

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 23

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2007
at Christ the King parish

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

1. **Elaine** led the group on an Opening Prayer
2. **Helmut** welcomed all to the meeting, and asked **Harold**, who will be leaving the dialogue with this meeting, to introduce **Doug Enns**, who will be replacing him.
3. **Sharing personal ecumenical and other experiences:**

John reported:

- 1) Meeting Alfred Bell (Steve Bell's father), who served for twenty-five year as a chaplain in the prison service, being invited to his home, and hearing a private concert by Steve, whose music is clearly inspired by his Christian beliefs.
- 2) Attending the recent Social Justice conference in Winnipeg, which received a lot of media coverage because Archbishop Weisgerber was pressured to "disinvite" James Looney (who had been scheduled to give a workshop) because Looney, a Catholic, lives openly with a gay partner. This led John to do a lot of thinking about issues concerning homosexuality. (**Richard** added a couple of footnotes to this story – the Archbishop was consulted early on in the planning of the conference, and warned the organizers that inviting Looney might lead to difficulties; it was the chancellery office that arranged a story in *The Prairie Messenger* on the talk Looney gave at St. Augustine Church.)
- 3) On the schism that is threatening the Anglican communion in Canada over the issues of concerning homosexuality.

Richard reported:

- 1) Attending his first meeting in Washington, DC, as a new member of the Board of the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, a rather "left-wing" group pushing for structural change and accountability in the Church.
- 2) His role at St. Ignatius in offering Catholics Coming Home, a six-week series, described as a "journey of reconciliation," for Catholics who have been away from the church for whatever reason and for however long. He is finding it a very moving experience to work with these "seekers."

Michael reported:

- 1) On his continuing connections as a lawyer with Hutterite communities.
- 2) His continuing involvement with the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises at St. Ignatius, and in particular with the Ignatian Lay Volunteer movement (for persons who have completed the exercises), which encourages its members to become involved in “core area” projects such as the soup kitchen that is run at the parish of Immaculate Conception and the House of Hesed. He also mentioned the book currently being studied by the volunteers, *Radical Compassion: Finding Christ in the Heart of the Poor* by Gary N. Smith, a Jesuit who has been living and working in the core area of Seattle for many years.

Henry reported attending the annual Hanley Lectures, given this year by Rasheed Omar, a Muslim scholar who currently holds a chair at the University of Notre Dame, and who spoke on Islam and the Challenge of Peace. Henry found Omar’s talks a moving experience. He spoke in a humble and profound way, with a deeply passionate love of his people, lamenting the way the Koran was being used to justify violence. Omar obviously yearned to establish understanding and peace between Muslims and Christians. At the close of his private conversation with Henry at the end of one of talks, Omar asked for prayers for himself and his people.

Harold reported:

- 1) Attending a conference on Gospel, Culture, and Church, which took up questions concerning how we deal with culture in ways that do not compromise the church. The featured speaker, who spoke from his experience of religious pluralism in India, works with Gospel and Culture Network Workshops that deal with different kinds of tensions involved, for instance, in inter-ethnic marriages.
- 2) Continuing involvement with the House of Hesed and with the counselling ministry of what had previously been identified as New Directions but which is now associated with the Living Waters (a ministry headquartered in Vancouver). His group is now offering a 25-week program to assist people dealing with issues of sexual identity, sex addictions, and other addictions. There are 20 to 25 people, usually from various Christian churches, who are participants in the program.

At 4:50 pm, **Elaine** had to leave to attend another meeting. She informed us that this would be her last meeting with the group. She is leaving, with regret, feeling that she has given her best to this dialogue, but that it is time for her to move on.

Helmut reported:

- 1) Spending ten days in Rome in October. The first five days involved a meeting between an international seven-person Mennonite delegation and various Vatican bodies, including representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, the Vatican Secretary of State, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace,

and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The group had an audience with Pope Benedict XVI as well. Helmut showed us photos of this event, and provided us with copies of an exchange of greetings between MWC president Nancy Heisey and the pope. The main purpose of the meetings was to present the responses gathered by MWC to *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, the report of the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, and to raise concerns arising out of the responses. Helmut found their reception by the various Vatican groups all positive. Taking into account the recent Response issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which appeared to question the use of the term “church” by other Christian bodies, the Mennonite delegation drafted a brief statement, *A Mennonite Ecclesiology in Outline*, which was subsequently sent to Cardinals Casper and Levada.

Helmut then described visiting many of the famous churches of Rome.

During his last three days in Rome, Helmut, with some members of the above delegation, joined with two representatives of the World Council Churches (Fernando Enns from Germany and Hansulrich Gerber from Switzerland) in meeting representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in developing a common statement to the WCC as it prepares for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011. This event will mark the close of a Decade to Overcome Violence.

