

## Minutes

### Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 19

Meeting held on 17 October 2006  
at Canadian Mennonite University

Present: Elaine Baete, Adolf Ens, Irma Fast Dueck, Helmut Harder, Harold Jantz, Richard Lebrun, Henry Loewen, Luis Melo, Michael Radcliffe, and Lynda Trenholm.

Regrets: John Long

1. **Helmut Harder** welcomed us again to CMU.
2. **Elaine Baete** led the group in an opening prayer based on the Breviary.
3. **Sharing ecumenical and personal experiences:**
  - a) **Luis Melo** reported a number of activities:
    - 1) Attendance at the Bridgefolk Annual Gathering, St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, June 29–July 2.
    - 2) General Council of the United Church of Canada, Thunder Bay, August 11–20, as a representative of the Canadian bishops. Luis described his first in-depth experience of “congregationalism” and its mode of decision-making. He was surprised by the diversity of opinion among those attending, and by the practice that allows each congregation to develop and implement its own policy on such matters as baptism and gay marriage.
    - 3) Attendance at the Anglican-Roman Catholic (national) Dialogue, Montreal, September 28–30.
    - 4) Noted participation in Ecumenical Workshops in Winnipeg, preaching (where he finds himself speaking about Mennonites and discipleship), Reflection with Clergy and Pastoral Workers in the Montagne Zone. Salvation Army to host a Chancery Staff Luncheon.
    - 5) Planned participation in the Western-Diocesan-Eparchial Coordinators of Ecumenism (WDECE) annual meeting in Edmonton, November 9–12. The topic will be “One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins.”
    - 6) The planned Summer Ecumenical Institute to be held in Saskatoon in June 2007.
  - b) **Lynda Trenholm** spoke of attending a wedding at the McIver Street Mennonite Church, where at the end, the bride leapt into the arms of the groom, carried her down the aisle, and into the back of a pickup truck. She also described officiating at funerals of various kinds, involving persons of various or no religious affiliations, at various funeral homes.
  - c) **Henry Loewen** spoke of:

- 1) A planned trip, with a number of others, to Pass Christian, a Texas Gulf community, to be involved in rebuilding activities.
  - 2) A couple just returned from a number of years of missionary activity in Nigeria, working for the MCC on the dividing line between Muslim and Christian parts of the country, and cooperating with other faith groups (including Roman Catholics) in various activities. In particular, they reported their interaction with a young Muslim woman whose husband had been killed. Her first response was bitterness and radicalism, but in part with the counsel of her father, she changed, and is now working for peace with both Muslims and Christians.
- d) **Elaine Baete** spoke of:
- 1) Her continuing involvement with the ecumenical chaplains at the University of Manitoba, and a recently organized Thanksgiving service hosted at St. Paul's College, and offering the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises to a group including two non-Catholics.
  - 2) Her retired father (82 years of age), who lives near Holland, MB, and who likes to haul things for people, and his recent interactions with the Amish community (the first in Manitoba) that is settling in that area.
- e) **Harold Jantz** spoke of:
- 1) His continuing involvement in a number of activities.
  - 2) The death of his brother, who passed away recently after a rather lengthy illness.
  - 3) Attending a Catholic friend's funeral at Holy Ghost (Polish) Parish.
- f) **Adolf Ens** described visiting a lady who lives on a farm just west of St. Claude, MB, her maintenance of park-like surroundings, and her generosity.
- g) **Richard Lebrun** spoke of:
- 1) Attendance at the Bridgefolk conference at St. John's University, which he described as a very rich experience. He was particularly taken by the closing liturgy, a mass at which, after the weekend's thorough discussion of issues surrounding the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, all present, Mennonites and Catholics together joyfully (and tearfully) took communion together. The hymns for the service all came from the Mennonite hymnal, led by a Mennonite song leader.
  - 2) Attendance at annual meeting of the North American Academy of Ecumenists in Minneapolis. He was very impressed by the quality of the papers and discussion (on Eucharist), and most pleased to have the opportunity to meet and chat with Leonard Swidler, a scholar whose work he had long read and admired.
  - 3) Reported the appearance of his grandson, Brian Butcher, on a recent TV show, a half-hour dialogue on relations between Christianity and Islam, with a charming Muslim woman.
- h) **Helmut Harder** spoke of:

