

Minutes

Winnipeg Regional Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue, Meeting No. 36

Held on Wednesday, 13 June 2012
at Canadian Mennonite University

Present: Tom Bailey-Robertson, Paul Doerksen, Dora Dueck, Michelle Gallant, Helmut Harder, Victor Kliewer, Richard Lebrun, John Long, Luis Melo, Ron Penner, Donna Peters-Small, Lynda Trenholm, and Nancy Wood.

Regrets: Melanie Kampen

1. **Helmut** welcomed us to CMU. He recalled that the last meeting had been on Catholic spirituality, while tonight's meeting would focus on Mennonite spirituality.
2. **The Opening Prayer** led by **Victor**. From a booklet called "Rejoice" (a quarterly publication, offering scripture passages following the lectionary, plus prayers); he suggested that it was an illustration of contemporary Mennonite spirituality that is used in many Mennonite homes. This particular reading was by Mary Lou Cummings, a free-lance writer from PA. The scripture reading was from John 12:20-26. Cumming picked up on the line "Whoever serves me, must follow me." Her reflections spoke about Dr Paul Farmer, a Harvard Medical School doctor who also works in the Third World, and whose life illustrates the connection between faith and action. We are all called to love those around us; this is part of our "Jesus DNA." The "prayer request" accompanying the reading was for the Israel College of the Bible (a college of "Messianic Jews on the coast north of Tel Aviv).
3. **Ron** asked to be excused early to attend a Mennonite-Muslim banquet, a fundraiser for dialogue between a university in Iran and Canadian and American Mennonites. Ten women graduate students from Iran are taking a course offered by Sheila Klassen-Wiebe and Irma Fast Dueck on an Introduction to Christianity. Consequently it was agreed to put Ron first on our program on Mennonite spirituality this evening.
4. **Sharing of ecumenical experiences:**

Donna reported travel to North Carolina, where she went to Mass. Picking up on Victor's mention of the Israeli College of the Bible, Donna told us that while was a student at the University of Toronto, she had for a time dated the local head of Jews for Jesus at the university and struggled to understand what he was about. She noted that at Westgate Collegiate where she teaches, local kids (non-Mennonite) attend because they think it's a good school. One grade 7 wanted to

join the Mennonite church. Donna also spoke about issues surrounding the planned expansion of the school. There has been some opposition in the neighbourhood because of traffic concerns. The school now has approval from the City of Winnipeg for a revised plan. The controversy has been a learning experience for the students, particularly when they encountered aggressive people opposed to the expansion.

Victor reported that in connection with a “northeast corridor” development, River East Mennonite Brethren, in a joint effort with a local Hindu Temple, has planted a circular flower garden as part of the project. This has been an interesting experience, showing the need to build trust with the Hindu group (to a large extent made up of recent immigrants).

Tom reported participation in an interfaith conference in March at CMU (invited by Melanie), which he found very worthwhile. In his parish, he was involved in organizing a visit the grand mosque on Waverly. Last week he took a course on counseling at CMU; he reported one interesting case study where an Anabaptist chaplain was brought in to help; this led to discussion around theology of baptism.

Ron reported spending twelve days in Basel, Switzerland, for a meeting under the auspices of the Mennonite World Conference, which included a meeting of representatives of the European Mennonite Church. There were about 140 Mennonites from around the world who participated in the MWC meeting. He found the meeting a refreshing experience. Following this meeting some of the Mennonite group was invited to meet with Seventh Day Adventists.

Michelle reported attending a University of Manitoba graduation ceremony a couple of weeks ago; she was struck by the remarks made by Sr Cyril Mooney, who received an honorary doctorate in recognition for her work in educational innovation at a girls’ school in India. Sr Cyril spoke openly about spiritual matters in this secular university setting.

Dora told us that she and her husband will be making a tour in Russia, including visits to Orthodox establishments. She will spend a day with the Iranian women tomorrow in preparation for writing an article about this event at CMU.

John indicated that he had nothing official to report. He has, however, been involved in a number of informal activities. To be attentive to his local church, he took part in a recent video text study, a biblical walk through the mass; it was a chance to get to know his fellow parishioners. He also mentioned reading a book – *The Eucharist Words of Jesus* by Joachim Jeremias. Was the last supper at Passover? – Yes. He has also been reading Robert Capon, *Kingdom, grace, outrage, and vindication in the parables of Jesus* (2002). In a breakfast club, there have been interesting discussions – especially relating to Ontario legislation re gay-straight alliance clubs in schools. The Catholic Teachers group has separated

itself from the Catholics bishops on the issue. John also reported a long chat with Henry Loewen about a Habitat for Humanity program.

Paul said that on Sunday he would be running the half-marathon; he started running a couple of years ago out of fear. He has a quadriplegic brother who has been in the hospital for two and half years. He is also involved with the Muslim-Mennonite dialogue going on at CMU; he will be having lunch tomorrow with this group, and participated in the teaching the “history of Christianity” – in two hours! With three daughters of his own, he found it an interesting experience with all these women. There were fascinating questions from people quite outside the Christian faith. He thought he learned a lot as well. He noted that this dialogue is not without controversy on the CMU campus; some think the dialogue is naïve. Paul distributed a sheet describing a Take and Read program offered to a Canadian Brethren Institute group, capped at 40. The books chosen are often not by Mennonite authors. This time the writers included two female theologians Shelly Rambo, who draws on von Balthasar; James Cone was a pioneer of black theology. Working through theology with other people who are interested.

Linda reported a new grandson on 1 March – delightful. During the Week of Christian unity she got to Dakota House (a retirement centre), for a maturing adults event. During in Lent, she was involved in an adult ed course at Christ the King parish – finding directions for interreligious dialogue by Fr Luis; it was full to capacity for five 5 Wednesdays in March. Her work at St. Bernadette often involves ecumenical marriage ceremonies (for example, a Catholic married in United Church with permission, with a representative from Catholic church present). Luis helped get the need permissions. She does funerals at funeral homes for a persons of a gamut of different religions.

