

Mennonite Central Committee in Canada

A HISTORY

Esther Epp-Tiessen



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Foreword

THIS HISTORY HAS come to birth right on time to celebrate Mennonite Central Committee Canada's fiftieth anniversary. The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada counts it a privilege and a joy to sponsor and support this important initiative, symbolizing the long and happy association between the two organizations.

The history society was formed in 1968 and worked in tandem with MCC Canada to assist Frank H. Epp in his telling of the story of Canadian Mennonites. It would support three volumes dedicated to writing the history of *Mennonites in Canada*. When Ted Regehr completed the third and final book, MCC Canada and the MHSC sought new ways to cooperate. Divergent Voices of Mennonites in Canada [DVCM] emerged in 2000 and, with a conference series, has highlighted the complexity of the Mennonite experience, much of which has been published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. Many of the issues highlighted in the DVCM historical research program—Aboriginal-Mennonite relations, gender, refugees, conscientious objection to war, mental health issues—come together in this book.

This history of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada comes out of a rich historical tradition, eloquently telling the fascinating and complex story of this well-loved organization. Each chapter illustrates the myriad of ways that people and programs have come together to create a work that we know as MCC, but which is much more than an institution. MCC in Canada is a movement that has linked Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada—young and elderly, rural and urban, women and men—in a deep desire for the wellbeing of others.

The Mennonite Historical Society is grateful that Esther Epp-Tiessen agreed to be the author of this book. As an historian and an MCC worker,

Esther has the fitting qualities to have undertaken the research and writing of this important work. It has been good to have worked closely with her over the last two years.

Lucille Marr

President, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

Preface

IN ONE OF my early childhood memories, my sisters and I are assembling Christmas bundles for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to share with needy children in some distant war-torn country. I clearly recall wrapping the contents—clothing, some toiletries, a toy—in a big bath towel and then closing the towel with large safety pins. What an ingenious way to wrap a Christmas gift, I thought. I also remember my father spending much time away from home to attend MCC meetings or to carry out MCC business. I remember many mealtime discussions about MCC and Vietnam, the Middle East, and a simmering Cold War.

As a university history student I spent one summer microfilming the early records of MCC Canada. I was fascinated by my discoveries in those dusty pages of correspondence, and eventually wrote an M.A. thesis on the origins of MCC Canada. A few years later my husband and I signed up for MCC service, spending four years in the Philippines. I have spent many years since that formative experience, working first for MCC Ontario and then MCC Canada. My life has been profoundly shaped by MCC.

This book was written under the auspices of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, a society which has published widely in the field of Canadian Mennonite history. The supervision provided by the society, as well as an office at the University of Winnipeg, helped create at least some distance from MCC, with which I have been closely associated over the years. Someone with greater detachment from the organization would undoubtedly bring a greater level of objectivity to the story than I. However, I have tried to use my experience as an “insider” to tell the story of some of the internal workings of MCC Canada—the struggle for identity and purpose, the oftentimes turbulent relationship with constituents, the power struggles within the organization, and the contradictions and complexities of compassionate service to a hurting world. I bring to the story a deep love of MCC and also a sharp critique.

I also acknowledge that I bring specific biases to the work; I have included

certain things, left out others, and favoured particular interpretations. Because of life experience, I am more familiar with Ontario and Manitoba than other parts of the country. Because of church membership, I am most knowledgeable of congregations within Mennonite Church Canada (formerly Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada) and am less knowledgeable of other Mennonite groups. I have been deeply influenced by Christian feminism and nonviolent faith-based movements for social justice and peace. I am intrigued by new post-colonial interpretations and analyses of Christian mission in the world. Finally, I am learning that my worldview has been shaped by a racist settler mentality. While I am trying to “unsettle the settler within,”¹ I know that this mentality continues to inform my thinking and writing. I am aware that my surname and my family “pedigree” have afforded me certain privileges within the MCC system that others have not experienced.

The story of MCC Canada is a story of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada coming together because of a shared history and identity and a shared mission. That history is rooted in the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth-century Reformation. In keeping with their commitment to Christ, the Anabaptists emphasized believers baptism and voluntary church membership, a refusal to bear the sword and participate in military service, and a conviction that believers should daily seek to live as Jesus lived. Menno Simons, a Dutch Anabaptist leader, wrote: “For true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant, but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love. . . it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and consoles the sad; it returns good for evil; it serves those who harm it; it prays for those who persecute it. . . it binds up that which is wounded.”² In many ways, these words express the mission of MCC today.

Despite the common foundations of history, faith and purpose, however, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada are notorious for their dividedness. Over the centuries, differences over biblical interpretation, leadership style, and cultural practice have led people to leave existing churches and conferences to found new ones. MCC Canada was formed in part to help overcome the divisions and differences. Its official membership has never included *all* Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups in the country, but from its formal beginnings in 1963, MCC Canada has sought to strengthen and to extend the sometimes shaky common ground. This book includes references to the many conferences and groups that have been formal members of MCC Canada, as well as other groups that may not have official membership, but

that nevertheless support the work of MCC in Canada through donations and volunteer labours. Readers are encouraged to reference other works to learn more about the individual groups.³

This book was written to celebrate MCC Canada's fiftieth anniversary in 2013, but the story begins well before 1963. One could identify the beginning point at 1918; this was the year in which the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, one of MCC Canada's predecessor organizations, was founded. One could point to the 1870s, when Ontario Swiss-German Mennonites provided assistance to the 7,000 Mennonite immigrants who settled and began a new life in Manitoba. We could also identify the beginning as 1783, the year when Mennonites first arrived in Canada, leaving the US in the years following the American Revolution. A booklet published in 1983 claimed that the foundations of the "partnership called Mennonite Central Committee Canada" go back to creation and God's invitation to humanity to join in caring for one another and the earth.⁴ I have chosen 1920 as a starting point because that is the year when Mennonite Central Committee was formed in the US and because Canadians were engaged in the work of MCC from that date.

This is a story primarily about MCC Canada and about its place within the broader realm of Mennonite Central Committee. It is, of course, impossible to isolate MCC Canada from the larger story, because the Canadian national body is intimately linked with provincial MCCs, with the binational (US and Canada) level of MCC, and with the worldwide ministry of MCC. Therefore, the book includes significant references to the provincial and the binational levels and the global ministry. It should be noted that the lines between the national, provincial, and binational embodiments of MCC are very blurry at times.

I have tried to lessen the blurriness in the way I use the term "MCC" in this book. When I am referring specifically to the Canadian national body, I refer to "MCC Canada." The original name included parentheses around the word Canada—"Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)"; for simplicity, I have chosen to dispense with the parentheses. When I am referring to the provincial bodies, I refer to the "provincial MCCs" or to the specific province, for example, MCC Saskatchewan or MCCS. When I write about both national and provincial, I refer to "MCC in Canada" or "the Canadian MCCs." When I refer to the entity headquartered in Akron, Pennsylvania with oversight of the international program, for the years prior to 1980 I refer to "MCC Akron," and for the years after 1980 I refer to "MCC Binational." When I write about the totality, I refer to the "MCC system." When I write about MCC in a generic sense, I simply use "MCC." I have tried to make a very confusing picture as

clear as possible, but I have no doubt that some confusion will remain. As indicated, blurred boundaries and a kind of happy “messiness” are simply part of the reality of MCC.

I have written this history relying primarily, though not exclusively, on the rich collection of MCC Canada documents, interviews with MCC-connected individuals, and Mennonite periodicals. As such, it is more about the internal workings of MCC in Canada than an evaluation of MCC Canada’s contribution to society or its impact on meeting human need more generally.

Readers may wonder about the decade-by-decade approach that I have chosen to explore the post-1963 years. I chose this direction because I wished to depict MCC Canada in its entirety at certain points in time. Also, as I read about the life cycles of non-profit organizations, I learned that most organizations pass through distinct phases: birth, growth, maturation, decline, and then, either death or re-invention. As I viewed the broad strokes of MCC Canada’s history, I noted parallel phases in its organizational development. The titles of the chapters of Part II reflect these phases.

I am aware that over much of MCC Canada’s history, its language has evolved. What was referred to in the 1960s as “the underdeveloped world,” later was called “the Third World,” which in turn became “the global South.” Similarly, “Native people” became “Aboriginal people” and then became “Indigenous people.” In general, I have chosen to use the terms in usage during the period I am writing about. However, I diverge from this practice in instances where a particular term used in the past is now considered offensive and inappropriate. “Handicapped persons” would be an example; I have chosen to use “persons with disabilities” throughout.

I am deeply grateful to the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) for entrusting me with the writing of MCC Canada’s history. Royden Loewen, vice-president of the society and Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, provided direct supervision and also arranged for office space at the University of Winnipeg. Both were invaluable to me. I am also deeply appreciative of the counsel provided to me by official readers appointed by MHSC: Dora Dueck, Ken Reddig, Lucille Marr, Stefan Epp-Koop, and Ted Regehr. Peter Rempel also read the manuscript and offered helpful advice.

A special thanks goes to Ken Reddig, who first dreamed about a history of MCC Canada with me many years ago and who helped to make it happen. He and Royden Loewen convened a group of individuals who helped me to conceptualize my work in its initial stages. The group included Arthur Driedger, Conrad Stoesz, Eleanor Martens, John Wieler, Marg Rempel, and Reg Toews. Hans Werner of the Plett Foundation at the University of Winnipeg

was a congenial next-door neighbour through my writing process.

Other people and institutions were also most helpful to me in gathering information. Alf Redekopp, Conrad Stoesz, and Connie Wiebe of the Mennonite Heritage Centre provided helpful assistance and ready access to documents and photographs. Laureen Harder-Gissing at Mennonite Archives of Ontario, and Colleen McFarland at the Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana did the same. I am also deeply indebted to the following individuals at MCC Canada and MCC US: Frank Peachey, Kaitlin Miller, Melaney Reimer, and Stephanie Dyck for access to materials; Martin Kaethler and Sam Sawatzky for technical support; Brenda Burkholder and Dana Hepting for photographs; and Kiersten Hoffman for statistics on personnel. Stefan Epp-Koop provided helpful research assistance at certain points. Over one hundred individuals consented to interviews, either in person or via telephone. Their names are listed in the Bibliography.

Close friends Melissa Miller and Dean Peachey and members of my “small group” cheered me on, when the going was tough. My mother Helen Epp and sisters Marlene Epp and Marianne Coleman sent words of encouragement.

Finally I mention my husband Dan, and our children Chris, Mark, Melissa, and granddaughter Hannah. Their love and support through this journey have been immeasurable. To my dearest loves, I dedicate this labour of love.

Prologue

WINNIPEG WAS DARK and cold on the evening of 12 December 1963 when some forty men from five Canadian provinces gathered for an important meeting at the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church. At -17 degrees Celsius, the temperature was not unusually bitter for a Winnipeg winter. But a strong north wind pummelled the out-of-town participants as they hiked the one kilometre distance from their hotel to the church. At least some of them anticipated a tense meeting.¹ Was the cold wind an omen of what was to unfold over the next few days?

The forty men were delegates from a variety of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ denominational conferences and inter-Mennonite organizations. They had come together to determine whether or not to embrace the vision of a national inter-Mennonite partnership through which they could work together in the areas of relief, immigration, service, and peace, and which could also represent Mennonites as a people to government and the wider society. At the time, a confusing “alphabet soup” of boards and committees, some of them decades old and dearly loved, presided over many such activities. If the delegates at the Winnipeg meeting affirmed the vision, and birthed the new partnership, they would also be presiding over the death of the existing organizations. This is where the chill lay. Not everyone was convinced of the vision.

Before the meeting ended two days later, however, the delegates had approved the creation of a comprehensive new inter-Mennonite body called “Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)” —hereafter, simply MCC Canada.”² Some participants were still quite anxious about what this all meant. The temperature, which had dropped to a bone-chilling -25 degrees, perhaps reflected their fears. Yet other participants felt energy and excitement, and a sense that they had participated in an historic event.³ One enthusiastic individual suggested that “a finer 1963 Christmas gift” for the Canadian Mennonite family “could not have been conceived.”⁴

The event in fact represented the culmination of more than forty years of

an evolving mission of cooperation among Mennonites in Canada. The story therefore begins much earlier than 1963. Its roots extend back at least to 1920 and the compulsion of Canadian Mennonites to help sisters and brothers in the faith who were suffering in the wake of the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union. In order to understand the birth of MCC Canada in 1963, it is important to understand its lengthy gestation. Part I explores this gestation. Part II examines MCC Canada's fifty year history since 1963.

PART ONE

Gestation and Birth

CHAPTER 1

Relieving Suffering, 1920-1939

ON 17 AUGUST 1920, Mrs. John Schultz of Milverton, Ontario wrote to Levi Mumaw, secretary-treasurer of the newly-formed Mennonite Central Committee in Scottdale, Pennsylvania. She was responding to a call for contributions of clothing and money for Mennonites in need in what was now the Soviet Union. In her cryptic four-sentence letter, Mrs. Schultz wrote that no one in her community had clothes considered good enough to send overseas. However, she enclosed a donation of \$34.08 which she designated “for Russia.”¹ Just two weeks later, on 2 September 1920, Mrs. J.B. Shank of Markham, Ontario also wrote to Mumaw about contributing to “Russian Relief.” As secretary-treasurer of the Markham Sewing Circle, she wanted to know whether children and infants’ garments, quilts and comforters—the items normally sewn by circle members—were suitable for sending to Russia. She asked for a reply by early October so that the circle could get to work. She added, “[W]e are willing to help in the little we can.”²

These two letters from Ontario women are the earliest indicators that Canadian Mennonites were eager to help suffering fellow Mennonites in the Soviet Union through the channel of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MCC was a new organization based in the United States. It had been formed in July specifically to address need in what Mennonites continued to call “Russia.” Indeed, at the time Mrs. Schultz and Mrs. Shank wrote their letters, MCC had not yet been formally constituted. But people in Ontario and in western Canada already knew that an unprecedented emergency was unfolding among their people in “Russia.” Time was of the essence in getting food and clothing to desperate brothers and sisters in the faith.

The crisis in Russia had begun during the war, but then unfolded swiftly and dramatically after events catapulted the Bolsheviks into power

in November 1917. Mennonites were quickly confronted with a sea change of events which shattered the way of life they had known for more than a century. As prosperous and privileged people, who lived in colonies separated and distinct from their surrounding Russian peasant neighbours, they became the target of rage. Through 1918 armed groups terrorized Mennonite villages by murdering, raping, looting, and burning. Soon after that, the war front between Bolshevik forces (the Red Army) and counter-revolutionary forces (the White Army) see-sawed back and forth across the south. Mennonites were implicated because of the establishment of a *Selbstschutz*, an armed self-defence force, which in a few instances fought Red Army soldiers, though it was formed to protect against bandit groups. When the Bolsheviks finally gained control of Ukraine, they killed many of the men who had joined the *Selbstschutz*. They also imposed heavy taxes on Mennonite colonists—requisitioning huge amounts of grain and food stuffs, animals, implements, furniture, even clothing—which left people hungry and destitute. Not only that, but the billeting of lice-ridden soldiers in Mennonite homes resulted in a typhoid epidemic that killed hundreds. Even before the drought of spring 1920 promised a full-blown famine, the situation demanded action.

A Study Commission was dispatched in January 1920. Its mandate was to inform Mennonites abroad about the dire situation in the Soviet Union, to secure material aid to ease the immediate emergency, and to investigate the possibility of resettlement elsewhere. Members of the Study Commission travelled first to Germany and Holland. Upon receiving pledges of support, they continued on to the United States, arriving in New York on 13 June 1920.

MCC is Born

The Study Commission learned that Mennonites in the US were somewhat aware of the situation in the Soviet Union and had begun to organize a number of relief initiatives. Already in 1917, the “Old” Mennonites had established a Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers (MRCWS), based in Scottdale, Pennsylvania. Between 1918 and 1919, this commission had placed some sixty workers in France, Germany, and Turkey for post-war reconstruction under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee and Near East Relief. By June 1920 it was planning its own independent relief initiative to the Soviet Union with four to five workers.³

In the central and western US, three additional groups were active: the Mennonite Brethren, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and the General Conference Mennonites. A few months earlier, in January 1920, these groups had formed the Emergency Relief Committee of the Mennonites of North America to cooperate in providing mutual aid to Mennonites in Siberia. This initiative has been referred to as a “preliminary MCC.”⁴ The ground had been prepared for the Study Commission’s appeal for help.

A.A. Friesen, a former teacher and leader of the Study Commission, was adamant that there be one joint initiative involving all the Mennonites of the United States, not several. It was fine if the US groups wished to retain their own identity stateside, but he insisted there must be only one operation on the distribution side in the Soviet Union. This required the formation of an executive or a central committee that would coordinate all the efforts of the various denominations and their respective relief committees. Attaining such a level of inter-Mennonite cooperation was no small thing in 1920. The various groups did not know each other; moreover, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and theological differences kept them separate from, and somewhat suspicious of one another, despite their shared spiritual origins in the Anabaptist movement. Theirs would not be “a marriage born of affection, but a cautious contract born of necessity.”⁵

The magnitude of the suffering

Nevertheless, the magnitude of the suffering and the urgent need for action compelled the groups to collaborate. A series of smaller meetings in Kansas culminated in a gathering on 27-28 July in Elkhart, Indiana when representatives of five denominational groups and their relief committees deemed it, “well and desirable to create a Mennonite Central

Committee, whose duty it shall be to function with and for the several relief committees of the Mennonites in taking charge of all gifts for S.Russia, to make all purchases of suitable articles for relief work, and to provide for the transportation and the equitable distribution of the same.”⁶

The first official meeting of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) took place on 27 September 1920 in Chicago, Illinois, after all the participating conferences had approved the plans for the new committee and named their representatives to it. P.C. Hiebert of the Mennonite Brethren became chairperson, Levi Mumaw of the “Old” Mennonites and their Mennonite Commission for War Sufferers Relief became secretary treasurer, and Maxwell Kratz of the General Conference, was named third executive member. The committee agreed the MCC would adopt the relief program

that the MRCWS had initiated. Even as the committee was meeting, the first team of three workers—Orie O. Miller, Clayton Kratz, and Arthur Slagel—was en route to Istanbul (Constantinople), Turkey with an initial shipment of clothing.

A Canadian Central Committee

Through the spring and summer months of 1920, Canadians were also organizing to help their suffering brothers and sisters in the faith. Mennonites in Canada—particularly those in the west, many of whom had come from Russia themselves in past decades—had been hearing about the troubles in their

former homeland for some time. Letters from relatives and reports in German-language periodicals told of the tremendous anguish resulting from war, revolution, disease, and now famine.

One of the persons moved to act was David Toews, bishop of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, and a teacher at the Rosthern Academy, a Mennonite high school and teacher-training institute. Toews was born in Russia in 1870, emigrated to Kansas with his family in 1884, and moved to



David and Margarete Toews and their family of eight daughters and one son. A daughter died in a house fire in 1926. Photo credit MHC.

Canada in 1898 to teach. A strong leader with a compassionate heart, Toews organized a meeting in Eigenheim, Saskatchewan in late June 1920 to discuss how best to respond to the news from the Soviet Union. The discussion quickly focused on immigration. Toews is reported to have said, “We must bear in mind that these our brothers and sisters, stripped of all resources, will want to immigrate, and we should begin to gather resources in order to expedite their rescue from this slavery.”⁷ The emphasis on immigration was prophetic, but relief was needed in the interim. Soon thereafter, Toews visited all the local congregations that were part of the Rosenorter Church, as well as several other districts, gathering money for relief. Through these efforts, \$3500 was raised and eventually sent to MCC.⁸ Although individuals elsewhere were also beginning

to raise money, there is little record of their activity.

In mid-August 1920 A.A. Friesen and B.H. Unruh of the Study Commission entered Canada to continue the reporting and mobilizing they had begun in the United States. They counselled Canadians to organize themselves into one body in order to expedite the relief effort. On 18 October, fourteen men from Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan gathered in Regina to do just that. They formed a “Central Committee for Canada” and authorized it to “get into touch with the Central Committee of the United States for united action in this work.”⁹ They elected an executive of five and also nominated 24 men to be contact persons who would facilitate the collections in their respective districts across the prairies.

As in the United States, the new Canadian Central Committee (CCC) involved the participation of a variety of Mennonite groups: the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada (consisting of the Bergthaler churches in Manitoba and the Rosenorter cluster of congregations in Saskatchewan); the Mennonite Brethren (located in congregations in Winkler, Manitoba and Hepburn and Herbert, Saskatchewan); and the Reinlaender, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde and Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman), each an independent church group in southern Manitoba. All these groups consisted of Mennonites of Dutch-North German descent. Most of their members, particularly in Manitoba, traced their arrival in Canada from Russia in the 1870s and the years following, but others, particularly in Saskatchewan, had come to Canada from the United States, and still others had emigrated directly from Prussia.

Also participating in the work of the Canadian Central Committee were the congregations of the Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference of the “Old” Mennonite Church, for example, Guernsey, Saskatchewan, and Duchess and Tofield, Alberta. Rooted in Swiss-South German ancestry, members of these congregations had moved west from Ontario in the early part of the century. They had a denominational link to the “Old” Mennonite Church and its relief commission, based in Scottdale, Pennsylvania.¹⁰

*The coming
together of these
disparate groups*

Despite the broad representation in the initial formation of the Canadian Central Committee, it remained a western entity and did not involve the Ontario Mennonites. The Ontario churches were already organized. In 1917 they had begun discussions that resulted in early 1918 in the establishment of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO).¹¹ Headed by L.J. Burkholder, pastor of the Cedar Grove Mennonite Church at Markham, the NRRO was formed to

collect money and material aid for post-war reconstruction as a demonstration of the Mennonites' appreciation to the government for military exemption during war. It included the Ontario Conference of the "Old" Mennonite Church, the Old Order Mennonites, the Brethren in Christ, and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. The coming together of these disparate groups, some of whom had separated from one another in the previous century, was no small thing. As elsewhere, the tremendous anguish unleashed by war demanded that Mennonites overcome the differences that kept them from regular cooperation and collaboration. Within a few months of its formation, the NRRO had raised some \$80,000 which it presented to the federal government for the relief of war sufferers in Europe.

Foundational to the work of the NRRO was that of the women's sewing circles. Indeed, while the men led the organization, the women did the actual work of sewing the clothing and bandages needed for relief.¹² Beginning in 1921, the NRRO and its related sewing circles supported MCC's relief effort in the Soviet Union, though congregations were encouraged to contribute through the channels of their denominational conferences.

Soon after the Canadian Central Committee (CCC) was organized on 18 October 1920, the new secretary, Johann Thiessen of Herbert, Saskatchewan wrote to Levi Mumaw of MCC. He asked, "How can we co-operate in this work? We desire to receive from the Committee in the United States advice and brotherly direction how to proceed, since you are already engaged in this work."¹³ More specifically, he asked whether contributions should be sent directly to Turkey, given the exchange rate against the US dollar would result in considerable loss. He ended his letter by reiterating the desire of Canadians to "subordinate ourselves in the Mennonite relief work."

Mumaw responded promptly, welcoming the offer of cooperation. He indicated the Canadian committee could simply channel money and possibly clothing through MCC, or it could actually join MCC by naming a representative to its executive committee. For reasons unknown, the Canadian committee did not formally join MCC at this time, although its chairperson, Peter P. Epp of Altona, Manitoba, attended an MCC meeting in Chicago in December 1921.¹⁴

Relief for the Suffering

Canadian Mennonites contributed to the work of MCC in a variety of ways. They dug deeply into their pockets and purses to contribute financially, and organized auction sales to generate funds. An auction held in Herbert, Saskatchewan in

December 1920 raised \$1100. It has been identified as the very first MCC relief sale on record.¹⁵ That same month, the treasurer of the CCC wrote Mumaw he had \$7000 ready to send; he was still awaiting instructions as to precisely where he should send it.¹⁶ By mid-1921, the CCC treasurer was sending semi-regular contributions of approximately \$400 to \$500 each month; these contributions continued into 1923. When it tallied up all contributions to “Russian Relief” in 1927, MCC attributed \$57,101.86 to the “Canadian Mennonite Central Committee.”¹⁷ Additionally, many Canadians contributed to the cause via their denominational channels. For example, “Old” Mennonites sent donations to M.C. Cressman of Kitchener, Canadian treasurer for the Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers.¹⁸

Canadians also joined in sending used and newly-sewn clothing. The Ontario women’s circles had been sewing clothing for war victims for years, and they now devoted their efforts to the Soviet Union. Much of this work was coordinated by Mary Ann Cressman, wife of M.C. Cressman. Mrs. Cressman was the secretary for the Ontario branch of the “Old” Mennonite Women’s Missionary Society. In many ways her leadership in the women’s organization paralleled her husband’s role as Canadian treasurer for the relief commission. That she had only one arm made her contribution even more significant. She kept the circles informed of the needs and supplied them with fabric from the family’s dry goods store.¹⁹ In mid-1922 Mumaw, writing to M.C. Cressman, expressed his deep appreciation to both M.C. and Mary Ann for their tremendous effort in baling and shipping clothing.²⁰

In western Canada, Mennonites were also eager to help with clothing—in many ways it was easier to contribute clothes than money. At least initially their efforts frustrated Mumaw at MCC because they did not follow precise instructions in baling the clothing, and this got MCC into trouble with the shipping companies.²¹ Sometimes people needed reminders to make sure the used clothing was of decent quality. On one occasion the CCC sent money directly to *Christenpflicht*, the relief agency of the South German Mennonites, and arranged to have clothes purchased in Germany and sent to the MCC team in Istanbul.²² In mid-1922, groups in Ontario and the west participated in a special MCC clothing drive. When it was completed, Mumaw reported that shipments from Hepburn, Winnipeg, and Kitchener, together with some loaded in Pennsylvania, amounted to seventy-five tons valued at \$110,000.²³

Despite Johann Thiessen’s indication of Canadian “subordination” to the US-based MCC, the Canadian Central Committee at times took action independent of MCC. The *Christenpflicht* clothing purchase is one example. Another example involved the shipment of more than 160 tons of flour, ground

from donated grain, and collected at Herbert and Rosthern in Saskatchewan and Steinbach, Altona, Gretna, and Winkler in Manitoba. After being discouraged by MCC from sending flour directly to the Soviet Union, the Canadians determined the flour could be donated to Save the Children Fund, which,



An AMR warehouse at Schoenwiese, near Chortitza, with sacks of flour. Canadian Mennonites arranged for a large shipment of flour to the Soviet Union via Save the Children Fund. Photo credit MHC.

together with the federal government, would pay the freight. For a time, the committee even explored the possibility of sending its own representative to help oversee the distribution of the flour. Save the Children Fund eventually delivered the flour to the MCC operations in Ukraine.²⁴

Several reasons prompted the Canadian Central Committee to pursue the flour shipment. First, Canadian farmers possessed more grain than money, and they were eager to make it available to the relief effort. A.A. Friesen in Saskatchewan wrote to Alvin J. Miller, MCC director in Moscow, about the flour shipment: “[W]e are getting quite generous support on the part of our people. . . which they would not be able to do if a contribution of money would be required since money is very scarce in this country.”²⁵ Secondly, Canadians wanted credit for the contributions they were making to the relief effort. They were aware donations to MCC disappeared into

the general treasury and could no longer be traced. Mumaw, writing to a colleague, noted complaints from Canadians who felt their donations were not being recognized.²⁶

Thirdly, some western Canadians were also concerned the money they were donating to MCC was not reaching the specific relatives and friends for whom it was intended.²⁷ This concern was also why the CCC was eager to send a representative to assist with the distribution of aid—someone who could speak both Russian and German, who understood the context, and who could help negotiate with officials. The Canadians believed that one of their own people could expedite the process of getting aid to the needy. Mumaw, writing on behalf of MCC, expressed openness to the possibility of sending a Canadian worker, but for unknown reasons it did not happen.

It is true that MCC aid took much longer than anticipated in reaching the needy—nearly eighteen months. After arriving in Istanbul with a major shipment of supplies in October 1920, MCC representatives Orie Miller and Clayton Kratz had continued on to Ukraine and the Mennonite colony of Molotschna to make arrangements for their distribution, while Arthur Slagel remained behind. The region was still in political turmoil, with the battlefield between Red and White Armies shifting across the region. After initial permission was granted by the White Army, which controlled Ukraine at the time, and contact had been made with Mennonite leaders, Miller returned to Istanbul to retrieve the material aid, while Kratz remained in the city of Halbstadt to continue with local logistics. In the meantime, the Red Army soldiers succeeded in pushing White Army forces southward and sending them, as well as some Mennonite colonists and other refugees, fleeing on ships onto the Black Sea. In the days following the collapse and retreat of the White Army, the Soviets arrested Clayton Kratz in Halbstadt. He was never heard from again and became, in MCC folk history, its first “martyr.” Another immediate consequence of the Bolshevik victory was that the door to MCC aid distribution closed firmly for some time.

It was more than a year before MCC gained permission to enter the Soviet Union and several more months before public feeding kitchens opened. New MCC director Alvin J. Miller—Orie Miller had returned to the US in spring 1921—succeeded in working out an arrangement whereby MCC would work under the American Relief Administration (ARA). MCC’s own operations within the Soviet Union would be known as American Mennonite Relief (AMR). The Soviets insisted AMR feed and clothe any people in need, not only Mennonites. Alvin Miller agreed fully with this policy. He had learned that in Ukraine in particular, hunger and starvation rates were much higher among the peasantry than among Mennonite colonists. He believed MCC must avoid giving priority to Mennonites, even if they were the *Glaubensgenossen*, the “family of faith” identified in Galatians 6:10. “To bring relief to Mennonites and refuse others would not seem christlike,” he insisted. Furthermore, “[I]t would. . . engender and increase the ill feeling



Alvin Miller was director of MCC's American Mennonite Relief (AMR) operations in the Soviet Union from 1921 to 1926. Photo credit MCC.

against the colonists.”²⁸ He expressed considerable frustration some western Canadians were so insistent that “their people,” and their people alone, receive help.²⁹

Whether to provide mutual aid to fellow Mennonites or whether to assist the most needy—this quandary would prove to be a recurring theme in the history of relations between the US-based MCC and western Canadian constituents. One of the ways MCC dealt with this tension was to facilitate the delivery of special food packets from individuals in North America to specific recipients in Russia. For a ten-dollar draft, sent via MCC, the American Relief Administration delivered to a specific address a package with sizeable amounts of flour, rice, sugar, lard, tea, and condensed milk. One quarter of each packet’s value went to support the feeding kitchens which served the very neediest. This was a way that MCC was able to respond to the pressure to help primarily the *Glaubensgenossen*, while also helping to feed the most seriously under-nourished individuals.

One of the first AMR kitchens, as MCC’s feeding operations were known, opened in the village of Rosenthal, Chortitza colony on 16 March 1922. Anna Funk and her husband Jacob were in charge of cooking daily meals for eight hundred to one thousand people: children, elderly, sick persons, and pregnant women. Anna, Jacob, and their one-year-old daughter Frieda were themselves destitute. Like many people, they had long ago run out



Hungry villagers await their daily ration at the AMR feeding kitchen at Chortitza colony. Photo credit MHC.

of real food, even after they sold their wedding rings and other precious items to buy the meagre but expensive bread that was occasionally available. They then resorted to cooking nettles, mushrooms and weeds, as well as roasting gophers and crows. They did not, as some others, resort to eating cats and dogs.

Anna Funk had several years’ experience working as a cook in a hospital for the mentally ill and so she was eager to help. She knew that as workers in the AMR kitchen, she and Jacob would receive double the normal rations, so that they would have the strength to do the strenuous work. Little Frieda, who had become

silent and listless, quickly regained the colour in her cheeks and brightness in her eyes on her new AMR diet. She toddled around the store-turned-kitchen where her parents and their helpers baked bread and cooked great cauldrons of rice with canned milk, hominy grits, beans and cocoa. The Funks served at the Rosenthal kitchen until it closed in 1923.³⁰

By May 1922, MCC was feeding 24,000 to 25,000 people daily in 140 different kitchens scattered through the southern Soviet Union. Eventually it also established feeding programs in New Samara and Orenburg regions in Siberia. In Ukraine, MCC distributed clothing and

shoes sent by North Americans, but in Siberia it purchased sheep locally and encouraged the production of wool and weaving because it was simply too expensive to ship clothing that long distance. MCC also helped struggling farmers who had lost seed, tools, and draft animals. Two shipments of Ford tractors, sent from Detroit, Michigan, were a great novelty. Horses, cows, and tractors were provided on credit, which recipients were required to pay for over time.³¹ Later on, MCC administrators would note that from the very beginning MCC engaged in relief *and* development—not only feeding people, but also helping people to once again feed themselves.