- 1) Participation of himself and his wife Irma in the Mennonite Festival Choir, which has just begun preparation for participation with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in a performance of Bach's D-Minor Mass on Good Friday, 2007.
  - 2) Participating in a meeting in July in Innsbruck, Austria, (on the site of the burning of Jacob Hutter in 1536) with Catholic, Hutterite, and Evangelical leaders (as well as a UN representative) who are planning a reconciliation ceremony to be held there in February 2007. Hutterite leaders from North American will be invited to participate, and an official Catholic apology is planned for the event.
  - 3) Reported that he will be speaking at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, Oct. 29–31, 2006, in the annual Menno Simons lecture series. His overall topic is "Mennonites and Catholics: Conversing on the Way." Individual lectures will be on "Sharing Our Stories," "Integrating Our Peace Witness," "Comparing Our Theologies," and "Healing Our Divisions."
- i) **Irma Fast Dueck** spoke of:
- 1) Her experience in teaching a course on Christian Doctrine (Introduction to Christianity), where she is working with a class of 55, which includes four Catholic students, and students from other denominations, and some who describe themselves as "non-denominational." She finds that from her experience in our dialogue and from dealing with Catholic students, she now treats topics differently than she once did.
  - 2) A planned conference, titled "Refreshing Winds," that will deal with Worship and Reconciliation.
  - 3) A visit to the Vancouver School of Theology (an Anglican-United Church institution), where she will likely be a Visiting Scholar teaching Christian Ethics.
4. Update on new congregational/dialogue groups:
- a) **Richard Lebrun** reported that the St. Ignatius/Charleswood Mennonite dialogue that he co-chairs with **Helmut Harder** has now met twice. Leona Dueck Penner, a member of that group, has written an article for Canadian Mennonite magazine about the meeting. The St. Paul's/CMU group that he co-chairs with **Irma Fast Dueck** will be meeting at CMU on Wednesday, 18 October.
  - b) **Luis Melo** distributed the article that appeared in the *Prairie Messenger* (11 October 2006) about our dialogues, including information about our new groups. The neighbourhood dialogue in north and east Winnipeg, co-chaired by **Lynda Trenholm** and **Harold Jantz** has met once, and has two more meetings planned. The south Winnipeg dialogue, which will include members from Mary Mother of the Church Parish and Fort Garry Mennonite Church, co-chaired by **John Long** and **Adolf Ens**, will hold its first meeting soon. Luis also reported that the *Prairie Messenger* story will be going to Msgr John Radano in the Vatican, and that it will likely appear eventually in some form in material distributed by the Catholic Information Service.
5. **Summary and reflections based on *From Anabaptist Seed*:**

- a) **Helmut Harder** provided some background on this publication, noting that it had been commissioned by the Mennonite World Conference (an organization that covers churches in some sixty countries with a membership of about one million people), for the purpose of strengthening Mennonite identity among them. Many of these churches grew out of Mennonite missionary activities. The booklet was offered, not as a creed, but to provide an historical core of Anabaptist-Related Identity. Helmut observed that not everything in the book reflected practices in the congregation to which he belongs. His church, for example, does not regard “foot-washing” as an ordinance. Recent scholarship has shown that there was considerable diversity among 16<sup>th</sup>-century Anabaptists, which continues to be the case among the churches with their roots in that seed. He noted as well that not all these churches identify themselves as “Anabaptist” or even “Mennonite.”
- b) **Richard Lebrun** commented on the first section on Anabaptist Doctrines as follows:

Chapter One, Section A. How can we know God’s will?

I found myself a bit confused by the Section title, because it turns out that what Snyder is writing about here is not, as I expected, how we as individuals might know God’s will for us in our individual lives, but how the Church, the community of believers, can know God’s will for the Christian Church. The question is really about authority in the Church – who has it? And how is it to be exercised?

