

Minutes

Winnipeg Regional Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 39

Held on Monday, 10 June 2013
at St. Bernadette Catholic Church

Present: Tom Bailey-Robertson, Michelle Gallant, Helmut Harder, Richard Lebrun, John Long, Ron Penner, Donna Peters-Small, Lynda Trenholm, and Nancy Wood.

Regrets: Paul Doerksen and Victor Kliewer.

1. **Lynda** welcomed us to St. Bernadette's. Before the beginning of the business of the evening, **Richard** reported that in discussion with Chris Butterill, one of the St. Paul's College participants in the dialogue between some members of faculty at St. Paul's and some members of faculty at Canadian Mennonite University, they had come up with the idea of collecting and binding the minutes of their meetings over the years, and depositing copies of the collection in the library/archives of both institutions. He wondered if the same might be done with the minutes of this older Mennonite-Catholic dialogue group. He thought that between **Helmut** and himself, we probably have minutes of all our meetings. Discussion did not seem to raise any objections to this proposal, so this is a project that **Richard**, calling on **Helmut** as needed, will pursue.
2. **Sharing of ecumenical experiences.**

Richard acknowledged that he had nothing to report.

Nancy, reported that she had attended a book launch where she met Dora Dueck, a former member of dialogue group.

With reference, to Chemin Neuf, she spoke about a conference in Switzerland, with talks from various groups, with a theme of church unity coming through the charismatic renewal in Catholic world interacting with Pentecostals. One of the leaders in this movement had been kicked out of the Pentecostals at one point for this initiative, but that there are now Pentecostals back on board in the movement.

Lynda said that she had no ecumenical contacts, except in her ministry in the parish, where she does marriage preparation with couples of different faiths. This involves making the non-Catholic feel welcome, and assuring them that they will be accepted without conversion. Recently she had a couple (Catholic and Mennonite) married at a hotel, with both a priest and minister present. This would be more common, but people don't ask for permission, in the form of a dispensation from the usual canonical form. She observes a trend for Catholics to get married outside the church, but those who do want to get married in the

church are doing it for the right reasons. In response to what is done about already co-habiting couples, she replied that her policy is honey rather than vinegar. Her attitude is that these couples have already chosen one another, and now they want to make a formal commitment.

John indicated that he did not have much to report. He continues to be involved with chats with a friend, who has recently been fussing about whether same sex might be blessed in the Anglican Church. His bishop is now requiring a civil marriage before a blessing, a policy that is causing anxiety for this man. He questions the bishop's rationale, not his jurisdiction. As a Catholic, John did not feel helpful on this one. Echoes of John Allen's comments about theological conservatism in the Third World, this man is worried about the posture of southern-hemisphere Anglicans on this issue. On a second matter, John reported that, with this same colleague, he has become involved in the debate about the current Manitoba government's bill 18, anti-bullying legislation that would mandate all schools receiving government funding to facilitate gay-straight alliances when such groups were requested by students. This is a contentious matter. Education critic Kelvin Goertzen has lit a fire in his constituency and agonized over it. This bill may well pass, a state-sponsored bill that will obligate religious schools to create committees on student demands that would run counter to the religious beliefs of some. *John's* view is not that bullying is acceptable, but that schools should not have to indulge student demand on a particular issue.

Helmut reported attending an interesting religious meeting on the Shoah at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue. The event was organized by the Jews, but people from other denominations were invited to participate. Secondly he attended a symposium on Michael Sattler at St. John's Abbey, jointly sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and St. John's Abbey. Sattler was a former Benedictine prior who joined the Anabaptists in Zurich in 1524, penned an early statement of unity for Anabaptists, and was then martyred. Catholics interested in him, reading Arnold Snyder's biography of Sattler, discovered Snyder's view that among the four major influences on Sattler, his Benedictine background was probably the most important. At St. John's there is now a "Michael Sattler House," where Ivan Kaufman and his wife, former Mennonites, now Catholics, act as hosts. One of the people who participated in the symposium came from St. Peter's Monastery, north of Freiburg, from which Sattler had come, and where a Mennonite Peace Community recently presented a Michael Sattler peace award to a woman from near Grassy Narrows. Helmut also mentioned Carol Neal, a professor from Colorado College, who studies the spirituality of St. Norbert, founder of the Premonstratensians" [Editor's note: "Order of Canons Regular of Prèmontrè" (name of the place in France where their first house was established), also known as Norbertines. This was a quasi-monastic order (quasi because they are often involved in parish ministry). In the 16th century, they had many houses in Belgium and one in the Netherlands; today they have houses in many countries around the world.] Neal has traced the influence of St.

Norbert in the training that Menno Simons received as a Catholic priest. Helmut also mentioned Abbot John Klassen's role in establishing Michael Sattler House. **Nancy** reported news that Chez Neuf is being given a former Benedictine house near Heathrow airport. **Helmut** mentioned as well Ivan Kaufman's recent book, *"Follow Me": A History of Christian Intentionality*.

Marco spoke about his involvement in the local area ministerial association, mostly Mennonites, with one United Church minister, and some others. Folks in this area (around Gretna) are upset about bill 18, so discussing what they might say well together, Marco and colleagues decided to buy all the teachers in Altona (public school) lunch. **John** commented that public schools are, in effect, licensed to sponsor a secular ethic.

