

Minutes

Winnipeg Regional Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue, Meeting No. 37

Held on Monday, 1 October 2012
at Mary Mother of the Church

Present: Tom Bailey-Robertson, Paul Doerksen, Michelle Gallant, Helmut Harder, Victor Kliewer, Richard Lebrun, John Long, Ron Penner, and Nancy Wood.

Regrets: Donna Peters-Small and Lynda Trenholm

1. **Welcome by Helmut**, who noted that **Paul** would be arriving late, and that Donna and Lynda had sent regrets. He reported that as well that while we are still counting **Luis** as part of our dialogue, in fact, he is in Rome in a new job. Although not yet officially announced, he is beginning an appointment to the Pontifical Council on Promoting Christian Unity. He has been on a working group of the WCC, and has been named as well as the Catholic representative to the Global Christian Fellowship (a kind of alternative or complement to the World Council Churches). Helmut explained that this new Fellowship is an attempt to cut across the evangelical/magisterial divide and be a forum rather than following the pattern of the WCC. **Luis** will also be the Catholic representative on a new trilogue between Catholics, Mennonites, and the Lutherans on Baptism. **John** Long has been asked by the Archbishop of St. Boniface to take Luis' place as co-leader of this dialogue.

2. **Sharing of ecumenical experiences:**

Richard spoke about his attendance at a conference, "Vatican II: For the Next Generation" at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. He was particularly impressed by the quality of the keynote speakers – especially Catherine Clifford, a Saint Paul University theology prof who spoke about "Learning from the Council: A Church in Dialogue," Richard Gaillardetz, who spoke about "Vatican II and the Vocation of the Laity," and a panel of "witnesses to the Council," which included Bishop Remi De Roo, Gregory Baum, Prof. Léo Laberge, and Bishop Gérard Deschamps. There was also a multitude of concurrent workshops in this bilingual conference of some 275 participants from across Canada. He observed that there were some Anglican participants in attendance.

Ron said that his highlight was attendance at the Mennonite World Conference meeting in Basel; he was there with about 150 other delegates from the global Mennonite church. He pointed out that Anabaptism had its origins in Zurich. Newer members in the Anabaptist tradition realized a sense of history at the site of first Anabaptist martyr. He found the cultural

mix a great experience. When all the papers had been presented and business dealt with, there was a small section on the Agenda for the sharing of prayer requests. From the many shared needs the purpose of being together and being church suddenly unfolded as delegates prayed for each other and specific needs. He noted that the Mennonite World Conference is at a new stage, with a new general director from the global south, a Spanish speaker from Columbia. The meeting Ron was involved with meets every three years, while the general assembly meets every six years. He noted the fact that the majority of Anabaptists in the world are now residents of south of the equator. **Richard** noted that the same demographic statistic is now true of Catholicism as well.

Tom reported spending a week taking a course at CMU on Advanced Pastoral Counseling and Care with a professor from Indiana. He was the only Catholic in the group. The course looked at spiritual care in interfaith settings, as well as pastoral care from an Anabaptist perspective. Tom feels that the course will be significant help for his part-time work at the Health Sciences Centre. He said that his work as a Pastoral Assistant at St. John Brebeuf Parish also offers some opportunities for ecumenical activities.

Helmut reported that he had also been in Basel for the Council on Faith and Life. His main ecumenical outing, at the end of July, was attendance at Bridgefolk; this time at St. Benedicts College in St. Joseph, MN. He found it to be a good experience to be on that campus. The theme of the dialogue was “Formed in the word – Scripture and Peacemaking.” He presented a paper on the Anabaptist perspective on this topic, which appeared to have been well received. But he was a bit disappointed in that his paper, and another paper from a Catholic perspective, were not really discussed. There were about 60 folks in attendance. A highlight was the “double-eucharist” presided over by Abbot John Klassen and Marlene Kropf. The Bridgefolk organizers had long been chagrined that participants couldn’t celebrate Eucharist together. The Double Eucharist was a compromise. There was a common liturgical experience: a first part of readings (a liturgy of the word) followed by a Catholic homily and Eucharist presided over by Abbot John; and then Mennonite Lord’s Supper service (with homily) presided over by Marlene. All were called to come up; but participants were told they could only receive the bread and wine once. All were invited to come forward for a blessing, but to receive the elements at only one or the other. All sang the various hymns in the two traditions, and all affirmed the readings. [Editor’s note: for one participant’s reflections on his experience of this event, see the Bridgefolk website for an article by Michael Turman (a student at Conrad Grebel University College in Kitchener-Waterloo), which had appeared in *Canadian Mennonite Young Voices*.]