Snyder begins by pointing out Anabaptist agreement that Luther’s notion of church reform on the basis of “Scripture alone” was a good starting point. What Snyder neglects to mention is why Luther had recourse to this principle – which is that when Luther found himself and his ideas condemned by Church authorities (the papacy in particular), he was left with nowhere else to go to justify his stand. In effect, Luther repudiated the principles and structures of authority that had been worked out in the early centuries of Christianity, the evolution of what Church historian Thomas Bokenkotter calls the development of a “Church with authority,” principles and structures that had done a pretty job of maintaining Church unity for well over a millennium. Snyder then points out that Luther almost immediately moved to restrict interpretation of Scripture to “learned theologians.” He might also have had added that Luther also ended up enlisting the authority of the prince (the state) to enforce discipline and unity in the Church (another development that Mennonites refused to accept – but that’s another important story).

As Snyder explains, the early Anabaptists soon moved beyond Luther’s principle of “Scripture alone” to the notion of “Scripture and Spirit together.” Experience soon taught, however, that this idea in turn had to be modified, because some individual Anabaptist leaders took it in some pretty wild directions. Very soon, the more responsible leaders came to the notion that the claims of those who said they were “led by the Spirit” should be tested by the discernment of the “gathered congregation of believers.” Later, after the notorious and disastrous attempt of some radical Anabaptism leaders to establish a theocratic community in the city of Münster, more moderate leaders, of which Menno Simons was the most important, began to emphasize that all prophetic and spiritual

claims should be measured by the life and words of Christ. Thus, “testing of spirits” was returned to the “discerning congregation.” Snyder sums up the Anabaptist answer to the question “How can we know God’s will” by saying that, for the Church, “God’s will is revealed in Scripture, interpreted by all believers through the power of the Holy Spirit, discerned in community, and tested by the measure of Christ.”

Catholics, from the sixteenth century onward, of course, have observed that these principles have not proved to be particularly successful in maintaining unity among Anabaptists. When no agreement could be reached in the “gathered congregation,” very often disagreements led to permanent divisions among the churches that have sprung from “Anabaptist Seed.”

This issue of authority in the Church has always been very important for Catholics. Ever since the Reformation, one of the major themes of Catholic apologetics and polemic has been to argue that the result of the Protestant principle of “Scripture alone” (no matter how modified by various descendants of the Reformers, including Anabaptists), has been a constant and continuing splintering of the Christian Church, and an erosion of doctrine towards religious indifference, skepticism, and even atheism. The great French bishop, Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, made the argument very forcefully in his *History of the Variations of the Protestant Churches* (1688). The man I’ve studied for most of my years as an historian, the Savoyard count, Joseph de Maistre, made the same case, most famously in his book on *The Pope*, where he argued the vital importance of strong papal authority in the maintenance of unity and vitality of the Church. At the moment, I’m translating a famous work by Félicité de Lamennais, his *Essay on Indifference* (1817–23), where the same argument is made, with numerous citations from various contemporary Anglican and Calvinist authors to prove his point. This perspective is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Roman Catholic Church was so long very hesitant about becoming involved in the ecumenical movement. It was only with the Second Vatican Council that the highest authorities in the Church of Rome came to recognize and acknowledge the survival of authentic Christianity in churches descended from the sixteenth-century Reformation.

In my own education as a Catholic, I was strongly indoctrinated with the older perspective. My thinking has been turned around, in part, by the documents of Vatican II, but more importantly, by my encounters and friendship with all the good Christians whom I have met in our Mennonite-Catholic dialogues. While I still believe that one of the treasures of Catholicism is the strong structure of authority that has and continues to preserve what we call “the deposit of the faith” and to maintain unity amongst what is now a huge world-wide body of believers, I have also come to appreciate that Bossuet, Maistre, Lamennais, and others like them, were mistaken in arguing that Christian churches and Christian faith would be unable to survive outside that structure and without strong central authority.