Nancy – At St. Charles, they are back to establishing a student residence, and looking for an ecumenical clientele (she handed out a brochure about the program, with a request that it be publicized). They are seeking a mix of students (or young working people). She also mentioned Bridgefolk (coming up this July) and an event at St. John’s Abbey recognizing Michael Sattler, a former Benedictine who had become an early Anabaptist leader. A Michael Sattler House has opened next to St. John’s. She also noted an article on Gene Herr in a Mennonite magazine. Herr eventually became a Catholic, but stayed connected with the Mennonites as well. He was open to seeing the gifts of all the traditions. **Helmut** noted that Sattler had been behind the first Anabaptist confession of faith.

Richard reported his continuing involvement in a Catholic-Mennonite dialogue between faculty members at St. Paul’s College and faculty members at Canadian Mennonite University. There were two meetings in the second term, with one on the Parable of the Merciful Father (also known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son) and the second on Mary (based on all the NT texts relating to her). He also

facilitated a Seminar at St. Ignatius on the Heritage of Vatican II (using DVDs of some of the keynote speakers from the American Catholic Council held in Detroit last June – Hans Küng, Anthony Padavano, Joan Chittister, and Jeannine Gramick).

Luis distributed a list of his recent “Significant ecumenical and interreligious activity” and spoke about a few these. He was involved in the Interfaith Harmony Week in Winnipeg “The Art of Compassion” in the first week of February at CMU. With respect to strategic planning in the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, he is involved in interweaving ecumenical and interreligious dimensions in planning activities. He helped Coptic Christians find space to pray on Friday evenings. He is also involved with ecumenical and interreligious dimensions of the St. Boniface Cathedral Renovations; the idea is a “cathedral open to the city,” which can cater to pilgrims. There is a “cabinet” of interfaith leaders helping with this project. Luis reported that he was just back from England, where he made his annual retreat at the St. John the Baptist Orthodox Monastery. He had also been in Rome (concluding his work with the joint Working Group). Most recently, he has been nominated to an International Dialogue that will involve Catholics, Mennonites, and Lutherans, and focus on Baptism. He has registered to attend the Bridgefolk gathering in St. Joseph, MN, in July.

Helmut published a chapter in book edited by John A. Radano, *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism*. In *Ecumenical Trends*, he published an article on “Prospects for the Future of Ecumenism in Canada” (from paper he gave at a Prairie Ecumenical meeting not long ago). He was also in Basel for a presentation on the 85-year history of Mennonite World Conference, which first met in 1925; there have been fifteen assemblies since that date. There are now 101 churches (conferences) that belong to MWC. He found working through the reports of these conferences (many held in German, with reports in German) an interesting experience. He and Irma had the plus of a good holiday in Switzerland, visiting sites associated with Mennonite history. He also attended a “perogy supper” at Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church. Helmut also plans to participate in the Bridgefolk conference in July on Scripture and Peacemaking.

1. **Focus on Mennonite Spirituality**

Ron – on Mennonite Spirituality. He began by noting that the concept of spirituality is not one that is familiar to Mennonites (at least his branch); they have been guarded against spiritualism, spirituality, etc., dwelling on the spiritual. More comfortable with emphasizing being Christian in daily life. Thus somewhat unfamiliar with the notion of “spirituality.” The Online Mennonite encyclopedia article he consulted observed that this topic was relatively new for Mennonites. Suspicious of academic theology and ethics together. Ron has a hunch that events in early Anabaptist days took some turns that were not very healthy (e.g., Munster); some early leaders went into excessive ways of expression (inner word, etc.) For Russian Mennonites as well, some experiences

not very complimentary. Enthusiasts. Dabbling in the charismatic movement was not seen kindly by Mennonite leaders. Spirituality is a topic that Ron is not entirely comfortably. He observed that there are three or four different Mennonite groups represented in our dialogue group. In WMC documents there are some references to the Holy Spirit, but not to spirituality directly. It is the same in the Constitution of his own branch of Mennonites (the Evangelical Mennonite Conference). It is discipleship rather than spirituality that is talked about. For the Mennonite Brethren the concept is included in the Christian Life – transformed by the Holy Spirit, etc. Baptized into one body by the Spirit. But spirituality is touched on only indirectly. The Mennonite Church Canada – does more in addressing Christian spirituality directly, speaking of our relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

Discussion. **John** said all this reminded him of Franciscan spirituality, suggesting that Francis would have been comfortable talking about discipleship. **Luis** referred to the article from the Online Encyclopedia that we had been advised to consult, and cited a statement from the next to last paragraph: “Some trends in Mennonite spirituality in the 1980s have drawn from Catholic sources, although modifying the borrowings heavily in the process, since Mennonite polity makes it impossible to establish traditional, liturgical, and sacramental spirituality in Mennonite circles.” Then he went on to point out that the word “spirituality” comes very late in history (after the Reformation). For example it is not in Aquinas. **Ron** speculated about why Mennonites are afraid of the term spirituality. **Nancy** wondered about the distinction between personal and community. Did have verbal prayer. **John** recalled that during our last meeting he had spent some time on the word spirituality, suggesting that it implied a way or emphasis in following Christ. Thus, there is more than one spirituality. In any case, being a disciple of Christ is of the essence.