After a reasonable harvest in Ukraine in 1923, MCC ended its operations in 1924, though it continued to provide assistance in Siberia until 1926. Long before this happened, Mennonites in the Soviet Union began to actively pursue emigration to Canada and Mexico. Many of them sensed that improved harvests alone would not restore their way of life. The self-government they had known and treasured would not be possible under the new Communist regime. The new government was confiscating more and more property. It had initiated its first Five Year Plan and begun to nationalize industry and collectivize agriculture. It had imposed an atheist curriculum on schools, and tightened provisions for exemption from military service. It had not yet closed churches or disenfranchised ministers and church leaders, but this seemed imminent. Besides, many people had lost their homes and all their material belongings and they had



*MCC tractors harvest barley near Chortitza colony, 1923.
Photo credit MHC.*

nowhere to go. Moreover, the intense agony of recent years—the murder, rape, looting, disease, and famine—had irrevocably shattered people’s sense of security. They were no longer “at home” in what they continued to call “Russia.”

Immigration and Resettlement

The Study Commission, which had left Ukraine in 1920, had been charged with the tasks of obtaining material assistance, but also seeking the possibility of resettlement. The very meeting in Elkhart, Indiana that established MCC on 27-28 July 1920, created a board to seek out settlement opportunities in the United States. A.A. Friesen and B.H. Unruh of the Study Commission also had immigration on their agenda when they entered Canada in August. Canadian Mennonites, as noted earlier, had begun to discuss this possibility themselves. A major problem was that at the end of World War I, the government had passed an order in council banning Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor immigrants from entering Canada. The order arose out of the nationalistic and patriotic fervour which developed during the war and continued afterward. Public opinion opposed the immigration of people who would not embrace “Canadian values,” would not perform military service, and would not enroll their children in public schools. Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were beginning to explore migration to Mexico at this time, because provincial governments were imposing compulsory attendance at public schools.

By mid-1921 it had become clear the US would not allow a mass immigration of Mennonites, and Mexico was not a suitable option either. It therefore became imperative to the Study Commission to urge Canada to open its doors once again. At a meeting in Herbert in June 1921, A.A. Friesen suggested the idea of sending a delegation to Ottawa, to request the rescinding of the problematic order in council. A month later he, together with four other men—H.H. Ewert and H.A. Neufeld from western Canada and S.F. Coffman and D.M. Reesor from Ontario—met with acting Prime Minister George S. Foster and officials of the Department of Immigration in Ottawa. Given that a general election had been called, the delegation also sought a meeting with the new leader of the Liberal party, William Lyon Mackenzie King. King promised that if he were elected, he would have the objectionable order in council repealed. The Liberals did win the general election, and, following the visit of another delegation to remind him of his promise, Prime Minister King had

the order revoked in spring 1922. Canada was once again prepared to receive Mennonite immigrants.

By June 1922 a Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization³² (CMBC) had been formed to facilitate the immigration of as many as 100,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union. Based in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, it was chaired by David Toews. A.A. Friesen, who had elected to remain in Canada to support the relief and resettlement efforts, was appointed corresponding secretary. The membership consisted of representatives of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, the Mennonite Brethren, the “Old” Mennonites, as well as the Bruderthaler (later the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren), the Kleine Gemeinde, and Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) groups. From the outset, the Board of Colonization sought to bring together the widest possible range of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups across Canada—those in Ontario

and primarily of Swiss-South German descent, and those in western Canada primarily of Dutch-North German descent. As such, it was the most representative of organizations that Canadian Mennonites had yet created for a common cause. One of the CMBC’s first big tasks was to negotiate an arrangement whereby the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) would transport on credit those immigrants without any



An extended Sawatzky family prepares to embark the train for their journey to Canada. Photo credit MHC.

financial resources.

The obstacles to a mass migration did not exist only on the Canadian side. Obtaining permission for Mennonites to leave Ukraine was also a very difficult and even dangerous undertaking, for a great exodus of some of the region’s best agriculturalists would no doubt appear to the new regime in Kharkov as a clear indictment of its policies. Mennonite leaders, headed by teacher Benjamin B. Janz, therefore negotiated very astutely. They managed to secure exit permits for groups of their people to leave, by persuading the regime that the removal of destitute and “surplus” people would improve the economic and agricultural recovery of Ukraine in the wake of the famine.³³ The strategy worked until 1926.

Despite the formidable obstacles, the movement of Mennonite refugees from Russia finally got underway in early July 1923 when the first group

of 738 persons left Chortitza. By year's end a total of 2,759 had arrived in Canada.³⁴ Among the immigrants of that year were Anna and Jacob Funk, who until recently had run the Rosenthal feeding kitchen. Observers of the arrival of the first group of immigrants at Rosthern, Saskatchewan on 21 July noted the poignancy of this historic occasion.³⁵ Hundreds of local citizens and hosts from surrounding communities had gathered to greet the newcomers. People wept and rejoiced. David Toews spoke warm words of welcome, and a spokesperson for the refugees responded, expressing profound gratitude, as well as assurance that the newcomers would adapt to the ways of Canada. Those soon distinguished as *Russlaender* (new Mennonite immigrants) and *Kanadier* (those from earlier immigrations) joined together in singing several beloved hymns. After these simple formalities, the newcomers were assigned to their various host families. The federal government had stipulated any new Mennonite immigrants must be sheltered and supported until they were financially viable; this meant that host families provided many months of food, shelter, and often work for newcomers.

The effort to bring thousands of Mennonite families to Canada was a monumental undertaking, with countless difficulties threatening to halt the movement at any moment.³⁶ For one thing, many Canadian Mennonites opposed the entire immigration scheme and actively worked against it. They were angered that David Toews, without consultation or authorization, had committed the entire Mennonite community to an enormous debt when

he signed a contract with the CPR. Secondly, Canada's strict health regulations meant that many refugees were detained in Germany or England until particular health concerns (particularly trachoma, an eye disease) had cleared up. This meant families were often separated and additional costs incurred. Thirdly, it proved extremely difficult for the newcomers to make their



Mennonite immigrants, just arrived in Waterloo, Ontario, walk from the train station to Erb Street Mennonite Church, 1924. Photo credit MAO.

Reiseschuld (travel debt) payments. Many complications also threatened the mission back in the Soviet Union: lack of unity among prospective emigrants, ongoing political upheavals, and the increasing reluctance of Soviet officials to provide exit permits.

Yet, together with the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization brought some 20,000 Mennonites to Canada between 1923 and 1930. Although many thousands more longed to make Canada their home, it was not to be. By the late 1920s, Canada accepted more immigrants reluctantly and even sooner, the Soviets resisted their departure. In 1926, 5,940 immigrants arrived in Canada, but the following year only 847 and in 1928 only 511.³⁷ Late in 1929, some 13,000 German colonists from various parts of the Soviet Union (Mennonites, Catholics, and Lutherans) amassed in Moscow in a desperate attempt to escape. Largely due to the generous intervention of the German government, 5,671 people—including 3,885 Mennonites—were allowed entry to Germany.³⁸ Eventually just over 1,000 of these were accepted by Canada; the remainder were settled in Paraguay by Mennonite Central Committee and in Brazil by the Dutch Mennonites. Among the last families to arrive in Canada was that of Jacob J. and Aganetha Klassen from the Zagradowka colony. Their one-year-old son Jacob would later become MCC Canada's first executive director.³⁹

Throughout this time, the public face of the Board of Colonization was David Toews—bishop, conference leader, teacher, and compassionate advocate for the suffering. His very competent assistant was Kaethe Hooge, a 1923 immigrant. A gifted multilingual woman, who had once aspired to the medical profession, Hooge faithfully typed and filed Toews' voluminous correspondence, wrote his reports, and generally organized his work life. Her career with the Board of Colonization would end with the formation of MCC Canada in 1963. Other Board staff included A.A. Friesen (he resigned in 1926), D.P. Enns, Jacob Gerbrandt, and C.F. Klassen. Klassen, a 1928 immigrant who settled in Winnipeg, served as chief *Reiseschuld* collector for the Board, salaried by the CPR, beginning in 1930. The *Reiseschuld* was the travel debt which the majority of immigrants owed to the CPR. Klassen continued in this role until MCC called him to serve in Europe in 1945.

Conclusion

During these early years, a number of critical patterns and themes emerged which would define the story of MCC in Canada and influence the formation of MCC Canada some forty years hence.

First, from the beginning of MCC's history, Canadians were eager to share in MCC's mission to provide relief to suffering Mennonites in the Soviet Union. Canadians supported the US-based MCC through the Canadian Central Committee in western Canada, the Non-Resistant Relief Organization based

in Ontario, and the various denominational conferences that spanned the US-Canada border. Canadians' sense of emotional connection to MCC would intensify as 20,000 Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union disembarked the CPR ships that brought them to Canadian shores. Many of these newcomers had been fed by MCC's food kitchens or clothed with the garments and shoes sent by MCC; as a result of being thus rescued from destitution and even starvation, they would become some of MCC's most faithful supporters. Indeed, in subsequent decades, MCC in Canada came to depend on the moral, financial, material aid, and personnel support provided by these recipients of MCC aid. No wonder that in 1985, when Jacob and Anna Funk, formerly of Rosenthal, Chortitza and now of Edmonton, Alberta, celebrated their sixty-fifth anniversary—also MCC's sixty-fifth anniversary—they invited donations to the organization that had saved their lives.

Mutual aid to the "family of faith"

A second theme is hospitality. The story of MCC in Canada is also the story of how Canadians assisted their fellow Mennonites through immigration assistance. The particular compulsion to provide hospitality and a new home to refugees of war or disaster continued to be an important aspect of the collective Canadian Mennonite

mission. This impulse informed and shaped MCC ministry and identity in Canada. The story of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, the channel for this assistance, is therefore critical to the history of MCC's evolution in this northern country. Eventually the Board's identity and its mission became incorporated into MCC Canada.

A third theme that emerges in these early years is the concern on the part of Canadian Mennonites, particularly those with roots in Russia, to extend mutual aid to the "family of faith" or the *Glaubensgenossen*. Canadian Mennonite leaders frequently referred to Galatians 6:10: "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." They were not opposed to MCC extending help to people who were not Mennonites, but they believed that MCC should demonstrate special care and concern for suffering brothers and sisters in the faith.

A fourth theme that emerges in the story of MCC in Canada is that of inter-Mennonite cooperation. As crisis in the Soviet Union brought US Mennonites into a previously unknown level of collaboration, it did the same north of the border, as well as across the border. To be sure, different Mennonite groups in Canada had connected earlier. In the 1870s, for example, Swiss-German Mennonites in Ontario had helped raise funds for immigrants from Russia seeking resettlement in Manitoba.⁴⁰ During World War I, some

connecting, though not effective collaboration, occurred on issues of military exemption. And as the war ended, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Ontario had come together to form the Non-Resistant Relief Organization. But the plight of sisters and brothers in the faith, and the efforts to extend relief and immigration assistance, pushed Canadians to begin to collaborate across cultural, denominational, and geographic lines. To be sure, most of this collaboration happened at the level of bishops and boards. Still, it represented an important beginning.

As the 1930s drew to a close, MCC and the Canadian organizations became less active. Profound concern for Mennonites in the USSR persisted, but all channels for relief were eliminated by the Soviet government. As the full weight of Josef Stalin's repression bore down, even the exchange of letters became impossible. Canadians could do little but pray for loved ones terrorized by Stalin's brutal tyranny. The onset of war in 1939 would resurrect the dormant organizations and provide new opportunities for Canadian Mennonites to bring relief to the suffering.

CHAPTER 2

Responding to War, 1939-1948

EDNA HUNSPERGER OF Preston, Ontario was one of the first “Old” Mennonite young women to enter nurses’ training. Post-secondary education among most Ontario Mennonites, especially females, was still unusual in the 1930s. But from a young age Hunsperger had set her mind on becoming a nurse. She graduated from nurses training in 1937.¹

After Canada went to war in 1939, many of Hunsperger’s fellow nurses enlisted in the Armed Forces for overseas nursing duty. As a conscientious objector she could not join “the war machine,” but she feared being called a coward. In 1941 a local pastor invited her to join Mennonite Central Committee’s new relief service program in England. Hunsperger saw this as a way of meeting human need and serving her country without joining the Armed Forces. She heard it as a call from God and she said yes. A year later, after government permission had been granted, she left for England with another nurse, Elfrieda Klassen of Winnipeg. They were the first two Canadian women to join MCC service.

Edna Hunsperger’s story is important because it portrays significant developments that occurred among Canadian Mennonites, and between them and MCC as a result of World War II. The war and the military service draft led Mennonites and Brethren in Christ to ask themselves how they could serve their country and remain true to their faith. The enormous war-time suffering likewise challenged them to contribute to relief, as well as to develop a program of “relief service.” The urgency of the times compelled them to work together in new ways, and also drew them more closely into the MCC orbit. Hunsperger’s decision to join MCC service in England symbolized all these things.

War and Alternative Service

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and occupied it within a few short days. Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September. Canada, a member of the British Commonwealth, followed suit on 10 September. Because of the division resulting from conscription during World War I—particularly between English and French Canada—Prime Minister Mackenzie King was reluctant to impose mandatory service in World War II. Nevertheless, concerns about military conscription were uppermost in the minds of many Mennonites and Brethren in Christ. Nonresistance and non-participation in military service continued to be central tenets of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ confessions. Therefore, immediate questions arose as to whether the federal government would

Differing opinions on the question of alternative service

honour their religious convictions and exempt their young men from military service, or whether it would require some form of alternative service.

Canadian Mennonites had been grappling with the possibility of conscription since before the declaration of war. The various denominations continued to affirm their belief in nonresistance, but they had differing opinions on the question of alternative service.² Generally speaking, the *Kanadier* groups in Manitoba were opposed to performing any type of alternative service. When their people had entered Canada in 1873, they had insisted on exemption from the Militia Act and hence all military service, including non-combatant service. An order in council and the experience of World War I confirmed for them that any alternate service would not be required.

Russlaender groups, however, had not received the same guarantees when they had immigrated in the 1920s. They were eager to offer certain types of alternative service, similar to the kind they had performed in Russia. Some of them, such as Mennonite Brethren leader B.B. Janz, were even prepared to accept non-combatant service within the military. The third position—represented by those of Swiss-South German descent—was between these two. This group had been granted an exemption from combatant military service but was subject to all other provisions of the Militia Act. It was prepared to offer a form of alternative service, but insisted that such service not be linked in any way with the armed forces.

By mid-1940 Parliament passed legislation conscripting labour for home defence. This meant nonresistant men from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches would be required to perform some service, though they would not have to bear arms. It was up to their leaders to negotiate an acceptable form of alternate service. Some of these leaders recognized the importance of Mennonites offering a single and united voice in their negotiations with government. Deputy Minister of National War Services T.C. Davis had indicated he would negotiate with one—and only one—delegation.³ Men like David Toews and S.F. Coffman, pastor of Vineland First Mennonite Church, also recognized their witness to the state would be seriously undermined if they were not united.⁴ During World War I, many different delegations had appeared in Ottawa trying to ascertain their status under the conscription laws of the time.

In Ontario, Mennonites joined with the Brethren in Christ and the Quakers to form the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC) to represent them. The CHPC was ably led by the venerable Brethren in Christ bishop E.J. Swalm. Swalm had been imprisoned during World War I for his refusal to bear arms, and he had become a champion of nonresistance.⁵ A close working relationship quickly developed between the CHPC and leaders David Toews and B.B. Janz

who represented the west on issues related to military service.

Efforts to reconcile the groups failed

Before long, however, the *Kanadier* groups of Manitoba—the Bergthaler, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde, Rudnerweider, and Old Colony—indicated they would negotiate with the government on their own. They had been led to believe that alternative service would not be required of their young men.⁶

So in September 1940 they established their own *Aeltestenkomitee* (committee of bishops) to represent

them before the government. Several efforts to reconcile the groups and their positions failed. A single united Mennonite witness in Ottawa would not be possible after all.

By Christmas Eve 1940 the government had passed an order in council which provided for a variety of forms of compulsory alternative service for men accepted as conscientious objectors. The order effectively eliminated the complete and unconditional exemption of those persons who had entered Canada under the 1873 assurances. Hereafter, all young conscientious objectors or “COs,” including those from the *Kanadier* community, would be required to perform some civic wartime duty.

Initially, many of the COs received “postponements” which allowed them to remain on the farm, but others worked in forestry, road construction, and national parks. Later on, it became possible to serve in psychiatric hospitals, or, as labour shortages demanded, in specific industries. Some “conchies”



Mennonite conscientious objectors build a road in Jasper National Park, Alberta, 1941. Photo credit MHC.

even taught school in northern communities or pastored United Churches, as these positions were vacated by men called up for active military duty. After 1943 COs could also become non-combatant medics, but because this option required service within the Armed Forces, most churches did not support it. Through the course of the war some 7500 Mennonite men participated in the alternative service program, from a total of 10,851.⁷

Many of the young men who performed alternative service found their horizons widened. As they worked alongside other varieties of Mennonites and even other Christians, they learned tolerance and acceptance. One preacher noted the alternative service camps provided COs with “a wonderful opportunity to free themselves of denominational bigotry.”⁸ Alternative service also opened their eyes to needs in the world. Many of those who served in psychiatric institutions developed empathy and compassion for people with mental illness.⁹ Those who taught in northern communities learned to love and respect Aboriginal people.¹⁰

Many alternatives service workers also experienced a deepening of their commitment to Jesus’ way of peace and nonviolence, and new desire to alleviate the suffering caused by war. Since building roads or clearing trees did not represent “relief” in the minds of individuals assigned to such work, some men chose to enrol in MCC relief service after the war, as a way of living out their convictions. John L. Fretz from Kitchener, Ontario wrote:

Most of us became more aware of the scriptural teachings on peace and nonresistance, and the importance of love and reconciliation, in the face of violence. As a result of my experience, I wanted to do more positive service, so I spent a two-year term in MCC relief work in France. . . . Service such as in MCC is a more positive kind of witness.¹¹

The war prevailed upon nonresistant Mennonites and Brethren in Christ to demonstrate visibly their desire to preserve life rather than to destroy it. It also challenged them to speak with one voice to government on issues related to conscientious objection and alternative service. A united voice proved impossible, and the painful division at the level of church leadership took some years to heal. But in the following decade, the call for coordination and for collective representation would grow. This call would eventually contribute to the formation of a national peace council in 1959 and MCC Canada in 1963.

Organizing for Relief

Canada had barely declared war in 1939 when Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women began to sew for war relief. By October 1939 Ontario women under the leadership of Martha Bechtel organized a Non-resistant Relief Sewing Committee to gather used and sew new clothing, bedding, and bandages. Historian Marlene Epp points out that women, who were not required to do alternative service, were nevertheless eager to do something. Sewing for relief was the way they lived out their commitment to nonresistance in gender-specific ways.¹²

It seems the urging of Martha Bechtel and other women may have prompted S.F. Coffman, minister of the Vineland First Mennonite Church and secretary of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO), to contact Mennonite Central Committee regarding the possibility of a joint relief effort.¹³ Orie Miller, now executive secretary of MCC, visited Ontario in November 1939 to meet with both the NRRO and western leaders Toews and Janz. As a result of their discussions, the Canadians agreed to channel their relief efforts to a special new MCC initiative in England. The Ontario Mennonites would work through their revived NRRO. Mennonites in the west would create a new organization, the Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC), to gather money and material aid.

The leadership of the MCRC was virtually identical to that of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) where David Toews was chair, B.B. Janz vice-chair, and C.F. Klassen chief collector of the *Reiseschuld* debt. Through the 1930s, the CMBC had become somewhat of a relief agency, collecting and sending money to destitute families in the Soviet Union, as long as that was possible. For some reasons, it was now deemed important that a new organization, separate from the CMBC, should be charged with gathering money and material aid for relief in Europe.

That the two organizations—the Mennonite Central Relief Committee and the Board of Colonization—were headed by the same men is not surprising. Historian Ted Regehr has pointed out the “curious phenomenon” whereby a fairly small group of powerful men came to hold almost all the key positions in their respective conferences and within inter-Mennonite organizations.¹⁴ In western Canada the triumvirate of Toews, Janz, and Klassen were the leaders on virtually all matters pertaining to conscientious objection, alternative service, contact with government, relief work, and inter-Mennonite relations. When Toews died in 1947, J.J. Thiessen of Saskatoon assumed many of Toews’ leadership positions. The same phenomenon existed in Ontario where Mennonite pastors S.F.Coffman (First in Vineland), J.B. Martin (Erb St. in Waterloo), Oscar Burkholder (Breslau) and Brethren in Christ bishop E.J. Swalm (Duntroon) headed up the NRRO, CHPC and many other committees. A strength of this “boys club” was its efficiency; without telephones and electronic communications, these men could organize a meeting, travel to Ottawa, or issue a broad call for donations in rather short order. Later generations would find this concentration of power in the hands of a few men quite objectionable, but this was accepted reality in the 1940s. It should also be noted that while the men led the committees and boards, women did much of the fundraising, as well as producing the material goods for relief purposes.

*Desire to be
seen as loyal
and patriotic*

Canadian Mennonites were eager to provide relief assistance to what was, for English-Canadians, the “mother country.”¹⁵ This interest was likely linked to the desire to be seen as loyal and patriotic to Canada. Mennonite leaders knew their use of the German language, their ties to Germany (particularly among the immigrants of the 1920s), as well as their resistance to military service roused considerable suspicion among their English-Canadian neighbours.¹⁶ They wished to demonstrate their loyalty to the dominion which had provided a home for their people.¹⁷

In response to the interest of Canadians, MCC commissioned Amos Schwartzentruber of Baden, Ontario to visit Europe and make recommendations for MCC’s relief program in England, as well as France and Spain. Schwartzentruber was on furlough from missionary work in Argentina. Though not a regular MCC worker, he can nevertheless be identified as the first Canadian to serve with MCC in some capacity. Schwartzentruber returned from Europe in April 1940, recommending specific suggestions for the relief program in England.

By the early spring of 1940, Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ had developed a mechanism to work together to relieve war-time suffering. This newfound unity of purpose, however, was short-lived. By the late fall the *Kanadier* churches of Manitoba—the Bergthaler, Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony, Ruderweider and Sommerfelder—had formed their own relief committee, separate from the MCRC. In the same way that they preferred to work independently with respect to alternative service, they also chose to gather relief contributions on their own. They named their committee the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC), even though it really operated only in southern Manitoba.¹⁸ For the remainder of the war, three separate relief committees—the NRRO in Ontario, the MCRC in western Canada, and the CMRC in southern Manitoba—would serve as the bodies that would gather money and material aid from Mennonites and Brethren in Christ churches for war relief in Europe. Ironically, they would all work together through MCC.

Relief to England

In response to the recommendation of Amos Schwartzentruber, MCC sent Ted Claassen of Newton, Kansas to London, England to oversee the distribution of relief goods. It also began to search for a Canadian who could establish a strong link with Canadian churches. John E. Coffman joined Claassen in October 1940. Coffman was a graduate of Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana and a son of S.F. and Ella Coffman of Vineland, Ontario. While Schwartzentruber was the first Canadian to serve on a short-term assignment with MCC, Coffman was the



John E. Coffman outfits a young child at MCC's clothing depot in London, England. Photo credit MAO.

first Canadian who served as a regular MCC worker. Coffman's letters to the churches back in Canada had a powerful impact in building support for MCC's relief program in England. Coffman is also known as recommending that the slogan, "in the Name of Christ," be sewn onto clothing distributed by MCC, as

a way of communicating the motivation of MCC to those receiving its assistance. Coffman served with MCC through the course of the war, eventually marrying there and making England his home.

Early in 1941 Peter J. Dyck of Laird, Saskatchewan joined Coffman. Dyck was a conscientious objector, serving as a United Church pastor in northern Ontario, when C.F. Klassen visited him and urged him to join MCC. Born in Russia, Dyck had immigrated to Canada in 1927 as a young teen. Dyck's family had benefited greatly from MCC's assistance in the 1920s, and so he did not hesitate to agree to the request. Dyck joined Coffman in London, where the two administered a rapidly expanding relief program.

Much of MCC's work focused on helping to fund convalescent homes for children, youth, and the elderly. Within Birmingham, MCC operated a mobile canteen which provided hot drinks and biscuits to people living in recently-bombed neighbourhoods or staying in air-raid shelters. In London Coffman ran a clothing distribution center with some local assistants.¹⁹ In time, both Coffman and Dyck began to question the practise of simply dispensing the money and material aid sent from Canada. They felt MCC personnel should also be present where constituency resources were being used.²⁰ They telegraphed MCC's head office in Akron, Pennsylvania requesting two nurses for the convalescent homes. In June 1942, Edna Hunsperger of Kitchener and Elfrieda Klassen of Winnipeg arrived in Liverpool after a seventeen-day journey across the Atlantic in a convoy of fifty-seven ships. Hunsperger and Klassen were the first two Canadian women to serve as international relief workers with MCC. At Klassen's posting at a home for youth called Taxal Edge, romance blossomed between her and Peter Dyck, and they were married in October 1944. Another nurse from Ontario, Mabel Cressman, joined the team in 1944. A total of twenty-four individuals served with MCC in England between May 1940 and July 1947 when the England program closed. At least thirteen of these were Canadians.²¹



Peter and Elfrieda Klassen Dyck, longtime MCC workers, in 148. Photo credit MCC.

An MCC Office in Canada

In January 1944 MCC, with the cautious agreement of the Canadian organizations, opened an office in Kitchener, Ontario.²² The purpose of the office was multi-faceted: to provide a repository for Canadian financial contributions, to coordinate the clothing collection program in Canada, to provide bilingual (English and German) information about MCC to Canadian churches, to assist in selecting and processing Canadian relief workers, and to do any necessary negotiating with the Canadian government.²³ With respect to this last task, it was becoming increasingly awkward and cumbersome for a US-based agency to make arrangements with the Canadian government for the shipment of Canadian relief goods and the placement of Canadian relief workers overseas.

In establishing the office, it seems MCC was also interested in promoting unity among the Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ.²⁴



Marguerite Rempel does clerical work for the Non-Resistant Relief Organization at its material aid centre at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario. She later helped manage the MCC office in Kitchener with her husband C.J. Rempel. Photo credit MAO.

MCC hired Kitchener resident and insurance agent C.J. Rempel to manage the operation. Rempel was a member of the Mennonite Brethren church, a 1920s immigrant from the Soviet Union, and he spoke German. He was also well-connected to the predominantly Swiss-German Mennonite NRRO and CHPC communities. So, “politically,” he was an excellent choice for the position, since he would be required to relate to a wide range

of Mennonites across the country. Rempel’s wife Marguerite also worked for MCC but without any additional remuneration. Marguerite Rempel provided a home for the women who worked in the office and the clothing depot, hosted countless guests, and kept things running during C.J.’s frequent travels.²⁵

Within a short time, Arlene Sitler joined the MCC operation, followed by Cora Cressman and Emma Loewen. Both Sitler and Loewen would eventually serve overseas with MCC. Alice Snyder was another key member of the Kitchener team. Snyder succeeded her mother, Ida Snyder, as the operator of the sewing circles’ cutting room. The cutting room was established in 1942 to

standardize the clothing being sewn for overseas relief. Snyder purchased fabric in bulk and, using a special cutting machine, prepared the pre-cut cloth that sewing circles could purchase, take home, and sew. MCC strategically located its clothing depot directly next to the cutting room, and then asked Alice Snyder to manage the depot. This dual role made Snyder very busy, but it also facilitated a close relationship between MCC, the cutting room, and the sewing circles. After war's end, Snyder would also complete an MCC assignment in Europe.

The new Kitchener MCC office and depot served the Canadian Mennonite relief organizations well. The treasurers of the various organizations simply forwarded their donations to the Kitchener office, and staff there wired them to England, as well as to India for famine relief. Bales of clothing from western Canada could be sent to Kitchener and then consolidated with Ontario bales for shipment overseas. Through two newsletters, available in German and English, MCC staff thanked the churches and women's groups for their participation in the ministry, updated them on needs for cash, material aid, and personnel, and reported on how all three resources were helping the needy.

The Kitchener office newsletters included information about the wider ministry of MCC, and frequently excerpts from letters and reports shared by MCC workers. These reports gave a glimpse into the tremendous needs which workers were trying to meet. In mid-1947 an excerpt from Cornelius J. Dyck, of Laird, Saskatchewan, serving in the Schleswig-Holstein region of Germany, conveyed the desperate situation there:

In the little village of Elmshorn . . . every school child has now been found to have open T.B. Similar incidents can be reported in many, many towns. Why? Because the children do not receive the right foods; they have not the vitamins; they have no clean clothing; they have no bedding; they have no shoes. Infant mortality is especially high in all areas—so high that sometimes doctors hesitate to tell it to me. Why? Because the mothers are undernourished; because they have not the strength to care for a newborn child. One local pastor friend of mine remarked to me not so long ago that the old people in his congregation are dying like flies. Why? Because they do not have food; they do not have fuel, bedding, or clothing. Nobody cares for them.²⁶

*Letters and
stories from
workers
overseas*

Letters and stories from workers overseas strengthened the connections with families and congregations in Canada, and encouraged them to keep on

giving. Another worker, Dorothy Swartzentruber from Kitchener, Ontario wrote, after distributing clothing to men released from a prisoner of war camp,

This experience, too, has left its indelible impression on our lives. How thankful we were for the blessed privilege of giving, or handing to the needy, those garments which you dear people had, in love, prepared for them. God bless you, every one, for your untiring efforts and your faithfulness.²⁷

Although Ontario constituents quickly came to see the Kitchener MCC office as “theirs,” in reality it remained a branch of MCC, based in Akron, Pennsylvania. MCC paid the bills and determined the basic program directions. C.J.Rempel and his staff reported to, took directions from, and provided copies of all correspondence to Orie Miller and colleagues in Akron. When funds accumulated, comptrollers in Akron determined where to allocate the money.²⁸ The Kitchener office could receive applications from potential relief workers from Canada, but all decisions about acceptance and placement were made in Akron. On at least one occasion, C. J. Rempel begged colleagues in Akron to at least inform him when it was communicating directly with Canadian candidates. It was awkward for him to be left out of the flow of information.²⁹ In general, the relationship between “Kitchener” and “Akron” remained positive, despite minor irritations such as this.

In late 1944 the MCC executive committee took another step to involve Canadians more directly. It invited the three relief organizations, as well as the Conference of Historic Peace Churches, to appoint representatives to serve on MCC’s membership. Now the Canadian Mennonite relief organizations, through their representatives, would have direct input into the shaping of MCC’s ministry.

Canadian Support for MCC

Canadian Mennonite support for the work of MCC, through the various Canadian organizations, grew steadily, exploding after the war, as MCC workers reported on the devastation and tremendous need they witnessed in Europe and Asia. For some Canadians, news that fellow Mennonites had escaped the Soviet Union under agonizing circumstances, especially spurred sacrificial giving. In 1946, the total value of Canadian cash, clothing and food contributed to MCC amounted to \$471,370; this surpassed the combined total for the previous six years.³⁰ For 1947, the Canadian total reached \$657,900.³¹

This represented about seventeen percent of MCC's total income of \$3.7 million.

Material aid became tremendously important in the relief effort. The MCC Kitchener office continually put out a call for clothing, both new and used, gently reminding constituents to ensure the used garments were worthy of the label "In the Name of Christ."³² In Ontario the cutting room was the locus for this activity. However, from Ontario to British Columbia, women's groups sewed (and mended) clothing, bedding, and bandages for MCC relief. From a post in Germany, where she helped to distribute clothing sewn by Canadian women, Alice Snyder wrote,

If anyone had doubts as to whether their sewing circle work is worthwhile I wish they could see some of these people. Many of them weep when they thank us. Women come with 5 or 6 children, their husbands are either dead or still prisoners of war in Russia, and their allowance is not enough to buy clothes. . . .³³



Members of Floradale Mennonite Church, Floradale, Ontario preserve chickens for MCC relief, 1950. Photo credit David Hunsberger, MAO.

In 1945, MCC initiated a special material aid project called the Christmas bundle. MCC workers in Europe had suggested North American children prepare special bundles for needy children in Europe, as a way of engaging them in the relief effort. This was probably one of MCC's first initiatives especially geared to children and youth. Each bundle, specifically designated for a boy or girl of a certain age, consisted of one complete outfit, some toiletries, a game or toy, and an optional New Testament.