## **Discussion:**

**Luis** returned to the experience at the General Council of the United Church of Canada, where one of the candidates for the position of moderator gave that church only fifteen years to survive, because in that church funerals are outnumbering baptisms two to one – a logical consequence perhaps of extreme “congregational” in governance.

- c) **Irma Fast Dueck** commented on the second section on Anabaptist doctrines: How are we saved?

#71 “*the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and the unity of the whole race.*” (*Lumen gentium, 1*)

Our scriptures describe the church as a light on a hill, a light to the nations. J. H. Yoder has claimed that the church is to be what the whole world is to be ultimately. If the unity of the church is indeed a sacrament – that unity, as I understand sacraments, is something we receive, as gift. It is not something we earn (something Mennonites are prone to thinking)

*The Church comprises both “a divine and a human element”* (*Lumen gentium 8*)

What catches me about the Catholic understanding of the church, and what I understand is behind the divine and human element, is the Christological starting point. We can’t talk about Christ without talking about the church. We can’t talk about the church without talking about Jesus Christ. This I believe we share as Mennonites and Catholics. This should be obvious, I believe, to all Christians but the reality is that it is not. For some, we can have Christ but don’t need the church in any meaningful way. A while ago I heard Father Melo use the *Lumen gentium* #8, to unpack the anthropological and Christological nature of the church. The church, like Jesus, is both human and divine. As I frequently teach in areas related to ecclesiology and I have become increasingly aware of this human-divine tension: between God’s initiative to embody Christ in the world through the Spirit and the flawed human institutional life of a particular community in time and space. As the church we, you as Catholics and we as Mennonites, live within this tension between what God is doing through Christ in the church and our flawed human reality, which sometimes leads to diminished notions of the church as “divine” at all. Further, we live in the tension between what we believe about the church and what it is we do in the church.

#83 *The meaning of “catholicity”*: the whole understanding of “catholicity” fascinates me. Fullness of the faith, respect for the gifts of the Spirit in their diversity... “driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity”, the Church’s mission *demand*s the *particularity of the churches*. In this context the catholicity of the Church is a call to embrace all legitimate human particularities. It begs the question what would be an “illegitimate” particularity? What is the boundary of diversity? Despite the diversity there is a strong sense that in the centre of it all, there is the same faith contained in Scriptures, handed on by the apostles and confessed in the creeds today. To be “catholic” is to be diverse. I am amazed at how the Catholic Church has held the church together. Is this

what allows for such unity despite diverse practices? I am amazed that you have so many diverse practices/perspectives (e.g. feminist critique of hierarchy etc.) and yet retain that unity.

**Discussion:** Mike opened the discussion by citing the passage in John's gospel to the effect that "I have chosen you," and suggested that perhaps the emphasis should be on the fact that we are "called" rather than on one's "decision" for Christ. **Helmut** suggested that what we do is acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit within us. **Harold** agreed that in making a choice we recognize the Spirit working, but that we also have to make a decision to accept the Holy Spirit. **Luis** wondered about the distinction **Irma** had made between "confessing Christians" and the "baptized" with respect to participation in Mennonite church services. Apparently practice varies from congregation to congregation.

d) **Harold Jantz** commented as follows on the third section on Anabaptist doctrines: Consequences of Anabaptist doctrines:

In this section, Snyder briefly summarizes what he believes have been the results of Anabaptist understandings of how we know God's will and how we are saved, as we have just heard.

He sees three specific outcomes: first of all, it led to the understanding that the church consists of believers, born of the Spirit and centred on Christ. This is where the term the "believers church" received its currency. Secondly, it resulted in a church in which there was a high level of biblical literacy. The Bible was returned to ordinary readers with the understanding implicit that even someone with very little learning but with a heart illuminated by the Holy Spirit could read it with understanding – perhaps even better understanding than someone with great learning. And thirdly, it led, clearly, to an assumption that the church is visible. There certainly are ways in which the church is more than that, but primarily it should be understood to be a visible community of believers.