Helmut also noted a meeting at the Michael Sattler House on the St. John’s campus. Sattler was a former Benedictine who became an Anabaptist. This

House was established through Abbot Klassen's initiative as a place of reflection for those in service. They were hosted there by Ivan and Lois Kauffmann. Ivan is a former Mennonite who became a Catholic some years ago.

Helmut mentioned Fernando Enns's new book (in German), which reports on ecumenical initiatives in the area of peace, including the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue. He is a professor of peace theology at the University of Amsterdam and director of the Institute for Peace Church Theology at the University of Hamburg.

As well, **Helmut** spoke of the Christian-Muslim dialogue in which CMU is involved. This past summer CMU hosted women from Quom in Iran. These graduate students in religion participated in a two-week course on the Christian Faith organized by Irma Fast Dueck and Sheila Klassen-Wiebe. Among other things they attended a service at Charleswood Mennonite Church, which happened to include a baptism. From evidence from a subsequent "debriefing," they were "blown away" by the experience. Hosting these female Muslim students involved a lot of work, such as adequate preparation of washrooms, food, etc. This event was part of ongoing relations with Mennonites in North America, with exchanges going on for a number of years.

John described attending a wedding in Abbotsford BC in a Sikh temple, with his niece marrying a baptized Sikh. The ceremony, which took about three hours began with a "joining of the families," a rite that was both serious and jocular, with leis around the arm and shoulder of each family member, etc. Two things stood out for John: one of the members of temple attached himself to guests such as John as a guide, told the visitors about the Sikh belief system, and how they revere their holy books. A fan-like instrument was waved over their holy books while there was chanting and hymns by an orchestra of singers and drummers. At the end of the service, one of the officials asked John if he would like to offer something to the couple. He recalled a blessing, went to the mike, and sang his blessing. No one was opposed and many were very gracious in their praise. Part of the wedding was a move to a communal kitchen (open 24 hours a day on basis of anyone who might need food), where they sat or stood to eat, not separated out as a wedding party. A charity ethic is obviously strong with these people. John found this inter-religious experience very satisfying. He was impressed with their hospitality and kindness. The Sikhs are monotheists, not Hindus. In response to a question, John described the small ceremonial dagger carried by a baptized Sikh. At the wedding ceremony, the elaborately dressed groom wore a full beard and carried a very large sword. He then shaved off his beard and wore a suit for the evening dinner. In the evening in deference to the bride's Western tradition, there was religious dancing and singing as entertainment.

Michelle said she had nothing to report, but added that until recently she didn't realize the United Church had child baptism. **Helmut**, noting the Calvinist origins of the United Church, reported that in Switzerland today the Reformed Church Calvinist) now has more adult baptisms than child baptisms.

Victor told us that he has become the interim pastor at a Mennonite church in Steinbach. He reported that one of the phenomena of the Steinbach area is the recent large immigration into that community of Mennonites from Germany and Latin America. In early 1970s there was a German-Russian agreement that allowed repatriation of persons of German background living in Russia. This included many Mennonites. At that time there were maybe 100,000 people of German background living in the Soviet Union. Many of them came to West Germany, where they stuck out as "Russians," and some were unhappy about conditions in Germany. The next generation of these people are looking for space, and have heard of Manitoba. Over the last couple of decades many of these *Aussiedler* have come to Canada. Theologically conservative, they come with money. In the Steinbach area there has been lots of development by these people; their houses are well-spaced, often on 1 or 2 acres of land. They did not like German education system, and even in Manitoba are using home schooling. They have built at least 12 to 15 churches on the open prairie. They have few connections to older Mennonite Canadian churches. Their presence has been something of shock to the traditional Mennonite churches in Steinbach. Victor described them as kind and gentle people with clear boundaries, for whom family is important. It will be interesting to see what the second-generation becomes. They are ethnic Mennonites speaking low-German. They can identify themselves as Pentecostals, Baptists, etc. **Ron**, who is familiar with the group, said that at first they identify with conservative Mennonites, but then go elsewhere. Women's head coverings are a big deal with them.

Nancy said that the highlight of her summer was a hymn festival at the Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, where she very much enjoyed the great singing and music. She reported that their St. Charles centre has lots of people coming for meetings, etc., but that only one student had been interested in their ecumenical student residence initiative. So they are not taking students at the moment.