These items were wrapped in a large bath towel and fastened with safety pins. The Kitchener office invited Canadian constituents to contribute Christmas bundles in 1946, a year after they had been tested in the US, and the response was outstanding. Within six weeks of his initial announcement, C.J. Rempel reported receiving 6,200 bundles.³⁴ He reported in his newsletter that over

half would be distributed in Germany, and the remainder in eleven different countries. MCC continued to solicit and distribute Christmas bundles around the world until the early 1970s, by which time it had sent out 725,000 from Canada and the US.³⁵

Through the course of the war it had been impossible to send food overseas, but that changed at war's end. The Kitchener office soon received permission to send canned goods, dried beans and peas, flour and other food stuffs. It then invited Canadians to preserve pork and beans, jams and jellies, baby food and fruits and vegetables in glass jars. Within a short time, MCC also obtained permission for constituents to use personal meat and sugar ration coupons for overseas relief.³⁶ In the summer of 1945, C.J. Rempel issued a call for 100,000 jars of canned meat and 125,000 of fruits and vegetables. In Coaldale, Alberta the local cheese factory founded by 1920s immigrants became a canning factory.³⁷ In Saskatoon, a public school provided space for teams of volunteers to pack thousands of jars into specially built wooden crates.³⁸ In Manitoba, one congregation with only sixty-five members slaughtered and canned seven animals in short order. In Ontario another congregation collected sugar for 500 jars of jam when members donated their sugar ration coupons.³⁹ Canadians did not quite reach the quota Rempel had suggested for the first year, but the total of 192,000 quarts of canned meat, fruits and vegetables was a phenomenal achievement, especially since much of the preserving happened in homes and church basements.⁴⁰ Amazingly, every jar from the initial thirty-six cases arrived in Holland unbroken.⁴¹ Later cases were not so lucky.⁴² Also in 1946, farmers donated fourteen train carloads of flour valued at \$50,900.00.⁴³

Nonresistance, Relief, and Relief Service

Thoughtful Mennonites understood a strong link between their stance of conscientious objection to war and providing relief to the victims of war. They believed any testimony of nonresistance and nonparticipation in war lacked integrity and authenticity if unaccompanied with an effort to lessen suffering. David Toews noted in 1942, "If our nonresistance is only something on paper, it has no real worth. Our task is not only to not shed blood, but to preserve life and to help those in need."⁴⁴ Besides that, helping the needy was basic to a life of Christian discipleship.⁴⁵

Public opinion also played a role in linking nonresistance and relief. Mennonites were keenly aware they were being criticized for their avoidance of military service. By actively supporting relief work, they hoped to convince

a sceptical public that Mennonites were not simply cowards or, much worse, enemy sympathizers.⁴⁶ This became especially necessary as the war progressed and as Mennonites, like most Canadians, began to profit from the economic prosperity that the war brought about. As C.J. Rempel of Ontario put it in 1944,

It is an established fact that most of us in Canada are now earning more money in factories, in business and on farms than we have ever earned before. Part of this situation is directly due to the present global war. To say we do not believe in war but rather in the preserving of life and the relieving of suffering as taught by Jesus and then do very little about easing such conditions is not enough. What the world looks for, and it is perfectly justified in doing so, is an active, sacrificial love on the part of His followers.⁴⁷

At the outset of the war, people had understood “relief” to mean contributing money and material aid that would help victims of war. But very soon, the concept of “relief service” began to emerge—the idea that MCC would also send people to *do* relief: to distribute food and clothing, to provide nursing care, and in other ways extend Christian love and compassion. The vision for relief service had its genesis within the alternative service program and the desire to find ways of helping humanity while refusing to serve in the military.⁴⁸ As noted earlier, some Canadian COs joined MCC’s relief service after the war because they longed to be more directly involved in the alleviation of suffering. Many women, though not having been required to do alternative service, joined the relief service program because they felt compelled to offer their peace testimony as well. One MCC worker explained the connection between nonresistance and service, “invariably rests on the command of Christ to love and not kill, to serve rather than to destroy.”⁴⁹

*MCC would
also send
people to do
relief*

By 1943 MCC was actively planning for the recruitment and training of a large contingent of workers who would engage in relief service on the European continent and elsewhere at war’s end. It had also identified the essential qualifications it required of all relief workers: confession of faith in Christ, membership in good standing in a congregation (not necessarily Mennonite or Brethren in Christ), a lifestyle of service and obedience to God, a testimony of peace, and sufficient physical, moral, and spiritual stamina to cope with inevitable challenges.⁵⁰ These qualifications would not change much in the future. MCC also saw as desirable: completion of relief worker training, speaking and reading knowledge of the language of the place of assignment, a

friendly disposition, leadership ability, and a posture of respect for the religious convictions of others.⁵¹ MCC agreed to pay the travel, health and maintenance costs of workers and to provide them with ten dollars monthly for “pocket money.”⁵²

The placement of workers in England and elsewhere represented the beginnings of this larger relief service program. By war’s end, MCC rapidly expanded its number of workers on the European continent and far beyond. Canadian workers participated in this expansion.⁵³ Wilson Hunsberger of



Marion Nafziger of Ontario died in Singapore in 1946 en route to an MCC assignment in India. Photo credit MAO.

Waterloo served in Belgium, John Fretz of Kitchener in France, and Andrew and Reta Bean, also of Kitchener, in Italy. Two men, Menno Klassen of Altona, Manitoba and Alfred Lindhorst of Galt, Ontario, went to Paraguay to provide agricultural extension work among Mennonite refugees who had settled there in the early 1930s. Linda Reimer of Steinbach, Manitoba and Marjorie Shantz of Preston, Ontario were assigned to Puerto Rico, while Helen Friesen from Steinbach and Margaret Jahnke of Herbert, Saskatchewan joined the growing MCC office in Akron. Arthur Jahnke, also from Herbert, served in Egypt where he worked with wartime refugees from Yugoslavia. Arthur Goossen from Coaldale, Alberta was assigned to China. Nurse Darlene Climenhaga, a member of the Brethren in Christ Church in Kindersley, Saskatchewan, joined the MCC team in the Philippines.

J. Harold Sherk of Ontario left his wife and daughters for two years to serve as the director of MCC’s India program after a major famine in 1942 prompted an MCC relief response there.

One Canadian worker bound for India, Marion Elizabeth Nafziger of Ontario, never reached her destination. She and US worker, Mildred Shoemaker, left San Francisco by ocean freighter in April 1946. They reached Singapore when Nafziger became very ill. Authorities insisted that Shoemaker travel on, as she had no visa, but they removed Nafziger to a local hospital. She died alone in Singapore on 8 July 1946 and was buried there by Methodist missionaries. Nafziger was the first Canadian worker to die in MCC service.⁵⁴

At a certain point MCC stipulated that workers be at least twenty-five years of age. This requirement could present challenges to potential service workers. In 1945, for example, newly married Fred and Toni Peters of British Columbia applied for MCC service. After being accepted, they moved to Kitchener to await their assignment and departure. In Kitchener, MCC learned

that Toni was not yet twenty-five, and she was informed that she could not go. Consequently, Fred travelled to Akron for a brief orientation, then England, and eventually Holland and Germany where he completed two years of service without his wife. For a time Toni continued her work in the MCC clothing depot in Kitchener, carefully itemizing the contents of each crate of clothing bound for Holland, before returning to BC due to pregnancy and other health concerns. A year later and across the ocean, Fred unpacked one of the crates Toni had prepared in Kitchener. He recognized her handwriting and became especially homesick for her and their new baby. He would finally meet his new daughter when she was seventeen months old.⁵⁵

Other couples were also separated from each other or from children when they joined MCC service. Andrew and Reta Bean of Kitchener joined MCC in 1946, leaving their one-year-old daughter Elizabeth with her grandparents. Later generations would look askance at this practice, but it is important to remember the context. During the war thousands of men and women serving with the Armed Forces were separated from their families for years. Likewise, most conscientious objectors were assigned to alternative service sites far from their loved ones. COs and their families did not appreciate being apart, and sometimes wives re-located to be near their husbands. But most of them recognized that a temporary separation was perhaps a small price to pay, in light of the sacrifices that soldiers made on the war front. As Andrew Bean put it, “My alternative service had not separated me from my family, nor had I faced hazard to life and limb. That was to come with MCC.”⁵⁶

Resettling More Mennonite Refugees from the Soviet Union

MCC had been organized in 1920 as an inter-Mennonite response to the suffering of fellow Mennonites in the Soviet Union. The end of World War II revealed that, once again, these members of the “household of faith” were in need of assistance. Thousands of Mennonites had



MCC workers Ellen Harder, Sam Goering, Edna Hunsperger, Peter Dyck and Elfrieda Klassen Dyck, in England in 1945. Photo credit MHC.

escaped the Soviet Union with the German army retreat in 1943, and were now scattered through Germany and Poland, seeking to avoid being repatriated by Soviet army forces. They were among millions of other refugees and displaced persons across Europe. The stories of their excruciating suffering once again began to reach Canadian relatives after no communication for a decade or so. Once again the hearts of Canadian Mennonites—particularly those who themselves had escaped the Soviet Union only twenty years earlier—longed to help. The refugees were, after all, not only brothers and sisters in the faith; in many cases they were blood relatives. So, in addition to its growing work of feeding and clothing the needy, whoever they might be, MCC undertook

a mammoth effort to locate Mennonite refugees scattered through Europe, to provide them with food, clothing, and shelter as needed, and to assist them in finding a new home in Canada or South America.

The dramatic story of MCC's rescue of Mennonite refugees of World War II has been told elsewhere in depth, so it will not be repeated here.⁵⁷ What is important about that story for the evolution of MCC in Canada, is how this new mission impacted Canadian Mennonites, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, and the relationship of Canadians to MCC.

In the first place, this project involved key Canadians whose names would quickly become household words, especially in western Canada. First and foremost were Peter and Elfrieda Klassen Dyck. The Dycks had left England for Holland in 1945, and then moved on to Berlin in 1946. They were at the centre

of a seemingly miraculous escape in early 1947 of one thousand Mennonite refugees from Berlin, through the Russian Zone and the peril of possible repatriation to the Soviet Union, to a Dutch ship waiting to relocate them to Paraguay. Peter Dyck's re-counting of this story was memorialized as MCC legend.⁵⁸ Elfrieda Dyck's own fame grew as she alone accompanied several



MCC workers Lois Yake, Siegfried and Margaret Janzen in front of their office at Gronau, Germany. The Janzens were from St. Catharines, Ontario. Photo credit MHC.

shiploads of refugees bound for Paraguay. On one fateful voyage, the engines of the infamous Charleton Monarch died, the food spoiled, the crew mutinied, and it seemed the weary refugees would never reach their intended home; Elfrieda's leadership ensured they did. In 1947 the Dycks returned to North America for a speaking tour about MCC's work with Mennonite refugees. In the US they spoke fifty-three times to audiences totalling 45,000, and in Canada sixty-five times to audiences numbering an estimated at 60,000. Their stories—as well as their riveting movies, a new technology for Canadian Mennonites—helped raise thousands of dollars for MCC's refugee resettlement work.⁵⁹

Although many Canadians already knew C.F. Klassen because of his role as *Reiseschuld* collector for the Board of Colonization and treasurer of the western relief committee, he became even more prominent because of his association with MCC's refugee resettlement program. Beginning in 1945 and continuing until his early death in 1954, he directed MCC's work with Mennonite refugees in Europe, spending more time there than at home in Canada with his wife Mary and children. Like the Dycks, Klassen was known to Canadians for the spellbinding reports he shared in churches back home. In the camps in Germany he was known as the refugees' "Moses,"⁶⁰ and as the tall distinguished man with the big shiny black car.⁶¹

Many other Canadian Mennonites also participated in MCC's refugee program work in Europe. Dorothy Swartzentruber of Kitchener, Ontario served as secretary at the main MCC office in Frankfurt and assistant to C.F. Klassen. Siegfried and Margaret Janzen of Vineland, Ontario established and operated MCC's main refugee camp at Gronau. Cornelius J. Dyck, of Laird, Saskatchewan, worked with the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany (CRALOG), the organization through which MCC shipped massive amounts of material aid. As indicated earlier, many other Canadians worked with other aspects of MCC's work in Europe and elsewhere.

The post-war refugee emergency brought renewed purpose to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC). While MCC attended to refugee needs in Europe, the CMBC was responsible for their resettlement in Canada. Under the new leadership of J.J. Thiessen, an immigrant of the 1920s and a minister in Saskatoon, the balance of the *Reiseschuld* was finally paid to the Canadian Pacific Railway in November 1946.⁶² This opened the door to new contracts with the CPR, which stood ready to transport Mennonite refugees on credit as it had in the 1920s. Thiessen also began an energetic period of advocacy with government officials in Ottawa to again open the doors to Mennonite refugees. A mass movement like the 1920s was not possible, but bit by bit Thiessen and his colleagues obtained permission for several thousand

refugees to immigrate. Between 1947 and 1951, the CMBC reported 7,698 new Mennonite immigrants, with the highest number of 3,828 arriving in 1948.⁶³ Many more would have come to Canada had the immigration regulations been less stringent. Numerous refugees opted to move to Paraguay because the Paraguayan government was eager to receive them and in a more timely manner than Canada.

The CMBC and MCC worked closely together on the resettlement of refugees. The arrangement was that MCC would attend to all refugee matters in Europe, while the CMBC assumed responsibility for their resettlement in Canada. This worked quite well, though there were some misunderstandings and tensions along the way.⁶⁴ The overall result was to draw the hearts of many Canadian Mennonites closer to the mission of MCC.

Conclusion

World War II and its aftermath transformed Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in profound ways. The war broadened their world and their worldview. Whether they simply listened to news on their radios, performed alternative service in national parks or psychiatric hospitals, read the reports of MCC relief work in England and beyond, Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ saw the world in a new way. Historian Ted Regehr writes that even those who remained in their rural communities became familiar with distant places and problems, while those who engaged in service projects “came to see the outside world less as a hostile and threatening place to be avoided and more as a suffering, damaged, and violated place in desperate need of Christian love and compassion.”⁶⁵

Secondly, Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ were also challenged to give authenticity to their stance of nonresistance through alternative service and through active support for war sufferers relief. Not all Mennonite and Brethren in Christ men chose alternative service—a full thirty percent opted for regular service within the Armed Forces—and probably not all people contributed to war relief. Still, there was a sense in which it was no longer possible, and not even morally right, to refrain from participation in war without serving humanity in some way. In the 1950s, this growing understanding of service would find expression in MCC Voluntary Service.

Thirdly, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ recognized the need to work more cooperatively in their negotiations with government and in their relief efforts. They were not fully successful. Still, the level of cooperation they achieved

represented a significant improvement over what had been possible in World War I and during the 1920s. As young men worked alongside other “varieties” of Mennonites in alternative service camps, and as women sewed and canned for a cause that linked them with others, differences of language, culture, and theology lost some of their importance. Mennonite Central Committee—both its head office in Akron, Pennsylvania and the Canadian office in Kitchener—was a factor in encouraging greater inter-Mennonite cooperation.

Fourth, Mennonites were gradually learning that their compassion must extend not only to their own people, but to all those who suffer. To be sure, Canadian Mennonites who had come from the Soviet Union in the 1920s were especially generous in giving for the new movement of refugees; they would continue to lobby MCC for more help to the household of faith. That said, many others understood that genuine Christian love and compassion must extend beyond their own people. MCC was a factor in expanding people’s circles of caring.

MCC was very much a part of the transformation Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ experienced between 1939 and 1948. It nourished new understandings about the world, about themselves, and about each other. It also provided a channel through which those understandings found concrete expression. Before long, some Canadians would begin to dream about an organization like MCC in Canada.

CHAPTER 3

Serving in the Name of Christ, 1948-1963

IN 1953 KATHERINE Penner of Lena, Manitoba wrote an article for a new English-language inter-Mennonite newspaper, *The Canadian Mennonite*, in which she described seven years of service with MCC in the Kitchener office.¹ As secretary, she read the many letters that arrived—letters either requesting help or expressing gratitude for help received. Some of the letters were addressed to “Dear Mr. MCC” and one even arrived addressed to “Dear Mr. Super Shrunk.” (The letter writer, not knowing English, had simply copied the salutation from a clothing label, where it appeared alongside MCC’s slogan “In the Name of Christ.”) Penner also did the book-keeping and assisted in the clothing depot.



C.J. Rempel and Katherine Penner at work at the MCC office in Kitchener, Ontario, 1950. Photo credit MAO.

She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to get to know groups of Mennonites she had not met before. She ended her article by encouraging youth to consider service. “I can assure you from my own experience that your blessings will be manifold,” she wrote.

Like many of the young single women who served in the Kitchener office, Penner eventually accepted an overseas assignment with MCC. In Germany she worked with

refugees and a new exchange program for European and North American youth that would eventually become known as the International Visitor Exchange Program (IVEP). While on assignment, she met and married John

D. Hostetler of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. After their term of service in Germany, Katherine and John Hostetler made their home in Akron. John became the director of Material Aid for MCC, while Katherine raised two sons, hosted and corresponded with friends from around the world, and continued to support MCC programs in many ways. She died in 2009 at the age of 84.

Katherine Penner Hostetler's story is significant not because it was so extraordinary but because it was so typical. Like so many of the young people who joined MCC service in the post-war years, Penner was from a very small isolated farming community. Like many, especially from Canada, she and her family had been recipients of MCC assistance, and she now wished to "give back" by serving others. Like the majority of workers she was female. She was also single, but like many MCC workers, she met her spouse while on assignment. The marriage of a Dutch-German Mennonite immigrant from the Canadian prairies to a Swiss-German Mennonite from the eastern United States was symbolic of how MCC helped to build bridges between Mennonite groups in North America.² In many ways, the experience of MCC service transformed Penner's world and profoundly shaped her life.

...

MCC's service program, both overseas and within North America, captured the imagination of many Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in the post-war period.³ During the 1950s and early 1960s, international tensions between the US and USSR renewed Mennonites' concerns about conscientious objection and exemption from military service. Within the Cold War context, MCC service provided a way for individuals to meet human need, express Christian love, and witness for peace. At the same time, a standing committee to represent to the federal government the concerns of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ regarding conscientious objection seemed increasingly necessary. That need, along with a desire to consolidate inter-Mennonite efforts in relief, immigration, service, and peace, led to the formation of MCC Canada in 1963. MCC provided the model for uniting Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in this joint ministry.

A Vision for Service

Even before World War II ended, Canada entered a period of sustained economic growth. Rapid expansion in the manufacturing sector in southern Ontario drove this growth. The discovery of oil and massive investments in

the energy sector in Alberta led to the tripling of its urban population between 1941 and 1961. The grain-growing provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and berry-producing province of British Columbia did not experience the same dramatic economic growth, but improved commodity prices benefited their economies, even as the mechanization of agriculture meant fewer farmers.

Canadian Mennonites benefited significantly from the economic boom. Indeed, in the decades following the war, they became “a prosperous people.”⁴ Post-war immigrants settled in urban centres where jobs were plentiful. Rural Mennonites, like many other Canadians, increasingly moved to the cities, bought cars and bungalows, and ensured that their children got an education. They also donated money to a host of new urban congregations and institutions: high schools, colleges, hospitals, and homes for the aged. Their newfound prosperity, combined with a new outlook on the world and their role in it, facilitated the growth of MCC and its programs. The service program in particular would likely not have been possible without the financial resources now available. Some individuals expressed concern about how Mennonites were buying into the materialism and individualism of the age. They believed service and all it entailed—living in community, serving the needy, and foregoing wages—offered an antidote to these evils.



The Brandon Summer Service unit on an outing to Clear Lake, Manitoba 1954. Havey Taves is third from left in the front row. Photo credit MAO.

*A positive
and practical
way to share
nonresistant
love*

In 1944 a group of US women asked MCC to provide a form of service for them as it had administered an alternative service program for men. The result was the establishment of two Summer Service units for women at psychiatric institutions. The experiment was deemed so successful that, at the end of the war, MCC turned these into co-ed units. It also established many more units across the US, and in 1948 it appointed David Schroeder, a graduate of the new Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, to develop Summer Service units in Canada. That first year, thirty-three young people—mostly women—served in units at three psychiatric institutions: at North Battleford, Saskatchewan; Brandon, Manitoba; and London, Ontario. Two years later, when Schroeder left the position for graduate studies, the number of participants had increased to sixty-four workers in a variety of institutions. At the peak in 1959, a total of ninety-eight young people—mostly Canadians but also US citizens—were engaged in Summer Service across Canada.⁵

In 1952 Harvey Taves joined the MCC office in Kitchener with a new vision for the role of MCC in Canada.⁶ While the office would continue to process donations and material aid, and inform churches about MCC's worldwide ministry, Taves' mandate was to develop an active Voluntary Service program in Canada.⁷ During the war, MCC colleagues had linked nonresistance and overseas relief service. Harvey Taves, David Schroeder, and others of their generation saw Voluntary Service in the North American context in a similar way—as a positive and practical way for Mennonites to share nonresistant love. It was also a Christian witness against the negative aspects of a booming post-war economy: consumerism, individualism and self-centredness. Frank Epp, a peer of Taves and Schroeder and editor of *The Canadian Mennonite*, wrote, "Voluntary Service in the name of Christ is the answer to the materialism and militarism of our age."⁸

Harvey Taves was eager to establish year-round Voluntary Service (VS) units in Canada. Summer Service was really just an internship in service. Summer workers actually earned wages (a recognition that many of them were trying to finance a college education), even though they turned a portion over to MCC. Year-round VS workers, on the other hand, were expected to be more mature and to make a financial sacrifice for at least a year, receiving a personal allowance of only ten dollars per month. When the first year-round unit of five workers began at the Ontario Hospital (a psychiatric facility in west Toronto) in 1953, Taves wrote, "We believe that each person should show his devotion to

God by being willing to serve Him at least a year without thought of personal gain.”⁹ Soon after, another year-round unit opened at a Mennonite-run home for the mentally ill in Vineland, Ontario.

Taves was not content to simply place Voluntary Service workers in existing institutions. He wanted to develop a project owned and operated by MCC and which demonstrated MCC’s unique ethos: nonresistance translated into active love.¹⁰ The result was Ailsa Craig Boys Farm, a type of foster home near London where troubled teen boys could be placed for several weeks or months for “recovery.”¹¹ Developed in conjunction with the Conference of Historic Peace Churches and staffed with Voluntary Service workers, Ailsa Craig was, according to Lucille Marr, a brash and naïve experiment, built without much expertise in the fields of social work or psychology.¹² The Ontario churches, however, loved it and supported it enthusiastically through the 1950s and 1960s.

The second of “two innovative, uniquely Canadian programs”¹³ was the placement of Voluntary Service teachers and nurses in Newfoundland. The province had just joined Canada, having shaken off British colonial status only in 1949. The Depression of the 1930s and the inadequate British colonial administration had left Newfoundland poor, isolated, and without the services and infrastructure that were developing elsewhere in Canada. At the insistence

of feisty new premier Joey Smallwood, Ottawa began to provide subsidies for roads, social services, health, and education that would help Newfoundland to modernize. It remained a challenge, however, to find qualified individuals to fill the vacant positions for teachers, nurses, and social workers.

Harvey Taves learned of the need for trained personnel in Newfoundland through family connections. In rather short order, he contacted Mary Nafziger, an Ontario nurse who had just completed serving as leader of the Summer Service unit in The Pas, Manitoba. By November 1954 Nafziger was in Newfoundland as the first of many MCC workers who would follow.¹⁴ Soon after, Taves, with the support of MCC officials in Akron, arranged for the placement of teachers in outport communities along the Newfoundland



Mary Nafziger was the first MCC service worker in Newfoundland in 1954. Photo credit MAO.

coast. The first group of four teachers—two Canadians and two US citizens—arrived and began teaching in fall 1955. By the end of the year a total of nine

MCC workers were serving in Newfoundland. That number would continue to grow until it reached a peak of forty-three in 1971.¹⁵

As elsewhere, MCC workers in Newfoundland were expected to provide a Christian witness on the job and off. So, in addition to their regular work as teachers and nurses, they taught Sunday school and vacation Bible school, led Bible studies, sang in choirs, and even preached occasionally in local



An un-identified service worker teaches Daily Vacation Bible School in Baie Verte, Newfoundland, 1956. Photo credit MAO.

community churches. The workers were not expected to plant Mennonite churches. Along the way, MCC had developed an understanding with the various Mennonite mission boards that the latter would do the work of proclamation, evangelization, and church planting, and MCC's role would be to meet physical and social needs in the spirit of Christian love. In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, workers were therefore encouraged to support and strengthen existing churches, whatever the denomination.

Through their service, MCC workers in Newfoundland also raised money for MCC. MCC received from the Newfoundland government full salaries for its workers, an amount considerably more than the cost of maintaining them and providing their monthly allowance. MCC used the revenue thus generated in Newfoundland to support VS programs elsewhere in Canada and in the US. As early as 1958 some workers began to question the practise of using revenue earned in one of Canada's poorest provinces to fund volunteer programs in wealthier provinces and states.¹⁶ But it would be several decades before MCC would confront this problem head-on.

The Newfoundland program provided a model for the kind of ministry that MCC would initiate in Africa a few years later. When independence movements swept the African continent in the 1960s, the newly independent countries were in situations not unlike that of Newfoundland in the 1940s—wishing to modernize, but lacking trained personnel. After visiting the Newfoundland

program, Robert Kreider, who had served in Germany at the end of the war, devised a plan for a Teachers Abroad Program (TAP) which would provide trained teachers for these new African nations.¹⁷ No sooner was TAP launched in 1962 than idealistic young teaching graduates, including many Canadian Mennonites, signed up for teaching assignments they hoped would build these new African-led nations.

Most young people who served with MCC were changed by the experience of service, whether it was in Summer Service, North American Voluntary Service, or overseas relief work. This transformation did not come about without struggle or soul-searching. Indeed, many workers found the challenges of learning a new language (where necessary), reading new cultural cues, witnessing incredible human need, coping with loneliness, or simply getting along with the other members of their unit, very difficult. Nonetheless, many of them spoke about how their lives had been utterly changed by the experience of service. Some years later Robert Kreider would refer to MCC service as “the most significant of our Mennonite educational institutions. . . . It has no credits, no formal curriculum, no diplomas, no grades, relatively few academic requirements, no tuition and fees, only slight incidental costs. . . . For many young people the MCC service experience is the most intense educational experience of a lifetime.”¹⁸

Waldemar Janzen of Waterloo, Ontario was a young Mennonite refugee who spent two summers in service, one at a sanatorium and another at a psychiatric institution. In his memoir, he reflects on how work with the severely mentally ill and physically disabled taught him lessons about the meaning of life. From time to time he and fellow workers asked themselves what meaning there was for people who crouched in a corner in the same position all day, uttering nothing. As a young theology student—and, later, a professor at Canadian Mennonite Bible College—Janzen recognized that, if nothing else, such individuals protected society from becoming consumed with “tooth-and-claw survival of the fittest” or from an ideology of the superior race. Janzen had spent several years in post-war Germany and struggled to come to terms with how Hitler’s regime had cared for him and others, while murdering millions of Jews, as well as people with disabilities. Caring for these “most helpless of people,” he felt, was a way of establishing a “front line for compassion and love.”¹⁹

Agatha Klassen of Yarrow, BC served on rugged Twillingate Island, Newfoundland from 1956-58 as one member of the unit of fifteen teachers and nurses. She was fascinated with the people of Twillingate and their remote and isolated, yet contented, life. She wrote, “They seem so happy and carefree.

Many live in the village where they were born. Most struggle for a living and yet they do not spend their time worrying about little things. They are probably happier than hundreds who are rich and have seen the world.”²⁰ She concluded the lessons she had gained through Voluntary Service would remain with her through life.

Katherine Dyck, a nurse from Rosthern, Saskatchewan, established a clinic for pregnant women, mothers, and infants in Pusan, South Korea after the Korean War in 1953. In her first reports home, she expressed great impatience with “these Orientals” because they were slow, lethargic, and indecisive.²¹ Not long afterwards she regretted her impatience. She had learned that, in addition to cultural attitudes



Katherine Dyck of Rosthern, Saskatchewan with Dr. Kim, Dr. Song, Dr. Lee, and Dr. Chung, at a well-baby clinic at the Pusan, South Korea provincial health centre, 1956. Photo credit MAO.

which encouraged people to defer to the white westerner, her colleagues were malnourished and this made them tire easily.²² Over time she gained a deep appreciation for her Korean co-workers and the difficult circumstances under which they worked. Sadly, Dyck and fellow MCC worker Bertha Kornelson of Vancouver drowned in Korea in 1956, before their return to Canada.²³ This tragic incident pointed to some of the risks of service.

Between 1940 and 1970 over 900 Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, as well as approximately thirty persons from other church traditions, served for at least a full year with MCC. Some individuals served multiple terms. Almost twice as many Canadian women as men served: 604 versus 341.²⁴ (See Chart 3.1) Single women in particular signed up much more frequently than single men. In 1950 a full forty percent of all MCC's overseas workers (Canadians and US citizens) were single women.²⁵

Why did so many more women, especially single women, respond to the call to serve? One reason, no doubt, is related to the exigencies of war. As men were drawn away from home for military service, alternative service, or other employment opportunities, Canadian women, including Mennonites, moved

Chart 3.1

**CANADIAN SERVICE WORKERS IN MCC BY GENDER,
DENOMINATION, AND PROVINCE, 1941 TO 1970**

Note: Includes service workers who served at least one year in Canada, the U.S., or overseas. Summer Service workers are not included.

Category of Worker	AB	BC	MB	ON	PEI	SK
Amish men				1		
Amish women			1	9		
BIC men				6		
BIC women	1			8		1
GC men	7	21	60	25		36
GC women	23	45	77	44		55
MB men	5	39	36	15		6
MB women	12	83	47	34		8
OM men	2	1		40	1	1
OM women	5	1	6	83		5
Other Menn men	2	2	26			2
Other Menn women		2	21	3		1
Non-Menno men	1		4			2
Non-Menno women	1	3	7	13		5
Total men	17	63	126	87	1	47
Total women	41	135	159	194		75
Grand total	58	198	285	281	1	122

BIC = Brethren in Christ; GC = General Conference; MB = Mennonite Brethren; OM = “Old” Mennonite

Source: Paul Classen, “Statistics on Mennonite Central Committee Personnel,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 324-329.

to fill in the gaps. Many found themselves in the labour force, doing work that would have been off-limits to women only a few years earlier.²⁶ It is possible these new war-time opportunities inspired some young women to take the bold step of joining MCC service after the war. MCC service, particularly in the international context, often opened doors for women to assume levels of leadership and responsibility not possible had they remained at home.²⁷

At another level, the disproportionate number of women in service may have been related to women's "inner compulsion" to serve. Mennonite women grew up serving others at home, at church, and in the workplace. From childhood they were taught faithfulness required submission, selflessness, and even sacrifice, all important elements of service as understood in Mennonite churches.²⁸ The concept of service therefore meshed with the expectations of women's roles within Mennonite communities at the time. Service "in the Name of Christ" resonated with their self-understanding as female disciples of Jesus.

MCC administrators articulated service as a radical and counter-cultural witness to the militarism and materialism of the world. But service as they envisioned it in the 1950s was not a call to transformed relationships between men and women—at least not yet. It would be several more years before Mennonite women would challenge their position of subservience within the church and within the MCC context. Then they would resist notions of service that reinforced rather than dismantled relationships of inequality. In the meantime, Canadian women continued to sign up for MCC service in disproportionate numbers.

Relationships to MCC

The involvement of Canadian young people in MCC's relief work and service programs fostered a sense of loyalty to MCC and its mission of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and comforting the sick and suffering. However, through the 1950s, the relationship between MCC and the leadership of some of the Canadian organizations—specifically the Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC) and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC)—soured somewhat. Both these organizations had begun with broad denominational representation, but by the late 1940s they were essentially owned by two conferences: the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Moreover, they were dominated by *Russlaender* Mennonites who had arrived in the 1920s. And, despite the

existence of an Ontario immigrant and relief committee after 1947 (a provincial counterpart), they were perceived by many people to be “western” and to have interests distinct from those of Ontario. Several issues upset the “western Canadians” about MCC.

First of all, they felt that MCC was not doing enough to support post-war refugees in Paraguay. MCC had facilitated the emigration of some 4,500 refugees to Paraguay in 1947 and 1948, and provided several months of assistance. But the challenges facing the refugees were staggering.²⁹ Through letters, reports, and the visits of key people, the MCRC and CMBC came to believe that MCC simply was not doing enough. They were particularly unhappy MCC was expanding its relief and service work to other parts of the world while the “family of faith” still experienced great need.³⁰ By 1951 the MCRC made a policy decision to send some of its revenue directly to Paraguay, rather than all of it through MCC. From here on, it would forward at least half of its relief aid directly to Paraguay, primarily for schools and hospitals, and would send the balance to MCC, specifically designated for MCC’s Paraguay program.

Orie Miller, executive secretary for MCC, visited western Canada in 1952 and again in 1953, ostensibly to try to resolve the conflict, but this policy remained fixed. The western Canadian concern about Paraguay—and about the possibility of administering some international work directly—would be an important consideration in the formation of MCC Canada a decade later.