Dinner break (6:15–7:00pm)

Paul offered **Historical Background to Mennonite Spirituality in form of a brief presentation from Cornelius J. Dyck’s book, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (1966).** He began by distributing a quotation from the writings of Menno Simons:

True evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love; it dies to flesh and blood; it destroys all lusts and forbidden desires; it seeks, serves and fears God in its inmost soul; it clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and consoles the sad; it does good to those who do it harm; it serves those that harm it; it prays for those who persecute it; it teaches, admonishes and judges us with the Word of the Lord; it seeks those who are lost; it binds up what is wounded; it heals the sick; it saves the strong (sound); it becomes all things to all people. The

persecution suffering and anguish that come to it for the sake of the Lord's truth have become a glorious joy and comfort to it."

The statement that true evangelical faith cannot lie sleeping is often cited. The paragraph is a good summary of Mennonite spirituality. Its details point to some of the dimensions of Mennonite spirituality, with no clear distinction between the inner and the outer. One notes the echoes and quotations from scripture, as well as the context of persecution and suffering. Historically, Mennonite spirituality has been shaped by *The Martyrs' Mirror*. About two-thirds of this famous volume contains accounts of Anabaptists being tortured and killed. Paul showed us an edition with a cover illustration of the story of Dirk Willems, who in his escape from prison rescued his pursuer. It is a story that has taken on mythical dimensions. The notion of suffering and persecution has played a considerable role in Mennonite spirituality. The book *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* by Cornelius J. Dyck has become a classic devotional resource. It attempts to correct or complete a picture of Anabaptism, featuring vibrant faith and action. Paul also mentioned a book by Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ* (2004), published in a Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series by Orbis books. In Snyder's view there is no question that Anabaptist spirituality had its roots in late medieval Catholic spirituality and was thus in continuity with many forces in the medieval world.

1. Late medieval spirituality emphasized sacramental signs as holy things insofar as they makes us holy, as means of grace, onto the believer's life. The early Anabaptists had a trouble with this understanding of sacrament, yet some dimensions of this understanding were carried into Anabaptist practice. They preached a life that calls for a significant amount of action. There was also a temptation to legalism.
2. There were direct and indirect connections between monastic movements and Anabaptism. For example, in Michael Sattler's understanding of church-world dualism, which was reflected in the early Anabaptist confession on faith, which he helped draft. There was an understanding of a separation between church and world a withdrawal or intensification that was the core of church. So there is a parallelism between monasticism and Anabaptism. There was opposition to kinds of lives led by regular clergy. Both monasticism and early Anabaptism were attempts to purify the church.
3. Mysticism, rightly understood, in some ways emphasized a personal direct experience of God; some of this is found in early Anabaptism. There was an impulse to resist authority. There was a "cross mysticism," some of which comes from Johannes Tauler, the *Devotio Moderna*, and the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life – streams picked up by Anabaptism. In this context, there is continuity with late medieval spirituality, but picked up and shaped a little differently by the early Anabaptists. Dyck proceeds by distinguishing between spirituality and history and theology. To illustrate Anabaptism spirituality, he gives a brief description of main dimensions of Anabaptism, which include a rejection of the sacramental liturgical tradition, a new understanding of community; an active life in full community; it is in community that the Bible is read, without

reference to the traditions of scholasticism. There are emphases on piety, suffering, humility, and progress in sanctification thru spiritual disciplines, as well as a rejection of introspection. Summary: spiritual life involved all of life and an intimate commitment to Jesus Christ. The concept of *Gelassenheit*, “to yield,” appears to have come from Meister Eckhart. It was picked up particularly by the early Hutterites, and to this day is strong among the Amish. It gives shape to other Mennonite spiritual characteristics. Everything is done in terms of giving everything to God in community. Thus an all-encompassing term shaping Mennonite spirituality.

Discussion: **Helmut** remarked that he didn’t hear any reference to peace-making? Was this not a monastic strain? **Paul**. Yes, eventually in the second-generation of Anabaptists peace-making became important. **Helmut** thought it comes very early (“not resisting evil,” non-resistance, was a way peace theology developed). **John** asked for more comments on the meaning of the term *Gelassenheit*. **Helmut** suggested that it means yielding not only to God, but to others as well. **Donna** thought it was an approach that was “all about you” rather than oneself. **Luis** wondered if it could be associated with “detachment”? **Tom** suggested perhaps a sense of “availability”? **Paul** contrasted its meaning with what Ignatius was about in giving himself over to the Church (agreeing that black is white if necessary). *Gelassenheit* does not mean submission to the hierarchy, but to joy, to God, within the community. It reflects a different ecclesiology, with an object different from Ignatius. **Donna** returned to the theme of “not about me,” of allowing you to misunderstand me, rather than defending myself. She also suggested that it is a vital spiritual life that makes disciples. Referring to Dawn Ruth Nelson’s book (see below), she noted that Nelson had a good solid training, but found something missing in her life (i.e., “spiritual formation”). **Helmut** suggested that it might be helpful to think of *Gelassenheit* in terms of a paradigm: Jesus moving towards the cross, in the garden saying not my will but your will be done, his word to Peter on the sword, his silence before Pilot. Jesus yields himself to the powers of evil leading to resurrection; in this he is not meek, but strong; a patient letting flow of events that come upon you; yielding and putting yourself in God’s hands. **Dora** thought one can only let go after having taken hold of one’s life. Jesus knows who he is, and yields. **Luis** referred to Paul on emptying of self, and wondered if Mennonites go to Paul a lot? **Helmut** replied with a very vigorous **yes!** **Luis** observed that since Vatican II there has been a rediscovery of community, especially in liturgical life in Catholicism. Historically, the Eucharist was more pietistic and devotional. Vatican II reacted to this; but now perhaps we expect community to do it all. Thus, adoration again appeals. Catholicism is in a period of flux. **Donna** reflected on the extent that so many connections in modern life are superficial. Facebook contacts have no meaning; no one just sits, young people especially are always engaged with their devices. Kids don’t know how to relate.