Michelle reported attending an event at the Church of the Rock, where a couple were renewing their marriage vows. She overheard a comment to the effect that maybe Catholics are all right, but their homilies are too short. She also reported having a minister from the Church of Scotland (a second career woman) staying as a guest, and conversing with her about religious issues in Scotland.

Ron, who serves on the executive council of the Mennonite World Conference, reported participating in a council meeting in Harrisburg, PA, in anticipation of a world assembly coming up in 2015. Some 6,000 or 8,000 Mennonites from around the world will gather in Harrisburg for this event. Participation in the executive council meeting provided a flavor of churches around the world. In North America, the situation is very comfortable, compared to some situations, such as in Zimbabwe and Indonesia, where there are tensions between Muslims and Christians, and Columbia, where there are questions about how to do peace witness in a culture with so much violence (from drugs). Coming away from that type of gathering, one realizes the church is challenged in many ways. **Ron** observed that there is rapid growth in numbers in the southern hemisphere for Mennonites as well as Catholics. North American Mennonites are becoming the junior partners among Mennonites in the world. He also reported that there two Mennonite delegates had been invited to the installation of Pope Francis; they reported on their experience.

Donna reported that she has also been involved in the controversy about Bill 18, but didn't want to speak about that issue. Rather she talked about spending Holy Week with her husband in Savannah, Georgia, where they attended musical events in various historic churches. She also reported a grandson recently baptized at St. Margaret's Anglian Church in the Wolseley area. Apparently there are so many former Mennonites now members of this congregation that it sometimes jokingly referred to as the Manglican Church. She has been doing marriage preparation with a couple of who have been living together (one of whom is Mennonite) and is involved in sex education at Westgate, and doing counseling as well. Taking the view that the Church is not talking about sexual issues, she has been asking students what they think of

various questions. She feels that there are whole area that need to be talked about, such as same-sex marriage.

Tom reported that the “spiritual health specialists” (part-timers) at the Health Centre, “on-callologists” they jokingly call themselves, have been meeting once a month, reading and discussing together. Most recently they took up the topic of interfaith prayer. Tom, and an evangelical pastor, and a “none” (former Catholic), read an article by a Mennonite caregiver (by one of the editors of a volume on Interfaith Spiritual Care). For some folks, this means stepping out of their comfort zones. It was interesting to hear from the “none” about her perspective when she leads prayers on request from patients. She said she did not feel authentic leading prayer, but when she named what was going on, it sounded authentic. It was good to validate her practice. **Tom** also reported that his sister, who is no longer Catholic, is getting married in August. He has been asked to officiate at the wedding and has obtained a temporary license from the province to do this.

3. **Opening prayers** were led by **Lynda**.
4. **Break** for an excellent Chinese meal arranged by **Lynda**.
5. **Discussion of John Allen’s *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church***.

Helmut. Introduction. A retired priest Helmut often walks with at the Reh-Fit Centre mentioned John Allen’s book, which he was reading. Helmut thought it sounded interesting and suggested it to John Long, and they decided to use it for our discussion. He warned us that each pair had a bit less than 20 minutes to talk about each “trend” that had been assigned, and he would keep time. He mentioned the possibility of using our next meeting to take up discussion of Allen’s last five trends.

Trend One: The World Church

Marco looked at the similarities and differences between Mennonites and Catholics with respect to the trend towards a “world church.”

With respect to similarities, he pointed to four important aspects.

1. A shift from a predominance of Europe (64,740) and North America (523, 969) in the Mennonite community with a rapid growth in numbers in Africa (592, 106), Asia and the Pacific (265,447), and Latin America and the Caribbean (169,74).
2. The moral impulse of Anabaptism in the global south is similar to that of Catholicism in the area: conservative on human sexuality, involved in spiritual warfare, and concerned about economic justice for the poor.
3. Para-church ministries is also a shifting reality, with more and more leadership be given to people from the southern churches.

4. Anabaptists in the global south are also being impacted by Pentecostalism, which with it shares some features (the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and congregational piety, to name a couple).

With respect to differences, **Marco** identified the following.

1. Anabaptist congregational polity impacts the level of awareness of southern dominance in North American congregations. Without strict global hierarchical connections, North American Mennonites can go on without giving much thought to the shifting realities of global Anabaptism. There is no pope, and MWC leadership doesn't have nearly the authority that is to be found in Catholicism and among the Orthodox. Pastoral leadership is local rather than migratory.
2. Pastors in North American churches are mostly from North America, while in the global south, Anabaptist mostly train and are led by people from their community.

Referring to the relevance of all this for his local congregation, **Marco** suggested that the "elephant in the room" is the affluence of North American Christianity. Everything else is a distraction from the main question: will we serve God or Mammon? Southern Anabaptists are making it increasingly clear to us that our affluence is one of the determining factors in our spiritual apathy, our moral accommodation to the surrounding culture, and a decline in membership. The dynamism, exponential growth, and vibrancy of southern Anabaptists will increasingly call into question our way of being church in North America.

Tom began his contrast between local Catholicism and Catholicism in the global church by observing that in the parish where he works, the homilies of the pastor, Fr Mark Tarrant, are always about economic issues and care for the poor, but never about sexuality. Catholicism in the global south, in contrast, is morally conservative and politically liberal. In the south, the issue is more often religious pluralism than secularism.