To be fair, MCC’s policy did not reflect a callous disregard for the counsel of its constituent groups. Rather, MCC was attempting to express a more generous relief and service witness, one that did not provide care and compassion just to Mennonites.³¹ An MCC executive committee member from Kansas admonished a Manitoba audience in 1955, “All are worthy of our love and we should not limit ourselves to helping only our own people, a danger which is a very real problem among the Mennonites at this moment.”³²

MCC’s interest in establishing an office in western Canada also contributed to tensions with western leaders. As noted earlier, David Schroeder of Winnipeg gave leadership to Voluntary Service and peace education projects in western Canada between 1948 and 1950; for a short time C. Wilbert Loewen of Steinbach continued this work. But MCC was interested in having a full-fledged regional office in the west, similar to the one it had in Kitchener. The Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee of the *Kanadier* Mennonite groups of southern Manitoba affirmed the idea of such a regional office, but the MCRC and the CMBC of the *Russlaender*-led groups saw the proposal as a threat to their own work.³³ They felt their organizations were adequately interpreting and promoting the relief cause in western Canada.³⁴

They also felt that at times MCC intervened inappropriately in Canadian affairs. They took exception to the fact that Orie Miller and his successor, William Snyder, occasionally travelled to Ottawa to discuss immigration or relief matters with government officials. They worried MCC might also try to represent Canadians on issues of peace and alternative service.³⁵ Clearly, they regarded the relationship with MCC differently than their Ontario counterparts. They were eager to continue to work with MCC—indeed, none of them suggested severing the relationship—but they did yearn for a different kind of relationship than the one embraced by Ontario. These dynamics would also play significantly into the formation of MCC Canada.



This delegation of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ leaders met with Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in 1951 to discuss exemption from military service for conscientious objectors. Photo credit MAO.

Ongoing Concerns about War and Peace

World War II had barely ended before much of the world found itself drawn into a Cold War which pitted communist East and capitalist West against one another. In Canada, the Gouzenko affair—which revealed the presence of a Soviet spy ring reaching into Parliament, the military, and

the civil service—represented the end of innocence for Canadians.³⁶ A Maoist victory in China in 1949 and North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950 convinced many people that a communist attack on the West was imminent. Canada signed on to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and, like other members, began a rapid rebuilding of the Armed Forces. Canadian military spending quickly soared to heights that would not be repeated until the late 1980s.

Mennonites and Brethren in Christ observed these developments with alarm. They feared Canada would follow the US re-imposition of conscription in 1951. Once again they felt it was important to appeal to the government for assurances regarding military exemption and alternative service. The Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC) in Ontario took the lead in arranging a meeting with Prime Minister St. Laurent on 22 February 1951.

Significantly, the nine-member delegation included representatives of the CHPC, as well as the western *Russlaender* and *Kanadier* groups. It was the most representative Mennonite delegation to make its way to Ottawa to date. The group requested that, in the event of a national emergency requiring conscription, it be given an opportunity to negotiate a form of alternate service under civilian administration and in keeping with the peace testimony of the churches. The members assured the prime minister they were willing to engage in a variety of forms of service that would serve the country and humanity: relief work at home or abroad, service in psychiatric institutions, hospitals, industry, or agriculture. The prime minister assured the delegation its concerns would be honoured and there should be no difficulty in making suitable provisions for alternative service.

Fears about war and conscription persisted. Harvey Taves and others continued to promote Voluntary Service as peace witness. In the US, where conscription was reintroduced in 1951, MCC created the Pax program, whereby young men of military age could sign up for two years of overseas service in lieu of military service.³⁷ Taves encouraged young Canadian men to participate in Pax, even though no conscription existed in Canada. Harry Harms of Sardis, British Columbia was the first to sign up. He turned out to be so popular at the South Korean orphanage where he was assigned that, long after he left Korea in 1956, many of the boys continued to call themselves “Harry Harms.” Another Pax worker, Menno Wiebe of Abbotsford, BC went to Paraguay. Wiebe credited Peter Dyck with urging him to join Pax. Dyck had spoken at the Mennonite Educational Institute where Wiebe attended high school and had reportedly asked, “If your non-Mennonite neighbours are prepared to enter military service to defend the country, what kind of commitment are you peace-loving Christians prepared to give?”³⁸ Harvey Taves and others insisted that by doing Voluntary Service or overseas service or Pax, young people were demonstrating the depth of their commitment to peace and were offering a witness to government. He hoped this would strengthen Mennonites’ bargaining position in the event of conscription.³⁹



MDS logo. Photo credit MCC.

The Cold War and the horrifying spectre of nuclear attack also contributed to the formation of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). Later, Mennonite Disaster Service would be known primarily for the ways it mobilized volunteers to clean up after natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes. At the outset, however, it was closely linked with the effort of federal and

provincial governments to establish Civil Defence (CD) units that could respond to enemy attacks, including nuclear explosions. CD trained civilians in rescue and recovery, as well as emergency feeding, housing, and health care. By 1955 it was actively recruiting Mennonites in some parts of the country to join its roster of volunteers. In general, Mennonites could support CD's life-preserving functions, but many were apprehensive about the program's military flavour, the war psychology it seemed to promote, and its connection to the Department of Defence.⁴⁰ They wondered if there was a kind of alternative service for emergencies—a service directed by the church.

Canadian Mennonites had from time to time responded to local disasters: the Fraser Valley flood in BC in 1948, the Red River flood in southern Manitoba in 1950, and Hurricane Hazel in the Toronto area in 1954. But once again, it was the example of the US Mennonites and their formation of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) in 1955, which led to more organized efforts in Canada. With some help from US colleagues, Canadians established MDS organizations in Manitoba and British Columbia (1956), Ontario (1958) and Alberta and Saskatchewan (1959).⁴¹ Working through provincial, district, and congregational contact persons, MDS could mobilize volunteers almost overnight to provide teams of workers prepared to do clean-up, repair, or reconstruction work. In the US, MDS became a section within MCC, and came to be seen as a Mennonite alternative to Civil Defence. Some people wondered if MDS could become the church-directed alternative to Civil Defence in Canada too.

Ongoing questions related to alternative service, to Civil Defence, and to the need for a united and ongoing representation to government prompted the Conference of Historic Peace Churches to call a major peace conference in 1957. A broad representation from the various Mennonite conference groups (including the Manitoba *Kanadier*), the Brethren in Christ, and even some Hutterite observers, attended. The conference unanimously affirmed MDS as a church-directed alternative to Civil Defence, and it established consensus on future forms of alternative service. The conference also passed a resolution affirming the need for a standing national inter-Mennonite council that could represent all Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in negotiations with the government.⁴² Alternative service had been the issue that had divided *Russlaender* and *Kanadier* in Manitoba during the war; and a united representation to government had thus remained elusive. That the conference reached agreement on the issue which had been so divisive only fifteen years earlier was very significant.⁴³

It took nearly two full two years before the national inter-Mennonite peace

council became a reality. It finally came to life on 16 February 1959 when eight men, representing as many different conferences, met in the Lord Elgin Hotel in Ottawa. They decided on the name Historic Peace Church Council of Canada (HPCCC), chose an executive, and resolved to gain the active support of groups who had not yet named representatives. Their task was to address problems of mutual concern in the areas of peace and disaster service, and to represent all Mennonite groups in negotiations with the government. They began their work the very next day when they met with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker to once again express their desire for alternative service in the event of war.

A Canadian MCC

In commenting on the formation of the Historic Peace Church Council of Canada, *The Canadian Mennonite's* often brash young editor, Frank Epp, wrote on 1 March 1959,

The council has begun. It will grow. It will soon find that its peace witness must extend into other areas of social concern. It will also soon experience the need for closer relation to other inter-Mennonite relief and service organizations in Canada. This will eventually lead to the formation of a Canadian MCC.⁴⁴

Epp had been promoting the idea of a Canadian organization similar to MCC for some time, though he was not the first one to suggest it. A.A. Wiens of Clearbrook, BC had mentioned it already in 1951. By the late 1950s a growing number of voices, mostly those of educated and younger men, were calling for a realignment of the Canadian inter-Mennonite landscape so that it would look and function something like Mennonite Central Committee did in the US.

These men advanced several reasons for a restructuring.⁴⁵ First, an amalgamation of organizations would eliminate the confusion, duplication, and inefficiency that often resulted with similar organizations doing similar things. Duplication was particularly problematic when it came to gathering material aid for relief. For example, why should Mrs. Klassen of Steinbach send her MCC layette bundle to one clothing depot, while her next-door neighbour Mrs. Guenther sent hers to a different one, simply because their respective congregations supported different relief organizations?⁴⁶ Secondly, a single organization with a bold new mission would better capture the imagination of a younger generation. The aging members of the Board of Colonization

and its sister organization, the Mennonite Central Relief Committee, with their agendas focused on past immigrations and Paraguayan relief, did not inspire the loyalty of young people. Thirdly, amalgamation would better reflect the growing interest in and commitment to inter-Mennonite cooperation. A divided relief and service effort symbolized a poor Christian witness. A final reason—articulated more privately—was the fear on the part of some people, that if Canadian Mennonites did not centralize their inter-Mennonite relief and service work, MCC would do so for them.⁴⁷ It seems MCC's attempts to establish an office in western Canada through the 1950s prompted these unwarranted fears.

People who argued for a restructuring of the Canadian organizations presented different visions for this new inter-Mennonite body. Some felt what was needed was simply a Canada-wide merger of the various relief organizations: the NRRO in Ontario, the MCRC in western Canada, and the CMRC in Manitoba. Others desired something grander and more comprehensive—an agency which would coordinate not only relief, but also immigration, Voluntary Service, disaster service, alternative service, peace education, and government contact. In other words, they envisioned an organization which could facilitate whatever Mennonites and Brethren in Christ wished to do together. In the end it was this broader vision that won out, aided by a steady stream of editorials in *The Canadian Mennonite*, as well as some behind-the-scenes networking by a group of younger men.

The story of the complex process which finally resulted in the new body has been told elsewhere.⁴⁸ Suffice it to say that by the end of 1963, a wide representation of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ denominations had agreed to the transformation of their existing inter-Mennonite organizations into one new national entity known as Mennonite Central Committee Canada, with provincial counterparts. The existing inter-Mennonite organizations with their respective mandates of relief, immigration, service, peace, and representation to government would be subsumed in this new body. (See Chart 3.2) Some of these organizations, such as the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, formed in 1918, and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC), formed in 1922, had long histories, and held special places in the hearts of their respective constituencies. The CMBC had in fact merged in with the Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC) in 1960 to form the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council (CMRIC), an intermediate step to the formation of MCC Canada. Other organizations, such as the Historic Peace Church Council of Canada, formed in 1959, had not yet had opportunity to prove themselves. Some organizations, which had been more provincially based, became the

Chart 3.2

ORGANIZATIONS AND ROLES SUBSUMED IN MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE CANADA

This chart demonstrates how the formation of MCC Canada brought together a wide range of inter-Mennonite organizations working in the areas of relief, immigration, service and peace, as well as providing a means whereby they could speak to government with a united voice.

Name of Organization	Dates in existence	Constituency
Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO)	1918-1964	Ontario Mennonites and Brethren in Christ; Swiss German Mennonites in western Canada
Canadian Central Committee (CCC)	1920-1922	Mennonites in western Canada
Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC)	1922-1960	Broad representation of Mennonites across Canada initially; later on, <i>Russlaender</i> Mennonites
Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC)	1940-1964	Ontario Mennonites and Brethren in Christ
Western Service Committee	1942-1946	Mennonites in western Canada except <i>Kanadier</i> groups in southern Manitoba
Aeltestenkomitee	1940-1946	<i>Kanadier</i> Mennonite groups in southern Manitoba
Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC)	1940-1960	Mennonites in western Canada except <i>Kanadier</i> groups in southern Manitoba
Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC)	1940-1964	<i>Kanadier</i> Mennonite groups in southern Manitoba

The shaded area indicates an organization or committee which was no longer in existence at the time of the formation of MCC Canada but whose constituencies and roles were nevertheless incorporated into MCC Canada.

The chart does not depict the work of the local and regional women’s sewing circles and organizations which linked informally and organically to the various relief committees.

Purpose/Role	Special Notes
To collect money and material aid for relief	
To collect money and material aid for relief for Mennonites in USSR	Subsumed in CMBC c. 1922
To facilitate immigration of Mennonites from USSR and later Paraguay	Merged with MCRC in 1960 to form CMRIC
To negotiate military service exemption and attend to needs of conscientious objectors; later, to facilitate Christian service	
To negotiate military service exemption and attend to needs of conscientious objectors	Informal committee which worked closely with CHPC; same leadership as CMBC
To negotiate military service exemption and attend to needs of conscientious objectors	
To collect money and material aid for relief	Merged with CMBC in 1960 to form CMRIC
To collect money and material aid for relief	

Name of Organization	Dates in existence	Constituency
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) - Kitchener Office	1944-1964	Mennonites and Brethren in Christ across Canada
Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)	1955 to present	Mennonites across Canada
Historic Peace Church Council of Canada (HPCCC)	1959-1964	Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, and Quakers across Canada
Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council (CMRIC)	1960-1964	

Source: Esther Epp, “The Origins of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)” (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980).

Purpose/Role	Special Notes
To receive and distribute money and material aid for relief; to communicate work of MCC to Cdns; to facilitate service in Canada and to help recruit Cdns for service overseas	Office was owned and run by MCC in Akron; many of its functions became part of MCC Canada
To provide rapid response to emergencies	Became a special section of MCC Canada in 1964
To attend to peace, disaster, and military service concerns; to represent peace churches in negotiations with government	
To facilitate immigration of Mennonites to Canada; to collect money and material aid for relief	Represented the merger of CMBC and MCRC

foundation for new provincial MCCs. Within a short time, the “alphabet soup” of organizations that had populated the Canadian inter-Mennonite landscape would be radically simplified and transformed.

Of course, none of this restructuring happened without significant difficulty. The primary reluctance came from Ontario, which, understandably, had the most to lose in such a radical reorganization. Ontario Mennonites and Brethren in Christ possessed a strong and vibrant inter-Mennonite network, and they saw little need for change. For most of them, predominantly of Swiss-German descent, the ties of family, denominational conference, and geography pulled south to the US, rather than west to fellow Canadians. The twenty-year presence of MCC’s branch office in Kitchener had also served to strengthen the Ontario Mennonites’ connection to MCC. The Ontario people feared that whatever western Canadians wished to create would be something that would separate them from MCC. That one of the early names considered for the new organization was “Canadian Mennonite Council,” seemed evidence of this. Then too, they worried about the future of beloved projects such as Ailsa Craig, as well as the new office building and material aid centre they had just begun to construct at 50 Kent Avenue in Kitchener.

The organizational meeting took place at the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, on those cold days of 12-14 December 1963 (see Prologue).⁴⁹ David P. Neufeld, executive secretary of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, served as chairperson, and C.J. Rempel, formerly manager of MCC’s Kitchener office, acted as secretary. As one of three major presentations, Neufeld offered his thoughts on “My Dream About Canadian Mennonite Council.” Wilson Hunsberger, a social worker and MCC alumnus from Ontario, read a paper on the hoped-for relationship of the Council to MCC. J.M. Klassen, executive director of the CMRIC, did a presentation on the potential program and structure of the Council. An important meeting held the previous April had prepared the ground for this December gathering, and it seems most delegates were prepared to support the creation of a new national body. Even so, several critical and potentially divisive issues still needed to be resolved: the name of the organization, the location of its head office, the future of existing provincially-based work, and whether the new entity would carry on any international program independently of MCC.

*All parties
made
compromises
for the
common good*

Some diplomatic negotiating behind the scenes by J.M. Klassen and

Harvey Taves, who attended as observers and non-voting delegates, resulted in the compromises needed to bring the Ontario delegates on board. The new organization would be called, not Canadian Mennonite Council, but “Mennonite Central Committee (Canada).” It would have affiliated provincial bodies which would relate to the national body but also carry on some of their own work. It would do all of its international work through Mennonite Central Committee. The office, however, would be located in Winnipeg.⁵⁰

Lucille Marr, author of MCC Ontario’s history, argues MCC Canada resulted from western Canadian Mennonites pushing their more reluctant Ontario co-religionists into arrangements which they opposed.⁵¹ She is correct in that the primary drive for the establishment of MCC Canada came from people in western Canada. But arguably the western Canadians made significant concessions to meet the concerns of Ontarians. The decision to do all international work through MCC was one such concession. To be sure, western Canadians were not eager to walk away from MCC—far from it. Nevertheless, many of them did wish to continue the independent work begun in Paraguay in the 1950s. Some also desired the option of initiating their own limited international ministries elsewhere—perhaps in Cuba or China, where a US organization could not operate, or in India, where it was a distinct advantage to be Canadian.⁵² That door now seemed closed. The decision about the name was another important concession to Ontario, one that would have significant consequences for MCC Canada’s identity. The point is that all parties made compromises for the common good of a unified Canadian relief, immigration, service, and peace witness.⁵³

How did MCC officials respond to these developments in Canada? MCC’s official policy was one of non-interference. The MCC executive committee, meeting in August 1963, communicated “its readiness and willingness to cooperate fully with the wishes of the Canadian Mennonite organizations and particularly with the proposed Canadian Mennonite Council.”⁵⁴ William Snyder, executive secretary, indicated that MCC would work together with “whatever grouping the Canadian Mennonites wished to make.”⁵⁵ Privately, however, Snyder viewed the unfolding events with some apprehension. He was worried Canadian Mennonites wanted to withdraw their support from MCC and thus end an era of meaningful cooperation across the border.⁵⁶ He was especially concerned when he learned the new organization would share MCC’s name. He, and possibly others, felt that as long as Canadians were prepared to abide by MCC mission, personnel criteria, and policies, the choice of name was fine. If, however, they chose to chart an independent path while raising money in the name of MCC, this could be detrimental to MCC

and confusing to its supporters.⁵⁷

*A charitable
organization
in the relief of
human suffering*

The delegates to the Winnipeg meeting felt it was important to check with Mennonite Central Committee regarding the use of the MCC name. C.J. Rempel, serving as the secretary, sent a telegram to Snyder at the Atlantic Hotel in Chicago where the MCC executive committee was holding its regular meeting. When no response arrived, the Winnipeg gathering surmised permission had been granted. As it turned out, the telegram never reached Snyder; but when he learned of it he was reportedly distressed.⁵⁸ He and his colleagues were reassured when it was impressed upon them that MCC Canada would work cooperatively with MCC, honouring its policies and procedures, and not initiating any independent international work. Consequently, when the time came to renegotiate Canadian representation on MCC and to determine the fate of the Kitchener office, Snyder and others accepted the recommendations of MCC Canada.

Before the delegates to MCC Canada's historic founding meeting returned to their homes, they accepted a new constitution and elected a seven-member executive committee. According to the new constitution, MCC Canada's mandate would be to function as a charitable organization in the relief of human suffering, with special care for Mennonite and other refugees; to coordinate the relief, peace, and service efforts of the provincial organizations; to act as a united voice for Canadian Mennonite people in "matters of national concerns, such as peace witness, alternative service, government contact, immigration and other matters as may be designated to it by the member conferences or organizations;" and to give leadership in exploring and initiating new areas of service.⁵⁹ It was a broad and expansive mandate.

The delegates also gave careful attention to ensure MCC Canada's new executive committee adequately reflected and balanced the various stakeholder and interest groups: denominational conferences; Ontario and western voices; *Russlaender*, *Kanadier* and Swiss-German perspectives; experience and youth. David P. Neufeld, recently of Rosemary, Alberta, became the first chairperson, while Newton Gingrich of Markham, Ontario, representing the "Old" Mennonites, became vice-chair. C.J. Rempel, former manager of the MCC office in Kitchener, was the secretary; he was Mennonite Brethren and also had a long association with the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC). Treasurer Ted Friesen of Altona, Manitoba, was

originally from the Bergthaler Church and had been treasurer of the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC) for many years. Other members of the executive committee included J.J. Thiessen of Saskatoon, former head of the CMRC; E.J. Swalm of Duntroon, Ontario, long-time chair of the CHPC and also Brethren in Christ bishop; and the young Harvey Plett, an instructor at Steinbach Bible College and member of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Unfortunately, although women were intensely involved in the work of relief, service, and mission, it would be some years before they would find a place at the MCC Canada board table. The delegates mandated their new executive to hire the appropriate staff and to officially begin operations by June 1964.

MCC Canada's first executive secretary was Jacob M. Klassen. "J.M.," as he was widely known, was a one-year-old when his family arrived in Canada in February 1930, as part of that desperate 1929 escape from the Soviet Union. A teacher and hospital administrator, he and his family had completed a term of MCC service in South Korea in 1961 and then had located to Akron where Klassen had assumed a position in MCC's overseas relief administration. J.J. Thiessen had invited him to serve as executive director of the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council (the result of the 1961 merger of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the Mennonite Central Relief Committee) when it moved from Saskatoon to Winnipeg in 1962. Klassen had accepted the position on the condition he would be permitted to help work toward its demise and the formation of the new national organization.⁶⁰ He was from Steinbach, Manitoba, a significant *Kanadier* centre, yet he was a member of a Mennonite Brethren congregation. Klassen's "political" qualifications therefore were excellent: he was *Russlaender* but he hailed from a *Kanadier* community; he understood western Canadian aspirations, but he had important experience with and loyalty to MCC. Besides that, he was known as an excellent administrator and a diplomatic negotiator. He would need those skills in the years ahead.

Conclusion

By the end of 1963, Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ had taken the historic action of replacing a plethora of inter-Mennonite organizations with a single entity. Three main factors contributed to birthing of MCC Canada in 1963.⁶¹ One of them was a new relief, peace, and service witness on the part of Canadian churches. Another was an increased spirit of and commitment

to inter-Mennonite cooperation across the nation. A third factor was the relationship of Canadians to Mennonite Central Committee which provided a model for the creation of MCC Canada, as well as an ongoing partnership. Many hopes and dreams—and not a few fears—were bound up with the birth of this new infant. In 1963 few of the midwives could predict how this infant would come to embody those dreams.

PART TWO

Growth and Maturation

CHAPTER 4

Forging an Identity, 1963-1973

IN 1967, MCC Canada organized a national speech contest, inviting Mennonite college and university students from across the country to reflect on the things that make for peace. Jean Hilborn, a young business college student from the Biehn Mennonite Church at Shakespeare, Ontario, won the contest. Hilborn's passionate speech noted the protests in the news—protests against the Vietnam War, against racial inequality, against poverty and discrimination. She acknowledged the discomfort which most Mennonites and Brethren in Christ felt about such public demonstrations, but she also challenged them not simply to protest the protests from the comfort of their overstuffed armchairs. She called for “positive protest through involvement,” encouraging people to get involved in local communities, to address the root causes of conflict, and to speak out. “A Christianity that does nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing is worth nothing,” she said.¹

Hilborn's speech reflected the turbulent spirit of the Sixties and early Seventies. Canadians were fascinated with the anti-Vietnam War movement, the civil rights struggle of African-Americans, and a young generation's critique of “the Establishment.” They were also infected with “Trudeaumania,” the



Jean Hilborn of Ontario was the prize winner of MCC Canada's peace speech context in 1967. Photo credit MHC.

excitement generated by charismatic Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau and his agenda of “the just society.” The Quiet Revolution in Québec, the emergence of “Red Power” among Aboriginal people, and the women’s liberation movement all changed Canada in irrevocable ways, as did—less dramatically—the implementation of medicare, a public pension plan, and state support for international development.

In the context of this exciting decade, MCC Canada tried to forge an identity. Initially, its energies were consumed with developing the structures, mechanisms, and relationships necessary for it to partner well with MCC in the US, as well as the new provincial MCCs. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, MCC Canada began to focus attention on issues of peace and social concern closer to home. As it moved forward, testing the mandate granted by its founders, MCC Canada encountered enthusiastic support, as well as vocal and sustained critique. It was an exciting and invigorating time.

Getting Started

MCC Canada’s first office was located in downtown Winnipeg, already the major Mennonite centre in Canada. By 1961 Winnipeg’s Mennonite population had grown tenfold in twenty years, easily surpassing the earlier dominance of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.² The city was already home to two Mennonite colleges, two high schools, two denominational conference headquarters, and some twenty-five different Mennonite congregations.³

The decision to establish MCC Canada’s home in Winnipeg was significant for the larger MCC system in that it ensured a different “MCC culture” than that of Akron or even Kitchener. Surrounded by Mennonites who were of Dutch-German (usually described as “Russian”), rather than Swiss-German descent, MCC Canada’s culture would feel discernibly different than MCC’s, though not in easily described ways. The differences would at times contribute to conflict, but mostly they would complement each other.

MCC Canada’s office was located in the C.A. DeFehr & Sons office building at 104 Princess Street. DeFehr had been a strong MCC supporter ever since he and his family had arrived in Canada in 1925. He had given special assistance to MCC in settling Mennonite refugees in Paraguay in the late 1940s. Over the years he and his sons had built up a successful furniture and appliance business. For some time, the DeFehrs had provided space in their warehouse for a Manitoba clothing depot, as well as two small offices for the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council (CMRIC) when it moved from

Saskatoon in 1963. It was here where J.M. Klassen began the operations of MCC Canada in January 1964, while simultaneously bringing to a close the work of CMRIC. He was assisted by Kathleen Froese, a young Winnipeg resident, who had just completed a Voluntary Service assignment in Akron, and who became MCC Canada's first secretary.



J.M. Klassen stands before the office of the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council which became the first office of MCC Canada, 1963. Photo credit MHC.

The small MCC Canada office on Princess Street was provided rent-free by the DeFehr family, who also offered the use of some of their office furniture and equipment. Initially, Klassen and Froese only had to purchase a manual typewriter and a filing cabinet. Within a year, they bought an electric adding machine for \$240 and some more office furniture for \$250.⁴ A year later they purchased an electric mimeograph machine for \$770.⁵ Froese's starting salary was \$3,000, while Klassen's was \$5,000. From these humble beginnings Klassen and Froese, the only two staff persons, began to make MCC Canada a reality.

Despite the small staff, MCC Canada's executive committee played an important role in shaping the organization in the early years. The strong and active committee met four times a year, usually at the Princess Street office. It began its meetings on Friday and continued all day

Saturday, establishing a pattern that has continued virtually to the present. Out-of-province members usually flew in for the meetings and were billeted in homes for their overnight stay. The committee took its meals in nearby restaurants, though occasionally food was ordered in. C.J. Rempel, with an excellent tenor voice, usually led in singing a devotional song or a grace at these meetings. E.J. Swalm added levity with his many jokes and stories, while Harvey Plett gave his "annual speech" about the need for solid spiritual foundation among service workers.⁶ D. P. Neufeld presided over the meetings with diplomacy and tact. A good spirit prevailed within the executive committee, though the meetings were not without strong disagreement at times.

The executive committee was elected by and from the board or "membership" of MCC Canada. Board members—sometimes also simply called "members"—consisted of: the persons named as official representatives by the eleven participating groups, the five provincial MCC representatives

(one representative for each province from Ontario to British Columbia), four members at large, as well as one representative of “MCC Akron.” The initial



MCC Canada's original executive committee, L to R: J.J. Thiessen, T.E. Friesen, Newton Gingrich, David P. Neufeld, C.J. Rempel, E.J. Swalm, and Harvey Plett. Photo credit MHC.

total number of board members was twenty-eight persons. The eleven conferences or groups named representatives in proportion to their size; this meant that the larger conferences—the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Brethren Conference—always outnumbered the smaller groups, a reality that sometimes troubled the latter.⁷ The full board met in an annual meeting to approve the work of the executive committee. From the beginning, MCC Canada established the practice of holding

its annual meeting in a different province, as a way of gaining visibility and building ownership for the national organization.

The eleven Mennonite and Brethren in Christ member conferences and groups (see Chart 4.1) represented considerable theological diversity, despite their shared history. This diversity existed both within and between the various groups. MCC Canada included: people who valued nonconformity and separation from mainstream society, as well as others who lived very assimilated lifestyles; people who were suspicious of higher education, as well as those who embraced it; people who espoused a revived Anabaptist vision, as well as those who had been influenced by American evangelicalism; people who were passionate about peace and nonresistance and those who had come to regard it as an obstacle to evangelism and outreach. The diversity reflected in the MCC Canada membership would prove to be both a blessing and a curse.

The eleven groups constituted the “owners” of MCC Canada, while the members of their respective congregations represented the “constituency.” (See Chart 4.2) The word “constituency” proved to be a highly important word in the MCC Canada lexicon, for it came to be the way that the organization spoke collectively of its primary supporters: the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and their members. The word “constituency” would also become highly problematic, because it mistakenly implied a homogeneous group.

Chart 4.1

MCC CANADA MEMBER GROUPS IN 1964

Name of Conference or Group	Members
Canadian Conference Brethren in Christ Church	1
Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches	3
Conference of Mennonites in Canada	4
Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference (formerly <i>Bruderthaler</i>)	1
Evangelical Mennonite Conference (formerly <i>Kleine Gemeinde</i>)	1
Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (formerly <i>Rudnerweider</i>)	1
Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference	1
Old Colony Mennonite Church	1
Mennonite Conference of Ontario (formerly “Old” Mennonites)**	1
Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church *	1
Western Ontario Mennonite Conference (formerly Amish)	1

* Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church was a single congregation in Kitchener, Ontario. Formed in 1924, it was not a member of any Canadian Conference but was a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church (based in the US). When the congregation joined both the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and the United Mennonite Conference in 1970, it no longer had its own representative on the MCC Canada membership.

** The Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference of the Mennonite Church (also formerly known as “Old” Mennonites) joined MCC Canada in 1965 with one member. The name of the conference changed to Northwest Conference of the Mennonite Church in 1973.

Chart 4.2

MCC CANADA OWNERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE IN 1964

MCC Canada “Constituency”

Members and adherents of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations, whose denominational conferences were official members of MCC Canada.



MCC Canada “Owners”

The eleven denominational groups who named official representatives to the MCC Canada governing body. The number changed over time as new groups joined and others merged.



MCC Canada Board or “Membership”

The governing body constituted by

- Representatives named by the eleven denominational groups
- Representatives named by provincial MCCs
- Representatives named by MCC (in the US)
- Several members at large

This group became known as the “delegate body” in 1997.



MCC Canada Executive Committee

Eight members elected from the board or “membership.” This included a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. This group became known as the “board” in 1997.

Building Relationships

Much of the energy of MCC Canada's first year went into sorting out relationships with the new provincial MCCs, as well as with MCC in Akron. By early 1965 the five provincial MCCs were in place.⁸ Although these new provincial bodies were autonomous, the expectation was that they would link their work with that of the national body, just as the national body worked with MCC in Akron. They would raise money for, channel material aid through, and encourage general support for MCC Canada and, through it, MCC. As indicated, each provincial MCC would name a representative to the MCC Canada membership to make an official link. The success of MCC Canada very much depended on the successful creation and operation of provincial MCC entities.

The process of establishing the provincial MCCs unfolded rather uneventfully in the three western provinces because of the simplicity of the pre-existing organizational set-up. In Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, only one inter-Mennonite relief and immigration committee existed (each one a provincial branch of the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council). The process required basically two things: 1) that the committees change their names to MCC Saskatchewan, MCC Alberta, and MCC British Columbia, respectively, and 2) that these new bodies invite all Mennonite groups in the province to join. In many of the western provinces, the provincial committees had become projects of the Mennonite Brethren and the "Conference Mennonites." The new provincial MCCs boasted a broader membership.

The process of creating MCC Manitoba was more complex because of the existence of two inter-Mennonite organizations: the Manitoba branch of the CMRIC and the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC). These two committees dated back to the division between *Russlaender* and *Kanadier* in the 1940s. Nevertheless, here too, the process of amalgamation and reorganization happened quite smoothly, largely because people like Ted Friesen of Altona, CMRC secretary, had been actively promoting the idea for a long time, and because the continuation of two committees no longer made sense. A younger generation simply did not care as much about the old *Russlaender/Kanadier* divisions.

In Ontario the process was somewhat more difficult because of the complexity of the pre-existing organizational landscape, but also because of lingering resistance to the new configuration. In the fall of 1964, C.N. Hostetter

and Robert Kreider, chairperson and executive member of MCC in Akron, attended the organizational meeting of MCC Ontario. These men spoke favourably of the new arrangements and encouraged delegates to support MCC Canada and the new MCC Ontario. Their counsel seems to have significantly assuaged the concerns of Ontarians.⁹ It helped that MCC Canada strategically held its first annual meeting in Elmira, Ontario as a way of building faith with Ontario. From the beginning, MCC Ontario had a head start over the other provinces in terms of staffing, programming, and diversity of constituency support. Harvey Taves became the new MCC Ontario executive director. He continued to administer the Ailsa Craig program and other Ontario-based initiatives, while the Newfoundland work shifted to MCC and MCC Canada.

Besides clarifying relationships with the provincial MCCs, MCC Canada also had to negotiate a relationship with MCC. Since 1944, it will be recalled, the four main inter-Mennonite bodies in Canada had each named a representative to the MCC board. With these organizations now gone, and the Kitchener office no longer under Akron's direction, a new relationship was needed. It was eventually determined that the individuals named by the provinces to the MCC Canada board would also represent MCC Canada on the MCC board. It was understood that "the provinces will select their most capable men to make this twofold representation."¹⁰ Additionally, MCC Canada could appoint up to two additional members to the MCC board, and MCC would appoint a representative to MCC Canada. MCC Canada remained legally independent and autonomous of MCC, just as the provinces remained legally independent of the national organization. At the same time, the three levels of MCC were committed to working together. Building linkages at the board level was a way of making this commitment concrete. The nature of these linkages would become very significant in future years.

