiocesan Report on Ecumenism for the Archdiocese of St. Boniface. He noted Archbishop Goulet's strong support for ecumenism, including establishment of a special office for this purpose.
 - ii) That he had presented a workshop on Ecumenism for Candidates for the Permanent Diaconate.
 - iii) That he had been much involved with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, including a) a Chancery Staff Luncheon, b) the actual Festival of Prayer, and c) on realization that the week had not come off as well as hoped, the establishment of a Steering Committee, to plan for a more successful event next year.
 - iv) That he had been involved in various Zonal Meetings with clergy and parish workers, which included discussion of various ecumenical activities and projects.
 - v) That he is involved in some of the planning activities for the Franklin Graham Festival (Oct. 21–22, 2006). Later, in response to a question from **Adolf**, Luis explained that there would be discussion with the Graham organization with respect to statements that that group had made concerning Muslims and U.S. foreign policy, and that Catholic involvement in the Graham event was to ensure that Catholics who respond to "calls to the altar" would be assisted in "remembering" their parent church. Luis admitted that the Graham event was not really in the "Catholic style."
 - vi) That he was much involved in a Jewish-Catholic Dialogue (six rabbis and six priests) that has been discussing The Akedah (Gen. 22) and "Two Faiths, One Covenant" (ed. by E. Korn and J. Pawliowski). He is finding this a rich dialogue.
 - vii) That he was involved with the Interfaith Round Table. This group petitions government to assure health care in correctional and health-care institutions.

- viii) That he was involved with the Faith Leaders Council for Understanding. This a recently formed group that used to be linked to the Global College at the University of Winnipeg and is now associated with the Mauro Centre. At present, it has education/formation as its focus (of its members) and perhaps, in the future, as appropriate, statements on interfaith issues (current) of a reflective nature to appear as editorials in newspapers/establishing an annual lecture series, etc. for a wider circle.
- ix) That he was looking ahead to a) participating in the national Anglican-Catholic Dialogue in Ottawa (March 2–5), b) a trip to Switzerland for a retreat at Grandchamp (a WCC – Lutheran/Mennonite event), c) a holiday in England, d) the Bridgefolk meeting in Collegeville (June 29–July 2), and e) a meeting of the North American Academy of Ecumenists in Minneapolis (Sept. 28–30)

At this point, the pastor of Christ the King, **Fr. Renato**, came in, and was introduced to the group.

4. **Debriefing on “Called Together to be Peacemakers.”** With respect to the four questions that been posed in the Agenda, **Helmut** requested that we present our reflections to each question in turn.

A) **What is your overall impression of the value of the 5-year dialogue?** To this question:

Elaine said she had found it an extremely valuable experience, especially the sharing of different perspectives, particularly the in-depth re-reading of history and the healing of memories that we lived. She felt that the experience had enriched her ministry at St. Paul’s College and her relations with the UMSU chaplains.

Adolf indicated that from a personal perspective he had found the dialogue very beneficial, and that from a church perspective he thought it important that leadership from both sides had endorsed the dialogue. He feels that how much the effects of the dialogue will pervade our respective congregations remains to be seen, and depends in part on efforts in the future.

Richard found the dialogue a wonderfully enriching and fulfilling experience, both in terms of the people he had gotten to know and what he had learned. Particularly since he has retired, opportunities for good discussion and exchange with people he greatly respects are something to be highly treasured. As for learning, his understanding of the Anabaptist tradition has been greatly deepened. Before the dialogue, this understanding had been based only on reading, but now he feels that he has much better feel for how at least some Mennonites see the world and understand and live their Christian faith.

Irma, after noting that she had been a participant for the shortest time, said that she had enjoyed the experience immensely, and that it had changed the way she teaches, and that it had opened her understanding in a number of different ways, especially with respect to reading various documents.

John replied with a long sentence replete with superlatives in which he said he found it engaging, illuminating, challenging, encouraging, etc. He said that he now thinks

differently, and feels he is more open to new possibilities, and more disposed to take risks.

Harold said that he had found the experience enjoyable and enriching. It confirmed in his mind the richness of Catholic teaching. He appreciated the people – the human resources – represented in the Catholic spokespeople around the table. He appreciated the faith he sensed in the people around the table – this has not been merely an intellectual exercise – it has been a shared faith in God known to us in Jesus Christ.