There is also a significant difference with respect to vocations to the priesthood, which seems to leading to a trend to "outsource" vocations. He cited Msgr. Obunga, of the Uganda Bishops conference: "I would like to see more collaboration between Americans who have money, and the Africans, who have got the vocations." The American attitude seems to be, if there is a priest shortage, throw money at it. The shadow side to the stewardship kick that our parishes have been on is to regard discipleship as management of our resources, which fits nicely with upper-middle-class sensibilities. Taking priests from third-world countries can be seen as exploitative, getting immigrant workers to do the work North Americans are not willing to do themselves. Importing priests also creates cultural, linguistic, and ecclesiological difficulties. These priests may be used to special treatment ("These are holy hands."); they can be socially conservative, especially with respect to the treatment of women. However, there can also be cross-pollination, with priests from these countries being educated alongside lay women in North American and European theological centres.

Tom also spoke about youth ministry and youth events in Winnipeg, in some cases with special ministries for Filipino youth and great enthusiasm in getting young people out.

With respect to consequences of this shift in Catholicism from European and North American leadership and issues, he noted a likely shift from attention to *ad intra* issues (such as gender and governance issues) to *ad extra* issues (religious pluralism and economic issues related to poverty rather than secularism). He thought some of this may alienate his own congregation; the Vatican will seem out of touch. It will make it more difficult to enter into dialogue with secular culture, and shift the tone of dialogue from deference to self-defense. The chances for shifts in teaching on sexual issues will decline sharply, while there will likely be more support for the left on issues relating to economic justice and war. **Discussion.** It was noted that while Catholicism may have a global agenda, the Mennonite World Conference has worked on global sharing.

Trend two: Evangelical Catholicism.

Nancy reads “Evangelical Catholicism” as a response to secularization and cultural pluralism, a response that sees the church as an embattled minority, strengthening its borders, returning to traditional liturgy, and characterized by a strong clericalism. Catholic apologetics is pushed to defend the faith against heresy, and to assert the truth of the Catholic faith. You see this happening, with the popularity of the ETWN network, in working with young people who are hungry for a Catholic identity, silent adoration, and a return to a personal faith. Pope Benedict pushed this kind of thing, calling for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet she said there are elements in this movement that worry her: rigidity, a way of asserting Catholic “truth” that doesn’t gibe with ecumenism, etc. In some ways she finds her own group, Chez Neuf, closer to Pentecostal types. She did find Allen’s treatment of this trend balanced.

Ron found *The Future Church* a good book, and Allen balanced and sensible. He was intrigued by the term Evangelical Catholicism, which he had never heard of. He had understood “evangelical” as largely a Protestant North American term, in part characterized as appearing to be self-confident and aggressive. It has good points, but some aspects that one can be concerned about. It can be connected to a right-wing agenda; the sense we are the only ones with the truth, and strong support of the military. So he wanted to look carefully at these Evangelical Catholics. As he reads Allen, he understands it to mean three things principally: to clearly embrace the whole of Catholicism; to have an eagerness to share this with others; and a stress on the personal choice in being identified with Christ and traditional Catholicism. Allen states that without a doubt this is the most consequential trend of policy setting in Catholic Church today. Historically there have been pockets of very zealous Catholics, but Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have put bishops in place to steer the church in this direction. Also, this

trend has also come from the bottom up, for example, from huge youth events that have trended in this direction. **Ron** was particularly struck by Allen's mention of the Rimini Meetings organized by the Communion and Liberation Movement, which have drawn crowds of 700,000 people. It appears to him that Evangelical Catholicism involves a number of things: in liturgy, resistance to attempts to modernize the language, and an impulse to go back to Latin forms; in music, back to Gregorian chant as opposed to folk songs; in architecture back to old Gothic forms; in education, insistence that Catholic educational institutions should be clearly Catholic, overseen by the local bishops; priestly identity stressed, clerical garb, etc., with priests delivering the homilies, making the decisions; theological clarity with a high Christology: Jesus is the Son of God, the Catholic Church is the one true church. In short, Evangelical Catholicism is a high tension religion that clearly defines boundaries.

Discussion. **Helmut** found himself mystified by Allen's last paragraph (p. 93), with a vision of millions of Catholics living like Amish. With respect to John Paul II's episcopal appointments, **Richard** reported a note in his morning email from Len Swidler about the death of Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn (who had been a secret advisor to the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church), recalling a conversation Len had had about John Paul's appointments, in which Sullivan said: "Of course they are theologically conservative; No surprise. What is bad is that so very many of them are totally incompetent!" **Marco** said he had observed the impact of Evangelical Catholicism in a small town in Saskatchewan, where the young Catholics had read their Scriptures. **Tom** observed that there are a lot of vocations coming out of this movement, which will have the effect of creating tensions in parishes. Recently, for example, a priest of this type kicked the Boy Scouts out of his parish because of their new policy of accepting gays. **John** was struck by how this trend was in one sense a step-child of secularism, a reaction to what is happening inside the church. **John** wondered how evangelical Mennonites were distinguished from other Mennonites. **Ron** suggested the distinction involved two details: a personal faith commitment to Jesus; and an urge to go forth and evangelize. **Donna** suggested that the distinction could also imply a more literal interpretation of the Bible and an atonement theology.