Friendship between Klassen and Snyder

Even more important for the MCC-MCC Canada relationship than the structural linkages was the friendship and trust between J.M. Klassen and William Snyder, MCC executive secretary. Klassen's work with MCC in Korea and his short stint at the MCC office in Akron had given him a good understanding for and sympathy with MCC and its ministry, and respect for Snyder. A trip which the two men made to Paraguay in 1964 seems to have cemented their relationship. At the end of a hot, dry day of travel, Snyder was discovered polishing Klassen's dusty shoes. Klassen interpreted this simple deed of service as comparable to Jesus' act of footwashing.¹¹

Loyalty to, and continuing cooperation with Akron, would remain a very high priority for Klassen.¹²

Snyder had harboured doubts about the formation of MCC Canada and how it might de-rail the US-Canada relationship in MCC. But as the money arrived steadily from Winnipeg, he became a believer. In mid-1965 he wrote a letter of appreciation to J.M. Klassen for the prompt remittances, indicating the MCC Canada structure would be a much improved channel for getting funds and personnel to places most needed. He wrote, "I believe history will give all of you who had a hand in bringing MCC (Canada) into being as a broadly based organization, a few kudos."¹³ Snyder was thrilled when in 1965 MCC Canada sent \$190,654 cash to Akron, not including the value of material aid, and in 1966, almost double that amount, \$363,446. At points he noted MCC Canada was increasing its giving to MCC in greater proportion than other groups.¹⁴ In many ways Snyder's worries about the Canadians were mitigated, at least for a time.

Klassen and Snyder frequently assessed the Canadian response to MCC by measuring Canadian statistics against those of the entire North American constituency. According to the membership in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches across Canada, compared to that in the US, Canadians should be contributing roughly thirty percent of the total revenue and material aid to the combined effort. It became clear in the 1960s that Canadians did comparatively well in terms of money and material resources. They even increased their participation in the service program. In 1963, for example, of a total of 623 MCC workers serving worldwide, 137 or twenty-two percent were Canadians. Notably, eighty percent of MCC's "country reps" (the administrative heads in the respective country programs) were Canadian.¹⁵ The preponderance of Canadians service workers in this leadership role was because they tended to be somewhat older and more experienced than US workers, many of whom were young men fulfilling alternative service obligations through MCC (a draft continued until the end of the Vietnam War). The percentage of Canadian service workers would rise and fall through the decade before climbing to thirty-two percent in 1973.¹⁶

The Work of Women

MCC Canada's official leadership remained a "boys' club" through the 1960s and early 1970s. The "women's liberation" movement which was emerging in the larger society and within mainline churches would not really reach

into Mennonite and MCC circles until later. The MCC Canada executive committee continued to reflect balance with respect to conference membership, representation from east and west, and involvement of those from Swiss-German and Dutch-German descent; they did not yet consider the issue of women's representation. The MCC Canada records from this period consistently refer to the "men" that are required for various staff and board positions. They speak of MCC Canada's desire to minister to "the whole man"—in other words, the importance of addressing both physical and spiritual needs.¹⁷ They consider a husband's qualifications for service, but not a wife's.¹⁸ In 1970 vice chair Newton Gingrich represented MCC Canada at a gathering sponsored by the Canadian Council of Churches. Noting that quite a few of the other Christian denominations had sent women as their representatives, he commented, "I believe in equality of men and women but would have to admit I'm not quite that equal."¹⁹ Gingrich's comments no doubt reflected the views of other board members of MCC Canada.

Women, however, enthusiastically supported MCC Canada and the provincial MCCs and gave significant leadership in other ways. One of these was the traditional channel of material aid. Women sewed clothing, made bandages and blankets, assembled layette and Christmas bundles, and prepared soap from grease, lye and ashes. In some provinces the value of material aid the women produced sometimes surpassed the value of cash that was donated. In 1965, for example, MCC Manitoba received cash income of \$87,000 and material aid valued at \$121,000.²⁰ MCC Canada's second annual meeting in 1966 acknowledged the hundreds of women—872 at Yarrow and 657 at Kitchener—who had contributed "free labour" at the two major material aid centres.²¹

In most provinces, women's auxiliaries were formed as a way of consolidating the various women's groups that produced material resources for overseas distribution and that volunteered their services at clothing depots. These auxiliaries held annual meetings in conjunction with the regular provincial annual meetings with their male delegates. The women's meetings often took place in church basements, while the men's meetings were held upstairs in the sanctuary.²² Like the delegate meetings, the women's gatherings heard reports and inspirational reflections, intended to encourage them in their labours.

SELFHELP Crafts

A new involvement for women was promoting SELFHELP Crafts, a program of marketing handicrafts made by artisans in developing countries. This program had begun in the US in the 1940s by Edna Ruth Byler, former MCC worker

in Puerto Rico. A promotional visit by Byler to several Canadian provinces in 1964 helped to generate interest and participation in Canada. Each provincial MCC designated one or two women who were to promote SELFHELP in each province. In 1968 those women were: Lena Unger in BC, Susan Peters in Alberta,



Palestinian needlework was one of the mainstays of the SELFHELP Crafts program in the 1960s and 1970s. Photo credit MHC.

Irma Balzer in Saskatchewan, Linie Friesen and Helen Doerksen in Manitoba, and Margaret Cressman in Ontario. Kathleen Froese from the MCC Canada office served as the overall coordinator for SELFHELP in Canada.

The SELFHELP representatives received a box of handicraft samples which they took to dozens of women's gatherings, encouraging orders for any of the items: woodenware from Haiti, needlework from India and Jordan, basketwork from north Africa, bamboo products from Thailand

and so on. The orders were then sent to the respective countries, the items produced, shipped back to Canada, and then delivered to the purchaser, with several stages of re-packing along the way. It was a long process from order to delivery, but Canadian women were fascinated by the very unique crafts and, because of increasing prosperity, placed many orders. Sales amounted to \$42,184 in 1968 and \$51,471 in 1969, though they dropped somewhat in subsequent years.²³ Years later, the modest beginnings of SELFHELP Crafts would be considered the beginning of the fair trade movement.²⁴

Relief Sales

Women also played key roles in the organization of relief sales. The first large Canadian relief sale took place in New Hamburg, Ontario in May 1967, but the idea was borrowed from the US. Winfield Fretz, the American president of Waterloo's new Conrad Grebel College, suggested that Ontario organize a sale similar to the one in Pennsylvania. As the story goes, he proposed the idea to a group of community-minded men who quickly realized that they needed a liaison with the women's groups in order to make the sale a success.²⁵ They approached Margaret Brubacher, a teacher and former president of the cutting room, for her assistance. She indicated she would help, if she could be on the organizing committee.²⁶ The men agreed, and she got to work.

Over the winter Brubacher visited dozens of women's groups, urging them to take on a particular "project" for the sale—baking pies, breads, or sweets, cooking borscht, or barbecuing pork or chicken. She found a way to reproduce Edna Ruth Byler's donuts, made famous by the Pennsylvania sale; the challenge was to get the dough to rise overnight in the cool New Hamburg arena. She also encouraged the women's groups to produce assorted handiwork for sale and

asked each group to make least one special quilt for the auction. Among Swiss Mennonite women, quilt making was an important creative outlet within a church context that did not always value creativity and artistry. The quilts' intricate patterns and exquisite colours quickly made the quilt auction the focus of the relief sale.

The New Hamburg sale was a shining success financially, as well as in other ways. Because the committee had covered all sale expenses in advance, all of the proceeds on the day of the sale—\$31,700—could be turned over to MCC.²⁷ The sale also advanced the spirit of inter-Mennonite cooperation as Mennonites and Brethren in Christ across

southern Ontario worked together in the common cause of serving those in need.

The relief sale idea made its way across Canada, and soon other provinces were organizing similar sales, each having its own unique flavour. Manitoba had its first sale in 1968, Saskatchewan in 1970, and British Columbia in 1971. Not everyone was enamoured with the concept of the relief sale. Some thought it was gimmicky; they believed that people should give readily to MCC without receiving something in return. Others felt that the auctions bred a spirit of unhealthy competition, while still others complained too much used junk was being sold. Some people voiced the concern that the sales, with their emphasis on traditional ethnic foods, portrayed Mennonitism as culture rather than faith. In the next decade, some people would add another complaint: that the sales promoted overconsumption in a world of limited resources.²⁸

Fred Peters, executive director of MCC Saskatchewan, responded to the critics. Peters argued the relief sales should continue because they raised money over and above what people would otherwise give, they fostered awareness of global needs, they nurtured inter-Mennonite cooperation, and they represented



The famous quilt auction at the New Hamburg relief sale, 1970. Photo credit David Hunsberger, MAO.

a form of outreach, since many non-Mennonites attended the sales and asked questions about their purpose.²⁹ Besides that, the sales were lots of fun. The criticism diminished and the sales continued; in fact, additional sales began. In 1973 the combined income from relief sales reached \$216,441.³⁰

Women were not the only ones involved with the relief sales. Men were also integrally involved at many levels, from fundraising, to publicity, to heavy lifting, to flipping pancakes and barbequing pork. However, because the sales focused significantly on food and handiwork, women's traditional domain, they served to highlight the contributions of women in an important way. Relief sale committees also provided a context where women and men could interact on a basis of greater equality and mutuality than elsewhere within MCC and its supporting churches. One person observed, "In no Mennonite conference do I hear women talking up as much and being listened to as intently as at these relief sale planning sessions."³¹

Thrift Shops

Yet another way that women's work significantly advanced MCC's ministry of compassion was through the thrift shops, which also had their beginnings during this time. Ironically, it was a crisis that contributed to the formation of the thrift shops. The crisis was provoked by MCC's decision in 1971 to reduce by one third its distribution of certain types of material aid, particularly clothing and shoes. There were several reasons for the decision. First, much of the clothing that was donated to MCC was suitable for colder climates; MCC had recently closed programs in several northern countries and could not use the heavier clothing in its priority countries. Second, it was becoming more expensive to ship clothing than to purchase it in the country where it was to be used. Thirdly and most significantly, MCC's understanding of meeting human need was evolving. Increasingly, MCC was recognizing that relief—in the sense of providing "charity" or "hand-outs"—created dependency among the recipients and also diminished their sense of dignity. The distribution of free clothes by relief agencies also harmed the clothing industries and economies of some countries. A more appropriate approach was to work at development and to do so in a way that actively involved the participation of beneficiaries.³² In this new development paradigm, material aid held a diminished role.

*MCC's
understanding
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John Hostetler, director of Material Aid for MCC in Akron, was guest speaker at the MCC Canada annual meeting in Steinbach, Manitoba in January 1972, and he spoke about the decision to reduce material aid. He encouraged women's groups to find ways of selling their used clothing locally and turning the money over to MCC. One of the few women attending the public meeting was Selma Loewen of Altona, Manitoba. She heard Hostetler's call for "a machine that would turn clothing into cash." Almost like the switch of a light bulb, Loewen imagined a community thrift shop that would sell used clothing and raise money for MCC programs.³³ No sooner had she returned to Altona, than she phoned several friends—Linie Friesen, Sarah Stoesz, and Susan Giesbrecht—and invited them to a tea party to share her idea. Loewen's enthusiasm was contagious and the four women quickly got to work. They obtained the blessing—though not financial support—from Arthur Driedger, executive director of MCC Manitoba.³⁴ They rented a tiny space for \$125 a month. They arranged for the printing of hundreds of brochures which they shared with the women's groups of the various churches (the four women represented three different congregations) and distributed them around town. Their "Community Self Help Centre" opened on Friday, 17 March 1972, only two months after Hostetler's speech in Steinbach.

Altona's tiny thrift shop was an immediate success. By the time it opened, some forty women from the three congregations had volunteered to staff the shop with monthly shifts of a half day. Good quality clothing, shoes, and housewares were donated and continued to be dropped off in subsequent months. From the beginning the shop also displayed and took orders for items from the SELFHELP Crafts program. Because rent was low and labour entirely voluntary, the shop could turn over almost all its proceeds to MCC Manitoba. In the first nine months, with the shop open only two days a week, it had gross sales of \$9095. In 1974 total sales reached \$13,126.³⁵

Similar thrift shops soon sprouted up elsewhere in Manitoba and in the other provinces. The second Manitoba shop established to support MCC



Linie Friesen, Selma Loewen, Susan Giesbrecht and Sarah Stoesz founded the first MCC thrift shop in Altona, Manitoba in 1971. Photo credit MCC.

opened in Steinbach in April 1972, just a month after Altona. In some ways, the Steinbach women felt they should get the credit for opening the first shop, because, under the leadership of Agatha Friesen, they had held a garage sale for MCC in the fall of 1971, with the intention of starting a shop soon.³⁶ A third shop opened in Winnipeg also in 1972. Saskatchewan's first store started operations in Herbert in November 1972, while a Saskatoon shop called "Mennonite Clothes Closet" (deliberately chosen to share the same acronym as Mennonite Central Committee) opened the following year. Alberta's first shop in Calgary and BC's in Clearbrook both opened in July 1973. Ontario's first "benefit shop" began in St. Catharines in 1974.³⁷ Within the MCC world, most new ideas had, till this point, originated in the US. This time a Canadian innovation was replicated south of the border. By the end of 1978 thirty MCC-supporting thrift shops existed across Canada, as well as twenty-six in the US. Combined sales across Canada that year amounted to \$409,947.³⁸

Although many women threw their energies into these new thrift shops, some also experienced a significant sense of loss at the diminished role of material aid. In February of 1972, Lavon Welty of MCC's Akron office toured the western provinces and heard a number of complaints about MCC's newly announced material aid policy. In Calgary a distressed woman had demanded to know what she and her group would now do with their time and energy; how else could they support MCC? In the Fraser Valley people were upset because Christmas bundles, no longer wanted in great quantities in Akron, were being distributed to local needy children, rather than children overseas.³⁹ Welty suggested that it was important MCC help to educate constituents about the reasons for the policy shift. He was confident that when they understood the reasons behind it, they would support it and adjust accordingly. A year later the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* reported that "Canadian Mennonites have responded sensitively to the Mennonite Central Committee's decision a year ago to ask its constituents to cut back their material aid giving somewhat."⁴⁰

Welty made another observation on his trip through western Canada. He wrote to William Snyder, "I . . . feel very much encouraged by the Canadian interest in MCC. There certainly seems to be a lot more 'grass roots' interest in MCC than is displayed here in the States. Certainly the MCC provincial organizations give impetus to this but generally there seems to be a much more intuitive response to MCC than one would find in the States."⁴¹ Welty was not the first person to comment on the significant grassroots involvement of Canadians in MCC.⁴² The existence of provincial MCCs in Canada was certainly one factor in fostering popular participation; there were no comparable state-level or regional-level MCC bodies in the US at this time. Another factor was

that so many Canadian Mennonites had been on the receiving end of MCC assistance, whether in the Soviet Union, Europe, or Paraguay. Because they had been helped by MCC, they now wished to help others.⁴³

New Work for Women



Kathy Hildebrand of St. Catharines, Ontario chats with Bill Snyder, MCC executive director at the MCC annual meeting in Chicago, 1971. Photo credit MAO.

Women's tremendous involvement in material aid, the relief sales, SELFHELP Crafts, and the thrift shops was possible largely because these women generally did not work for pay outside the home. Many middle class Mennonite women had free time that they could offer. But this reality would change in subsequent decades as Mennonite women joined the paid workforce and had less volunteer time. It would also change as more women, like

Margaret Brubacher, began to expect participation at the higher levels of MCC decision-making.

A harbinger of this shift was the decision of Kathy Hildebrand of St. Catharines, Ontario to attend the MCC annual meeting in Chicago in January 1969. She had a brother in the Middle East and was eager to hear the presentations and the discussion on MCC's work in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War. Hildebrand was the only woman present who was not a secretary at MCC, a returned worker, or the wife of a board member. In introducing herself, she indicated that she had come because she was "nosy" and wanted to learn more about MCC's work. William Snyder seemed rather incredulous. Surely, she must have come to visit friends or relatives or simply to go shopping in Chicago's famous shopping district. No, she insisted, she had come to attend the annual meeting.⁴⁴

The Canadian Mennonite ran an article on Hildebrand's presence at the meeting entitled, "A woman at MCC! An Omen?" The article raised the question of women board members in MCC and in MCC Canada. The issue had come

up for discussion at an MCC Canada meeting, and, according to the newspaper, “prominent male members immediately prophesied that a woman on the Board would be disastrous for MCC.”⁴⁵ *The Canadian Mennonite* insisted women should be represented, given their very significant participation in MCC service and on staff.

In 1970 the Conference of Mennonites in Canada named Helen Janzen of Winnipeg as its representative to MCC Canada, and the following year she was elected to the executive committee.⁴⁶ A former public school teacher, Janzen had just retired from twenty-one years as supervisor of Home Economics for Manitoba’s Department of Education. She served two full terms on the MCC Canada board. Anne Warkentin, an MCC alumnus from Indonesia, was named a member-at-large by MCC Canada in 1974.



Helen Janzen of Winnipeg, Manitoba was the first woman to serve on MCC Canada’s membership, representing the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Photo credit MHC.

MCC Canada Discerning its Role

In its first decade of existence, MCC Canada was trying to establish its identity and discern its role. It had been given a sweeping mandate by its founders: to relieve

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human suffering, especially with respect to Mennonite and other refugees; to coordinate relief, peace, and service efforts of the related provincial organizations; to act as a united voice for Canadian Mennonites on a wide range of matters of national concern; and to explore and initiate new areas of service in Canada.⁴⁷ This far-reaching mandate reflected the broad hopes and dreams of the founders for MCC Canada. Some of the people on MCC Canada’s board were interested primarily in simplifying and streamlining the processing of workers, money, and material aid for MCC’s international program, but others saw a much

bigger role for the new national body. They imagined MCC Canada as a means whereby Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ together could actively address needs within Canada, could offer a bold and prophetic peace witness,

and could facilitate all manner of inter-Mennonite activity. In the first decade, MCC Canada tested this more comprehensive vision.

It also took over the Canadian administration of a number of programs run by MCC in Akron. One of these was the Child Sponsorship program. MCC had begun Child Sponsorship in South Korea in 1953 in response to constituency pressures. New organizations like Foster Parents Plan and World Vision were providing opportunities for caring donors to support individual children in need. For a specified amount of money per year, donors were assigned a needy child with whom they could correspond, exchange photographs, and develop a relationship. When it became clear some MCC constituents were donating to these organizations, MCC established its own Child Sponsorship program, and it grew quickly.⁴⁸ The context for MCC's initial "project" was a training school for older orphaned boys in South Korea. By 1968 MCC had projects in eight countries and was managing 2000 individual cases. J.M. Klassen and Kathleen Froese struggled to handle the significant administration involved with the Child Sponsorship program.⁴⁹

MCC Canada also took over the Canadian administration of the Visitor Exchange Program, more often known as the "trainee program." The trainee program emerged in 1950 from a post-war work camp for German and American young people, intended to "heal some of the hatreds and animosities of the war."⁵⁰ The program brought young adults from different parts of the world to the US, and by 1960 to Canada, for a year of cross-cultural learning and vocational training. MCC recruited volunteer host families to provide homes for the trainees, and sponsoring organizations, schools, and businesses to provide workplaces. The hope was that through the experience of cross-cultural change, trainees could help to build understanding between peoples. Doreen Harms, longtime administrator of the Visitor Exchange Program, called it a "peace program that works, not in a big sweep, but one small ripple at a time, each ripple enlarging with every expanding circle."⁵¹ By the early 1970s more than twenty trainees from a dozen countries were serving in Canada annually.

Service in Canada

Because service and peace were so integral to MCC identity and were so intimately linked, MCC Canada soon hired a staff person to give leadership to both aspects of this work. Dan Zehr of Nairn, Ontario joined the MCC Canada staff in August 1967. Zehr had worked as a pastor and as part-time

chaplain at Ailsa Craig Boys Farm before becoming executive director of MCC Ontario in 1965.⁵² Zehr brought a Swiss-German “Old” Mennonite presence and perspective to the work of MCC Canada. It was not an easy adjustment for Dan and Elaine Zehr to move from the more diverse Mennonite context of southern Ontario to Manitoba, where constituents were perceived to have doubted that the Zehrs were Mennonite because they did not speak Low German, eat *borscht*, or possess a typical Dutch-German surname.⁵³ Zehr nonetheless plunged himself into the work, even trying to learn some German as he visited various constituent churches.

Zehr focused on developing new Voluntary Service (VS) units across Canada. MCC Canada’s way of “doing program” was placing service workers into contexts where they could meet basic human needs and minister to human suffering. These individuals, like all MCC workers, were required to meet the “three screens”: profession of Christian faith, membership in a church community, and a commitment to nonviolent peacemaking. Usually they were placed in or “seconded” to existing institutions or organizations. By sending caring and compassionate followers of Jesus into contexts of alienation and marginalization, MCC Canada sought to bring healing and hope to people in need.

*Service
tested
their faith
and sense
of self*

Under Zehr’s leadership the Summer Service program faded away, as many of the psychiatric and municipal hospitals could no longer host summer workers. But one- or two-year-long Voluntary Service expanded. By 1973, VS units with a total of seventy-two workers operated in five provinces. Besides the Newfoundland unit, where the demand for teachers remained strong, “VSers” served in Dixville, Québec; Toronto, Oshawa, and Kitchener, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Waldheim, Montreal Lake, and Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan; and Yarrow and Abbotsford, BC. The work in these units focused on disadvantaged children and youth, persons with emotional illness or disabilities, and prisoners and ex-offenders.⁵⁴

The service program often thrust innocent and sheltered young Mennonites into new worlds of hurt which tested their faith and sense of self. One young woman from southern Manitoba joined the service program after several exhausting years of teaching. She hoped for a quiet, conventional office job, but instead found herself in downtown Toronto as head resident of a home for eight emotionally troubled teenage girls. She learned to deal with their drug addictions, abortions, fights with boyfriends, police encounters, and much more. Despite her own experiences of fear, anger, and confusion, she

later related, “Those were the best two years ever. You couldn’t have paid me to take such a job, but I found myself happy doing it for no pay . . . I really learned what it means to forgive, to love nasty people, to turn the other cheek.”⁵⁵ Young people returning to their home communities after a service assignment often opened the world to their families and friends.

At the same time, some Voluntary Service workers found the adjustments required of them too great. An informal 1966 study noted workers struggled with culture shock, unit living, spiritual isolation, and lack of social contact with peers. They also struggled to appreciate the people with whom they were to work. One young man assigned to work with children with severe developmental challenges wrote, “Some days I feel I am learning to love and accept these children. . . ; other days I loose [sic] my patience and feel frustrated.”⁵⁶ For some, the greatest hurdle was lack of clarity with respect to their work. One unit leader wrote in a quarterly report, “[W]e are surviving, we are not happy with the things that got us here, like lack of job descriptions and lack of careful unit placement. I hope VS’ers in future months won’t have to go through the same.”⁵⁷ The 1966 study revealed that for about five percent of workers (Canadian and US) the difficulties of service outweighed the blessings. About two percent were unable to cope with the many adjustments and terminated their service early.⁵⁸

Service in Québec

MCC Canada’s service involvement in Québec resulted from the FLQ crisis of October 1970. The kidnapping of two government officials by a radical separatist group called *Front de libération du Québec* revealed to the rest of Canada the extent of unhappiness of many Québécois within the Canadian federation. At provincial MCC meetings held in the weeks after the crisis, delegates called on MCC Canada to seek to offer a reconciling presence in Québec. MCC Canada responded by hosting a consultation, bringing together the personnel from two missions, the Mennonite Mission Board of Ontario and the Mennonite Brethren Conference, as well as Mennonite faculty and students from McGill University. The aim of the consultation was to discuss ways in which the broader church, with MCC Canada support, could become an “effective agent of reconciliation” within Québec society.

The goal of the consultation was hopelessly naïve, since MCC Canada personnel had no real understanding of the unique realities of Québec, the French language, or the dynamics at play between evangelicals and Catholic

church. Some people at the consultation felt that any ministry of reconciliation demanded a relationship of respect with the Catholic Church. Some missionaries working in the province, however, had little desire to work cooperatively with Catholics; they did not regard Catholics as part of the “true Christian church.”⁵⁹ MCC Canada staff and board members who attended the consultation quickly realized how much they had to learn. It was, perhaps, a lesson for MCC Canada on the importance of seeking to understand a particular context before determining an appropriate ministry. A second consultation a year later posed the more modest goal of profiling social needs within Québec society. As a result of this, MCC Canada began to place service workers at homes for children with disabilities in Dixville and Lennoxville, two English-speaking communities in Québec.

By 1973 MCC Canada had also partnered with the Mennonite Mission Board of Ontario to establish *La Maison de L'Amitie* (House of Friendship). *La Maison*

was a ministry to the people of Mile End Zone, a neighbourhood of Montreal populated primarily by newcomers. Operating out of an old three-story former Jewish school, *La Maison* quickly developed a range of programs for all ages: a daycare for pre-schoolers, clubs for boys and girls, coffeehouses and camping programs for youth, women's meetings, a New Horizons program for seniors, as well as remedial education and language classes for all ages. Albert and Susanne Hodder, former missionaries in Congo, became the first directors. A board consisting of local representatives, as well as representatives from the Ontario Mission Board and MCC Canada, gave direction to the work of *La Maison*. MCC Canada service workers staffed the various programs of *La Maison*.

The work of *La Maison* focused on meeting the needs of newcomers—both immigrants and refugees—to a particular Montreal neighbourhood.⁶⁰ At one point *La Maison's* daycare boasted children who came from nine different language groups. By providing a warm and friendly setting where people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds could meet and interact, *La Maison* did



MCC service worker Diana Jutzi (left) and an unidentified companion supervise children at the daycare program of La Maison de l'Amitie, 1975. Photo credit MCC/Canadian Mennonite.

serve as an “agent of reconciliation” in a particular place. But MCC Canada’s hope of building understanding between French- and English-speaking Québécois or between Québécois and other Canadians only happened in limited ways over a much longer period of time.

Peace and Social Concerns

Besides his work in Voluntary Service, Dan Zehr also gave leadership to MCC Canada’s peace program. A significant challenge confronting Zehr and MCC Canada was that major shifts were taking place among Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in their understanding of peace. Before, during, and immediately after World War II, most Mennonites had understood they were called to a life of “nonresistance.” They articulated nonresistance to mean renunciation of anything violent or coercive (including military service, but also litigation and union membership) and a willingness to suffer, as Jesus suffered, rather than avenge injustice.⁶¹

But by the 1960s the consensus around nonresistance was breaking down. On the one hand, some groups understood peace primarily in spiritual terms—peace as peace with God. Influenced by American evangelicalism, they downplayed the Anabaptist commitment to nonresistance and peacemaking.⁶² Other groups, however, believed Mennonites were called to a much more active and engaged witness. They preferred the positive language

of “peace” and “peacemaking” rather than the negative and passive connotations of “nonresistance.” They were convinced that it was not enough for Mennonites to be conscientious objectors—they should invite *all* people to forsake war. Moreover, a Mennonite peace witness should not only confront overt violence, but should address the host of social ills which contributed to violence in society.⁶³ Jean Hilborn, the winner of the 1967 peace contest introduced at the



Bruce and Ruth Jutzi staff MCC Canada’s peace booth at the Toronto National Exhibition, 1966. The Jutzis went on to serve with MCC in Hong Kong. Photo credit MHC.

beginning of this chapter, reflected this perspective in her speech.

Zehr, together with a Peace and Social Concerns Committee, attempted to address this bolder and more active peace agenda. Zehr had attended the last course taught by Harold S. Bender, president of Goshen College in Indiana, and he had been influenced by Bender's seminal writing on "The Anabaptist Vision" and the centrality of peace and peacemaking to a faithful life of discipleship. Zehr regularly taught and preached in constituent churches about the biblical basis for an Anabaptist peace theology. He and the committee also helped to organize a peace booth presence at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, various peace events and symposia, a peace scholarship, and even proposed an alternative to the paying of "war taxes." Cognisant that Mennonites and Brethren in Christ were not going to war, but were nevertheless helping to pay for military preparedness, Zehr suggested as early as 1968 that they donate twice the amount they were paying for military purposes to a special international peace project.⁶⁴ In 1973 MCC Canada also supported a study on the Canadian defence industry by a young Mennonite originally from Alberta named Ernie Regehr. The study would eventually be published by McClelland and Stewart as *Making a Killing: Canada's Arms Industry* (1975).

*A major
study on
immigration*

In the 1960s and early 1970s, MCC Canada also discussed "social concerns" such as alcohol use, labour relations, and half-way houses for offenders. Perhaps the most significant of steps into the world of "social concerns" was a major study on immigration. In truth, immigration was not a new issue at all. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, followed by the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, had laboured on behalf of Mennonite refugees and immigrants for decades. MCC Canada, at its founding, had been charged with carrying forward that agenda. But by the early 1960s the role of non-government and faith-based agencies in the work of immigration assistance had become quite ambivalent. Then too, MCC Canada was confronted with a whole range of perspectives from within the constituent churches. Some people felt the organization should simply try to help Mennonites from the Soviet Union and South America come to Canada. Others believed that it should assist people from developing countries and Vietnam War draft resisters. Still others thought immigration should not be a part of MCC Canada's responsibility at all.⁶⁵

As a result of its study, in 1969 MCC Canada went on record as affirming immigration and refugee assistance as a priority. More significantly perhaps, it saw fit to expand the circle of compassion by declaring its readiness to assist *any* people needing protection and resettlement—not only Mennonites. Although

no immediate action resulted, in 1972 MCC Canada joined other organizations urging the federal government to open the doors to Asian-Ugandan refugees who had been expelled from Uganda by dictator Idi Amin.⁶⁶ Immigration authorities acted fairly swiftly to allow about 5,600 to resettle in Canada. A few years later the exodus of thousands of “boat people” from Southeast Asia would propel MCC Canada into refugee assistance in a very major way.

Despite this expanded commitment to immigration and refugee assistance, MCC Canada continued to work quietly to re-unite Mennonite families that had been separated during World War II. Since Canada was generally open to welcoming family members under its Close Relatives Scheme, the issue was persuading Soviet officials to allow particular individuals to emigrate. A number of reunions had taken place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but very few after that. In 1970, Prime Minister Trudeau promised an MCC Canada delegation that he would intervene on behalf of particular cases with Soviet Premier Kosygin. By the mid-1970s, about thirty families or individuals were reunited with loved ones they had not seen for decades.

One touching case involved Mary Knittel of Waterloo, Ontario and her fiancée Hans Neufeld. They had been teenage sweethearts when separated by the war in the 1940s. After almost thirty years of separation, they were reunited in Canada on 31 January 1972 and married two weeks later.⁶⁷ In another case, Jacob Neufeld of Winnipeg was reunited with his wife Katharina after a thirty-one-year separation and six separate applications to Soviet authorities. Katharina Neufeld had spent twenty-five years in a Siberian concentration camp and buried four of five children.⁶⁸

By the mid-1970s it became possible for people who were “culturally German”—including Mennonites or those with Mennonite roots—to emigrate from the USSR into Germany. Thereafter, many reunions happened as Canadians visited relatives in Germany. As well, MCC Canada became a major conduit for assistance by Canadian Mennonites to their *Umsiedler* (“re-settler”) relatives in Germany.

*A significant
departure from
petitions made
to previous
prime ministers*

Visiting the Prime Ministers

As indicated in previous chapters, it had become a pattern for a delegation of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ leaders to visit new prime ministers to extend

best wishes, but more importantly, to express continuing pleas that young people from the historic peace churches be allowed to do alternative service in the event of war and conscription. This responsibility of representation now was a part of the MCC Canada mandate. According to the constitution, MCC Canada was to act as the “united voice” for the Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in “matters of national concerns, such as peace witness, alternative service, government contact, immigration and other matters as may be designated to it by the member conferences or organizations.” The organization took this mandate very seriously, and within this first decade of its existence, sought meetings with both Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson (1963-1968) and Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau (1968-1979, 1980-84).