Paul reported a trip to Kentucky where he visited the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville. He noted that Merton had been in conversation and correspondence with John Howard Yoder.

3. The **Opening prayer** was led by **John Long**. We then enjoyed a dinner prepared by John's wife, who was duly thanked for the great meal.

4. **Discussion of Helmut's paper: "Scripture and Peacemaking in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition."**

Helmut set the stage for a discussion of his paper by reviewing the circumstances, familial, personal, and circumstantial (the Bridgefolk conference at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, MN) that led him to prepare it, and took us through a brief review of the origins and development of Anabaptist and Mennonite thinking about peacemaking, showing how it has always been a deeply constitutive part of Mennonite teaching and culture. He traced its formulation in successive confessions of faith, starting with the Schleithem Confession of 1527, tracing the contributions of Menno Simons, and the impact of more recent developments (in particular WWII and Mennonite involvement with ecumenical concerns). In response to a question he spent some time explaining the origin and practice of the ban ("shunning") as a method of church discipline that developed as an alternative to reliance on civil authority or the use of violence. In tracing all these developments, he pointed out the heavy reliance on biblical texts (New Testament in particular), in Mennonite thinking about these issues.

Discussion:

Helmut recalled that when we studied *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, we noted difference of references on Catholic side (in addition to Scripture, Catholics put much more emphasis on tradition—conciliar statements and encyclicals, etc.). **Michelle** commented on the apparent separation between Catholic teaching and what Catholics know about the peace tradition. She asked whether the "ban" occurs at the community level or a higher level, as in Catholic practice? **Helmut** replied this occurred at the congregational level as contrasted with the 16th century "political Christendom model." **John** acknowledged that the Catholic practice of the time used civil authority to sustain religious judgment. **Helmut** observed that Lutherans did the same thing. **Richard** pointed out all 16th century groups except the Anabaptists did this. **Paul** reported that in Russia, where Mennonites formed colonies, the ban was used by both Mennonite civil and church authorities. **Helmut** agreed, and noted that similar developments occurred in places like Mexico and Paraguay. In other words, there was separation until the Mennonite community took on some of the shadow power of the state, where there have been "Mennonite Christendoms."

Helmut traced in some detail the story of Menno Simons in Netherlands. Menno as a Catholic priest had sought a theological orientation in Scripture, and had focused on biblical teachings on peace. After ten years he joined the peaceful wing of the Anabaptist movement (vs. Munster). He became the pastoral leader of Mennonites in northern Europe, in part through his prolific writings. In effect, Menno was one of the most important leaders of the

peaceful Anabaptists from about 1540 until his death in 1561. **Michelle** asked if Menno's emphasis was on the New Testament, and wondered how Menno got around Old Testament texts? **Helmut** suggested that Menno placed the New Testament above the Old Testament. **Paul** pointed out that Menno read the Old Testament with a Christological lens, but added that when you say you just follow the Bible – you can get into all kinds of trouble. He noted that Menno, in his view of Christ, was not quite orthodox. **Helmut** thought that Menno, not a literalist, was more concerned with ethics than rational thinking. He looked at texts in terms of what they mean for life. **Helmut** stressed the point that the Schleithem Confession and Menno have influenced Mennonites up to the present. For four hundred years of Mennonite history, the emphasis was on preserving peacemaking within the Mennonite community, but more recently there have been efforts to carry this thrust into the wider world. He thought that 1950 was kind of a watershed in this respect, after which Mennonites expanded their notion of peacemaking to see it as witness in the broader world, and became more interested in learning from society. Before that, the emphasis was mainly on nonresistance. There has been, significantly, an effort to dialogue with Catholics, and to engage with world peace movements.

Nancy said she enjoyed reading the paper, which reminded her of what led her to become a Mennonite. She still holds dearly to the Mennonite peace tradition. When she went to *Called to be Peacemakers*, and read the recommended sections on Catholic thinking about peacemaking, she found it was all new to her. She thinks that Catholics in the pews don't know the present Catholic position, and would still be ready to glorify war, etc. We need to teach the newer position. She was struck by a quote from John Paul II on the "culture of death." This phrase has more often been used to critique abortion and euthanasia and this comment on war is not well-known. There are a lot of things that Catholics can learn from Mennonites about peacemaking.