Dora offered the following reflections based on **Dawn Ruth Nelson's book, *A Mennonite Woman: Exploring Spiritual Life and Identity*** (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2010):

"What is Mennonite spirituality?" When an Irish Jesuit asked Dawn Ruth Nelson, who was part of the Mennonite peace witness in Ireland, this question, she realized she didn't know how to answer it. It prompted reflection, study, and this book, which I think offers a very interesting and useful contribution to our topic this evening. The question we're responding to, after all, is the same one the Jesuit asked her. For various reasons, however, it seems harder to articulate Mennonite spirituality than Catholic spirituality.

In order to do so, Ruth Nelson tells a number of stories. One is the story of her grandmother, Susan Ruth (1909–2005), a farm wife and mother who lived in the same Mennonite community all her life. The grandmother's spirituality (or "lived faith") was rooted in place, immersed in nature and the rhythms of work and church, was separated from "the world" by the German language and plain dress, and shaped further by themes of hospitality, *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness), prayer, and a special relationship with the Bible. The ethos of community and its practices were simply *absorbed*; they formed an "unintentional" Rule of Life.

Another story is the author's own, a life not characterized by place as her grandmother's was, but by a sense of displacement into the "postmodern context of an urban woman." In the late 1970s, she and her husband Paul headed off to Ireland, full of idealism, to live the way of peace in a rough area of Dublin. She and the others involved in this work were very serious about community, discipleship, the gospel of peace, martyrdom, and mission, but the violence around them was unrelenting, the trials many, and most disastrously, it seemed, the household fell apart. Ruth Nelson reached a point of spiritual bankruptcy. She longed, she says, "for a life of prayer" that would sustain her over the long haul in Ireland.

During this time, she had two formative experiences: a spiritual retreat at the Carmelite Center of Spirituality, where she learned *lectio divina*, and visits with an Irish Cistercian monk named Brother Eoin. Her seminary training before 1980 was about ethics and communal practices, she says, and "the individual's inner life tended to be neglected." She learned that "a vital spiritual life, not ethical vigilance...makes disciples."

A third story in the book is the beginnings of the spiritual formation program at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana) in the 1980s. Two key persons were Marlene Kropf and Marcus Smucker. Kropf noticed that the generation of students coming in at the time did not have a vital prayer life. She learned that "one's own deep connection to God either has to be cultivated in adversity or intentionally in spiritual formation practices." Smucker noted that spiritual formation is built on the "basic freedom" in Anabaptist thought; "where there is choice, disciplines are essential."

Drawing on these stories and her study and analysis, Ruth Nelson issues what she calls “a wake-up call.” Quite simply, it’s that life for contemporary Mennonites (and other religious groups too, of course) has changed. Coherence based on place, on membership, is gone. We’re in a kind of collective “Dark Night.” We’re in the story of Abraham, who left all that was familiar to follow God’s call. There’s been a shift from an implicit to an explicit spirituality, from one primarily communal to one that includes the personal, a shift from “dwelling” to “seeking,” from “place” to “pilgrimage.” For this, we’ve needed – and need – new forms, and to fill in gaps.

Ruth Nelson is grateful for what she’s gained from other traditions, especially the Catholic, but she recognizes that we have what we need in our own tradition. The themes of earlier Mennonite spirituality are the same ones the world needs now.

The list she proposes as a kind of core Mennonite spirituality – for “becoming like Christ inwardly and outwardly” is 6-fold (she includes various ideas how to live these out):

1. **An everyday, embodied sacramentality.** (*God is in the ordinary.*) An especially important piece of the “rhythm of life” is Sabbath-keeping.
2. **Non-conformity.** Seen in simplicity (materially, but especially silence, solitude), meditative tasks, discernment about technology, separating from evil.
3. **Community.** (*God and our experience with each other are inter-related.*) The congregation as priority, learning approaches to self and conflict, “the biblical work of visiting,” mutual accountability, eating together, believers baptism.
4. **Service.** Love in action, footwashing, hospitality to needy strangers, peacemaking.
5. **Gelassenheit or meekness.** (*We are creatures.*)
- *6. **The person of Jesus and the Bible** (*To be conformed to Christ, to be formed by Christ, we need to spend very significant time with his words and in his presence, corporately and privately.*) She notes, in the words of Arnold Snyder, “the manner in which the Anabaptists appropriated Scripture recalls more the ancient monastic tradition of *lectio divina*’ than it does the practice of the general Protestant laity.”

Just a few comments about the book from my perspective. The context is American Mennonites. There are some variations in “our” story, especially for Russian-background Mennonites. The trauma of upheaval in the Soviet Union and the immigrant life was certainly “adversity” that shaped a deep spirituality for our grandparents and parents, which they then sought to guard within *new stable places*. Music was a strong form of prayer. Jesus was perceived via the Word (preaching, reading).

As a Mennonite Brethren, which has borrowed heavily from Evangelical/Pietistic streams, I absorbed devotional practices that emphasized the inner life. In that sense my experience differs somewhat from Dawn Ruth Nelson’s. But I think her analysis of the essential Mennonite

spirituality, the shifts it has seen, and subsequent spiritual formation needs, is spot-on. My contemporaries and I in Canadian and/or MB settings also needed to find new vocabularies and new forms. I would say that for us, a critically important and timely resource was Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* (1978), in giving us new containers and words for what we knew; although his work felt new and exciting, it also felt very Anabaptist, very compatible, for he brought together inner and outer. Learning "listening prayer" has also been very important in my own spiritual journey; I only regret that I learned this within a context of losing – or finding wanting – the prayer forms I'd inherited, as it were, and I didn't learn it early enough – or maybe wasn't confident enough in – to pass on as explicitly as I wish I would have to my children.