Trend Three: Islam

Richard offered the following remarks on this trend:

Despite some ambiguity in my feelings about John Allen and this book – I acknowledge that I often find myself in disagreement with his analyses and disliking his predictions with respect to the future of the Catholic Church – I have to admit that his chapter on Islam is one of the best in this book. He is a competent and knowledgeable journalist, and he writes well. Despite his rather uncritical stance towards rigidly conservative groups within the Church, such as Opus Dei (which I find somewhat fascist), he remains on the staff of the *National*

Catholic Reporter, a consistent voice of liberal reform within the American Church. He has been praised as the best-informed “Vaticanologist” writing today, and appears on TV as often as in print.

I found his chapter on Islam extremely helpful for its overall depiction of Islam as it exists in the world today, and of the major streams within contemporary Islam: the Sunni, the Shi’a, Neo-Sufism, and “Moslem democrats” such as Tarig Ramadan, the Swiss proponent of Euro-Islam, who was once offered a chair at Notre Dame University (blocked by the U.S. State Department). He makes a strong case for the importance of relations with Muslims for the Church today, stressing the demographic situation – as he says, the 2.3 billion Christians and 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, after all, represent more than 50% of mankind in our world. He not only offers clear explanations of the differences between these various branches of Islam, he also provides interesting data on the populations of the largest Muslim nations, and places the various streams of Islam within these national contexts.

Allen’s analysis of the strength and weaknesses of “radical Islam” offers a balanced picture that contrasts with the hysteria that acts of a very small minority of Muslim terrorist have aroused among some commentators (e.g., following the recent events at the Boston Marathon). I think he is correct both in his explanation of the “anti-colonialist” origins of this fanaticism and the violence of these “jihadists,” and his assessment of the general lack of support for the extremists among the very great majority of Muslims.

Our author stresses both the opportunities and challenges of dialogue between Muslims and Catholics. He notes similar stances with respect to certain moral issues such as so-called “reproductive rights” (i.e., contraception and abortion), and theological kinship with respect to written Scripture, the Abrahamic heritage, and common roots in Judaism. Allen also picks up on Pope John Paul II’s thrust towards building better relations by putting the stress on what the religions can do together rather than on theological reflection. Clearly this pope saw Islam as a possible ally against what he decried as “relativism.”

On the other hand, John Allen does not downplay the challenges posed by the continuing harassment of Christians in a number of majority Muslim nations or the difficulty of demanding reciprocity of treatment for Christian minorities in nations like Saudi Arabia, a country that still refuses to allow open expressions of Christianity, despite papal assistance in building a large mosque in Rome.

With respect to the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue, I was particularly impressed by Allen’s report on p. 124 on the six-point program recommended by experts concerned with advancing the issue of religious freedom in Muslim countries. And there are positive developments, such as the opening of a Catholic Church in Qatar on the Arabian Peninsula and the contemporary situation in Jordan, which he describes as a model of respect for its Christian minority.

In the other local Mennonite-Catholic dialogue group in which I participate (of faculty members from CMU and St. Paul’s College), I have learned a lot about Mennonite dialogue with Shi’a Muslims in Iran, so I was extremely interested in Allen’s prediction that “Catholicism may find itself increasingly reaching out to Shi’a leaders.” (p. 125). He cites an Iranian writer who argues that the Shi’a

branch of Islam is the branch that is closest to Catholicism, and who describes a number of points of contact, including a strong emphasis on clerical authority, an approach to the Qur'an accenting both scripture and tradition, and a deep mystical streak, etc. Allen also cites the Benedictine monk, Fr Mark Serna, who says: "In distinction to Muslims in the Sunni tradition, Shi'ite Muslims are very natural dialogue partners with Roman Catholics and monastics," and who lists many areas of mutuality, such as a contemplative and mystical tradition, veneration of the saints, especially of Mary, notions of infallibility and authority, high emphasis on rational inquiry into matters of faith; belief and praxis; and philosophical and theology.

What I would like to do now is pick up on the thrust of this argument and relate it to my experience in the dialogue group with the folks from CMU. During the past few years, when Harry Huebner and Irma Fast Dueck had been reporting to us on their ongoing dialogue with their Shi'a Muslim counterparts in Qum, Iran, I had been rather disconcerted that it seemed that Mennonites seemed to have a monopoly on Christian-Shi'a Muslim dialogue, and I had wondered whether Catholics were in any way involved in such dialogues. But at our last meeting, in April, we looked in detail at a number of volumes of conference proceedings from the events in which Harry and Irma had participated, and, as well, at volumes reporting dialogue conferences between Catholic scholars and their counterparts in Iran. I was assigned to report on the latter volumes. It turned out that these volumes had the same co-editor as the volumes on Mennonite-Shi'a dialogue on which Harry reported, an Iranian scholar by the name of Mohammad Ali Shomali. In addition, Harry also provided me with a copy of another volume, entitled *Monks and Muslims: Monastic and Shi'a Spirituality in Dialogue*, co-edited by this same Mohammad Ali Shomali, and William Skudlarek, a Benedictine monk from my alma mater, St. John's University. Fr William, along with Abbot John Klassen, of St. John's Abbey, have been hosts to the Catholic-Mennonite Bridgfolk dialogues that have been held at St. John's every second year for a number of years. I attended two of these events, and got to know both Abbot John and Fr William on those occasions. I knew Fr William had been involved with a Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (and in fact was the Secretary General of this group). On one occasion when I was at St. John's, I saw Buddhist monks wandering around the campus, who were there attending one of the events that Fr William had organized.