John said that the key thing for him was where the Mennonite conception of peace begins, that is with the invitation of Christ—that is a Christological origin. But then it goes all the way to questions of social justice in the real world. When he reread some of the papal encyclicals, especially *Pacem in Terris*, he observed that to speak to both Christians and non-Christians, to men and women of good will, Pope John XXIII anchored his justification in the natural law. In effect, the Catholic approach begins where the Mennonites have arrived, with social justice. Pope John's argument was that you can't have peace if you don't have justice. In short, Catholics have a theology of peace, but Mennonites have a theology of peacemaking and a peace church. Catholics are more concerned about the world as we find it. **Richard** recalled being asked to speak to a group of Protestant clergymen in Ottawa when *Pacem in Terris* appeared. **John** commented that *Time* magazine had put Pope John on its cover because it recognized the significance of the document.

Victor spoke about how World War Two led Mennonites to more concern about the broader world. **John** suggested that this was related to experience with conscientious objection. Whether Mennonites claimed conscientious objection or went to war, either way, they came back different people. With that shift, they had to deal with wider conflict and ask themselves “How do we communicate with non-Christians?” **Victor** said they wondered if they could work together with other political partners. In 1930s and 40s, Mennonites did not want to be called pacifists (from a Mennonite perspective a pejorative term). **Michele** said she found it surprising that in Catholic practice, Catholics have not been much exposed to social thought. **John** agreed, the stream of thinking on social justice has not been seriously applied or achieved. **Helmut** suggested that the difference might have something to do with Mennonites not taking on Christendom, although they are now vigorously pursuing service and social justice. He cited the Mennonite Central Committee, which is more about development than politically focused peacemaking. **Victor** pointed out that when young men were hauled up before courts during WWII, they did not know what to say to justify their refusal of military service. This, in fact, worked in their favor, as judges saw that they were speaking with integrity from their community ethos. But the boys had not thought it through and did not know the texts. **Helmut** remarked that David Toews talked about going to the courts and speaking for Mennonite kids, who had no clue. **Victor** reported that in doing research on Mennonite teaching and preaching, he found few sermons on war and peace during the Second World War. Conscientious objection was not reflected in their sermons.

Ron noted that there is one very short statement in Scripture that we all know very well that should convince us of the importance of peace and nonviolence and that is Lord’s prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is all we need, if we imagine heaven to be the most peaceful place imaginable. **Tom** commented that one of the critiques that Stanley Hauerwas levels against Catholic teaching is its failure of imagination; it is unable to imagine the kingdom of heaven present in the world. He suggested that Catholics and Mennonites have different starting points: Catholics start with the situation in the world rather than with the kingdom. He recalled Paul VI’s statement in *Populorum Progressio* that there is no peace without development. He was writing in the period of decolonization, when people were fighting to be liberated, when the Catholic Church had to be very careful about what it said. It was not a time to tell people to put down their arms. John XXIII was clear that human rights had to be respected; that there had to be preliminary justice.

Helmut spoke about another dimension. Mennonites see tension between people passionate about peace in their own community and having signs of the kingdom in society, and those who are working at the whole picture, to make Canada the kingdom of God. We see some who want to demonstrate, to

draw attention to problems, who want to see people doing things. Others are content to light one candle in the midst of society. Historically, Mennonites have been on the latter side, providing signs to keep the light burning. We will not create heaven on earth, but it is enough to create islands of peace on earth. **Ron** agreed: the church should be a light of how peace operates so that world will see what Jesus is talking about. **Victor** was struck by the need for humility. **Richard** reflected on the present polarization within the Catholic community. **Helmut** noted the different perspectives: the local congregation vs. a world-wide church.

5. Thoughts on the future of our dialogue and the date and theme of the next meeting.

Considering the topic of the next meeting, **Paul** said he would like to read *Pacem in Terris*. **Richard** suggested perhaps *Pacem in Terris* and the relevant articles of *Called Together to be Peacemakers*. **Paul** mentioned a book by William Cavanaugh, who teaches at DePaul University, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. **Helmut** noted that Luis tended to favour using official documents for our dialogue. After some discussion, it was agreed that **Helmut** and **John** would prepare an agenda for our January meeting. After some discussion of the future of the group, since some of the group found the longer sessions difficult, it was agreed that we should try a shorter format, 5 to 8 pm.

As for the date, it was agreed we should meet again on Monday, 21 January, 5 to 8 pm, at CMU, beginning with the meal.

6. John led us in a closing prayer.