Irma reported:

- 1) Attendance at the Canadian Council of Churches Forum at the University of Winnipeg.
- 2) Preaching at a Mennonite church in Steinbach, using the cover photo of the current issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, with its photo of the Pope being presented with a framed image of the Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems, as her “text.”
- 3) Speaking at a local Lutheran church on Mennonite beliefs with respect to peace, where she was challenged by some woman, not a member of the local congregation, but felt supported by some veterans in the audience who appeared very receptive to the Mennonite stance.
- 4) Her sabbatical activities: working on a book on worship, the first in a series of books that is taking John Howard Yoder’s theology in different directions; transforming her Ph.D. thesis into a book; more participation in her own congregation (Bethel Mennonite), where she will be preaching an Advent sermon on Mary on December 16 (10:45 am); and working on the Week for Christian Unity, during which Bethel will host an activity on 24 January (7:30 pm).

Lynda reported:

- 1) That since 1 August she has been working in pastoral ministry at St. Bernadette’s parish, while continuing to worship at Christ the King.
- 2) Attendance at the Canadian Council of Churches Forum at University of Winnipeg, where she had to miss a talk by Bill Blakie (who, being an old friend, sent her the text by email).
- 3) Attending at an interfaith retreat on the spirituality of healing at St. Benedict’s. She is also taking a course on healing at St. Benedict’s.

- 4) Being involved in offering RCIA at St. Bernadette. **Helmut** reported a comment by one of the Vatican representatives citing adult baptism as “normative” for the Catholic Church. **Luis** explained that this means that adults provide the main criteria – infants now are baptised only if there is assurance that the child will be raised as a Catholic.

Luis distributed a list of his current Ecumenical and Inter-religious activities, and commented as follows:

- 1) Europe: London (April 28–May 9... Chemin Neuf Community, Bruderhof in East London, Mass at Westminster and March to Trafalgar), Rome (May 9–19: Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue /10th Anniversary of the JDDJ in 2009)
- 2) Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: Gathering of the Dialogues in Ottawa (June 15–17)
- 3) Guest and Observer at National Events in Winnipeg:
 - General Synod of Anglican Church of Canada (June 17–25)
This was a contentious meeting that received much publicity. Luis was struck by the way decisions were made (with a rather ad hoc decision about the majority that would be required for a motion’s approval), feeling that the process was not helpful.
 - National Convention of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (June 20–24)
- 4) Responding in July to the *Motu Proprio* (Jewish Community) and *Summum Pontificum* (Lutherans et al) in July
- 5) Anglican-Catholic Dialogue (Toronto, September 13–18)
Luis reported on the issues being raised by many traditional Anglican parishes now applying for admission to the Catholic Church as parishes (not a process preferred by the Vatican). It means creating a new rite, and all kinds of challenges for Catholics.
- 6) Western Diocesan-Eparchial Coordinators of Ecumenism (WDECE, Saskatoon September 26–28): “Prayer for Unity is the Royal Door of Ecumenism” [Implementing “The Handbook for Spiritual Ecumenism” 2007]
- 7) North American Academy of Ecumenists (Saskatoon, September 28–30): “Interpreting the Bible Together: Seeking the Visible Unity of the Church”
Luis reported that this was an excellent meeting, which appears to show movement from Tradition to Traditions to an Ecumenical Tradition in reading the Bible.
- 8) Canadian Council of Churches (Faith and Witness) Forum (Winnipeg, October 1)
- 9) Professor Alberto Melloni’s Lecture on John XXIII (University of Winnipeg) and Interfaith Award at Government House (Canadian Centre for Ecumenism): October 16
- 10) Conference call with the Board of Bridgefolk on “communicatio in sacris” (relating to sharing of sacraments).
- 11) Accompanying Francophone Urban “Zone” of Clergy: monthly
- 12) Sessions on Catholic Principles of Ecumenism: (Winnipeg and St. Jean-Baptiste, November 15 & 22)
- 13) Western Canadian Chaplains’ Conference: Correctional Institutions and Community Service for Restorative Justice (St. Benedict’s Retreat Centre), Diaconal Ministry (CMU) Luis reported an incident in which a Lutheran deaconess was murdered, and he was called as “their” chaplain.
- 14) Jewish-Catholic Dialogue: Rabbis and Priests (monthly):

- Sermon at Etz Hayim Congregation
 - Observing Shabbat at Shaarey Zadek and Home
 - Phase II (Amy-Jill Levine's *The Misunderstood Jew*), Sermon at Etz Chayim
15. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Festival of Prayer in Winnipeg (January 20–27, 2008)
- 16) L'Armée de Marie: Excommunications and Follow-Up
Luis described and explained the heretical theology of this now excommunicated Catholic sect, which involves a woman by the name of Marie-Paul Giguere, who claims to be a re-incarnation of Mary. The whole thing claims to be based on a "private revelation" (which is always suspect to church authorities). There are a great many adherents in Quebec, and about 3,000 in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface.