I recall that when Harry and Irma were reporting on the dialogues in Qum, I asked if these Muslims were involved in dialogue with other Christian groups, and as I recall the response was that the Muslims preferred dialogue with Mennonites to other Protestant groups, and that specifically they were not interested in dialogue with evangelical types. It was in reading the introduction to the volume on *Monks and Muslims* and considering the contents of the series *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue* that I finally figured out the key to this Shi'a preference for dialogue with Mennonite Christians. I would like to share my "discovery" with you.

In their introduction to *Monks and Muslims*, the editors cite a remark by a writer by the name of Frithjof Schuon about why it is "important for Christian

monks and Muslims to become friends who are willing to speak to their own religious practice and experience and who are eager to listen to and learn from one another." Schuon poses the question: "Why is monasticism excluded from a religion which nevertheless possesses mysticism, ascetic discipline, and a cult of saints?" And he offers this answer:

One of the *raisons d'être* of Islam is precisely the possibility of a "monastery-society," if the expression is allowable: that is to say that Islam aims to carry the contemplative life into the very framework of society as a whole; it succeeds in realizing within that framework conditions of structure and behavior that permit contemplative isolation in the very midst of the activities of the world.

The three volumes *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue* that I reporting on, were, in effect, the proceedings of three conferences hosted by the Benedictine abbeys of Ampleforth and Worth in England, in collaboration with Heyworth College of the University of London. The key Catholic organizers and participants in all three of these conferences were Benedictine monks. [Incidentally, these dialogues are not mentioned by Allen in his list on p. 118.]

In his paper, "Monastic-Muslim Dialogue: The Challenge and the Promise," in the volume *Monks and Muslims*, Timothy Wright, monk and former abbot of Ampleforth Abbey, and one of the co-editors of the second volume of the series on *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue*, writes:

Muslim spirituality is more closely related to monastic spirituality than to any other Catholic spiritual tradition. Both confess one God, revealed in Word, whose creating and merciful gifts we recognize in prayer regularly throughout the day, as individuals and as a community. In addition we read, ponder, munch and pray the revealed Word, available to us as inspired Scripture.

In reflecting on these comments by Schuon and Wright, I recalled our discussions in our own dialogues on monastic influences on some of the early Anabaptist leaders, in particular Michael Sattler, who had been the prior of a Benedictine monastery in Germany, and Menno Simons, who it has been argued had been influenced by the Norbertines, a quasi-monastic order dating from the Middle Ages, which had a strong presence in Belgium and the Netherlands. I also recall that in our discussions it was suggested that many of the early Anabaptist communities were, in effect, seeking to live out something of a monastic ideal of a Christian community, but one made up of families rather than celibate men or women. I can't help but go back to Wright's phrase in speaking about Islam, the idea of a "monastery-society." In short, my "discovery," based on these reflections and this history, is that there is a significant resonance between Shi'a, Mennonite, and the Catholic monastic understandings of religion in life, and that, consequently, a quite

understandable reason for the Shi'a Muslims of Qum to prioritize dialogue with Mennonites and Catholic monks.

To turn now to another issue, **Helmut** informed us that **Paul Doerksen**, who was assigned with me to speak about Islam, would not be able to attend this meeting. There is one issue relating to Christian-Muslim relations that John Allen identifies that strikes me as being especially relevant to Mennonites. Allen predicts that in the 21st century church leaders and theologians will be challenged to develop “a theology of armed force that does justice to the reality of the threat posed by Islamic radicalism, but at the same time set limits to morally dubious conflicts justified in the name of that threat.” He acknowledges that the traditional Catholic theory of “just war” doesn’t seem to have much to say about this issue. He does note that under John Paul II, the old theory, which presumed two states at war with each other, was supplemented “by the new language of ‘humanitarian intervention,’ which presumed a situation of an aggrieved minority requiring international assistance.” Allen is of the opinion, however, that “Neither seems adequate to the new realities of the twenty-first century, in which the primary actors are mobile and transnational terrorists networks.” What is needed, he suggests is a clear and practical set of concepts about what can be done in this situation that would be effective and moral. He concludes that: “Ideally, such reflection [on this issue] could be carried out with Christian and Muslim scholars together, each drawing on the resources of their own traditions, groping towards a consensus that could enjoy the broad acceptance of reasonable people on both sides.” In Paul’s absence, I wonder if any of the Mennonite participants here this evening could envisage a Mennonite role in such reflection and dialogue? What could Mennonites bring to the table in this instance?