Donna reviewed the salient points made in a recent book on **Mennonite Spirituality by Gordon Houser (a Mennonite pastor), *Present Tense: Mennonite Spirituality (Cascadia, 2011)***. Here is the summary (created, least in part) by Donna's elderly friend Eddie:

- Acknowledges that spirituality is not a common term or focus among Mennonites.
- His definition of spirituality: "How we live out our Christian practice and follow the way of the Spirit."
- **Catholic** perspective: "Richard J. Woods calls spirituality "the intrinsic, self-transcending character of all human persons and everything that pertains to it, including, most importantly, the ways in which that perhaps infinitely malleable character is realized in everyday life situations" (from *Christian Spirituality: God's Presence Through the Ages*)
- **Mennonite** perspective: He quotes Philip Sheldrake who describes spirituality as "the whole of human life, viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and within a community of believers."
- Spirituality includes the inner and outer lives of Christians, our contemplative and active lives, it is about who we live as bodies, not about escaping our bodies.

Practice

- Living out our faith, according to both aspects of "practice": as an action/occupation, and as in repeating an act in order to "get it right."
- *Gelassenheit*: self-surrender, yieldedness, resignation to God's will.
- Spirituality is the "way we are to live," often focusing on physical, practical works of service (i.e., MDS).
- Living in the *present*, living fully in each moment, aware less of self than of being in God's *presence* with a sense of gratitude.
- Slowing down.

- “It’s the ultimate realism. Living ‘at once’ is easy and hard. It is following Jesus each moment and receiving forgiveness – over and over – as we fail.”

Patience

- “Behind patience lies theological truth, the belief, that our life – all life – is a gift of God and we are not in charge. To live ungratefully and act as if we are in charge, as if everything belongs on us, is to be, among other things, impatient.”
- At the heart of patience is the practice of humility, *Gelassenheit*.
- “Taking the form of a servant means serving rather than ruling, healing rather than killing, forgiving rather than seeking revenge and being patient rather than coercing and trying to take control.”
- All of these practices require small yet crucial decisions to relinquish control or expectations for how things should be.
- “*Gelassenheit* means emptying ourselves of desires that may lead us to use power over others for our own ends.”
- Waiting: not *inaction*, rather *acting* slowly, mindfully, deliberately, accepting the “tension of God’s rule” which *has come* and is *not yet come* in fullness.
- “... patience of living day by day, doing what we can with no certainty that things will get better any time soon.”

Peace

- Pacifism as both non-resistance and nonviolent resistance includes making right relationships with one another. Mennonites have historically taken Matt 18:15–18 to heart: “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when they two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses...”
- Focus on making peace, “peace is the way to peace.” Not just anti-war, working at just and health-giving relationships between peoples and nations.
- Trying to live with consideration of “how things should be”; recognition of the tension between the real and the ideal.
- Strong focus on mediation, on being a “non-anxious” presence.

Politics

- Mennonites see *community* as the essence of living out our faith.

- Biblically: “you and your household,” read the Bible noting that the pronoun “you” is most often plural. We are called as a collective people, not as individuals.
- Discernment meant to take place in community.
- The “just society” is judged in accordance with how it cares for its most vulnerable, therefore we are accountable to each other for how we use our resources, how we live our lives.
- Leads to tension in Mennonite spirituality: How we call one another to obedience, *yet* welcome each other as Jesus does? How do we have an intimate community *yet* remains open to newcomers?
- We are not “trying to follow an ideology, but the Lord Jesus.” We try “not to depend on the power of ideas, but on the power of the Spirit.”

Play

- Admittedly a challenge for Mennonites who are often seen as serious and resistant to being “playful.” Difficulty with being “non-productive,” with doing something “for its own sake” (play).
- Seek to experience the Spirit in day-to-day “ordinary” activities. See all activity as “holy.”
- Freedom in God comes through detachment from “things,” such as comfort, pleasure, and status.
- “Our true self is hidden in the love and mercy of God. If I find God I will find myself, and if I find my true self I will find God.” (Thomas Merton).
- “As we go deeper within ourselves and release our attachment to outward things to give us meaning, things like material comfort, financial success, acclaim from others, we discover God’s presence.”
- Play implies not taking ourselves too seriously. Mennonites have struggled with seemingly “frivolous” activities (i.e. dance, the arts, film, fiction...)

Prayer

- prayer represents a yearning beyond ourselves; we live in this world, yet long for eternity.
- Mennonite prayer books = hymnals. Singing always an important form of prayer.
- Historical discomfort with prepared, written prayers, often felt not “of the Spirit.”
- Recent publications of “Take our Moments and Our Days”
- Take seriously the command to “pray without ceasing,” to see all we do as a form a prayer.
- Ronald Rolheiser in *The Holy Longing*: “Spirituality is what we do with our unrest”: “The opposite of being spiritual is to have no energy, to have lost all zest for living.”

- *Theodicy*: the defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil.
- Richard Rohr: "pain is the activator that forces us to choose between what is important and what is not."
- Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests that perhaps suffering is a form of prayer.
- Suffering can leave us bitter, angry and imbalanced – *or* – can make us compassionate, forgiving, and loving.
- Thanksgiving central to prayer (*Eucharist* – thanksgiving). Mennonite vs Catholic views of Communion.
- Prayers of Confession, Contemplative prayer, Silence ... not common for Mennonites, more interest in current times.

Perfection

- "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (but we are not God).
- Invitation to participate in the Divine Nature, to participate in God's energy and activity in the world.
- To see the "divine" and the holiness in the other ... has often been a struggle for Mennonites, danger of equating ourselves with God (Buddhism, etc.)