I think Snyder has identified well several consequences flowing out of core doctrinal understandings of the Anabaptists. In the first place, the church: people would not belong to it because they had grown up in a certain region or belonged to certain "believing" families. They came into the church through conversion to Christ, the new birth, and their readiness to confess this faith in word and baptism. The church should consist of those who had made such a confession. They constituted a "believers church" and this closely resembles what I knew as a young person growing up in the church. I think it also resembles what was understood by those who organized "believers church conferences" for a number of decades during part of the last century. I'm not so sure it describes as well what we see in Mennonite settings today – and this chiefly because of the concern to see children within the family of faith and invited, for example, to the Lord's Supper, the church's communion meal.

My understanding of renewal within the church has been that it invariably involved a re-engagement with the Scriptures. That seems to have been the case with the early Anabaptists, who immersed themselves in the Scriptures and who argued vigorously with those who would have said that only the “learned teachers” could read the Scriptures with understanding and teach them. I recall that one of my most respected teachers during my years of Bible study would say that some very ordinary believer who read the Scriptures with an obedient heart might very likely understand it better than someone who came with great learning but was unwilling to submit to its truths. My concern is that we are increasingly returning to the assumption that without the help of learned teachers, we can’t meet God in the Scriptures and grow spiritually. I find relatively few people bringing Bibles to church. Classes on topical issues or just friendship circles in church on Sundays easily out-draw Bible classes. I had a very troubling conversation with someone recently who went through a deep and prolonged faith crisis after he had studied with a teacher at one of our Bible colleges locally who had left him with the sense that it was impossible to understand the gospels without knowing the cultural setting in which they were written. At a time when Bibles are available as never before, it appears that many Christians scarcely read it, it doesn’t engage them, energize their faith, stimulate their thinking, and it doesn’t form a vital part of their faith journey. I think this is true in many Anabaptist-related churches with which I’m familiar.

The third outcome of Anabaptist teaching, that the church is a visible presence in the world, is still an emphasis that we give attention to, but it also is under a great deal of stress. I think the notion of the “visible church” was at one time taken very literally. For example, if the number of members of a congregation was understood to be two or three hundred, we would expect a Sunday service to have most of those two or three hundred in attendance, plus children and young people who might not yet be members (with visitors in addition). But for many this is no longer true, and perhaps in some cases for very good reason. Again, for example, work or professional obligations often have large numbers traveling. On the other hand, an increasing number of those who came out of believers churches like ours have come to separate their faith from a visible community of faith. They cannot link to a community – or if they do, it is to a very small community. This is a growing and quite certainly a widespread phenomenon. To illustrate, in the most recent statistics for my Mennonite church, the attendance figures for Sunday morning attendance for the first time are nearly the same as those for the membership. In earlier years and not many ago, they could have been 30 to 50% higher. This separation from a visible community results in Christians who make themselves in some ways very vulnerable. They separate growth as followers of Christ from any correcting or nurturing role that fellow believers might have in their lives.

**Discussion:** Elaine wondered about the extent to which Mennonite churches practiced an “open table” with respect to non-Mennonites. Answer – seems to depend on the congregation. Helmut observed that the idea that the Lord’s Supper is no more than a “memorial meal” is common among many Protestant churches and that in many cases there is nothing “sacramental” in the practice. There followed discussion about the co-relation between baptism and “commitment” – with the



suggestion that church attendance without baptism is somewhat analogous to “common law” marriage, that is, it probably signifies a lack of commitment.

- e) **Lynda Trenholm** summarized and commented on the first section on Anabaptist ordinances: Baptism.

Baptism of believing adults was the most identifying mark of the Anabaptist movement.

The essential scriptural argument for adult baptism was taken from Matthew 28:19–20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

In this passage is seen a clear command: 1<sup>st</sup> Go forth and teach (proclaim the Word). 2<sup>nd</sup> After teaching, baptize. 3<sup>rd</sup> Following baptism new Christians are taught to live lives of obedience to Christ’s commands.