Discussion: **Helmut** thought Mennonites could bring mediation. He observed that Mennonites work together with Muslims in Palestine, in the Bethlehem area, and there are close relationships with projects in refugee centers. **Donna** reported that Westgate had a visit from Muslim and Christian students from a school in Israel (Brenda Suderman wrote a story about this in the *Free Press*.) She added that in her World religion class, girls wore head coverings for two weeks, both in school and in public, to learn about the experience. **Helmut** reported that ten Muslim women from Iran took part in a program at CMU a year ago. They came to Charleswood Mennonite Church on a Sunday morning, an occasion when there were baptisms. Reportedly, the Mennonite women were left wide-eyed by this experience. **Donna** also reported that one Muslim woman, whose family was helped to come to Canada, continues to come to her church, apparently out of gratitude for the assistance her family had received. **Helmut** noted that he and Irma have been in dialogue with a woman in Toronto involved in the Focalari movement, who keeps voicing concern about the number of Muslims now settling in her city. She calls to ask why Mennonites are not expressing anxiety concerning the rapid growth of Muslims in Canada. She is frightened at the prospect that they will takeover Canada. **Ron** said that

would find this attitude among Mennonites as well. MCC has had flak for allowing Muslims to speak.

Trend Four – New Demography.

Michelle said she appreciated Allen’s attempt to offer a deeper analysis than many similar books, going beyond popular media stuff. In short he is looking at the global demographic picture to 2050, predicting greying and declining populations, etc. He is predicting a peak at 9 billion and then decline. She found it interesting that Allen talks about population decline while ecological people still worry about population growth. He identifies consequences of greying of Catholicism: changing care networks, elder equity as a social justice issue – aging people vs. younger people; the Church developing more interest in poverty and women, which may require policy adjustment. It could also mean financial crisis for the church, making it harder to pay the bills. All pension plans have the same problem. He also talks about acceptance of more late vocations (second careers, more skilled, candidates, more difficult to form and regulate). There are also implications with respect to immigration, tensions between closing borders, and U.S. bishops pushing for immigration reform. In the U.S., the biggest group of immigrants are Catholic Mexicans, as opposed to Muslim immigrants to Europe. Demographic change will also lead to euthanasia debates, with people feeling safer heading into Catholic hospitals. Stand on issues like stem-cell research may also be influenced: if I’m aging, maybe a policy shift on stem-cell research would be more acceptable.

Victor finds these demographic changes affecting Mennonites too; it’s in the global south where Mennonite numbers are growing fastest. Some two-thirds of the growth is in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Volunteerism is still a significant part in Mennonite life, but in decline. Immigration is also a significant factor in Mennonite life today, but with “transmigration” from Latin America back to Canada). Theological diversity or schisms can be a result. He referred to St. Margaret’s Anglican Church, which is now reputed to have the largest Mennonite congregation in Winnipeg! **Donna** suggested that greying populations will push the issue of doctor-assisted suicide. **John** thought that this is an issue where the Church will have take a stand of resistance. **Richard** commented how difficult it was to assess the strength of Evangelical Catholicism locally. **Tom** referred to one commentator’s assessment that declining birth rates are shifting understanding of Christian life. If one-child families are a norm, what are the implications? What does this do to society as a whole? Allen does not pick up on consequences for family structure. **Marco** sees this issue tied to affluence.

Trend five. Expanding lay roles.

Donna agreed with **Michelle** on John Allen’s balance and breadth. He asks things that she has long questioned. Growing up Catholic, she had felt inabilities to be what she could be. Such changes as Allen describes might have kept her in

the Church. Her experience in the Mennonite church today is that there is too much talking about things forever. So she appreciates the advantages of a clear structure of authority. She thought Allen cited some wonderful examples of women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church today; especially Focalari, which must have a woman president of the brotherhood! She said her eyes were opened by what Lynda and Tom are able to do. Allen clearly identifies forces that are driving the expansion of lay ministry, such as competition with Islam, secular ideologies, etc., sexual and financial abuses, acknowledgement of the gifts of the community (including women and youth). Allen also offers examples of various groups, such as "Gorilla evangelists." His data is disturbing, showing numbers of lay ecclesial ministers going up, and numbers of priests declining. In Germany, the Church is church the second largest employer after Volkswagen. She also mentioned Allen's description of a common situation in the global south, where dioceses rather than parishes are most important organizational, and the primary points of contact for ordinary Catholics are lay centres.

Lynda spoke to the second half of Allen's chapter, on what expanding lay roles might mean to the Church. She began by observing how Allen attempts to explain the meaning of this trend (and its changes) in terms of models developed by social scientists to develop models for explaining organizational change, with some pointing to evolutionary response to a changing environment, other saying its teleological or goal driven, or perhaps driven by interactions between groups within an organization, or to be explained life-cycles, or a mix of all of these. She then offered the following personal take on the matter:

I must say that during my lifetime I have seen many changes in the Roman Catholic Church. I was born in 1952 – pre -Vatican II, so I remember quite well the changes in the Church mainly in the liturgy. In my opinion Vatican II revolutionized the Church. John XXII saw the need for change after a four hundred year state of status quo.

I would say that the changes in the Church came about as a result of mainly evolutionary and political changes. Certainly there is a chain of command in the hierarchy of the Church, with few mechanisms for participatory governance, and powerful incentives for conformity. The changes came with Vatican II, but the faithful had little say in their implementation. Things did change quickly, which were not always for the better. We didn't know why they were changing; they just did whether we liked it or not! Organized anarchy! Perhaps it was because not all those in authority – cardinals, bishops, and priests were in agreement with the changes. Change is difficult for people especially after four hundred years of doing things the same way. There was bound to be conflict! Therefore, I agree that changes are likely to be scattered throughout the system in different ways and to a different extent, depending upon local circumstances and opinion. What happened in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface didn't necessarily happen the same as in Rome.