Lynda said she found the report rewarding, that she was impressed by its reference to Scripture (especially to John 17:21 “may they all be one”). She now appreciates the sense of faith of all involved; it’s no longer merely an intellectual exercise.

Helmut reflected on the question in the light of his participation in both the international and local dialogues, and indicated that he felt lucky to have been a part of both. Overall, he finds that the dialogues have taken the edge off his “triumphalism” – part of his Anabaptist heritage, especially as derived from Harold S. Bender, who had influenced him during his education. The dialogue experience was something he needed to help realize that Anabaptism was part of something bigger.

Luis said that on a personal level he had been pleasantly surprised by how the group had trusted the co-chairs to set agendas. He was proud that this was the only such group in Canada. Referring to Paragraph 28 of “Called Together to be Peacemakers,” which speaks of a purification of memories, he reflected that our group had been creating new memories, escaping from the prison of old misunderstandings, being freed for the life of the Holy Spirit in trying to be one. He stressed that the churches today are in a “new” situation: Christendom no longer exists, we are neighbours and family (through intermarriage), and we are all in a situation where “religion” tends to be on the margins of society.

B) Which section of the Report caught your attention?

Helmut responded first to this question, saying that what most interested him was the section involving reconsideration of our interpretations of history. He thought it very important that his was done so carefully and at an international level.

Richard indicated that as an historian he too was particularly impressed with how well the report treated historical issues, and that as a Catholic he was most taken by the generally positive and hopeful attitude displayed throughout the document. As someone who has at times been more than a little critical of the attitudes, actions, and lack of action by the Vatican, he was impressed and grateful that this international Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue received so much and such effective support from the folks in Rome.

Elaine echoed this appreciation for the work of historical interpretation, the “re-reading” of history, and the healing of memories involved in this activity.

Harold said that what caught his attention was the discussion of the sacraments, and particularly concerning Baptism, for the reason that he had known about adult Baptism and the testimony that accompanied it as it is now practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. He especially appreciated the historical work that has been done around this issue in recent decades and the way this was reported to us.

Adolf was particularly taken by paragraphs 53 to 62 of the Report, which deal with the “Constantinian Era,” a period of enormous significance for those in the Anabaptist tradition, because it had brought the union of church and state that the Anabaptists repudiated in the sixteenth century. They reacted by demanding complete separation of church and state. Today the Roman Catholic Church no longer supports that union, and Mennonites are coming to appreciate their responsibilities in the larger society. At this point, we need each other.

Luis referred particularly to paragraph 49 of the Report, which speaks of Mennonites now finding themselves with a growing experience of integration into established society and Catholics increasingly finding themselves in situations of disestablishment. Both have similar questions to answer; we can consider theology together, both *Ad Intra* (the inner life of discipleship) and *Ad Extra* (the outer life of discipleship). With respect to the nature of the Church and with respect to Sacraments and Ordinances, Catholic and Mennonite traditions and teachings are very close, and both groups experience similar zones of “discomfort.”

Lynda was particularly impressed by what the report had to say about “healing of memories,” something that she regards as essential before working together for justice becomes possible.

John said he was particularly taken by paragraphs 205 and 206 of the Report, and especially with the comment that “We commit ourselves to self-examination, dialogue, and interaction that manifest Jesus Christ’s reconciling love, and we encourage our brothers and sisters everywhere to join us in this commitment.” He finds this statement a ringing call to action.

Irma was especially impressed with what the Report had to say about sacraments and worship, with a great sense of the workings of God in Baptism and the Eucharist – in contrast to what we do. She also much liked the Report’s statements on the nature of the church, with the emphasis on God’s initiative to embody Christ in the world. She reflected on the tensions in flawed congregations, and on how often there can be a gulf between what we say we believe and what we do.

C. **What is your most valuable insight?**

Richard replied that the most valuable insight that he had obtained from our entire five years of dialogue, an insight that was only reinforced by our study of the international report, was an appreciation of how and to what extent Mennonites can experience Christ’s presence in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. He said that this had not only deepened his understanding of Mennonite teaching and experience, it had also broadened his understanding of Catholic theology of the Eucharist.

Luis began by recounting an exchange with another priest on the question of Mennonite teaching and practice with respect to the Eucharist, and in which the other man had said that “Of course, they don’t really have a Eucharist.” Luis considers it a real gift that our dialogue has led him far away from such assumptions. He has found the experience extremely valuable for its contribution to his understanding of “method.” What he has learned from reflecting together on the past, on the key concept of discipleship and how this is lived out both within the community and with respect to those outside the church, he regards as a great gift from the Mennonites.