Anabaptists insisted that the preceding scriptural commands could not possibly apply to newborn infants or small children. For Anabaptists the scriptural command was clearly explicit. Baptism was not a sacrament to be used by priests. It was an external sign of an interior faith.

Early Anabaptists believed in a “three-fold” baptism:

1. Baptism in the Holy Spirit
2. Baptism in water
3. Baptism in blood.

**Baptism of the Spirit.** Anabaptists rejected the idea that water could become a sacrament that conveyed grace. “Water was just water” The water of baptism was not holy. It was the inner baptism of the Spirit that was primary and essential.

Spiritual baptism led believers to repentance, faith, and commitment. “Regenerated believers” were granted spiritual power to become obedient disciples.

**Baptism in water.** Anabaptists considered water baptism secondary. It was seen as an outward confession or “testimony” to what happened inwardly. It was not unimportant. It played a crucial role in establishing the visible Body of Christ on earth. It was a necessary outer witness to the inner spiritual change – public seal, promise and commitment to the Church.

**Baptism of blood.** It brings to mind “martyrdom” – 4000 Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. It had a dual meaning – one less fatal than the original notion. Despite the baptisms of Spirit and water, Anabaptists believed they would still face a constant struggle against evil – in the flesh and the world. The 16<sup>th</sup> century

belief – mortification of the flesh “killing of the old Adam.” It could mean a call to accept the fact that one’s own blood would or could be shed.

Comments:

I found the Anabaptists’ understanding of baptism to be very interesting and different from the Catholic understanding. I am a “cradle Catholic.” I was baptized as an infant on June 6, 1952, about two weeks after my birth. I can appreciate that I would not have had any understanding or belief of the teaching of salvation or repentance or been able to promise to live a life of obedience. My parents and godparents would have made the promise raise me in the faith.

The Baptism of Infants (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1250):

“Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men and women are called. The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.”

For Catholics, there are three sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. They lay the foundations of every Christian life. Children are baptized as infants, and receive the sacraments of Eucharist normally around the age of seven. The sacrament is received at the age of ten to fourteen depending on the discretion of the local ordinary (Bishop or Archbishop). “The sharing in the divine nature given to men and women through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation through the receiving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.” (Paragraph 1212, citing Paul VI.)

“Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons and daughters of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’” (Paragraph 1213, citing the Roman Catechism.)

“This sacrament is also called the “*washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit*,” for it signifies and actually bring about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one ‘can enter the kingdom of God.’” (Paragraph 1215, citing Titus 3:5 and Jn 3:5)

In my ministry to prepare parents for the baptism of their infants, I impress upon them the following teaching of the Catholic Church.

“Baptism is God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift.... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal and most precious gift. It is called *gift* because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; *grace* since it is given to the guilty; *baptism* because sin is buried in water; *anointing* for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; *enlightenment* because it radiates light; *clothing* since it veils our shame; *bath* because it washes; and *seal* as it is our guard and the sign of God’s Lordship.” (Paragraph 1216, citing St. Gregory of Nazianzus)

**Discussion:** **Elaine** observed that at Catholic baptisms, all those present are given the opportunity of renewing their baptismal vows. **Lynda** added that adult baptisms normally occur at the Easter Vigil service. **Harold** reported that Mennonites are given frequent opportunity to renew their “covenant” with the church. **Irma** noted that preaching often stresses the notion that baptisms were matters involving the whole church. Those being baptized make a profession of faith. **Helmut** observed that the language used by Mennonites with respect to baptism borders on the sacramental, while Catholics use language that includes discipleship. **Harold** reported that many Mennonite congregations practice some kind of “child dedication” ceremony, which gives families an opportunity to voice their commitment to nurture the child and to prepare the child to make a decision for Christ. The community as well is invited to participate in these tasks. With respect to symbolism, **Henry** reported that in his congregation, the minister might wrap the child in a blanket to symbolize the love and commitment of the community to the infant.