The statement which MCC Canada presented to Prime Minister Pearson in April 1966 marked a significant departure from petitions made to previous prime ministers. Earlier appeals had focused on the readiness of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ to perform alternate service in the event of war, and to continue to engage in relief, development, and service through MCC in peacetime. This one included that same assurance, but it also encouraged the government to reduce international conflict by strengthening the mechanisms of the United Nations and by preventing the spread and use of nuclear weapons. It urged assistance for people in need elsewhere, through making surplus foods available for relief purposes, and by enacting an open-door immigration policy that would “be based on the broadest concern for human welfare without consideration of race, creed, or national origin.”⁶⁹

MCC Canada began its efforts to contact Prime Minister Trudeau soon after his landslide election in 1968. The Prime Minister’s Office, however, was reluctant to grant a meeting. The Prime Minister did agree, on short notice, to meet with famous rock musician John Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono, who were holding a “bed-in” in a luxury hotel in Montreal. This prompted a number of Canadian newspapers to react negatively. The *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, for example, editorialized as follows: “We do not doubt the sincerity of Lennon and Ono. They have been talking for peace for two years. The Mennonites in Canada, however, have been quietly working to help the needy, and at the same time practising pacifism, for 470 years.”⁷⁰ After this, even Members of Parliament, it appears, put pressure on Trudeau to meet with the Mennonites.⁷¹

A meeting with Trudeau finally took place on 20 March 1970 at a Winnipeg

*Changing
attitudes about
the relationship
of church to
state*

hotel. It turned out to be “a significant public relations and media event.” In addition to the Prime Minister, three cabinet ministers, and five MCC Canada representatives, numerous news reporters and TV cameras was present. In the words of an MCC Canada news release, it was “in every respect one of the most thoroughly covered events in which Canadian Mennonites have ever been involved.”⁷²

The brief MCC Canada prepared for Prime Minister Trudeau was similar to the one addressed to Pearson several years earlier. It added three new requests: exemption of Old Order Mennonites and Amish from participation in the Canada Pension Plan, official recognition of the communist-oriented People’s Republic of China, and the establishment of peace studies programs on Canadian university campuses as a way of advancing nonviolent conflict resolution.⁷³

The briefs for Prime Ministers Pearson and Trudeau reflected the more activist peace stance, as well as changing attitudes among Mennonites and Brethren in Christ about the relationship of church to state. Prime Minister Trudeau took note of this peace stance and remarked to the *Winnipeg Free Press*, “I am very much impressed by the Mennonite community because of its interest in the cause of peace and their decision not to opt out of society but act within it in a way compatible with their own feelings.”⁷⁴

A strong tenet of the early Anabaptist belief system was the idea of “two kingdoms.” In essence, two kingdom theology asserted that God ruled over both church and state, but the state was “outside the perfection of Christ.” The state had authority to wield the sword, but the church was called to live by the nonviolent ethic of Christ. The implications of this dualism were twofold. First, Anabaptists understood that, as living “within the perfection of Christ,” they were to separate themselves from the state—that is, refuse participation in the military and other state institutions. Second, however, they recognized the legitimacy of the state’s resort to lethal force in the maintenance of order. In other words, it was not for the church to critique the state’s use of lethal force as it carried out its duties.

This church-state dualism, articulated most clearly in the Schleithem Confession of 1527, evolved over time and in varying ways among different Anabaptist groups. Still, in World War II most Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, at least those who continued to identify with nonresistance, continued to believe their role was to withhold participation in the Armed Forces, but not to challenge the war or Canada’s involvement in it. This is what changed in the 1960s. Informed by their own experience and by new theological winds, many Mennonites came to embrace the concept of the

“lordship of Christ”—a concept which revolutionized their thinking about the state.⁷⁵ This concept advanced the idea that God did not have two different moral standards, one for the church and one for the state, but one standard for all. Both church and state were called to the righteousness of God. The implication of this dramatic paradigm shift was a new understanding of the role of church vis-à-vis the state. No longer were Mennonites only to ask for special privileges for themselves, they were to remind the state of its calling to reflect the righteousness of God. In other words, they were to witness to the state.⁷⁶

This new understanding of church and state very much informed the practise of MCC Canada, even though it was never clearly articulated by the organization or, for that matter, shared by nearly all of its member groups. It nevertheless provided the rationale for MCC Canada in its first decade to address the government on broader issues of peace, militarism and international aid, as well as matters of social concern such as divorce, capital punishment, and immigration. It would also pave the way for an Ottawa Office in the next decade.

Funding from CIDA

One of the agreements made by the founders was that MCC Canada would relinquish any aspirations for its own international program, and it would work through MCC to address international needs. This did not mean, however, that MCC Canada played a passive role in the global ministry of MCC. On the contrary, it eagerly engaged that ministry, bringing forward proposals, suggestions, and the counsel of Canadian constituents, as well as providing financial, material, and human resources. In the late 1960s, it took the initiative to seek out government grants for MCC’s international work. Such funding became a possibility followed the establishment of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) by the new Trudeau government in 1968.

*Shift from
relief and
reconstruction
to development*

The creation of CIDA, as the expression of Canada’s official commitment to foreign aid, signaled the era’s optimistic belief in the potential of international development assistance to eliminate poverty. In general, the visionaries of development saw it as the transfer of knowledge and technology to improve industry, agriculture, education, and health. They

believed that the “developed” west could help transform the “underdeveloped” or “developing” world by sharing knowledge and expertise. The days of charity and emergency relief were over. Indeed, the Chinese proverb—“Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”—was quoted frequently during this period.⁷⁷ The United Nations confidently named the 1960s as the Decade of Development.

MCC had been making a shift from relief and reconstruction to development since the 1950s. By placing teachers in Newfoundland and Africa, by recruiting agricultural extension workers, and by providing employment through SELFHELP Crafts, MCC was “doing development,” even while it continued its work in emergency assistance. Some MCC leaders were fond of pointing out how the organization had actually been “doing development” since its beginnings in the Soviet Union when it provided seed, draft animals, and tractors.

Edgar Stoesz, MCC staffperson and promoter of development over relief, insisted at the MCC Manitoba annual meeting in early 1969, “All that is lacking to feed the world’s hungry is the human will to do so. Technological techniques and know-how are there for much greater food production if only they were used to best advantage.” Stoesz advocated a radical increase in MCC development-related programs as against direct hand-outs. “Direct relief . . . is necessary in emergencies, but the best kind of help we can give is to help a man help himself.”⁷⁸ Stoesz’s thinking evolved in subsequent years and he came to articulate MCC’s unique perspective on development—a process whereby people working together in community were empowered to improve their lives in their own culturally-appropriate ways.⁷⁹ MCC’s shift from relief to development opened the doors for MCC Canada to establish a relationship with CIDA.

Maurice Strong, the first president of CIDA, was eager to tap into the energy and expertise of “non-government organizations” (NGOs) to further CIDA’s aims, and he allocated a portion of CIDA funds to support their work. More than fifty agencies eagerly applied for and received funding for projects including an educational radio program in Tanzania, a clean water venture in Peru, and community development activities in Jamaica and India.⁸⁰ The budget for the NGO Division of CIDA rose from an initial \$3 million in 1968 to \$8.6 million in 1970.⁸¹ Eventually, many NGOs would receive the major part of their funding from CIDA.

In January 1968 the MCC Canada board gave staff permission to apply for government funding for MCC projects, as long as the acceptance of such funds, “does not have adverse implications for the projects and the MCC

constituency.”⁸² It is not clear what was meant by “adverse implications” or what kind of research was undertaken to ensure that potential difficulties could be avoided. But J.M. Klassen was sufficiently assured that he began to submit project applications to CIDA. The initial response was quite disappointing. It took over a year for CIDA to approve the first application: \$10,000 to cover the cost of shipping 150 tons of skimmed milk powder to eleven different countries.⁸³ Several additional applications submitted in 1968 and 1969 were not approved at all. But in 1970 MCC Canada received \$16,000 for a dam building and irrigation project in India and \$25,000 for a poultry and loan project in Brazil.⁸⁴

By this time, CIDA’s NGO Division indicated that it welcomed larger country-focused project proposals and would support them on a 1:1 matching basis. Subsequently, MCC Canada received \$129,000 in 1971 for MCC projects in India, Botswana and Paraguay. In 1972 it received \$113,000, primarily for refugee rehabilitation in Bangladesh, and the following year \$200,000 for projects in Zaire, Botswana, Nicaragua, and Paraguay.⁸⁵ As more CIDA money became available and more staff time was required to do the paperwork, MCC Canada proposed hiring a staff person whose responsibilities it would be specifically to work on the CIDA file, in conjunction with staff in Akron.

Fears about the acceptance of CIDA funds

Initially, William Snyder and others in Akron were wary of tapping into Canadian government funds. Their reluctance was very much informed by the context of the Vietnam War, which pointed to the danger of independent organizations linking their efforts with government. MCC had, for a time, accepted US AID (US Agency for International Development) funds for the shipment of relief goods, and in South Vietnam it depended on the US military for transportation of material and personnel. But there was increasing discomfort with these practises. MCC staff were justifiably concerned when Canadians started to propose the use of government funds for MCC work. They feared this would lead to MCC becoming an instrument of Canadian foreign policy. They also felt that Anabaptist theological commitments to separation of church and state might be compromised by the acceptance of state funds. Canadians, on the other hand, saw the state in a more positive light and were generally disposed toward accepting such funds. Their government provided medicare, pensions, and other social welfare benefits, and it did not pursue an aggressive military agenda. They saw the state more as a benefactor rather than a military empire-builder.⁸⁶

William Snyder’s fears about the acceptance of CIDA funds subsided

when it became clear to him that the political implications of accepting Canadian government money were not the same as accepting US money.⁸⁷ He was reassured by the fact that the money was provided with virtually no strings attached.⁸⁸ In 1971 he stated that the formation of CIDA was one of the most important resource developments of late, and a few years later he spoke in support of seeking larger grants from CIDA. In 1973 he wrote to his own executive committee about CIDA's approval of a major animal breeding and grain milling project in Zaire: "It is the largest project we have thus far submitted to CIDA, but I am convinced it will also do many times the good that our smaller projects have done."⁸⁹

In 1973 MCC Canada approved a set of criteria that should guide the pursuit of government funding for international relief and development. These guidelines had been prepared in conjunction with MCC staff in Akron. Among other things, the criteria stipulated MCC must be able to retain prerogative and control on the use of funds, there be no strings attached regarding the use of the funds, grants cover a period of two to four years, and such grants be accepted only from groups whose "philosophy is in agreement with the philosophy of MCC."⁹⁰ There was no explanation of this last point, presumably because the philosophies of CIDA and MCC were considered compatible.⁹¹ Additionally, the guidelines insisted that whenever MCC Canada reported to constituents about the receipt of a grant, it should emphasize these funds would supplement, not replace, contributions from constituents. The approval of these guidelines set the stage for dramatic increases in CIDA funded projects in the succeeding years. It also set the stage for more debate about the wisdom of MCC Canada intentionally seeking government funds for its own faith-based work.

Vietnam

By the mid 1960s, the US was engaged in all-out war, supporting the anti-communist (and US-installed) government of South Vietnam against the communist-led government of North Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of US soldiers were combating Viet Cong guerrillas on the ground, and US planes were conducting devastating bombing campaigns on Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia. MCC had been placing workers in the southern part of Vietnam since 1954, in refugee assistance, literacy, health care, and agriculture. As US involvement in war escalated, MCC presence grew as well, peaking at forty-two workers in 1968. Increasingly, MCC workers witnessed the horror of the war and the terrible suffering it inflicted. They became convinced they could not

continue to minister to that suffering, without condemning the war itself. They also insisted MCC reach out to North Vietnam. As Doug Hostetter, an MCC worker in South Vietnam, maintained, if MCC was to clearly demonstrate that



Anne Falk of Altona, Manitoba served with MCC as a nurse in South Vietnam in the 1960s. Photo credit MAO.

the God it served was the God of all people—and not just the God of America—it must extend love and compassion to the people of North Vietnam.⁹²

Because MCC, as a US based agency, could not have any contact with North Vietnam, MCC turned to MCC Canada for help in reaching out to the North. Canada was officially neutral. Unofficially, however, Canada, as part of an international observer commission since 1954, was

known to share intelligence with the US military. It also benefited significantly by the sale of weapons and weapons components to the US for use in South Vietnam. Even so, Canada was not at war in Vietnam, and for the most part did not turn away US draft dodgers and resisters who sought refuge in Canada. Both at MCC and at MCC Canada, people believed and hoped Canada's "neutrality" would make it possible for MCC Canada to make contact with North Vietnam.

In 1967 MCC Canada agreed to a three-pronged response: to establish a fund specifically for North Vietnam, to attempt sending small relief shipments into the North, and to seek permission from the North Vietnamese government for a visit. J.M. Klassen, no doubt addressing anti-communist constituents, provided the rationale in this way:

The people of North Vietnam are not our enemies, unless it is by their own definition, or by that of the nations of which we are citizens. Our love reaches out to them because they are people; people whom God loves and for whom Christ died. People, who are suffering because of man's inhumanity to man. We do not distinguish between the suffering in North and South Vietnam—both are regrettable. We do not distinguish between the aggressor and the victim—neither side to the conflict is without blame. However, it would be less than Christian to extend love to the people on only one side of the conflict. The biblical imperative to love and feed our enemies moves us to extend help to North as well as to South Vietnam.⁹³

MCC had long established as a basic policy that only in very rare cases would it ship relief goods to places where it had no MCC personnel to oversee the distribution. North Vietnam was considered one of those rare cases. MCC Canada therefore sent two separate shipments of Vietnamese-style children's outfits to Hanoi via the Red Cross in 1967. One parcel was returned and then sent again. Word eventually reached Winnipeg the parcels had arrived. Later that year, MCC Canada also sent a shipment of medical equipment valued at \$9,300 via an East European Christian channel.⁹⁴ This too arrived.

MCC Canada had no success in obtaining permission for a Canadian representative to visit North Vietnam. It was not for lack of trying. Over a two-year period MCC Canada staff or Canadian personnel in MCC overseas service applied for visas in Paris, Algiers, New Delhi, Djakarta and Phnom Penh, cities where North Vietnam maintained offices. J.M. Klassen himself travelled to Phnom Penh and spent two weeks there, waiting for the elusive visa. Each time the answer was no. The official reason given was that North Vietnam could not ensure the safety of foreign visitors. But the real reason, it seemed, was one of distrust. North Vietnamese officials noted many western humanitarian groups, many of them well intentioned, were being used

by governments for their own political purposes. The government of North Vietnam was therefore reluctant to admit foreign groups which might in any way represent western "interests."⁹⁵

In a number of cities where Klassen or other Canadians met with North Vietnamese officials, the officials expressed appreciation for the relief shipments from MCC Canada. But they also emphasized they would much prefer to see the Mennonites raise a louder voice of protest against US policies in Southeast Asia.⁹⁶ Peter Dyck, then serving as MCC's director of Europe and North Africa, met

several times with the ambassador of North Vietnam in Algeria. Dyck reported that the ambassador "was very emphatic in pointing out that the biggest help we can give would be to bring about a change of heart in the Pentagon." MCC's task, the ambassador insisted, should be focused "in Washington rather than

*Raise a
louder voice
of protest*



Bob Neufeld, a service worker, meets with Laurenda M. Scott and Jon B. Messer of Pennsylvania at the Ottawa Mennonite Church. Neufeld counseled draft dodgers like Messer. Photo credit MAO.

Hanoi; not in binding up the wounds of war, but in stopping America from inflicting more and more wounds.”⁹⁷ The ambassador’s counsel to address root causes presented a significant challenge to MCC.

While MCC Canada was attempting to initiate a relief program in North Vietnam, it was also dealing on the domestic side with the issue of US “draft dodgers” coming to Canada. Young men deserting the military or seeking to avoid the draft began arriving in Canada in the mid-1960s but especially after 1968. Between 75,000 and 125,000 sought residency in Canada before the war ended.⁹⁸ In 1970 MCC Canada allocated \$2500 to meet the immediate needs of some of these refugees, and it encouraged Mennonite families in Canada to reach out to draft dodgers by providing hospitality, jobs, and spiritual counsel.⁹⁹ Those who advocated for this action argued that Canada had welcomed Mennonites at numerous points in history, including immediately after the World War I, when several hundred sought entry from the US in response to difficult wartime experiences; it behooved Mennonites to now welcome others who also refused military service.¹⁰⁰

Constituents reacted swiftly to MCC Canada’s action. Some of them were strongly opposed to offering any help to US draft resisters. They were influenced by portrayals of draft dodgers as drug-using hippies who were not willing to work or contribute to society.¹⁰¹ Then, too, some Mennonites suspected the dodgers were not “true” conscientious objectors because they lacked a well-articulated faith-based conviction.¹⁰² Opposition to helping the draft dodgers came from individuals and also from conferences. The Ontario Mennonite Brethren conference, for example, resolved it could not support the activities of individuals or groups who encouraged or gave aid to US draft dodgers. In their opinion, draft dodgers should return to the US where they could avail themselves of opportunities for alternative service.¹⁰³ Constituency reaction was strong and widespread. Dan Zehr, as director of Peace and Social Concerns, asked why constituents were generous and open in helping people overseas, but were only prepared to help the “the right kind of people” at home.¹⁰⁴ David P. Neufeld, MCC Canada chairperson, expressed frustration that ninety percent of the criticism directed towards MCC Canada was aimed at a miniscule portion of the budget.¹⁰⁵ He blamed the Mennonite papers—the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* and *The Canadian Mennonite*—for giving the issue too much attention.



MCC adopted this logo, designed by Ken Hiebert, in 1970. The circle, neither closed or complete, represents a broken world. The cross of Christ, and the dove of peace emanating from it, are central in bringing healing and hope to the world. The eye of the dove is alert to the needs of others. Photo credit MCC.

Aid to North Vietnam and support for draft dodgers were only two of many issues that would prove to be controversial among MCC Canada supporters.

Constituency Critique

The MCC Canada leadership—J.M. Klassen, Dan Zehr, and chairperson D.P. Neufeld—were very sensitive to the concerns of the constituency. They wanted the organization to reflect the wishes of the constituency, even though they were prepared to push the edges on some issues. Yet the constituency was far from homogeneous. At times in fact there was considerable distrust between groups that were members of MCC Canada. At one point Zehr proposed a Canada-wide pulpit exchange on the topic of “inter-Mennonite Relations and the Peace Position.” This suggestion emerged from his deep frustration over the divisive spirit he observed between different groups. He found it highly incongruent that so-called peace churches were so judgmental of each other’s perspectives.¹⁰⁶

*Buffeted by
critique and
controversy*

Given the heterogeneity of the constituency, it stands to reason MCC Canada would be buffeted by critique and controversy as it sought to establish an identity. This critique focused on a number of key areas. One of them was the organization’s mandate. As previously indicated, the mandate granted to MCC Canada at its birth was broad and sweeping. Many constituents were not aware of this comprehensive mandate or, if they knew of it, disapproved. Because they had grown to view MCC as a relief agency, they felt this was what MCC Canada should be. MCC Canada should feed the hungry, period. Critics were unhappy when they learned some of their donations were being used for peace education or cleaning up after tornadoes.¹⁰⁷ John A. Lapp, director of the Peace Section of MCC in Akron, visited British Columbia in 1971 and met with a group of pastors who held this view. After the meeting he wrote, “There is a great yawning gap between MCC as a soup kitchen and clothing distribution agency and what it’s [sic] 750 people are in fact doing. Unless some major attempts are made to refashion the MCC image the credibility gap will increase.”¹⁰⁸

Some people objected to the idea of MCC Canada speaking on behalf of all the Mennonites and Brethren in Christ of Canada. They saw this happening as MCC Canada representatives attended meetings of the Canadian Council of Churches or the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. They opposed such a “representational” function. Some people believed MCC Canada was starting

to take on the status of a “super-conference,” usurping the roles of the existing conferences.¹⁰⁹ They feared that it would soon be telling people what to believe.

A frequent critique was that MCC Canada was engaging in activities considered “political.” Critics said that MCC Canada should not be addressing the government about controversial issues such as helping draft dodgers, ending capital punishment, or recognizing China. It should not be seeking to help communist countries like North Vietnam. And it should definitely not be encouraging involvement in peace protests, marches, and civil disobedience. Actually, MCC Canada was not encouraging such involvement, but the Peace Section of MCC had gone on record as recognizing such action as legitimate.¹¹⁰

The critique that MCC Canada was “political” arose, at least in part, out of two-kingdom theology. It also arose out of a strongly anti-communist orientation.¹¹¹ Many of the MCC Canada constituents who had experienced life under communist rule in the USSR were virulently anti-communist. When these people saw MCC Canada challenging US involvement in Vietnam, helping draft dodgers, or sending aid to North Vietnam, they saw it as siding with communists and revolutionaries, and this was abhorrent to them.¹¹² Very often, these individuals did not recognize the “political” nature of their own support of America’s war on communism.¹¹³

An incident in 1966 crystallized the critique of MCC Canada being “political.” In that year, the inter-Mennonite and chronically under-funded periodical *The Canadian Mennonite* appealed to MCC Canada for a grant of several thousand dollars. The rationale for the request was that the paper provided MCC Canada with a great deal of free publicity. Initially, the MCC Canada board responded favourably. But this decision roused an immediate and sustained outcry from constituents. A major concern was the newspaper’s “politics.”¹¹⁴ Under the editorship of Frank Epp from 1953 to 1967, *The Canadian Mennonite* raised issues normally considered taboo, it challenged the traditional piety of the church, and it advocated engagement with the social issues of the day. It also confronted those who linked evangelical Christianity with support for American militarism and western capitalism.¹¹⁵ The paper’s stance, though popular with a younger and more educated audience, was very controversial, especially in southern Manitoba where, ironically, it was published. Because of the strong and sustained constituency opposition to the grant, MCC Canada eventually rescinded its decision.¹¹⁶ William Snyder, writing sympathetically to J.M. Klassen, said, “This is one of your first ‘hot potatoes.’”¹¹⁷

Yet another issue generating significant debate related to broader understandings of the church’s mission in the world. For many years Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches had been strong supporters of

missionary activity, both in Canada and abroad. While many missionaries engaged in meeting basic human needs, the primary purpose of their work was the verbal proclamation of the gospel in order to lead people to faith and to support new believing communities. MCC and MCC Canada, as inter-Mennonite agencies, however, had a different purpose. They were to meet basic human needs through a variety of ministries, and leave the proselytizing and church planting to the denominational mission boards. This separation of word and deed invariably led to difficulties. In some situations missionary and relief activities came to be seen as “parallel and even competing endeavors” rather than as inter-related parts of a holistic ministry.¹¹⁸ It also meant that MCC Canada was frequently confronted with a somewhat confusing dilemma. On the one hand, its workers were not to create new churches, but those same workers were expected to offer an explicitly Christian witness. And here they were often found wanting.

A regular refrain was that MCC workers were so focused on meeting physical needs that they neglected to address the spiritual needs of people they served.¹¹⁹ Oftentimes, in situations like this, the best response was not one from MCC Canada leadership, but the kind offered by alumnus Elisabeth Wieler, who wrote to the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* about her family’s service assignment in Greece: “The work was defined as agricultural development, but the MCC team also taught Sunday School, distributed Bibles in villages and discussed scripture with villagers. . . . We are sorry if we left our churches with the impression that only better chickens and pigs were produced.”¹²⁰

Constituents also challenged MCC Canada because they felt its workers did not measure up to the standards expected of them. Critics surfaced stories—true and untrue—about the behaviour of service workers in Canada and overseas. Detractors wrote about a worker engaged in “fornication,” another worker fathering an illegitimate child,¹²¹ workers going dancing,¹²² workers smoking or drinking,¹²³ and male and female workers living in units without chaperones.¹²⁴ MCC Canada was regularly admonished to do a more careful job of screening the young people



Frieda Schellenberg of Watrous, Saskatchewan completed three terms of service in Bolivia as a nurse and health promoter between 1965 and 1982. Much of the time she lived in remote villages and travelled around by horse. Photo credit MHC.

that it accepted into service. It also received the occasional letter encouraging less rigidity and legalism about certain behaviours and more understanding for the young people in service. In 1972, for example, when smoking and drinking in the Toronto service unit led to a bit of a shake-up, one Ontario minister pushed MCC Canada to provide more support for service workers who were often placed in difficult situations without sufficient supports. He also made this comment, "When an institution begins to think more of its [sic] reputation than of the individuals who look to it as an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to serve, then something is wrong."¹²⁵

MCC Canada leadership conceded some of the criticism regarding its workers was legitimate. Writing to William Snyder in a moment of discouragement, J.M. Klassen lamented, "I am becoming somewhat weary of these accusations. Often they are ill founded and unwarranted. . . . On the other hand, I too, am troubled with the inability of some of our young people to identify their objectives and articulate their faith." He had recently met a young person who claimed to have "doctored" his MCC application form and was still accepted into service. He had also recently been in Bolivia where some workers chose to identify themselves to the public as Peace Corps, rather than as MCC service workers. These experiences clearly weighed on him.¹²⁶ Snyder responded sympathetically. He also gently suggested that perhaps people challenged MCC Canada because they identified with its work and mission. If they did not care about MCC Canada, they would likely not voice their concerns.¹²⁷

Snyder was in many ways correct. Much of the criticism aimed at MCC Canada in its first decade originated with what came to be known in MCC parlance as "the Loyal Opposition." The critics were generally not people wishing to withdraw from MCC Canada; they wanted it to change certain practices. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) Conference, for example, launched a significant study in 1969 to examine the level of dissatisfaction within the conference toward MCC Canada. As a member of that conference, J.M. Klassen found this a deeply troubling experience. He need not have lost sleep, for the outcome of the study was a call for "wholehearted and continued support."¹²⁸ In the US, the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) Conference did choose to withdraw from MCC in 1969, but MCC Canada was not significantly affected, because there were few EMB congregations in Canada, and the large one in Steinbach continued its membership in MCC Canada. In fact, a self-study which MCC Canada conducted in 1968, surveying about one thousand constituency representatives, indicated that in general people were satisfied with the national agency, even if they were not really well informed about it.¹²⁹ Eventually MCC Canada leaders came to recognize that critique from its

constituency came with the territory and was one of the burdens they would have to bear.

In a desire to deepen its relationship with constituent denominations, MCC Canada hosted a consultation in Saskatoon in 1973, with some seventy denominational leaders from across the country. The purpose of the gathering, from MCC Canada's perspective, was to build a deeper sense of inter-Mennonite partnership, but also to gain feedback and guidance on new possibilities for programming in Canada. Evidently, some of the men who attended suspected that MCC Canada had some hidden agenda. They relaxed when they learned this was not the case.¹³⁰ The *Mennonite Brethren Herald* reported good sharing and discussion. Among other things, the gathering encouraged MCC Canada to move ahead in expanding Voluntary Service work in the country and initiating new work with Aboriginal people (see next chapter). It also recommended the moderators and secretaries of the various Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conferences meet annually, in advance of the MCC Canada annual meeting, "to extend our fellowship, to find our larger common task, and to probe the contemporary issues of faith and discipleship."¹³¹ MCC Canada not only reflected a growing spirit of inter-Mennonite cooperation, it also advanced it in significant ways. The Council of Moderators and Secretaries, eventually renamed the Canadian Council of Anabaptist Leaders, was still meeting annually with MCC Canada leadership in 2012.

Conclusion

Ten years after its inauspicious beginnings in a warehouse on Princess Street in downtown Winnipeg, MCC Canada had established itself as a respectable organization. The office had moved twice—first to Portage Avenue in 1965 and then to a brand new facility on Pembina Highway in 1968. The new building was owned by MCC Manitoba, with MCC Canada renting most of the top floor. There had been modest growth at the staff level. J.M. Klassen had returned to teaching and Dan Zehr replaced him as executive secretary, while Kathleen Froese had become the coordinator of the SELFHELP Crafts program. Additional full-time staff included John Wieler, who had been hired as associate executive secretary, Bert Friesen as researcher, Judii Rempel and Karen Bowman, secretaries. Several part-time staff provided specialized assistance, and a search was on for someone who could direct the Voluntary Service program.

Growth was much more evident in terms of the donations received and personnel placed. In the course of a decade, MCC Canada's receipts, including

both cash and material aid, had increased more than tenfold, from \$149,769 in 1964 to \$1,792,056 in 1973. Material aid had grown steadily but then decreased, in response to Akron's request. Canadians also represented a very respectable proportion of MCC workers. Their numbers had gone up and down in the course of the decade but in 1973 stood at 243 of 750 or 32.4 percent of the total.¹³² The proportion would continue to climb through the 1970s, reaching 323 of 809 or 39.9 percent of the total in 1980.

Through the decade MCC Canada had been trying to forge a role and identity. That identity included—at various times and in various ways—international relief organization (through MCC in the US), Christian service ministry, force for peace and social concern, vehicle for Mennonite cooperation and “ecumenicity,” voice and face of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in the public square. MCC Canada was already becoming many things.

In its first decade, MCC Canada had developed good relationships with MCC and with the provincial MCCs. It had demonstrated the value of inter-Mennonite cooperation, in spite of ongoing challenges. It had been generally well accepted by its constituency. It had gained the respect of other church agencies and the Canadian International Development Agency. On its tenth anniversary, Newton Gingrich, the new chairperson, reflected on these significant accomplishments, even while he acknowledged the “mistakes, criticism, suspicions, false accusations and limited vision.”¹³³

*MCC Canada
was already
becoming
many things*

Gingrich also dared to offer some of his own hopes for the future. He hoped MCC Canada would build greater trust between constituent groups and would become the unifying structure for *all* inter-Mennonite work in Canada. He urged the organization to develop creative new programs to meet the needs of the day, and not only be guided by historical precedence. He expressed the hope that, through MCC Canada, Mennonite groups would learn to dialogue and work with other religious bodies, offering a strong witness to them, but also learning from them. Gingrich suggested, “the Canadian and USA MCC’s can become counterparts in all overseas work.” He even concluded by saying that, while MCC Canada clearly had a future, down the road “the structure, programs, methods and even name may be altered.”¹³⁴

Gingrich was pushing the organization to be bold and to take risks. He was even daring to suggest a re-negotiated relationship with MCC. The next decade would demonstrate whether these hopes and dreams would become realities.

CHAPTER 5

Growing a Ministry, 1973-1983

IN THE EARLY 1970s MCC Canada placed a young Roman Catholic from Kansas named Tim McEvoy as a Voluntary Service worker in the northern Saskatchewan community of Meadow Lake.¹ Meadow Lake was a heterogeneous community, populated by First Nations, Metis, and white residents who did not mix much. McEvoy's assignment was to help local youth—Aboriginal and white—develop a drop-in centre that would facilitate relationship-building and provide a healthy recreational outlet. McEvoy quickly won the trust and friendship of local Aboriginal youth and the drop-in centre became a popular gathering place. However, his relationship with the two Mennonite churches in town got off to a rocky start. Church members were concerned about reports of alcohol consumption and dancing. They also felt McEvoy should be witnessing more explicitly to the Aboriginal people about the love of God.² McEvoy, on the other hand, found the spirituality of the local Mennonites rigid, judgmental, and patronizing of their Aboriginal neighbours. He insisted that before anyone could preach about the love of God, it was important to demonstrate the love of God through relationships of friendship and respect.³

A crisis developed in Meadow Lake between McEvoy and the churches, necessitating a visit from MCC Canada executive director Dan Zehr. Zehr's companions were Menno Wiebe, director of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and Fred Peters of MCC Saskatchewan. A difficult meeting with members of the two churches revealed MCC Canada had erred by not sufficiently engaging them in the development of its service involvement in the community. It also revealed to the MCC representatives that members of the churches held negative and stereotyped notions about Aboriginal people and lacked understanding of and empathy for their situation.⁴ Zehr and the others became convinced that MCC Canada needed to be intentionally

educating Mennonites about the realities of oppression and injustice experienced by Aboriginal people, as well as analyzing the “inadequacies” within the constituency which hindered genuine relationships of trust and respect.⁵ By 1974 MCC Canada had established a new program called Native Concerns with the mandate to address these crucial needs.

...

As MCC Canada entered its second decade, Canada was still enjoying the unprecedented economic growth and prosperity it had experienced almost continuously since the end of World War II. Wheat exports, potash mines, a growing energy sector and a booming automobile industry brought new wealth to many parts of the country. Although Aboriginal people, new immigrants, and some Atlantic Canadians did not share in the wealth, most Mennonites and Brethren in Christ did. By the 1970s, the vast majority of Mennonites were well entrenched in the Canadian middle class.

This prosperity bode well for the growth of MCC Canada, even while it widened the distance between the constituency and the people MCC Canada sought to serve. The organization entered into a period of unprecedented growth and creativity. By 1983, in addition to work with Aboriginal people, it established programs addressing the needs of criminal offenders, persons with disabilities, refugees, and colony Mennonites in Mexico. It had begun an Ottawa Office to facilitate work with the federal government. And it had initiated a food bank as an innovative way of facilitating the shipment of wheat for emergency relief purposes. These new programs took the organization in new directions, while also building on the older foundations. MCC Canada's growth and increasing confidence contributed to tensions in the relationship with MCC and a renegotiation of the MCC-MCC Canada relationship.

Native Concerns

MCC Canada had been involved with Aboriginal people for years, through membership in a variety of national ecumenical organizations, and through Voluntary Service placements in Newfoundland-Labrador, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. The establishment of a Native Concerns program in 1974 increased the depth, breadth, and visibility of this involvement significantly.

MCC Canada invited Menno Wiebe to become Native Concerns' first director. Wiebe had served as a Pax worker in Paraguay, where he developed

strong relationships with the indigenous Guarani. He had studied theology and anthropology and served with the Mennonite Pioneer Mission (later Native Ministries) in northern Manitoba. Combining the gifts of poet and prophet, Wiebe was as comfortable playing crokinole with Aboriginal youth, as he

was making presentations to parliamentary committees or speaking to national media. Because of his unique character, his outspoken defence of Aboriginal people, and because he remained in the position of director for more than twenty years, Wiebe came to personify the Native Concerns program.