On the Horizon for Luis:

Joint Working Group of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches (Rome, January 17–27, 2008)

4. **Options for the future for our regional and local dialogues.**

Luis opened the discussion by outlining three options for our "regional dialogue."

1. Continue the group
 - Replacing outgoing members
 - Exploring topics such as Ratzinger's Jesus, "Amish Grace," etc.
 - Modality to be established
2. Reconfigure the group – for a new regional dialogue with a new focus
3. Stop meeting

Helmut thought that continuing the group would be difficult, because of the need for a new vision. Our original impulse was a response to the international dialogue, which has now reached closure (at least until the MWC meets in July 2009 to consider its response to Called Together to be Peacemakers).

Others expressed various diverse views on the desirability of continuing or reconfiguring the group. Options mentioned included an annual meeting (perhaps in the form of a "reunion"), periodic conferences, meetings of more specialized groups of theologians, a lecture series, becoming a "think tank," and looking to other models (such as Bridgfolk).

At this point we broke for a shared meal.

After our meal, **Helmut** proposed an option for continuing the group, which, after some discussion and suggestions, amounted to this:

Continue the group, with six Mennonite and six Catholics (replacing those of our existing group that do not opt to continue) who would make a three-year commitment, as a "mixed" group (which was the original design), meeting three times a year, choosing texts and topics as appropriate, and leaving open options for inspiring and mentoring other dialogue groups in Winnipeg.

It was agreed that current members of the group should indicate their commitment to **Helmut** or **Luis** by 5 January, along with suggestions for replacement members. The next meeting of this group was tentatively scheduled for 12 March 2008, 4 to 9 pm, at a Mennonite venue to be arranged. **Helmut** and **Luis** will produce an Agenda for this meeting.

5. **Discussion of options for local dialogues (“twinning” projects).**

St. Paul/CMU – on their own (**Richard** & Harry Huebner are working on this)

South Winnipeg – **John, Adolf,** and **Henry** will be working on possibilities

North Winnipeg – **Harold** and **Lynda** felt there had been no commitment to continue.

St. Ignatius/Charleswood Mennonite. There did not appear much interest in continuing.

Luis indicated that he remained available as resource person for other groups that may want to organize.

6. **Discussion of Mennonite Self-Identity Statement** (the document, “A Mennonite Ecclesiology in Outline,” distributed with the Agenda)

Helmut reviewed the background and highlights of the document, and then opened the floor to discussion.

Richard indicated he liked the document and was ready to “sign on,” but wondered about the statement in para. 13 that “Sainthood is not based on ethical merit” – what it meant and why it was in the document? His question led to an interesting and rather far-reaching discussion about how Mennonites and Catholics view the “communion of saints,” “saints,” and “martyrs.” It seems that the establishment by the Catholic Church of an elaborate process to “canonize” certain persons as “saints” has somewhat complicated matters.

Luis was also ready to “sign on,” basing his assessment of the document on a creedal approach that sought to determine the extent to which it exhibits belief in a church that is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” As a group we then went through the document, identifying paragraphs and statements that gave evidence of these beliefs. In the end, **Helmut** confessed that in drafting the document, he had originally proposed using the Latin terms identifying these marks of the church, but that in end had been satisfied with language that “translated” these classical terms into the “vernacular.” Discussion included the biblical characterizations of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church, Peter as the “rock” on which the church was built, and notions of an “invisible” church as opposed to a “visible” church.

Luis also sought evidence of a sense of the relationship of the church with world. Again, paragraphs were found that provided evidence of this concern.

Harold, from a Mennonite Brethren perspective, said he would have liked a stronger statement on evangelism as a church characteristic, speaking of a traditional Anabaptist stance of nonconformity to the world and withdrawal from it as opposed to an evangelical missionary stance. His suggestion led to an exploration of the appropriate relationship between faith and culture. **Harold** reported a recent rather extraordinary self-critical statement from the Willow Creek Church indicating regret for “inviting people in” and then failing to develop and deepen their faith.

Helmut thanked the group for the helpful discussion of the document.

7. Closing

Harold, in saying his “good-bye” to the group, expressed his appreciation for having been part of a very enriching experience.

Lynda sang a closing hymn, and **Helmut** offered a spontaneous prayer.