- f) **Henry Loewen** commented on the second section on Anabaptist ordinances: Church Discipline. He began by noting that he never before thought of Discipline as an ordinance, and observing that when he was growing up Thursdays were known as “discipline days” (Thunder Days). He went on to say:

The two scripture passages 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 and I Corinthians 13: 1–7, suggested in the “For Discussion” questions, point out the difficulty in exercising church discipline according to the scriptures. In the first passage from chapter 5, the apostle says, “not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber,” and concludes the paragraph with the words “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

Chapter 13, the second passage, seems to be the opposite. It talks about the ‘gift of love’ Verse 4–7 reads, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

How does the church maintain a balance between these admonitions? What should “discipline based on the gospel look like from the beginning to the end, from recognition of the problem to, if necessary, the excommunication and hopefully restoration of a Christian brother (sister).” [Marlin Jeschke, *Disciplining the Brother* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA, 1972), p. 40.]

Marlin Jeschke in his book, *Disciplining the Brother*, tries to cast discipline in the church in a non-punitive light. He focuses on Matthew 18 as an act of disciplining. John H. Yoder in his Introduction to this book writes:

The discipline – which he proposes to call “disciplining” in order to underline its commonality with evangelism and baptism – is the renewal of the call of forgiveness, rendered real by the word of the brother.... Discipline is not to be held in tension or in balance with grace and forgiveness, it is grace and forgiveness. It is not rigor, regrettably necessary in structured communities, but needing to be tempered with gentleness; it is gentleness at work, as the apostle says in so many words in Galatians 6:2. [Ibid., cover.]

Discipline, disciplining, should be seen as a congregational action, even when performed by Ministers. Jeschke writes:

the handling of this matter is done by the ministers as ministers of the congregation. The action is ultimately congregational action under Christ, not the action of a minister in independence of the congregation. The reason is that the church as such, the whole people of God, stands under the authority of Christ and is his agent in the task of discipline – as it is also in the task of missionary proclamation. [Ibid., p. 180.]

The Matthew 18:15–18 text continues to be the instructive guideline for many Anabaptist congregations today. In Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, my home congregation, our Covenant states:

This we covenant that we will strive to understand the Will of God and strive to live by it in the strength of the Power of the Spirit. This will require reading the Word, listening to the Spirit and each other in the Fellowship, and being much in prayer where differences of opinion divide us. Christian discipline (discipleship requires a holy life and to that end members will exhort and correct each other according to Matthew 18:15–18).

**Henry** also recounted a couple of anecdotes about how the practice of disciplining happened in his congregation. He noted as well that while the responsibility of exercising discipline was in theory the responsibility of all, in practice it may turn out to be the responsibility of none.

**Discussion:** **Luis** wondered about a possible distinction between “public sin” and “personal sin,” and the possibility of “self-imposed ban.” **Henry** described in more detail how the community prepares for communion the Sunday previous to celebration of the Lord’s Supper, with members being encourage to get things right with others, and the practice of serving communion to each other, and looking directly at each other as a sign that things are right between each other. **Irma** spoke of her personal experience of deciding not to participate at times. **Harold** noted that the words of invitation encourage reflection about “right relationship,” and link reconciling to one another with God’s forgiveness. **Luis** noted that in Catholic practice, the only persons who might be refused communion would be in cases where reception would be a “public scandal.” He recited the formula of absolution used by the priest in the sacrament of penance, which emphasizes that forgiveness is from God. **Irma** said she could appreciate how the formula and Catholic practice could help people get “closure” on episodes in their lives, and thus be very helpful. **Elaine** suggested it was important to recognize a distinction between “emotional guilt” and “rational guilt,” and observed that it was often more difficult to resolve the first.

6. **Next meeting.** The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, 7 February 2007, 4:30 to 9 pm, at St. Paul’s College. The Agenda will include completion of our discussion of *From Anabaptist Seed*, and whatever else **Helmut** and **Luis** think might be appropriate. They were offered suggestions for possible new themes, and there was some discussion of exploring the relationship between Christianity and Islam, perhaps using both Catholic and Mennonite statements on the issue.