Thus it is true that with regard to lay roles in the church, it is difficult to predict how they will develop in the future - sporadically I would suggest. I have been employed by the church in a lay role for nineteen years in three different parishes. My role has developed and evolved as I became more educated in the ways of the church and depending on the needs of the parish as seen by the pastor. I began as an administrative assistant where my role was largely secretarial in one parish. After a year I moved to another parish and was hired as a pastoral associate. I still performed administrative duties such as doing the financial records of the parish but I also visited the infirm and prepared people for the reception of the sacraments.

Near-Certain Consequences

1. CONFLICTS OVER CONTROL

“Perverse law of ecclesiastical life the more successful a Catholic initiative becomes, the more the hierarchy frets about independence.” For example Pope Pius XII encouraged the growth of the Catholic Action movement – the key objective was to keep the Communists at bay and to ensure that lay activism was not infected by socialism.

Catholic media became prevalent in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On the one hand, the hierarchy sees it as necessary but on the other hand cannot control what is said in the media. “The fear is that they may be perceived as speaking in the name of the Catholic Church, especially given that they often reach a much larger audience than whatever the bishops themselves have to say.” An example of this would have been when the Mount Cashel scandal hit the news media in Canada. In trying to keep these matters under wraps, the Church was powerless. It seems that the media will stop at nothing to attack the church. The lay people that run the media outlets are not necessarily fully supportive of Church teaching such as sexual morality or papal authority. It is true that the lay apostolate is not truly independent in this regard. There has to be accountability on both sides in my opinion.

2. FEAR OF “FEMINIZATION”

There is no doubt that lay women play an important role in the Catholic Church today. It is true that not everyone is totally on board with this. In my career with the Church, I have been well received by most people including priests. I’ve had a few negative experiences but I’ve always tried to work collaboratively with priests and my lay coworkers. While I think there are slightly more women involved in the church, there is also an abundance of men, at least in the parishes where I have worked. As far as the Pastoral teams are concerned, we have been equal in numbers, men and women. It is difficult to target men for lay ministry in the Church as we are in need of more priests. Therefore, it would make more sense to encourage vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate. More women are involved in lay ministry as the salaries are not such that a man could support a family on it. Money is always a problem in the church. More men have opted

to become deacons. Generally they have another job or are retired so they do not draw a salary.

3. PROTECTING THE PRIESTHOOD

It is no secret that there are not enough priests being ordained to sustain our church. Ordaining deacons is helpful but they still do not fulfill all the functions of the priesthood. What has happened in our diocese is that some parishes are administrated by one or two parish life coordinators. Men and women have been placed in these positions. They administer the parish and a priest is assigned to the parish to say mass and administer the sacraments. It is true that that it should be clear that the person appointed is not a substitute for the priest who still directs the pastoral care of the parish.

4. MORE SACRAMENTAL MODEL OF THE PRIESTHOOD

In my experience, priests are often involved more in the administrative duties of the parish rather than their pastoral duties. For example if the roof leaks, it has to be fixed! Priests spend much of their time worrying about money and the lack thereof. Certainly, it's a Catch 22 situation, as with any home repairs are needed so the need for funds increases as the physical plant grows older. In the parishes I have been involved with, there is a team of lay consultors who share these responsibilities with the pastor. It is this group who advises the pastor concerning the physical plant and the finances of the parish. They ask for money and give a report to the parishioners about how it is spent. Seminaries do not offer courses on finances and repairs to buildings. When these duties are taken care of by lay people versed in this regard, it frees the priest to perform his pastoral and sacramental duties for which he was trained. Certainly, I expect to see more of this in the future with the decline of vocations to the priesthood or the arrival of more international priests.

Probable Consequences

1. BATTLES OVER BUREAUCRACY

I would agree that many diocese and parishes in Canada are struggling with declining resources and have had to downsize. This tend creates problems as one would imagine. The faithful are not thrilled about having their parish closed by the bishop. Parishes become second homes to the parishioners so they feel that something very important and vital in their lives has been taken away from them. The Archdiocese of St. Boniface is a bilingual diocese, French and English. Totally French parishes are dwindling in numbers, yet it seems that English parishes are closed before these will be. I know of a French parish in the city which only has about 40 families supporting it. Obviously there is a dichotomy present here. This parish has a resident priest who says one mass only on Sundays. Many other parishes do not have a resident priest, nor do they have mass every Sunday.

“The stereotype of lay professionals in the Church is that they tend to skew to the left.” I would suggest that these lay professionals are somewhat more

liberal than the hierarchy but they are more of the world than the hierarchy. I believe that you can attract more people with honey rather than vinegar. There are issues in the church that I have difficulty with; however I feel that I can do more good within the church than outside of it.

In 2005, I attended a National Convention for the Laity in Ottawa, a first of its kind. It was a wonderful experience to join with other lay people working in the Church throughout Canada. Many lay people and bishops spoke of their experiences. Not all were positive but it was a forum where people could express their hurts and feel they were being heard. I came away from that conference feeling empowered. Unfortunately nothing came of it. There has not been another gathering of its kind. I am disappointed.

Meeting our lay women at this conference led me to being interviewed for a book entitled “Catholic Women in Ministry – Changing The Way Things Are” In order to protect our identities our names were changed. “It is a sober reminder that women still do not feel safe offering the Church the reality of their experiences and insights, both positive and negative, with anonymity.”