Under Wiebe's leadership, Native Concerns unfolded in several different directions: service, community development, justice advocacy, and constituency education. MCC Canada expanded its efforts to place service workers in Native communities or working at issues pertaining to Native people. One rather serendipitous assignment occurred in the Kwakiutl community of Tsulquate, near Port Hardy, BC. A Pentecostal minister named Ed Sampare, whose wife

was from Tsulquate, regularly visited inmates in the Matsqui penitentiary in the Fraser Valley. There he met and befriended Jake Hiebert, a member of the Olivet Mennonite Church in Clearbrook and vice-chair of the local Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), who also regularly visited inmates. When Sampare indicated that homes in Tsulquate needed repair, Hiebert offered to bring a group of MDS volunteers to do the work. It turned out to be a good experience all round. A while later the community conveyed a message to Hiebert they desired more assistance and "more contact with these people." Hiebert, sensing that the aid needed was beyond the scope of MDS, passed the request on to MCC BC. About a year later, MCC workers Stephen and Edith Dyck were assigned to Tsulquate. Their soft-spoken and sensitive ways as counsellors and welfare workers—a stance expected by Native Concerns—was appreciated. Thereafter, Tsulquate and other nearby communities welcomed MCC service workers continuously until 1999.⁶

A new service venture launched by Native Concerns was a summer gardening program. At the request of the chief of Sachigo Lake in northwestern Ontario, MCC Canada placed a summer volunteer to assist with the development of vegetable gardens. According to the chief, it was extremely expensive to bring fresh vegetables into the community, and he hoped that, with assistance, the people might develop self-sufficiency in

*Service,
community
development,
justice,
advocacy, and
constituency
education*

vegetable production, while improving the local diet. This initial experiment was quite successful, prompting MCC Canada to make summer gardening in Native communities a regular program. In 1978 five gardeners were placed in five communities. By the peak year of 1982, twenty-four gardeners were serving in twenty-one communities.⁷ Even more important than the gardens, according to Menno Wiebe, were the friendships that developed. A widely distributed MCC poster pictured a summer gardener and an Aboriginal woman laughing together as they squatted in a patch of vegetables; the caption read, “Planting gardens, growing understanding.”

Serving in Aboriginal communities, whether for a summer or a longer period, was not without its challenges. Occasionally, summer gardeners arrived at their place of assignment ready to work, only to discover that they were not expected.⁸ Sometimes workers experienced theft of possessions, or, if young women, sexual harassment.⁹ Many workers were also exposed to levels of alcoholism, violence, and trauma they had not witnessed before. Esther Dick, serving at a children’s home at Montreal Lake, Saskatchewan in 1975, wrote about a child giving birth at the age of eleven and another child witnessing the murder of her mother. She wrote, “I can no longer look at a child here without realizing that in many ways he or she is no longer

a child. Many have had to fend for themselves for as long as they can remember.”¹⁰

Most service workers recognized that the violence and dysfunction they witnessed in Indigenous communities represented the trauma which resulted from the multiple losses of land, livelihood, cultural, and spiritual identity.¹¹ Many also experienced generous hospitality, as well as much beauty and tenderness amidst the more painful realities. Linda Warkentin, serving in Davis Inlet, wrote in her journal, “men



Bonnie Cumming (R), summer gardener from Dunster, BC, enjoys a laugh with Aldina Favel and her daughter at Poundmaker Reserve, Saskatchewan. Photo credit MHC

bringing home load after load of firewood. . . , women carrying heavy loads of laundry and babies. . . , room for the old folks. . . , a teen aged daughter’s newborn welcomed with love. . . , sisters laughing together. . . , indulgent smiles of grandparents. . . .A society is said to be held together by the strength of its families. I fear our ‘more advanced’ society. . .will destroy something most

precious.”¹² Many workers came to deeply love their Aboriginal friends and their way of life.

In addition to service and community development, Native Concerns quickly moved into the arena of justice advocacy. In a 1977 report, Menno Wiebe asserted that justice was rooted in the biblical witness of the Psalmists, the prophets, and Jesus, and was manifest in relief from oppression.¹³ Aboriginal people experienced profound oppression through having decisions imposed upon them by others—decisions about their land, their way of life, and their very identity. A commitment to justice, in Wiebe’s view, demanded solidarity with Aboriginal peoples and advocacy on their behalf. In the context of the 1970s, this meant supporting them in their resistance to the development of several energy mega-projects in Canada’s north.¹⁴

The first of these mega-projects was the construction of the massive Nelson-Churchill River hydroelectric development project in northern Manitoba. The project had been approved in the mid-1960s by both federal and provincial governments with very little consultation with the people of five affected reserves. By 1975, with the dams not yet in operation, construction had already adversely impacted traplines, hunting and fishing grounds, and some homes. At the request of the northern communities, an Inter-church Task Force on Northern Flooding was created by Catholic, Anglican,



This group of people participated in the native gardening program during the summer of 1982. Photo credit MHC.

Mennonite, and United Churches. The Task Force held open hearings as a way of drawing public attention to the concerns of the Aboriginal people. As Mennonite representative on the Task Force, Wiebe did not oppose hydro, energy, or mineral development in the north *per se*, but he insisted that Native treaty rights be honoured and given priority, and that Native people have input into any decisions affecting their land and way of life.

Wiebe became an outspoken voice for justice for Canada's Aboriginal people, including the Dene of the Northwest Territories, the Lubicon Cree of northern Alberta, the Innu of Labrador, or the Ojibway at Ipperwash, Ontario. Much of MCC Canada's advocacy was carried out through Project North, a national inter-church coalition responding to industrial expansion in northern Canada as it affected Native people. MCC Canada joined Project North in 1976; Wiebe served as chairperson from 1984-86.

From the beginning, constituency education was also a key aspect of the Native Concerns program. Much of this education happened organically as service workers and summer gardeners returned home and shared what they had learned from Aboriginal people. Additionally, Wiebe spent much time speaking in churches, schools, and colleges, running workshops, addressing conferences, as well as inviting First Nations elders and Metis leaders to speak to Mennonite gatherings. He wanted Mennonites to appreciate the Native people as people—their deep sense of community, their profound relationship with the earth, the beauty of their arts and culture—while also understanding the violence and injustice perpetrated against them by governments, industry, and an uncaring and often racist public. Additionally, he wanted Mennonites to acknowledge that as relative newcomers and settlers to Turtle Island (an indigenous name for North America), they had benefitted—and continued to benefit—from policies which relegated Native people onto small reserves and opened up their land for agricultural settlement, industrial development, and mineral exploration.

Wiebe frequently recalled the question put to him by Chief Carl Roberts of Roseau River First Nation in southern Manitoba, only a small distance from the predominantly Mennonite town of Altona. Roseau River was part of Treaty 1, signed in 1871, while Altona was located on what had been the Mennonite West Reserve, allocated by the Manitoba government for incoming immigrants from Russia in 1875.¹⁵ At one point Roberts reminded Wiebe the people of Roseau River were still waiting for the land entitlement owed them by Treaty 1, while the Mennonites had received all the land promised them—and more. "Could the Mennonites, from their position of

privilege, put in a good word for fulfillment of government obligations to us?" he had asked.¹⁶

Above all, Native Concerns hoped Mennonites would listen to and learn from Aboriginal people. Although Wiebe believed that Mennonites had something to offer Native communities—a similar sense of peoplehood, a similar history of displacement, a commitment to Jesus—he strongly resisted traditional understandings of mission and evangelism. He opposed the notion that missionaries and service workers were there to “bring” the good news which Native people needed to “receive.” He insisted “the good news must be good news not only for the proclaimers but also the hearers.”¹⁷ This meant MCC workers, and Mennonites in general, needed to enter into relationships with Aboriginal people from a stance of listening and learning.¹⁸

A stance of listening and learning

Many constituents who were exposed to the Native Concerns agenda in the 1970s resonated with the focus on justice advocacy and the stance of listening and learning. These individuals knew enough about the broken promises, the theft of land, and the social dislocation that Aboriginal people continued to experience at the hands of government, dominant society, and even the Christian church. These constituents wanted to make things right, and they believed that Native Concerns pointed in a helpful direction.

But a good number of constituents were highly critical of the Native Concerns program for a range of reasons.¹⁹ Some people felt MCC should not be telling government or business how it should relate to Native people. Others argued MCC should not stand in the way of “progress”—that is, energy and industrial development. For some, the problem was Project North; the coalition did not seem to espouse a clearly biblical and evangelical theology. Related to this, some people also felt that MCC Canada was too accepting of “Aboriginal spirituality.” They believed an easy acceptance by service workers of Native traditions such as drumming, dancing, potlatches, represented a kind of syncretism. The criticism was quite relentless, with some churches withholding funds because they could not endorse the Native Concerns work.²⁰

In truth, racism was deeply entrenched within Mennonite churches and communities, as it was within white society generally. One Saskatchewan individual likely expressed the views of many when he wrote to *Mennonite Reporter*, “the Native problem” hinged on “laziness, liquor and immorality.”²¹ Another prominent Mennonite from Manitoba suggested that since the government fed, housed, and provided an education for Aboriginal people, they should stop demanding their “rights.”²² Metis adviser and writer Emma

LaRocque charged such attitudes were widespread. In a report, she listed a dozen predominantly Mennonite towns in Canada and asked, “what do these areas know and care about Native people? How many times do [the residents there] mouth off stereotypes about [Native] people?”²³ LaRocque was eager to start a racism awareness program among Mennonites, but no one picked up on her suggestion.²⁴

The racism went deeper than the attitudes of individuals or groups; it encompassed an entire worldview. Mennonites had arrived in Canada as immigrants and refugees, and, like most other settlers, saw the land as empty and waiting to be exploited.²⁵ While remaining “separate” in some ways, Mennonites had generally adopted the values, lifestyle, and worldview of white settler society without much critique.²⁶ This worldview denied the reality of the colonization process and its ongoing legacy of injustice.

The persons who participated in the Native Concerns program gained much from their experiences in Aboriginal communities. They served as a vanguard in Mennonite understandings of and relationships with Aboriginal people. Yet they also were not fully cognizant of the ways MCC Canada’s work with Native people arose out of a settler paradigm. It would remain for later generations to name and grapple with this reality.

Offender Ministries

In 1978 the *Mennonite Reporter*, a new periodical, carried a story about Gord Hillyer, a 21-year-old prison inmate. Life had dealt Hillyer some hard blows and he had responded in violent ways. In prison his bad behaviour had landed him in solitary confinement on several occasions. One day, according to the story, Hillyer managed to steal a razor blade and prepared to slash his wrists. Just before he acted, a prison guard appeared at his cell with a visitor. It was the first visit Hillyer had received in eighteen months. The visitor was Al Laing, a volunteer with M2 (Man to Man), a new prison visitation program staffed by MCC Voluntary Service worker, Harry



Volunteer Henry Wiebe visits an inmate friend at the Oakalla Prison in Burnaby, BC, 1970. Photo credit MAO.

Nigh. According to Hillyer, Laing's arrival that day prevented him from committing suicide; it also marked the beginning of his healing journey. Two years later, Hillyer was a transformed person. He was out of prison, happily married and father of an infant son, with self-esteem and newfound faith. He credited his recovery to Laing who had visited regularly, sent letters, and become like a father to him.²⁷

*Healing for
both victim
and offender*

A prison visitation program had begun in BC in the late 1960s, led by churches in cooperation with government and prison officials. MCC BC was quickly drawn into the new venture, providing financial support and VS workers to help staff the program. M2 (Man to Man) grew to include W2 (Woman to Woman). It matched particularly isolated inmates with volunteers who were "compassionate and free of prejudice and self-righteousness."²⁸ The hope was these relationships would help rehabilitate the inmates and support them upon their release. The BC model inspired the development of similar prison visitation programs in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, with significant support and involvement from the provincial MCCs. In each province, Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituents, as well as others, responded enthusiastically to the call for volunteers. Many of them were inspired by the gospel call to visit prisoners, an exhortation from Matthew 25:36. Not nearly all of the "matches" resulted in the kind of dramatic transformation experienced by Gord Hillyer, but many of them made a powerful difference in the lives of prisoners.

In addition to prison visitation, MCC Canada, through its Voluntary Service program, and in cooperation with the various provincial MCCs, addressed the needs of offenders in a variety of ways. In Manitoba, a half-way house called Grosvenor Place provided a supportive home for parolees and offenders coming out of prison. In Alberta, a residential farm work program called Youth Opportunities Unlimited helped young offenders and at-risk youth develop the skills and attitudes to lead healthy and productive lives. MCC BC supported an inter-denominational program for ex-offenders called Job Therapy. In Ontario, a new initiative matched volunteers with people on probation, in the hope that the friendships which developed would prevent offenders from re-offending. Voluntary Service workers were assigned to all of these programs.

MCC Ontario's probation program was the birthplace for an innovative new project aimed at reconciling victims and offenders.²⁹ The idea was the brainchild of Dave Worth, VS coordinator for MCC Ontario, and Mark Yantzi, a VSer working with the probation program. The two friends believed victims of crime needed healing, offenders needed opportunities to make things

right, and the criminal justice system was unable to meet either need. They were also convinced the church's mission in the world was to offer a ministry of reconciliation through alternatives to the criminal justice system. They developed the idea of bringing victims and offenders together in a context where the two parties could reach agreement on a way for the offender to acknowledge his offense and make restitution. They felt such a process could bring healing for both victim and offender and the possibility of reconciliation.

The first opportunity for testing this idea took place in April 1975. Two youths in Elmira, Ontario had gone on a rampage, smashing windows, slashing tires, and committing other acts of vandalism. The youths were charged and, as a condition of probation, sentenced to pay for the damage. Yantzi happened to be the probation officer on the case. He and Worth submitted a letter to the judge, suggesting the therapeutic value for the youths, as well as the twenty-two victims, if they would meet each other. The judge agreed to the experiment. Worth and Yantzi accompanied the youths to the homes of their victims, and witnessed them admit their guilt. At some homes the youth were received with anger, elsewhere with expressions of concern. A few months later, the youths returned to the homes of the victims, with certified cheques for the payment of the damage. An evaluation later revealed the experiment brought a sense of closure to victims, and it taught the young offenders the impact of their actions, while allowing them to make amends. In many ways the outcome was a win-win situation.

This experiment led to formation of the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) in 1976. A key ingredient of the proposal was the use of a trained mediator to facilitate meetings between a victim and an offender. Within a year VORP had taken on sixty-one cases. Forty-eight of them had led to meetings between victims and their offenders, with levels of satisfaction reported high.³⁰ With the strong support of judges, social service agencies, and church groups, MCC Ontario developed a partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Service for processing the cases. VORP-style programs soon began to emerge elsewhere, with and without MCC support, in Canada and in the US. The idea caught the attention of media and it spread further. VORP evolved and in turn gave birth to additional mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution. In 2000 about 1200 VORPs were operating worldwide.³¹ Although VORP was rooted in ancient values and commitments, the small experiment in Kitchener in 1975 is considered to be the beginning of what became a world-wide movement.³²

Mennonite interest in offenders and prisons in the 1970s reflected a wider wave of concern in the Christian church about the criminal justice system.

The formation of the Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC) coalition was a symbol of this movement. One of the key voices advancing new understandings and approaches was Edgar Epp. Trained in theology and in social work, Epp believed, like Worth and Yantzi, the church should offer an alternate vision to the criminal justice system. As superintendent of the Prince Albert penitentiary in the mid-1960s, Epp had dismantled the gallows a decade before capital punishment was abolished in Canada. Later, as warden of the Haney Correctional Centre, he locked away the guns and ammunition. He also successfully defused a prison riot through negotiation rather than armed force.³³ In 1975, Epp was hired as a part-time consultant on offender issues for both MCC Canada and MCC. Epp's appointment marks the formal beginning of MCC Canada's Offender Ministries Program; Epp also devoted some of his time to staffing the CCJC. Dave Worth followed Epp in 1983, serving from his post in Ontario. He renamed the program Victim Offender Ministries.

Both Epp and Worth were proponents for a redemptive and restorative approach to crime and to criminals. Victims needed to be heard and healed, while offenders needed to be held accountable for their offences and given opportunity to make amends. Epp and Worth believed Mennonites, with a theology of peace and reconciliation, were well equipped to speak into a system built on punitive and retributive justice. But they knew that Mennonite "speaking" or advocacy only had integrity as it arose out of grass-roots efforts to make change. As ordinary people engaged in prison visitation, half-way houses, mediation programs, and victim-offender reconciliation efforts, they demonstrated ways of making a difference at the grass-roots level; they also strengthened advocacy at the system level. For Worth especially, restorative justice was a way for Mennonites to put their beliefs about peacemaking into practice. He wrote in 1983, "The area of crime provides/demands an opportunity to be involved in peacemaking very directly in every community and congregation across Canada. We do not have to wait for a war to take a stand against violence. In fact here is one place where we can actively be involved as reconcilers between enemies without going far from our homes."³⁴

Constituency education was a large part of the Offender Ministries program, as it was with the Native Concerns. Generally speaking, the program did not generate as much controversy, though from time to time Epp or Worth encountered resistance—as, for example, when they spoke out against capital or corporal punishment, or dared to imagine the abolition of prisons.³⁵ Many constituents were inspired by the vision and its practical application.

Handicap Concerns

In 1971 Peter and Irma Penner of St. John's, Newfoundland welcomed daughter



Peter Penner with his daughter Yvonne. Peter and Irma Penner served in Newfoundland and New Brunswick as advocates for families with children with disabilities. Photo credit MHC.

Yvonne into their family. Yvonne was born with significant disabilities and her parents were told she should be placed in an institution. But the Penners desired to keep Yvonne at home, believing she could thrive if provided with sufficient supports. They became advocates for Yvonne and for others families like theirs, demanding the kinds of programs, equipment, and resource people available in other parts of the country. Eventually Peter Penner resigned his tenured position as a biochemist at Memorial University, and beginning in 1981 he and Irma

became family support workers with the Canadian Association of the Mentally Retarded, seconded to the organization as MCC service workers. Many people were incredulous Penner would give up his secure university job, but he explained it this way: there were lots of biochemists looking for work, but very few people who wanted to help families with disabled children.³⁶

MCC Canada had been involved with the physically and or mentally disabled for some time, through its Voluntary Service program. VSers had worked—in some places, continued to work—at homes for disabled children or adults in various parts of the country. The work of the Penners, however, represented a new approach in the care of those with disabilities—a de-institutionalized approach. It was part of a larger cultural shift which aimed at closing institutions and moving persons with disabilities into their respective communities.

De-institutionalization in turn was part of a larger self-help movement among people with disabilities. By the 1970s, disabled people in Canada and around the world were organizing and taking charge of their lives. They rejected society's

A larger self-help movement among people with disabilities

definitions of them as odd, abnormal, “retarded” or “crippled.” They argued society’s attitudes, and the obstacles created thereby, were the real handicap. They began to demand the right to participate fully in society, and especially to determine how they would live their own lives.³⁷

Henry Enns was part of this self-help movement. Enns had grown up in Paraguay, as a refugee from World War II. He immigrated to Canada with his family in 1954 and settled in Steinbach, Manitoba. As a teenager he contracted rheumatoid arthritis which eventually required he use a wheelchair. He nevertheless completed a Bachelor of Social Work degree at university and became involved in a number of local and provincial disability organizations, helping to found the national Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped. In 1979 Enns applied to MCC Canada as a Voluntary Service worker, indicating he wished to work with Mennonite congregations across the country, to sensitize them to the needs of people with disabilities. Dave Dyck, MCC Canada program director, was intrigued by the proposal because of his own special interest in disabilities. MCC Canada’s Handicap Concerns ministry was born.

Enns threw himself into his work with vision and passion. Despite his own mobility and health challenges, he criss-crossed the country, encouraging congregations to become more accessible—both attitudinally and architecturally—to persons with disabilities. This was at a time when few buildings were built with any attention to the needs of the disabled. One of the ironies of Enns’ work was that the MCC Canada

office building remained inaccessible. The three-storey jointly owned MCC Manitoba/MCC Canada office on Pembina Highway had many stairs but no elevator. When Enns arrived at work in the mornings, he rang the doorbell outside the backdoor and waited until one or more staff members came to haul him and his wheelchair up several flights of stairs. A new building completed in 1987 was fully accessible.

Enns’ involvements took him well beyond the Mennonite and Brethren



Henry Enns of Steinbach, Manitoba spearheaded the Handicap Concerns program of MCC Canada in the early 1980s. Photo credit MHC.

in Christ community. In 1979 he learned about a California initiative to establish an independent living centre, a home where people with disabilities could live independently but with the kinds of staff and other supports they determined. Within a few years, Enns had helped to establish Canada's very first Independent Living Centre in Kitchener. Similar centres followed in Winnipeg and Calgary. In 1981 Enns was a key player in the founding of Disabled People's International (DPI), the first international organization of disabled people mandated to work for their full participation and equality worldwide.³⁸ In subsequent years he served as chairperson and executive director. Through DPI he contributed to the drafting of a United Nations World Program of Action concerning disabled people. Later he helped to found the first Canadian Centre for Disability Studies. Enns' vision and contribution to the disability movement were acknowledged by awards from the Government of Canada, the United Nations, and honorary doctorates from both Queen's University and the University of Manitoba.

*Education
"from the
underside"*

After four years with MCC Canada, Enns signed on for a term of service with MCC to help identify ways that the international program could support the needs of persons with disabilities. In Canada, the work of education and advocacy was thereafter carried forward by provincial committees which Enns had helped to found.

The establishment of Native Concerns, Offender Ministries, and Handicap Concerns represented new directions for MCC Canada. These initiatives demonstrated a deliberate effort to address crucial social needs within Canada and to do so in the context of wider movements advancing Aboriginal rights, criminal justice reform, and empowerment of those with disabilities. MCC Canada's impact in this work was magnified because of the exceptional expertise, passion and theologically grounded vision provided by staff persons Menno Wiebe, Edgar Epp, Dave Worth, and Henry Enns.³⁹

These programs plowed new ground in another way. They focused on the need for educating Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church members. To be sure, the Peace and Social Concerns program had had an educational focus from the beginning. But these new initiatives aimed to do education "from the underside" – that is, from the perspective of people MCC was seeking to serve.⁴⁰ MCC Canada staff and service workers were often on the front-line of relationships with marginalized people, entering into worlds of hurt which most constituents never encountered. They became aware Mennonites not only had something to *give* to people in need, they had much to *learn* and to *receive*. MCC Canada began to see itself as a vanguard in bringing this

underside perspective to the churches. In a sense, MCC Canada shifted from being a ministry *of* the churches, to also becoming a ministry *to* the churches.

An Office in Ottawa

In 1975 MCC Canada opened an office in Ottawa, the nation's capital. The organization had been debating the idea of establishing a "listening post" since the mid-1960s, but some people strongly resisted the idea of such an active political involvement. MCC had recently established such an office in Washington, D.C., and, while it inspired the activists, it disturbed others.

A turning point finally came in 1974 when the annual meeting considered two brief presentations, one for and one against an ongoing Ottawa presence. Siegfried Bartel from British Columbia argued vigorously against the office. J.M. Klassen, who was now serving on the MCC Canada board and executive committee as a representative of the Mennonite Brethren conference, argued in favour. Klassen calmed the fears of sceptics when he insisted a primary purpose of the office would be monitoring and interpreting government policy to constituents, rather than acting independently as the "voice" of Canadian Mennonites; moreover, the office would address government only on those issues wherein there was reasonable agreement and where clear authorization was given. Klassen also pointed out how Mennonites had frequently gone to Ottawa to request consideration for their own needs; he stated, "now that we are reasonably secure, comfortable and appreciated by fellow-Canadians, are we not willing to let our voices be heard on issues or for causes which are not necessarily popular but which are God's will in heaven and on earth?"⁴¹ This time, a resolution moving the establishment of the office on a three-year trial basis, passed with only four dissenting votes.

William (Bill) Janzen became the first director of the Ottawa Office, a position that he would hold for thirty-three years. Janzen was originally from an Old Colony community near Osler, Saskatchewan. He had served with Pax in Congo in the 1960s, then gone on to pursue an education. In 1975 he was completing an M.A. in theology and a Ph.D. in political science, while also serving as a part-time pastor for the Ottawa Mennonite Church. Janzen became known as an attentive listener, who spoke thoughtfully and wrote meticulously. His careful and balanced approach to his work won the respect and admiration of many, including Siegfried Bartel and other MCC Canada board members who had initially opposed the opening of the office.⁴²

Although the mandate of the Ottawa Office seemed clear enough on paper,

it was less so in reality. Janzen soon found himself spending a great deal of time attending to administrative functions and responding to random and unexpected requests. One such request came from a Mennonite father whose son was in jail. Both the man's lawyer, who had already been paid \$10,000, and his Member of Parliament had said nothing could be done to secure parole. In frustration, the father "decided to try this fella Bill Janzen to see if he could do something."⁴³ Janzen made some inquiries, and the son was out on parole within two months. Although pleased with the outcome, Janzen was frustrated similar requests kept him from monitoring government policies and writing educational articles. He was also perturbed MCC Canada did not have a clearly articulated theology of the relationship of church to state which could guide him in his work; basically, he was left to develop such a theology on his own.⁴⁴

Seeking legal provisions for conscientious objectors

Nevertheless, gradually the work gained some focus and clarity, or perhaps Janzen simply came to accept the ambiguity of it all. He soon found himself researching and crafting briefs for parliamentary committees, writing letters to politicians, and penning a column for the Mennonite periodicals called the *Ottawa Notebook*. He arranged meetings between returning MCC workers and government officials. He related to Members of Parliament who had membership in a Mennonite or Brethren in Christ church or whose ridings included constituency churches, and he developed friendships with key civil servants in specific government departments. Janzen also kept thorough records of all MCC Canada submissions to government. In the early years, Janzen addressed a wide range of issues of concern to MCC Canada; capital punishment, nuclear weapons, immigration and refugee regulations, and Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In subsequent years, the sweep of issues would widen further.

One specific concern Janzen worked on was seeking legal provisions for conscientious objectors. MCC Canada, it will be recalled, had been mandated to represent Mennonites and Brethren in Christ on this issue. When the federal government took action in the early 1980s to patriate the Canadian Constitution, MCC Canada encouraged efforts to have conscientious objection enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a part of the constitution. Until this point, the peace churches had always relied on special privileges to obtain exemption from military service in wartime; MCC Canada was now asking that conscientious objection be accepted as a "right." Bill Janzen prepared a submission on behalf of the organization and presented it to a

special parliamentary committee. Significantly, it requested the charter include the right to conscientious objection against taking human life. By framing the request in this way, MCC Canada was hoping that there might be protection for persons pressured to perform abortions. The government did not include provisions for conscientious objection in the Charter, but in some follow-up correspondence, Justice Minister Jean Chrétien, wrote to Janzen, “I believe that the Charter as it is presently drafted could provide the protections you request.”⁴⁵

Another area of particular interest for Janzen related to colony Mennonites who were returning to Canada from Mexico. In the 1920s, members of the Old Colony, Chortitzer, and Manitoba Sommerfelder had moved from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico because of laws demanding compulsory attendance in public schools. There they had established colonies where they could live a separated existence. Many of their descendants were now returning to Canada for a variety of reasons.

As someone of Old Colony background, Janzen had a deep sympathy for them. In 1975 David Friesen, a minister in southern Ontario, contacted him on behalf of John Hildebrand, a recent arrival trying to gain landed immigrant status. Janzen made some inquiries in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and eventually Hildebrand, the descendent of Canadian citizens, received a Certificate of Canadian Citizenship, without having to apply for landed immigrant status. This success encouraged David Friesen to send Janzen an entire shoebox filled with the documents of other individuals in similar situations. Janzen recognized an appeal on behalf of so many required a policy change. He therefore purchased a Spanish dictionary to help him decipher the documents, and then composed a seventeen-page letter explaining the situation and requesting a means whereby the individuals named in the letter could also receive citizenship. About ten months later, the government created a provision for “delayed registration,” a mechanism enabling many Mennonites from Mexico to attain Canadian citizenship. In subsequent years this significant policy change benefited thousands.⁴⁶

Ministering to Colony Mennonites

MCC Canada as a whole had been concerned for some years about the situation of colony Mennonites in Mexico. The population was growing rapidly, but there was insufficient land for young families. A religious culture that favoured agriculture as a way of procuring a life of Christian humility prevented



*Margaretha and Helena Penner at work on the family dairy, Durango colony, Mexico, 1980. Within the Old Colony church, boys attended school for seven years and girls for five. Photo credit Abe Warkentin, *Gaeste und Fremdlinge/ Strangers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, MB: Die Mennonitische Post/Derksen Printers Ltd, 1987).*

many people from venturing into other occupations. School education had remained unchanged from the 1920s, and, according to MCC officials, levels of functional literacy were quite low.⁴⁷ Additionally, the boundaries of strict separation of the colonies from the world around them were weakening, resulting in significant turmoil within and between churches. Members of the Old Colony Church (the dominant church body) who purchased trucks or rubber tires for their tractors, or in other ways violated the church's teachings about the separated life, faced excommunication. Young people who took part in "harmless enjoyment" invited censure, which in turn contributed to considerable rebellion.⁴⁸ These difficulties were prompting many people to return to Canada and others to seek a more separated existence elsewhere, in British Honduras (later Belize) and Bolivia.

As indicated, the Ottawa Office assisted individuals with citizenship work. Additionally, MCC Canada and MCC Ontario jointly began

a resource centre in Aylmer that addressed the settlement needs of the many colony Mennonites arriving there. This centre built on mission work begun by the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church in the area. Workers at the resource centre offered documentation assistance, literacy classes, women's groups, and individual and family counselling. They also helped newcomers connect with schools, health, and social service systems. This ministry expanded to other communities and before long the work of the Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Advisory Committee was MCC Ontario's largest program, supported by significant funding from federal and provincial governments.⁴⁹ Eventually, both MCC Manitoba and MCC Alberta would begin similar programs in their respective provinces.

But MCC Canada was eager to help address perceived problems at their source, in Mexico. It was aware of critics who said that MCC Canada, by providing documentation assistance and other settlement supports in Canada, was simply encouraging people to leave Mexico.

Getting more directly involved was delicate

The stated priority was to help colony Mennonites stay in their communities in Mexico. But getting more directly involved was delicate, for several reasons. The colony Mennonites, by moving to Mexico in the 1920s, had made a principled decision about living apart from “the world.” The intervention of outside groups, especially from more assimilated Mennonites wanting to help, was often not appreciated. The Old Colony Church leadership especially resented Mennonite missionaries seeking to “convert” their people, asking people to break their baptismal vows and drawing them out of the church.

MCC was also considered a problem by the Old Colony Church. In the 1940s and early 1950s it had provided food aid and placed health, education, and agriculture workers in the Cuauhtémoc area, in spite of resistance from colony leadership. Pressure from the colonies forced MCC to shut down this work in 1956, and for a time, according to David M. Quiring, a common saying in the colonies was, “MCC is DDT.”⁵⁰ Any new MCC Canada initiative to assist the Mexican colonies would therefore need to be “wise, patient, steady and persistent.”⁵¹

A second reason for the delicacy of this work related to the relationship between MCC Canada and MCC. Since Mexico was considered to be “international,” and international work was the prerogative of MCC and not MCC Canada, there was bound to be tension if the latter initiated its own program activity in Mexico. (See below.)

Despite the sensitivities, MCC Canada moved forward incrementally. It appointed Arthur Driedger, former executive director of MCC Manitoba, as part-time staffperson for what it called *Kanadier* Concerns, a reference to the linkage of the colony Mennonites to the 1870s migration to Canada.⁵² An advisory committee helped guide the unfolding program. This committee drew heavily from those southern Manitoba groups with the closest links to the colonies in Mexico: representatives of Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Evangelical Mennonite, and Evangelical Mennonite Mission churches in Canada. Early meetings of the committee revealed significant differences of opinion as to the spiritual health of the colony Mennonites. Some committee members indicated evangelistic work was appropriate, because they felt the Old Colony Church in Mexico lacked spiritual vitality. They said some Old Colony Church ministers were more concerned about regulating behaviour than preaching a saving faith. Others, however, felt MCC Canada should demonstrate respect for the Old Colony and not try to “teach them to become like us.” Abe Wiebe, a Sommerfelder minister and businessperson who had spent twenty years in Paraguay, was especially insistent that MCC Canada avoid any sense of superiority toward the colony people.⁵³ The committee agreed that

people on the economic and social fringes of colony life needed help, including help of a spiritual nature. But this in turn raised questions about how MCC Canada could work with those on the periphery—presumably those who had left or been excommunicated from the Old Colony Church—but do so in a manner respectful of the Old Colony way of life. It meant Arthur Driedger, Abe Wiebe, and others spent several years visiting the colonies and building trust before placing workers in Mexico.