Helmut recounted that when he and his fellow Mennonites had first become involved in the international dialogue they had the feeling that they had less “stuff” to bring to the table than the Catholic participants. He was most impressed with how the Catholics proved eager to “draw out” what the Mennonites regarded as important. He felt that the Catholic participants had been very gracious to their “little group” (thinking in terms of the vast disparity in size between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mennonite group they represented).

Elaine had been struck by how our ancestors had been prophetic, even though they were unable to deal effectively with certain issues. The Church had been called by Martin Luther and the Anabaptists, but at that time the Church was not ready to listen. Today we are dealing with many other issues in our faith and ecclesial life.

Adolf went back to the meeting in which our group “reported” to the archbishop and some of the leaders of Mennonite conferences, and expressed his gratitude for the magnanimity with which our work was accepted by these leaders, especially that of the much larger Catholic Church.

John found most valuable the thought that all that we need to do we can do, because we have proven by our dialogue the possibilities of a prayerful method; we have substantial resources for becoming one.

Harold thought that what had been most valuable was the opportunity to see our respective positions alongside each other, to see from different directions. He has the conviction that our convergences are more important and much stronger than our differences; the convergences outweigh the differences. We walk in the same direction.

Lynda found it invaluable to learn to celebrate convergences. That we are called together to be peacemakers is important for the church and the world.

Irma, like Adolf, liked the idea that the “little” church could talk to the “big” church. She was delighted to be part of the conversation. Her most treasured insight is the realization that reconciliation does not depend on reaching absolute convergence, that we don’t have to fix all the differences to achieve some kind of unity.

Helmut added further reflections on the essential theological themes: the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit; basic agreement on the meaning of Baptism and discipleship, Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper, etc. We agree on the basics.

Luis came back to our shared “high ecclesiology” – in both traditions we believe in the Church, and we appreciate the need to be “exclusive” in certain areas. We also tend to be “uncomfortable” in certain areas, such as recognition of the validity of baptism, “closed” Eucharistic tables, etc. We can agree about the adjectives.

D. Which aspect of the Report reflects a crucial issue for you?

Harold thought that the crucial issue coming out of the Report that needs further discussion is the relationship to the universal body of Christ with a visible institution.

Richard drew attention to the next to last paragraph of the document, no. 213, where it is stated that “the dialogue members encourage Mennonites and Catholics to engage each other in joint study and cooperative service.” Among the areas of possible interaction listed is “mutual engagement in ... peace and justice initiatives.” Insofar as

the environmental crisis of our time bears directly on issues of social justice and peace, he suggested that an appropriate Christian response to this crisis might be a crucial issue crying out for our joint attention.

Adolf wonders why people who worship should find themselves misunderstanding each other so seriously. Why is there so much violence between various Muslim sub-groups?

John referred to paragraph 189 of the Report and drew our attention to questions 4 and 5, which ask: “How can we meet the challenge of developing common theological perspectives on peace that reflect the diverse voices of men and women from different contexts world-wide?” and “What is the role of the Church in promoting a culture of peace in civil society and in establishing institutions for the practice of non-violence in public life?” He sees responses to these questions as crying needs in the world today.

Elaine spoke of the need for continued discussion and the work of reconciliation and healing of memories, to study “models of the church,” and to achieve further understanding of each other. She also spoke of the need to get to the grassroots level in our respective denominations.

Luis reflected on what was not said in the Report. He sees room for more reflection on Christology in both traditions. What does it mean to mean to live the Eucharist in the world? What needs to be done to live the commitments of Baptism? What do we mean by saying Jesus is the “Word of God” and the “Bread of Life”?

At this point, there was a **dinner break**

5. **Review of Winnipeg Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue discussion** from the beginning until now. **Richard Lebrun** distributed and spoke briefly to a “Summary of Minutes” that he prepared. This covered minutes for the 15 meetings held between June 2000 and October 2005. He indicated that he had copies of all the minutes, except for the meeting of 14 May 2003, for which no minutes were taken, and would be glad to provide copies on request.

6. **Quo vadis?**

Helmut opened the discussion by stressing the need for some discernment on issues of themes, agenda, shape of future dialogue, group organization etc.