Presence

- "If spirituality is living in the Spirit, then our living, everything at all, has to do with the presence of God, as well has to do with how we are present – and how we recognize that Presence. Our living, from beginning to end, is in God's presence, and our goal, as it were, is to be aware of that.
- Mystical element has perhaps held Mennonites back from "practicing the presence of God."
- Presence of the Holy Spirit leads to concrete actions of forgiveness, proclaiming good news, healing, coming together as a community and sharing possessions.
- Houser discusses use of imagination and icons in praying.
- "Ministry of presence," "casserole comfort."
- Christian Peacemaker Teams, examples of simply *being present*.
- "*Gelassenheit* – opening ourselves to what is (and that two-letter word names the present), understanding that we cannot control the past or the future, that we live under the canopy of God's grace, is a way of imitating our Lord Jesus, whose incarnated life showed us what it like to live in the harmony of God's triune love."

Our entire task in his life consists in healing the eyes of the heart to that they may be able to see God. *St. Augustine*.

Victor offered the following comments on the article by **Dennis Martin**, “**Catholic Spirituality and Anabaptist and Mennonite Discipleship**” (*Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 762 [1988]; 5–25:

At the time of this article, Dennis Martin was assistant professor of church history at AMBS and assistant editor of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. V (Supplementary volume). Since 1991, he has been associate professor of theology at Loyola University in Chicago. His main research focus is medieval monastic history and spirituality, with secondary interests in the Reformation (particularly the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions) and in contemporary Catholicism.

The article by Martin compares Catholic and Anabaptist/Mennonite understandings of spirituality. Antecedents of 16th-century Anabaptist spirituality have been seen in medieval sectarianism as well as monasticism. Martin sees validity, yet also limits, to both; the article examines similarities and differences by considering their understandings of ecclesiology, sacrament, tradition, and generational development. (7) **A central thesis is that "the Catholic and Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of the Christian spiritual life and discipleship are essentially in harmony; that is, that both aim at the same objective—holy living in word and deed—and that they share a common vocabulary."** (7) Beyond the similarities, Martin notes that Catholics and Mennonites have significantly different understandings of ecclesiology, history, tradition, worship, and sacraments.

Martin emphasizes that the spirituality of one era should be viewed in its **historical context**, not from another—i.e., the Catholic spirituality of the 16th century should not be read with the worldview of 21st century Mennonites (or Protestants). He also notes the importance of different spiritualities in **the first and second (or subsequent) generations** of the church—be these in the time of the early Christian church or the 16th century Reformation. That is, the "first generation" will typically be less structured, more spontaneous, charismatic, and fluid than the next, which typically becomes more organized, structured, and even dogmatic and rigid.

Martin notes that Catholics and Anabaptists emphasized the **inner and outer dimensions** of the Christian life differently. Anabaptists emphasized the inner aspects of the spiritual life more, going back to the early (first generation) church for their norms and largely bypassing the later institutionalized (second generation) church, which emphasized ritual, structure, and formalism. [In this they followed Luther's *sola scriptura*.] Catholics, says Martin, have emphasized the value of the outer forms of worship, baptism, and Eucharist as "indispensable sacramental vehicle" that (hopefully) would lead to their inner meaning as well. So Anabaptists, like other first generation Reformers, were charismatic and spiritualist in their orientation and disconnected discipleship from outer worship and liturgical

forms, while Catholics tended to see spiritual life in just the opposite manner: participation in the liturgy, Eucharist, etc., was the beginning of deeper spirituality. This was evident, particularly, in monasticism and its understanding of the inner life of the Spirit as related to and flowing from the outer Rule. The link between the inner and outer spiritual life was, however, central to both Anabaptists and Catholics [at least in both of their best teaching and efforts—of course, practical errors and failures abounded].

It is noteworthy that the first-generation spirituality could not be long maintained, by either the early church or the 16th century Reformers, and regulations and forms also developed among the Anabaptists/ Mennonites of the next generation—in this case, often leading to religious/charismatic revivals which tried to recreate the first-generation spirituality. Martin concludes, "That the external sacraments and liturgical worship could be filled with inner, dynamic Spirit has for the most part escaped Mennonite awareness, even while informing Mennonite institutions." (11)

The Anabaptists and Catholics, writes Martin, **had different starting points for their ecclesiology**, i.e., their understanding of what it means to be the church: Catholics assumed that all Christians are sacramentally within the church through infant baptism, although only some will be faithful to their baptism in keeping the church disciplines (confession, penance, Eucharist); Anabaptists understood discipleship to be meant for all Christians, although only relatively few joined them through the commitment of adult baptism and even those who did were unequal in their seriousness of commitment. However, in their basic teachings both have tried to take seriously the Sermon on the Mount and the command to love God and neighbour.

Hence, writes Martin, "once these theologically different starting points are accounted for, the degree of convergence [between Catholics and Anabaptists/Mennonites] is remarkable." (13) He lists a number of areas where this could be demonstrated, basing his categories on the earlier work of H.S. Bender and J. Lawrence Burkholder: baptism, church membership and discipline, *Gelassenheit*, community, separation from the world, humility, suffering, mission, nonresistance, etc. (13) In this article Martin focuses especially on **baptism** and **church membership/discipline**.

On a personal note, **Victor** observed that *Gelassenheit* had not been a word much used in the vocabulary of the Manitoba Mennonites of Russian background with whom he grew up.