2. DEMOCRATIZATION OF CATHOLIC CONVERSATION

In my mind, it is clear who speaks for the Church: the pope, the bishop and the priests. They are all supposedly preaching the party line so to speak. I don’t think this is particularly true. Many bishops have never been ordinary parish priests so they don’t necessarily know what parish priests have to deal with – the leaky roof, let’s say! In my experience, I don’t find that lay people are “competing with the bishops as the public face and the voice of the Catholic Church” in Canada per se. I believe that the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops defends the Church quite well. For instance, they sent a letter to the Prime minister of Canada re: the upcoming G8 Summit asking the leaders “to put the protection of the poor and assistance of developing countries at the centre of the meeting.” In addition they sent condolences to the family of Henry Morgentaler on his death.

I must admit that I read Rocco Palmò’s blog “Whispers in the Loggia” once in a while. I do know a lot of people including priests who refer to it quite often. I’m not sure how influential it is in Canada. It is the age that we live: almost everyone has access to alternative media and its various blogs.

Possible Consequences

1. AN EVANGELICAL EDGE

It is true that evangelical churches are gaining ground throughout the world. I found the following question very interesting: “The real question is, will people (Catholics and non-Catholics alike) come to accept Catholic laity as legitimate agents of spiritual care in their own right, not as a sort of “junior varsity” beneath ordained priests?” I feel that I am making inroads in this area in my own ministry. I bring communion weekly to a number of seniors who are not able to attend church any longer. In most cases their children no longer attend mass so they do not look after their needs in this regard. Just last week I took

communion to three people in a senior's residence. A deacon and a priest used to take turns servicing their residence but the deacon retired and the priest died. They have asked me if there is a possibility that I might do a communion service once a week for the Catholic residents. Thus I feel that I am being accepted as a legitimate agent of spiritual care who is present in the community. I don't feel that I am being slighted by these people. They are grateful that their needs are being met. If they require a priest, I will be the first one to put them in touch with one and they are aware of it. We are all called to be Christ to one another. I don't feel like I am a poor substitute for a priest!

2. PARISH STRIKES

Parishes don't usually strike. Those who are disgruntled beat a path to the Archbishop's residence. People who are unhappy usually change parishes. Most people vote with their feet or don't go to church at all if they are not satisfied. Certainly this has been my personal experience. I left my home parish many years ago in spite of the fact that I still live in the same neighbourhood. I felt that I was not being nourished at that particular parish so I moved on.

I am aware that my job is insecure. Who's job isn't in this day and age? I know that staff have been let go largely due to personality clashes between the pastor and individuals. I believe in the collaborative model. If you can't accept the authority or ideas of the pastor, then it's best to move on. I've been in that position myself. I left on good terms knowing that I wanted to continue doing more in my ministry. I knew that the priest would never allow me to do more than be his secretary entirely at his beck and call. Definitely we were not on the same wave length so I moved on. As a family we have changed parishes a couple of times. These were difficult decisions but good ones for us as a family. I don't envision parish strikes in our archdiocese but who knows!

3. A LESS PURPLE ECCLESIOLOGY

I have experienced the problem of misconceptions about a lay person doing what was originally the role of the clergy. I do many funerals in funeral homes – some families opt for a Catholic funeral celebrated at a funeral home instead of a church for various reasons. People seem surprised that as a Catholic lay woman I am able to do this. However the ritual does provide for this type of service. I am sure that we will see more of this in the future.

Long-Shot Consequences

1. LAY CARDINALS

Not likely!

2. A FEMALE BOSS IN THE VATICAN

Not in my lifetime!

3. A HOLIER WORLD

I agree with Allen that “ultimately, the purpose of promoting lay activism is not to remedy ecclesiastical imbalances or to reshape public perceptions of the Church, but rather to extend the Church's mission of sanctifying the world.” By

virtue of our baptism and confirmation each individual is called into service to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. At each mass we are sent forth to go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in other words to make the world holier.

Discussion. **Donna** observed that these issues are not unique to Catholic church; they also present in Mennonite congregations. **Ron** asked how do you (Catholics) react to the point about Evangelical Catholics gaining power in the Church? **Richard** indicated that he didn't like it. It seemed to **Marco** that the new Evangelical Catholics are picking up "neo-evangelicalism" with respect to both liturgy and conservative theology. **Helmut** recalled that when he came to Winnipeg in 1962 as a young teacher, all the Mennonite churches had older male pastors; he would never have believed there would be so many congregations with women ministers today. **Lynda** said he never expected to do what she does now. **Helmut** observed that Mennonites didn't have a rationale for not accepting women. **Lynda** observed that people working as she is as a pastoral assistant are not paid that well. **Tom** reported a study that showed that only 7% of Catholic lay ministers in North America are primary bread-winners in their families.

5. Next Meeting.

After some discussion it was agreed that the topic for the next meeting would be the remaining five chapters of John Allen's book, that Helmut and John would prepare an agenda taking account some suggestions made at this meeting, and that the meeting be scheduled for 21 October at a Mennonite venue (to be arranged)

John distributed copies of *Perspective* in which he and Georgina Lewis took up the issue of clerical sexual abuse of minors.