Irma, in part because she had to leave early because of a prior commitment, replied first, indicating that she would love to continue to participate in the present group. She reported that she had been approached by people at CMU asking to become a part of our group (and wondering if Elaine Pinto had been replaced). She thinks that a number of her colleagues at CMU would like to engage in discussions with colleagues at St. Paul’s College.

Richard wondered if it might be possible for us now to be involved in two activities. In the first place, he said he would be most pleased and grateful to continue our current dialogue. There are, it seemed to him, many questions that we could fruitfully explore together. He had mentioned one in his pre-dinner break reflections – an appropriate Christian response to environmental issues. *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict’s encyclical, is another topic that we might fruitfully explore together. In the second place, he suggested, it is probably time for us, certainly as individuals, and perhaps as a group, to offer what we have learned to our

broader communities, the congregations where we regularly worship, and perhaps as well to higher authorities in our larger religious communities. We have, indeed, done a bit of this, but we haven't had an in-depth discussion of how these things might be done, and obviously we have not reached any decisions about group activities.

Elaine indicated that when she had read *Deus Caritas Est*, the same idea had occurred to her. She thought there were other issues as well, such as ecclesiology and Christology, that we might explore in more depth.

John, indicating that he was thinking about his own parish, wondered about the possibility of an Adult Education Program. He reflected about Irma's comment at our last meeting to the effect that "we need each other," that we are the Body of Christ. He thought that we need both more study and some joint action. As an example of an "action" we wondered about a city-wide "celebration" that would concretize when we are doing. He noted that the disavowal of anathemas by the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue had to be taken from the rather intellectual level of theologians down to the level of congregations. Perhaps we need to challenge our respective church leaders, to ask them what we can do together, as churches. Perhaps we should be asking what we can do as individuals, as parents? Could there be protocols for such matters as intermarriage? We need to inform our communities about our work and its results. Dreaming, following the example of Elaine Pinto at our last meeting, we reflected on common initiatives towards peace, common worship, and a common Eucharist. What would this take by way of personal commitment, organization, and time to translate this dream into action? He suggested that the Bridgefolk edition of *Called Together to be Peacemakers* offered a ready-made starting point for new groups.

Luis agreed about the need to tell our story. He observed that there has been little follow-up to the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, largely because Anglican attention has been directed elsewhere.

Harold favoured the use of events to draw attention to this dialogue (e.g., might be an event at CMU, with some special feature such as choral music appropriate to the occasion) and the idea of a year of exchanges by coupling Catholic and Mennonite churches, with members of our discussion group as facilitators and participants people who commit themselves to be part of the exchange for the duration.

Helmut expressed concern about the question of tying our activities to the larger structures in both religious communities, pointing out that to this point our dialogue was totally informal.

Adolf pointed out that the session in which we had "reported" to the archbishop and some Mennonite leaders as at least a quasi-official endorsement of our activity.

John thought that we didn't need anyone's permission to talk to each other.

Luis suggested that we would be moving into new territory if we initiated talks between faculty members at CMU and St. Paul's College.

From this point on there was a general discussion of various possible "outreach" activities – including sponsoring new groups, invitations to general sessions where our work might be publicized, a "celebratory" event of some kind, "public accountability" sessions, possible venues for such sessions, series of such sessions, etc. It was noted that different people would have different expectations and different needs. **Helmut** felt uncomfortable with the "celebration" idea, suggesting that it was a Catholic term. There were reflections on the

resources now available, including publications by the Bridgefolk people (a study edition of the International report and a booklet on baptism).

In the end, it was agreed that our group would continue to meet, and that two new initiatives be undertaken:

- 1) The establishment of a dialogue group of academics from CMU and St. Paul's College, with **Richard** and **Irma** to work on this project.
- 2) The pairing of Mennonite and Catholic congregations to established dialogue groups of invited participants from the respective congregations. It was agreed that these groups should be made up of six and six, that they should be meet about four times over the next year (September through May), and that the meetings should be in the evening.

Helmut and **Richard** agreed to work with folks from Charleswood Mennonite Church and St. Ignatius Parish.

Adolf and **John** agreed to work with folks from their respective congregations

Harold and **Lynda** agreed to explore possibilities for the North Kildonan area.

In all cases, it was agreed that, as needed, participants might be sought from beyond the congregations in question – so these pairings might be considered area groupings.

Luis and **Helmut** agreed to prepare a kind of “template” to assist both types of groups, with suggested agenda, topics, etc.

7. The **next meeting** of our group was scheduled for 27 June, at a Mennonite venue yet to be decided.