Baptism. Citing Ignatius of Antioch (early 2nd c.), Martin points out that for early church fathers **martyrdom** became a second baptism, a "baptism of blood"; as toleration increased, and as the first generation of Christians gave way to the second, **monasticism**—the deliberate commitment of Christian discipleship—replaced martyrdom as the "second baptism." (14) This was a

kind of parallel to the Anabaptists' concept of believers' baptism. On the other hand, as Anabaptists moved into the second generation, they found ways to integrate children into the church [e.g., child dedication] before they were ready for baptism. And following baptism, Martin points to the Amish and Old Order Mennonites' use of the *Ordnung* [the "Orders" or the "Rule"] as similar to the monastic rules—and with the same value of [providing a sacramental "vehicle" for inner commitment. "In contrast," he writes, "the 'progressive' Mennonites accepted a revivalism that attempted to perpetuate the fiction of living in the first generation." (14)

Church membership/discipline. Martin begins this section by noting that "baptism has long been tied to church discipline, both for Catholics and Anabaptists." (16) In the early church ethics—including public penance and use of Matthew 18—baptism and the Eucharist were closely related; gradually, by the Middle Ages, this evolved into private repentance, confession, and penance between the Christian, priest, and God. Church discipline was thus expressed in the linkage of baptism and penance. This was parallel to the Anabaptist concepts of baptism as initiation into membership but ongoing membership depending on church discipline. Once again, Martin notes the significance of monasticism as "the form of committed Christianity par excellence" (17): it was like a second baptism, "a form of adult baptism," and a continuing life of penitence—not unlike the call to discipleship of the Anabaptists. Thus "both Anabaptists and Catholics linked baptism and church discipline." (19) One important form of confession and penance in the Catholic tradition is **spiritual direction**. It began in monastic circles as a training method for young monks: learning from older, more experienced brothers. While spiritual direction is a foreign, or at least a very recent, phenomenon among Mennonites, it may be closer to Mennonite discipleship training than the present college and seminary-based educational leadership training.

[Martin also briefly addresses the concepts of *Gelassenheit* and community, 20–21.]

In conclusion, "Anabaptist discipleship and Catholic spirituality have much in common. Their differences lie primarily in differing attitudes toward traditional worship and sacraments and in differing ecclesiologies, both of which are related to different standpoints along the first- and second-generation continuum." (22)

Helmut offered the following comments on "gleanings" from the **inaugural publication of *Vision: A Journal for Theology and Church*** (published jointly by CMU and AMBS), "Spirituality," Vol. I, No. 1, Fall 2000:

Editorial

It is significant that the editors of the very first issue of *Vision: Journal for Church and Theology* (Fall, 2000) chose the topic of Spirituality. Here's what they say about this choice:

"The theme of this first issue is spirituality. When the editorial council met, this topic emerged as one that unites and divides, is at home in the church and also crosses the boundaries of church and society in ways that are sometimes healing and sometimes disconcerting. How to assess current spirituality movements, how to affirm Christian spirituality, how to nurture a faltering spirituality are all questions that have an impact on our congregations. We intend the articles in this issue not to answer all questions but to stimulate thinking and invite response" (3).

Seeking the headwaters of Mennonite spirituality – Nelson Kraybill

Nelson's intent is to appreciate the spirituality of the early church, especially pre-Constantine, but also the middle ages. So he holds up the Anabaptist spiritual lens through which to learn from the pre-Reformation period. The following quote will be of interest to our dialogue group:

"Although [the Anabaptists] reacted against Catholic spiritualities that sometimes had turned mechanical or exploitative, early Anabaptists were deeply influenced by medieval monastic movements and other radical renewal efforts (e.g. the Waldensians). In the words of Mennonite historian Arnold Snyder, the 'deepest, strongest, and richest taproot of Anabaptism found its nourishment in the subsoil of ascetic, Christian spirituality, even though it was fertilized by Luther's Bible revolution,' Anabaptist spirituality relied on the direct movement of the Holy Spirit, informed by the Bible and the example of Jesus. 'The negative side of this radical spiritualization of the Christian life,' Snyder says, 'was that a millennium of liturgy, ceremony, symbolic language, prayer, and ritual [was] thrown away as 'human inventions,' not truly biblical, and not necessary for a [i.e. to replace] truly spiritual life.'" (7)

A discriminating spirituality – Gerald Gerbrandt

Renewed interest in spirituality in our time is welcome news, an antidote to the materialism of our age. Gerald criticizes the way we employ the word "spiritual" ambiguously. E.g. how is an encounter with God different from a *spiritual* encounter with God? Or, what is the difference between spirituality generally and *Christian* spirituality? Here are some questions that need to be considered: 1) What is the relationship between spirituality in general and *human* spirit? How does one differentiate between the *human* spirit and the *Christian* spirit, or the *divine* spirit? 2) What is the role of *grace* in the pursuit of spirituality? Achieving *spirituality* appears sometimes to concentrate on *what humans do*, whereas grace is a *gift of God*. 3) Is there a tension between

individualistic and communal spirituality? (In *Journey Toward Holiness* Alan Kreider concentrates on “social holiness,” and intimates that “community holiness” is a key characteristic of Anabaptist spirituality.) 4) How can spirituality remain holistic; encompassing both body and spirit; intellect, emotion and ethics; shaping the total being? 5) Does the spiritual we envision move the person (or the church) beyond itself to service/mission in society? Or does it only serve private indulgence?

A spirituality shaped by the Psalter – Perry Yoder

In the Psalms spirituality is expressed in the form of lament – the cry of the suffering, of those unjustly treated, of harassed by enemies. The Psalmist speaks boldly to God in complaint, yet relies completely on God to rescue. Such prayers are not an escape mechanism, but a way of confronting God and pleading for aid. The key to approaching God aright is to immerse oneself in the Torah, and listening to the community of faith. Response of the person to the beauty of nurture finds expression in the whole body – through dancing, playing musical instruments, shouting for joy. A vibrant spirituality encompasses opposite poles of a continuum – anger and trust, doubt and belief, discouragement and encouragement.

Facile spirituality, profound love of God – Harry Huebner

(pp. 32ff) There has been a debate over how to formulate an appropriate Christian-Anabaptist spirituality. It has centred on how we understand the human person, and especially the relation of body and spirit. St Paul holds the two together: “How we present our bodies determines our spiritual worship.” A spiritual/physical distinction usually assumes the pull upward toward God is spiritual; the pull away from God is physical. But where does this leave our quest for the embodied community of faith?

Our Anabaptist forebears of faith have something to say here. The Anabaptists basically agreed with Martin Luther’s Kingdom-of-God-vs-a sin-corrupted-world cosmology, two realms. But they disagreed with Luther’s view that the Christian has a different ethic for the one realm than the other. In Luther’s it is appropriate for the Christian to attack sin and evil in the worldly realm, but not in the Kingdom of God realm. In the latter, sin is forgiven, and grace abounds. In the worldly realm, sin and evil need to be ‘contained’. Not to punish sin in that realm is to forsake the mandate of God. The Christian realm of the Kingdom is spiritual, the worldly realm is physical. The Anabaptists disagreed with this approach. For them “profound love of God included the profound love of the physical” (34f.). All was to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. You could not love enemies spiritually but kill them physically. They saw their approach in Jesus Christ, and in the great traditions of monasticism. The heart of the gospel is not all about a belief (only), living in community as God intended. Spirituality had to do with

setting up spiritual disciplines that can sustain such a commitment to renunciation and community. (They agreed with the cenobites [compared to the desert hermits] who lived in alternative community as a sign to the world of how Christians ought to live.) Yet they advocated that life style for all Christians, in the midst of a sinful world. There they would not kill. Rather, 'when push came to shove,' they would give preference to being killed. Communion was a communal matter for the Anabaptists – dealing with sin between persons physically and in a physical world; not a 'spiritual' matter only, between me and God.

Spirituality according to Oprah – June Mears Driedger

Christian spirituality – Following the way of Jesus – April Yamasaki

The CFMP, in the article "Christian Spirituality," says that "Christian spirituality is defined by Christ and his way." This leads April to look to Jesus for an understanding of spirituality. *Jesus entire life was spirit led and spirit filled. Jesus was aware and in communication with God in all of his life. For Jesus spirituality was a way of life. *Jesus expressed his ongoing relationship with God through prayer – morning, noon, and night. *Reading scripture and reflecting on it was a constant practice for Jesus. *Ethical action and good works belonged to Jesus' spirituality. *But Jesus spirituality was not "whatever you make of it." His spirituality was guided by the two greatest commandments – love God and neighbour.

In our world of many different spiritualities, we gain a perspective when we ask that "Christian spirituality, Mennonite spirituality, is defined by Christ and his way, in accordance with the scriptures. So let us follow Jesus in faith, in life, in a spirituality that comes from a personal relationship of love for God and love for others." (p.54).

Anastatic Anabaptists – Tom Yoder Neufeld

In a sermon preached in 2000, TYN calls us to be anastatic Anabaptists – experiencing baptism as a renewal of commitment to the way of peace in a 'resurrectionist' mode. Tom explains:

"Anastatic Anabaptists? Anastatic? What on earth does that mean? Why not 'ecstatic Anabaptists'? We know what that means, even if it is a bit of an oxymoron. Are you sure you don't mean 'anti-static' Anabaptists – '*die Stillen im Lande,*' the 'quiet in the land'? Or why not just leave it at 'static' Anabaptists? We also know what that means, even if it hardly makes for a sermon topic – unless, of course, we mean Mennonites who create static, troublers of the peace. Did not Jesus say something like that? 'Think not that I have come to bring peace! We have come to create static!' (Matt. 10:34). It's true, I could just as well have used 'resurrectionist Anabaptists'"(59).

My question: Is Tom still on the topic of Christian spirituality here?

What is a healthy congregational spirituality? – Marlene Kropf

Marlene highlights the resource book: *Congregational Discipling: A Three-fold Vision of Worship, Community and Mission*. The book provides “a practical framework for seeing all of congregational life as spiritually formative” (71). The vision for worship is both personal and corporate. Community focuses on relationships among persons within the body of Christ. Mission gives attention to the church’s work of service, witness, peacemaking and stewardship in the world. Each of the aspects discussed points to the discipling or spiritual formation process as it relates to love for God, for neighbour for self and for the world. In the paragraphs on worship Marlene extols the worth of healing rituals, of spiritual disciplines, and of praying the daily office. (Reference to rituals and disciplines and daily offices are unfamiliar to Mennonites historically.)

Although, in effect, Mennonite devotional practices through the centuries have engaged regularly in such practices, mainly in the context of family, but also privately.) Small group events for spiritual nourishment have been plentiful in Mennonite congregations – from classes that prepare youth and young adults for baptism, to fellowship groups that meet for sharing and prayer, to Sunday morning Bible study classes, to mid-week prayer and Bible study classes, to inter-congregational weekend retreats, etc.

Generally speaking, Mennonite spiritual formation has been focused more on the congregational context and the family context than on individual commitment to spirituality. And spirituality has been understood primarily as the spiritual life of discipleship.

6. Next meeting: After some discussion it was agreed that Monday evening, October 1, 4:30–9:00 pm, would be an appropriate date for our next meeting. The meeting will be at a Catholic venue (yet to be decided). **Dora** indicated that she would not be continuing with the group; she said thank you and goodbye and said she much appreciated the friendships that have developed. **Helmut** thanked for her contributions. Dora will be launching a new book in September. **Melanie** will also be leaving our group, to do a Masters degree in Ontario. **Tom** said he has discovered there is lot of interest in our group among young people.

6. Closing prayer. **Luis** observed that today was the feast of St Anthony of Padua, a Franciscan, originally from Portugal. He was a man who wanted to preach the gospel in Africa. He died in 1213. Luis read from one of Anthony’s sermons, what was both a short sermon and a prayer.