One project which MCC Canada initiated fairly quickly, however, was



Mrs. Jacob Neufeld (so identified) of the Canada Colony in Bolivia, reads *Die Mennonitische Post* with her grandchildren, 1978. Photo credit MCC.

the publication of a twice-monthly newspaper called *Die Mennonitische Post* for colony Mennonites throughout the western hemisphere. Edited by Abe Warkentin of Steinbach, the German language periodical intended to advance literacy, nurture faith, and build a sense of Mennonite identity among the colony Mennonites. Warkentin printed an initial run of 17,000 sample copies in April 1977 and sent them to colonies in Canada,

Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia, Belize and the US.⁵⁴ The response was swift and enthusiastic. Within three months, 3000 readers had subscribed. Two years later subscriptions had nearly doubled, with an estimated readership of 20,000, based on the assumption of five readers per issue.⁵⁵ An important function the *Post* played was to connect readers with the lives of loved ones in other colonies and even other countries. In its first two years, the *Post* published 2000 letters from individuals conveying greetings to friends and relatives far away. Within a short time, Warkentin expanded the paper to twenty pages. He also began a book ministry, distributing German language books about Mennonite history, theology, and the Bible. A decade later he initiated a children's paper called *Das Blatt fuer Kind und Jugend*.

MCC Canada's *Kanadier* Concerns program would grow gradually, intensifying in the 1990s. Some people questioned the appropriateness of this work, given that the colony Mennonites in Mexico and elsewhere were not suffering as much as people elsewhere. The work surfaced the old dilemma about the *Glaubensgenossen*: should MCC give priority to reaching out to the neediest or should it emphasize helping the family of faith? Given that MCC

tended to support the former, and MCC Canada tended to support the latter, this dilemma also focused some of the tensions between MCC and MCC Canada, between Akron and Winnipeg.⁵⁶ Among Dutch-German Mennonites on the Canadian side, ties of family, language, history, and culture made it imperative to extend compassion in some way. Besides, there were gains to be made in Canada by engaging this work. By working with colony Mennonites in Mexico, MCC Canada drew certain church groups in Canada—the Old Colony, the Chortitzer, the Manitoba Sommerfelder and the Saskatchewan Berghthaler—closer into its orbit. MCC Canada gained much stronger support from these respective groups as a result of its *Kanadier* Concerns work.⁵⁷ The Manitoba Sommerfelder in fact became members of MCC Canada, with Abe Wiebe as their official representative.

Food, Development and Simple Living

In the early 1970s a global food crisis erupted, threatening 500 million people with starvation. Experts identified a number of causes, both long-term and more immediate. The immediate cause was skyrocketing oil prices, but longer term trends identified by experts included high population growth in developing countries, the neglect of rural agriculture development in previous decades, and the consumption of meat-rich diets in the industrialized countries.⁵⁸ MCC was aware of these trends and was deeply concerned about the crisis. The 1974 annual meeting passed what came to be known as “the Hillsboro resolution”—named for the Kansas town where the meeting was held. The resolution committed MCC to invest significant money, material aid, and personnel resources toward family planning and rural agricultural development projects globally over the next ten years. It urged constructive engagement with the government policies of the United States and Canada with regard to food aid. It also pushed a major educational initiative encouraging constituents to reduce their consumption in general, especially of meat.⁵⁹

MCC Canada eagerly supported these new directions. One important Canadian contribution to this larger work was the organization’s continued leveraging of CIDA funds, enabling MCC to expand its international work in rural community development and family planning. The 1970s were the “golden years” for MCC Canada in its relationship with CIDA. Key people in CIDA’s NGO Division were unabashedly Christian, and they endeared themselves to MCC Canada staff and board because of their heartfelt desire to help those in need. One of them, Romeo Maione, former director of the

Catholic organization Development and Peace, attended MCC Canada meetings from time to time. He was fond of touting a favourite proverb—“When you sup with the devil, use a long spoon.” The comment, remembered by many, conveyed to MCC Canada that he understood concerns about the use of government funds. Maione even invited MCC Canada to critique Canada’s aid program and CIDA priorities.⁶⁰ Several former MCC workers were now working as staff for CIDA, and they too helped to deepen the MCC Canada-CIDA relationship. One of them, Tony Enns, had worked for MCC in northern Africa for eight years. Frieda Enns became a staff person in MCC Canada’s Ottawa Office.

*The
systemic
roots of
poverty*

Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, the NGO Division at CIDA continued to grow, as the agency recognized the valuable work of non-government agencies in community development.⁶¹ After MCC received an award from the Bangladesh government for promoting dry-season wheat production in its Noakhali region,⁶² CIDA encouraged MCC Canada to apply for more funds. The Winnipeg office subsequently created a “Development Desk” and hired additional staff to focus specifically on CIDA grants. In 1973, MCC Canada received \$200,000 for development projects from

CIDA. A decade later that amount had grown to an annual grant of \$2.9 million, with additional grants coming from provincial government development agencies.⁶³

People continued to raise questions about the wisdom of MCC Canada accepting such large amounts of government funding. This occurred especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when government grants actually surpassed the donations of Canadian constituents.⁶⁴ Moreover, considerable consternation resulted in 1981 when a new CIDA official remarked at the MCC Canada annual meeting, “Development assistance is an extension of the Canadian foreign policy.”⁶⁴ Even so, the organization continued to apply for and receive substantial CIDA grants. Brethren in Christ board member Lamar Fretz even suggested MCC Canada consider accepting considerably more funds to undertake large projects.⁶⁶ His suggestion led to several years of intense discussion about the “size of MCC.” CIDA grants enabled MCC to expand its work in rural agricultural development significantly.

As a result of the Hillsboro resolution, MCC Canada also launched into the realm of what was becoming known as “development education” or “dev-ed.” Development education was a larger movement within the NGO community aimed at helping people in the “developed” world better understand the systemic

roots of poverty and build support for long-term solutions. Within MCC, staff, volunteers, and returned workers wrote articles, led workshops, did speaking tours, and produced resources on the connections between the consumption of North Americans and the poverty and hunger of much of the world. Gordon Hunsberger of St. Jacobs, Ontario, serving as an agriculturalist in Haiti, wrote that “overdevelopment” within the rich world was a greater problem for the poor than their own “underdevelopment.”⁶⁷ What the poor needed from the rich was not more “aid” but less exploitation. Like many others within MCC, Hunsberger promoted the notion of “living simply so that others could simply live,” believing that if North Americans consumed fewer resources, a more just order would result.

By far the most successful project was the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, written by Doris Janzen Longacre and published by MCC in 1976. The cookbook encouraged eating more whole grains and legumes and less meat



Canadian grain shipped by the MCC Canada food bank is unloaded at a Calcutta, India dock in 1983. Photo credit MHC.

and processed food as a way of living faithfully in a world with limited food resources. A companion book on lifestyle called *Living More with Less*—a “cookbook for life”⁶⁸—followed soon after. The cookbook was an immediate success, with 25,000 copies sold in a few short weeks; nearly forty years later sales stood at 850,000. For Mennonites and others seeking practical handles for living faithfully in an unjust world, the cookbook struck a resounding chord. More than a

recipe book, it became a symbol of a deep yearning for just living. A Catholic couple from Ohio, Rob and Patty Burdette, read *Living More with Less* and applied to MCC for service, never having heard of Mennonites before. They and their family served in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in the first of a series of Voluntary Service assignments.⁶⁹ Years later, a young theologian raised on *More-with-Less* recipes argued the cookbook and its various successors represented a kind of organic theology, expressing Anabaptist values of discipleship and simplicity more profoundly than the writings of systematic theologians.⁷⁰

Building a Food Grains Bank

In response to the global food crisis, the United Nations hosted a major international conference on food in Rome in November 1974. As part of its three-point plan to prevent similar crises in the future, the conference proposed the establishment of a world food bank. This bank would maintain a reserve of ten million tonnes of stored grain that could be easily and quickly accessed in times of emergency.⁷¹ No such reserve existed, so it often took up to eighteen months before governments and aid organizations could respond to major food crises. The Rome proposal for a world food bank died, but the idea encouraged John Wieler at MCC Canada to pull together a group of Winnipeg men to dream about the possibility of an MCC food bank—a resource that could respond quickly in serious emergency situations. A key player in these breakfast discussions was Art DeFehr, a businessperson with a sharp mind and a compassionate heart for feeding hungry people. DeFehr had recently returned from an assignment in Bangladesh where he played a significant role in MCC's successful dry-season cultivation project. DeFehr and others took their inspiration from the biblical story of Joseph who, during years of plenty, stored up grain for use during years of famine.

MCC Canada had for years been urging the Canadian Wheat Board to allow farmers to donate grain for relief and development purposes, but the response had always been negative. Such donations, the reasoning went, would harm Canada's commercial wheat sales. But by the mid-1970s the Wheat Board was more amenable, so MCC Canada also took its proposal to CIDA, hoping the federal agency would match the value of the donated grain. CIDA officials were also initially skeptical, since they had never committed money for food aid to a non-government organization before. But Wieler and his colleagues made repeated trips to Ottawa to argue their case. At one point Romeo Maione remarked, "You Mennonites are not very aggressive, but you are damned persistent."⁷² Eventually, the doors opened. Tony Enns, former MCC worker now at CIDA, played a crucial role in persuading the agency to support the MCC Canada experiment. MCC Canada began operating its Food Bank in 1976 with John R. Dyck as director.

The system worked fairly simply. Farmers delivered the wheat they wished to donate to their neighbourhood grain elevator. At the elevator, they received a ticket and payment which they endorsed and sent on to the Food Bank. The Food Bank presented the tickets to CIDA which increased their value with a matching formula of 3:1.⁷³ The Food Bank then used these "value-added"

tickets to purchase grain from the Wheat Board for shipment to a place of need. The Wheat Board held the grain in reserve until it was requested and took responsibility for transporting it to the port of shipment. MCC Canada did not have to establish any actual storage facilities.⁷⁴ Despite the big dreams of Wieler, DeFehr, and the breakfast group, the Food Bank had a difficult beginning. Some issues with the Wheat Board still needed resolution. At the end of the first year, only 44,000 bushels of wheat had been donated by 275 farmers.⁷⁵ This was a far cry from the projected 500,000 bushels. Moreover, no grain had yet been purchased for overseas delivery. The second year saw a twenty-seven percent increase in donations and matching funds, and some initial purchases of wheat for India, Zaire and Ethiopia.⁷⁶ But it was the hiring of C. Wilbert (Bert)

*The Food Bank
generated
considerable
conflict*

Loewen, a former school superintendent from Morris, Manitoba, as executive director of the Food Bank in 1978 which turned the tide. Loewen promoted the Food Bank aggressively and, under his leadership, donations grew significantly. By 1982 he reported that, since inception, the Food Bank had shipped 900,000 bushels of wheat, valued at \$13,616,700, to ten different countries.⁷⁷

Western farmers became enthusiastic supporters of the Food Bank. In just one community, Laird, Saskatchewan, local farmer John Regier and Steve Epp, owner of a farmer service operation, teamed up to support the Food Bank. Regier recruited sixty-five farmers to donate grain, while Epp offered his facilities and staff to clean, bag, and load the grain. After thirty-four hours of work, nearly 5,000 100-lb bags of wheat were loaded onto railcars for shipment to Montreal.⁷⁸ This kind of response was replicated in many communities, as farmers learned their grain could go directly to feeding hungry people.⁷⁹ Historians Robert Kreider and Rachel Goossen later asserted the Food Bank achieved for farmers what MCC's Teachers Abroad Program had done for teachers in the 1960s. "It allowed a segment of the MCC constituency to link Christian compassion with a particular livelihood and expertise."⁸⁰

At the same time, the Food Bank generated considerable conflict within the MCC system. The conflict was complex, multi-layered, and involved many people. At one level, the clash was a philosophical one. Some people, especially in MCC in Akron, were concerned the Food Bank, with its focus on emergency relief, countered the organization's primary focus, which was long-term development. Edgar Stoesz, director of Overseas Services in Akron, and area directors, staff with responsibility for program in an entire continent, were convinced that long-term community development was the best way—perhaps

even the only way—to help hungry people.⁸¹ They feared the Food Bank would distract MCC from its emphasis on growing food where it was needed.⁸² They also questioned the appropriateness of providing wheat to people for whom rice, corn, or beans were the staples. Further, they believed overseas partners and the needs they identified—rather than the availability of Canadian wheat—should be guiding MCC’s responses to hunger.⁸³ Besides this, there was the ongoing concern about CIDA involvement. Would constituents be so attracted to the prospect of increasing their donations of grain through CIDA matching funds, they would become reluctant to support the “less glamorous, long-standing development programs which depended on cash gifts rather than grain?”⁸⁴

At one point, MCC area directors simply refused to use the Food Bank’s grain.⁸⁵ Siegfried Bartel of BC, a vocal member of both the MCC and MCC Canada executive committees, scolded the area directors for their intransigence. Shaking his finger at them, he reportedly said, “If you guys had been in charge of MCC in the 1920s, you would have left those in the Ukraine to starve.”⁸⁶

At another level, the conflict was about ownership and authority. The original understanding was the Food Bank was to be an arm of MCC Canada, purchasing and shipping grain only at MCC Canada’s request, and then distributing it only through MCC’s partners overseas. Under Bert Loewen’s leadership, the Food Bank quickly began to take on a life of its own. It created its own publicity, solicited donations directly from the Mennonite constituency, and accepted cash in addition to grain. Loewen even began to make overseas trips to monitor end-use of the grain. According to MCC Canada and MCC, these functions were to be retained by the parent organization. In other words, the Food Bank was to remain a servant of the MCC system. This perspective was that of MCC staff in Akron, as well as J.M. Klassen, who had returned to MCC Canada as executive director in 1976. Not all MCC Canada staff shared Klassen’s view.

An undercurrent was the fear on the part of Akron staff that MCC Canada, in forming the Food Bank, was initiating its own independent international work. They recalled the decision made at MCC Canada’s founding that it would do all its international work through Akron. It seemed to Akron staff that with the Food Bank, MCC Canada was heading down a slippery slope in the opposite direction. At one point, Peter Dyck expressed fearfully to John Wieler, that “the quilt is coming apart,” to which Wieler replied, “No, we are just sewing on another patch.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless it was true, certain people at MCC Canada, both at the staff and board levels, in fact did wish for more direct

*Opposing
visions of the
role of the
Food Bank*

involvement in international programming.

At a third level, the conflict also involved personalities. Many Food Bank supporters appreciated Bert Loewen's ability to mobilize people and to generate positive publicity, but certain people found his personal style and some of his actions challenging. J.M. Klassen, the skilled diplomat, felt it almost impossible to work with Loewen.⁸⁸ Conflict also emerged between Klassen and his colleague, John Wieler, and between Wieler and MCC staff in Akron. Wieler was one of the MCC Canada staff who pushed the boundaries of MCC Canada involvement in international program. In the fall of 1983, J.M. Klassen suffered a massive heart attack which he attributed, in part, to the stress of trying to find common ground between the Food Bank and his various colleagues in Canada and the US.⁸⁹ In the early 1980s Bert Lobe, a former area director in Akron, moved to Winnipeg to take on leadership of MCC Canada's Overseas Department, thereby becoming the person to whom Loewen was accountable. Lobe forcefully defended MCC interests with respect to the Food Bank. The two opposing visions of the role of the Food Bank strained relations between Lobe and Loewen to the extent that an executive committee member referred to the "two-Bert conflict."⁹⁰

One of the conditions of CIDA's support of the Food Bank was that a review take place after five years. From the beginning, CIDA had wanted the Food Bank to involve other denominations, and not just Mennonites. The breakfast group had in fact proposed exactly that, though the MCC Canada board had insisted on a smaller, in-house pilot project first.⁹¹ The 1982 CIDA review recommended the Food Bank membership be opened to include other denominations and their relief agencies. Thus the MCC Canada Food Bank morphed into the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) in 1983 with four additional member groups: Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee of Canada, the Baptist Federation of Canada Relief and Development Committee, and the Christian Missionary Alliance of Canada. The following year the United Church of Canada and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada joined, bringing CFGB membership to seven. For a time, MCC Canada continued to dominate the CFGB through a provision that allowed it to name more representatives to the board than other groups. But by 1986, MCC Canada's status on the board became that of an equal among other members, though the Mennonite "account" at CFGB continued to dominate.

A massive famine in Ethiopia in 1984 resulted in tremendous growth for CFGB, while also increasing the organization's public profile. Over a three-year period, the bank provided 110,000 tonnes of grain to MCC and other partner organizations for emergency relief in Ethiopia. In 1984-85 alone, the total value

of grain and cash donations, including CIDA matching funds, amounted to \$6.65 million. The agency would not see this level of giving again until a similar famine in North Korea fifteen years later.⁹²

The relationship between MCC Canada and CFGB continued to be stormy through the early 1980s, but with time the tensions eased, even if they did not disappear. The bank did in fact become a separate and distinct agency, not just an arm of MCC Canada, but it respected the insistence of MCC Canada and other church partners that distribution of grain overseas happen through their own channels. Over time, CFGB became sensitized to the negative impacts of food aid and began to support more long-term food security initiatives. Much later, it gained permission to monetize its wheat, allowing the purchase of grains near the location of food emergencies. This strengthened fragile local economies and provided more culturally appropriate food for the hungry. At the same time, the wider MCC system re-affirmed the place of relief in responding to emergency needs. The Food Bank, and then the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, restored MCC's commitment to do relief *and* development.⁹³ MCC would, however, continue to deal with the tension between the needs as defined by international partners and the resources the constituency wished to provide.

Churches

*eagerly applied
to sponsor
refugee families*

Welcoming Refugees

In some ways, the development of the Foodgrains Bank harkened back to MCC's beginnings in the 1920s and the feeding of hungry people. As the 1970s drew to a close, another major initiative built on the early foundation of welcoming refugees.

In late 1978 people around the world became aware of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their home in overloaded and decrepit fishing boats. TV cameras captured the images of "boat people" narrowly escaping the raids of pirates or the dangers of the open sea in a desperate attempt to reach refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia. The plight of these people touched the hearts of many Canadians, including Mennonites and Brethren in Christ. MCC Canada was soon inundated with calls from congregations and groups wanting to help these refugees resettle in Canada.

On 5 March 1979, MCC Canada signed a private sponsorship agreement with officials of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. It was the first of many such agreements between various church groups and the federal

government. The “master agreement” provided a mechanism for congregations and groups of at least five adults to sponsor individuals or families. Sponsoring groups committed themselves to meet the refugees upon their arrival, help them

settle, and provide financial support for up to a year. (MCC Canada, or the respective provincial MCC office, approved groups as legitimate sponsors and also took upon itself liability for any congregations not able to fulfill their obligations.) The federal government committed itself to pay for healthcare, language training, employment services, and to provide interest free loans for transportation to Canada.

Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches eagerly applied to sponsor refugee families. Some, like Toronto United Mennonite Church, had already submitted an application before the Master Agreement was signed. By the fall of 1979, MCC Canada reported receiving 440 sponsor applications for 2,384 individuals; 437 of these individuals had already arrived.⁹⁴

Some congregations sponsored successive refugee groups; as soon as one family was established, they welcomed another. By the end of 1980, half of all MCC constituent congregations across the country had sponsored one or more refugee households. In addition, 100 churches of other groups, as well as eighty-four non-church groups, sponsored refugees through the MCC Canada program.⁹⁵ The bulk of the refugees, numbering 3,769, arrived in the first two years; by 1985 the total reached 4,651.⁹⁶ The refugees came from Vietnam, Laos, and to a smaller extent from Cambodia.

Why did Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ churches answer the call to sponsor refugees so enthusiastically? Most responded simply out of genuine Christian compassion, remembering Jesus’ words in Matthew 25, to clothe the naked, comfort the sorrowful, and welcome the stranger.⁹⁷ Some responded because they, their parents, or grandparents had been refugees, and they now wished to ease the suffering of others. One man told the MCC Manitoba refugee coordinator, when he saw the TV images of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their country, he saw himself as a young boy, clutching the hands of his parents, and trudging along a road in their escape from the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ Many people who had fled the Soviet Union were especially motivated by the fact that the Southeast Asian refugees were fleeing communism, as they had. Some people



A refugee mother and baby arriving in Winnipeg from Southeast Asia in 1979. Photo credit MHC.

simply wanted to repay a debt to MCC. And some felt sponsoring refugees was an important way of taking responsibility for the evils of the Vietnam War. Those who had actively protested the war felt refugee sponsorship was a witness of peace.⁹⁹

In response to a survey conducted a few years later, churches reported high levels of satisfaction with the sponsoring experience.¹⁰⁰ Many of the sponsors and the sponsored became life-long friends—some, even like family. Years later, they were still gathering for meals and special events like birthdays, weddings, and Christmas celebrations. Many of the newcomers were eternally grateful for the hospitality and the assistance given to them. In 2005, Vinh Huynh, then a Winnipeg high school teacher, remembered his boyhood refugee experience at a refugee history conference, saying that he was “humbled by the love, care and compassion” that had been extended to Southeast Asian refugees by Mennonites.¹⁰¹ Some of the newcomers were able to return the gift of compassion. When Martha Nickel, a Saskatoon resident struggled with cancer many years later, one of her medical doctors was a Vietnamese anesthesiologist and pain specialist named Hung Ha. Nickel’s congregation, the Nutana Park Mennonite Church, had sponsored him and his family when he was a 30-year-old physician, and it also helped him to re-license in Canada. As Nickel was dying, Dr. Ha visited her at home, helped manage her pain, and provided much tender loving care.¹⁰²

But refugee sponsorship did not always go this well. Despite receiving information on the social, cultural, and religious preferences of the refugees, some sponsors tended to impose their own values. Some sponsors pressured the refugees, most of whom were Buddhist, to attend church and to be baptized. Some cut off the allowance of those refugees who were spending money on foods and other items considered expensive or inappropriate. Some sponsors housed refugee families in remote or isolated settings, where they were lonely and frightened.¹⁰³

And some sponsors simply lacked comprehension of the emotional trauma the refugees had undergone. In one situation, a refugee was asked to dig a hole for a new septic tank. The terrified



In addition to refugees from Southeast Asia, MCC Canada also facilitated the sponsorship of refugees fleeing civil war in Central America. The Cesar Castellon extended family (so identified) from Guatemala was the first family to arrive from Central America. Photo credit MCC Canada.

man believed he was being asked to dig his own grave—this had been a common occurrence in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ A great deal of learning happened as sponsors and refugees built relationships.

Nevertheless, the private sponsorship agreement proved so successful overall, that both the government and MCC Canada were eager to renew it after the initial two-year period. MCC Canada also joined the new Inter-Church Committee on Refugees, as a way of working with other denominations on refugee-related issues. By this time, the provincial MCCs had hired special staff to coordinate the sponsorship program. In Edmonton, a group of churches with MCC Alberta support, established the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers to provide resettlement supports. Anne Falk, a Manitoba nurse who had served with MCC in Vietnam, was the first director; since she spoke Vietnamese and understood the Asian context, her work was greatly appreciated by the bewildered refugees who arrived in Edmonton before travelling on to other parts of Canada. Within a few years, the New Life Centre in Toronto and the Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers had been established with the help of provincial MCCs. In Montreal, *La Maison de l'Amitie* adopted refugee support and resettlement as part of its mandate. In the words of historians Royden Loewen and Steven Nolt, by the early 1980s, refugee sponsorship and assistance had emerged as, “a signature expression of service and Cold War peace witness on the part of Canadian Mennonites.”¹⁰⁵

But, like the Food Bank, the refugee sponsorship program was also fraught with internal MCC controversy, some of which spilled into the media. MCC workers in Southeast Asia opposed the whole notion of resettlement. They knew many of the people fleeing Vietnam were in fact some of the more educated and well-to-do, and they believed refugee sponsorship contributed to “brain drain.” These workers felt it was more important for MCC to strengthen the still-struggling economy of Vietnam through agriculture, health, and other forms of assistance. They also felt MCC should be lobbying the US government to lift the embargo it had imposed on Vietnam at the end of the war. In other words, they wished MCC and MCC Canada would address the root causes of the refugee crisis, rather than simply apply what they saw as a band-aid and reactive approach.¹⁰⁶

Many MCC staff in Akron shared the perspective of the workers. So once again, it appeared that MCC Canada and MCC were at odds, even though J.M. Klassen worked hard to keep the relationship strong. From the MCC side, it did not help matters that MCC Canada’s overseas director, John Wieler, sought to intervene in the Southeast Asia program in a way which troubled MCC service workers, as well as Akron administrators.¹⁰⁷ From the Canadian side, it did not help that some of the workers in Southeast Asia seemed too sympathetic to

Vietnam's communist government. Nor, that these workers were, according to certain Canadians, not doing enough to feed thousands of Cambodian refugees who congregated on the Thai border in late 1979.¹⁰⁸ Three MCC workers resigned as a result of their frustration with MCC Canada and the public criticism levelled at them.

Passionate advocates for justice

Seeking Justice

In truth, the controversy over refugee sponsorship reflected not so much a divide between MCC and MCC Canada, but the increasing distance between MCC workers serving around the world and the constituency at home. Many

MCC workers underwent a profound process of conscientization as a result of their experiences. They witnessed things which constituents in Canada and the US did not, and saw and learned about the deeper, more systemic causes of poverty and need, often rooted in the policies of governments and in power imbalances within and between nations. These workers longed for MCC to concern itself not so much with relief, and or even with development, but with justice.

The language of justice increasingly found its way into MCC Canada's lexicon in the 1970s. It emerged out of a deepening sense that relief, reconstruction, and even development did not fully address human need. What good was it to teach someone to fish—returning to that old proverb—if certain obstacles kept fishers from fishing? Put another way, what good was it to provide agricultural extension in El Salvador when a civil war, fueled by American military involvement, repeatedly displaced peasants from their homes and farms? A concern for justice was occurring within MCC, the wider Mennonite church, as well as the ecumenical coalitions in which MCC Canada increasingly participated.¹⁰⁹

Many MCC workers became passionate advocates for justice.¹¹⁰ Within Canada, Menno Wiebe was especially vocal about the imperative of justice for



Dorothy Friesen of Winnipeg, Manitoba (right) speaks with a political detainee and family members in the Philippines, 1978. Photo credit MHC.

Aboriginal people, but the call for justice also came from overseas workers. Hedy Sawadsky of Vineland, Ontario served among Palestinians who had been displaced by wars in 1948 and 1967. A Palestinian friend expressed appreciation for MCC's material aid and its needlework program, but also confided to Sawadsky her heartfelt hope that MCC would help to end the Israeli occupation that kept them in refugee camps.¹¹¹ A different Palestinian woman in a refugee camp in Jordan was more critical of MCC priorities. When offered an MCC Christmas bundle from North American children, she threw it back at the US MCC worker with the remark, "We get Christmas bundles and the Israelis get Phantom jets. You keep your Christmas bundles and you have your country keep its Phantom jets."¹¹²

Dorothy Friesen, formerly of Winnipeg and serving in the Philippines, condemned the kind of development which simply sought to draw people into a cash economy and turn them into little capitalists. She heard impoverished Filipinos call for solidarity in building an alternate economic system where there was enough for all.¹¹³ Ernie Regehr, a former Albertan who served in southern Africa, observed how the investments of North American banks and corporations in the global south actually served to further enrich the north. He insisted that, minimally, MCC Canada help its constituents understand that wealth and poverty were not the result of either fate or hard work (or lack thereof), but were intimately linked to systems of injustice and inequity.¹¹⁴ Very often, MCC workers concluded that North Americans were implicated in systems of injustice.

MCC workers found inspiration for justice in scripture. They understood justice to be in keeping with the moral vision of *shalom*, the prophetic call to "rescue the oppressed" (Isaiah 2) and Jesus' announcement of good news for the poor (Luke 4). MCC workers frequently spoke of justice work as dealing with root causes rather than applying the "bandaid" of charity. They also understood it as addressing powerful structures which exploited and oppressed the poor and marginalized. In their view, justice work demanded advocacy in the halls of power in Ottawa or Washington, as well as changed lifestyles on the part of North American constituents.

Many constituents found it difficult to hear the challenging words these workers shared upon their return home. Staff at MCC Canada, though often sympathetic, recognized the risk of asserting a bold call for justice. On at least one occasion MCC and MCC Canada "silenced" two workers by refusing to itinerate them through the constituency. Dorothy Friesen and her husband Gene Stoltzfus were particularly vocal in their critique of unfettered capitalism and the need for solidarity with poor people seeking a new economic paradigm.

When they returned from the Philippines in 1979, eager to do a speaking tour, MCC said no.¹¹⁵ The couple consequently chose to organize their own itineration, in many communities speaking in a number of United Church of Canada congregations, rather than Mennonite churches.

A New Relationship with MCC

In January 1973, MCC held its annual meeting in the United Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario. It was the first time in the US-based agency's more than fifty-year history that its annual meeting had taken place elsewhere than the Atlantic Hotel or the YMCA in Chicago. MCC Canada had suggested the meeting be held in Canada and close to the grass-roots. It was, perhaps, a way for Canadians to convey the importance of the linkage to the people in the churches, as well as to help US counterparts experience firsthand a small slice of the Canadian context.¹¹⁶ The experience proved so positive that, in subsequent years, MCC held its annual meeting in different communities across the US and Canada.

As already indicated, MCC Canada's program work in the 1970s led to tensions with MCC. These tensions focused around relief versus development, working with colony Mennonites versus the poorest of the poor, and sponsoring refugees versus trying to prevent the creation of refugees. Added to this were significant differences of perception on the nature of the MCC-MCC Canada relationship.

Imbalance of power in the MCC system

In the early 1970s MCC initiated a major "self-study" to assess the health of the entire MCC system. One of the issues which surfaced was the unhappiness of some board members of MCC Canada regarding the relationship. These members desired a relationship of equality and mutuality with MCC, and felt it did not exist. They saw the Canadian agency as a partner in the work, while MCC tended to view MCC Canada as another "constituent group."¹¹⁷ A particular annoyance was that so much of the agenda at MCC executive committee meetings focused on US issues. Canadians thought it inappropriate that issues such as the US military draft and the US Voluntary Service program should be on the table of a supposedly "binational" agency; after all, they did not bring their Canadian issues to the table. They sensed MCC was primarily American in its identity. As well, certain Canadians (including both board members and some staff of MCC Canada) were eager

for more direct involvement in international program work. They felt the combination of constituency interest, the growing expertise of staff, and the material and financial resources available in Canada, justified MCC Canada giving leadership to some of MCC's international work. By the late 1970s, there was a growing call for a new relationship between MCC Canada and MCC.

One of the people at the forefront of the call for a new relationship was Frank Epp. Epp had been a board member of MCC Canada since its founding in 1963. In 1974 he was elected to the executive committee, and he used his new position there to argue strongly for a relationship of mutual partnership. Epp expressed deep frustration with the imbalance of power in the MCC system. He argued that if MCC was a truly binational entity, US issues would be dealt with in an MCC US structure, as Canadian issues were dealt with at MCC Canada; and the two national bodies would jointly run the international program.¹¹⁸ He even dared to suggest that since MCC's head office had existed in the US for fifty years, it should be located in Canada for the next fifty years. Epp insisted Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ had matured to the point where they were no longer satisfied with playing "second fiddle" to their US counterparts. For their benefit, and indeed for the greater good of MCC and its global mission, a relationship of equality was essential. At one point he compared the dilemma of Canadian Mennonites to that of the Québécois wanting separation from Canada.

Canadian Mennonites are still very much interested in doing things together with American Mennonites but only on egalitarian terms. Yet we find that the existing institutions are so powerful that every time we turn around or close our eyes we have lost ground again. Thus, Canadians are becoming with reference to Americans what the Québécois have become with reference to Canada, namely separatists for the sake of survival.¹¹⁹

Many people in MCC—including some Canadians who worked for MCC in Akron—did not get the point of the argument. They considered Epp's views nationalistic and argued that nationalism should have no place in a church institution such as MCC.¹²⁰ They perhaps associated nationalism with a kind of chauvinistic patriotism, rather than the national identity and aspiration emerging among a certain generation of Canadian Mennonites.¹²¹ What Epp and others wanted was a partnership that acknowledged and addressed the power imbalance between the US and Canadian constituencies in MCC. But many on the US side feared MCC Canada wanted a "divorce."¹²² This generated considerable fear and defensiveness.

Not nearly all persons on the MCC Canada board – nor staff and service workers – shared Epp’s views or the passionate and even abrasive way he debated them. But by 1977, sufficient momentum on the issues led MCC Canada and MCC to agree to a process that would, hopefully, resolve the problems. And by 1981, the work of an exhausted committee—it had met 29 times over two years—culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would guide the MCC-MCC Canada relationship going forward.

The MOU resulted in three main changes. First, a MCC US structure was created as a parallel to MCC Canada, to deal with US-specific agenda. Second, representation on the MCC executive committee was equalized, with six members named by MCC Canada and six members named by the US-based conferences. Till this point, Canadians had been a minority. Thirdly, there was agreement that “in exceptional circumstances” some international program be administered from a location other than the MCC headquarters—that is, from Winnipeg. From this point on, Canadians increasingly referred to MCC as “MCC Binational.”

The shift to having equal numbers of Canadian and US representatives on the binational executive committee was actually an idea CIDA had been pushing for some time, as a way of increasing Canadian input into MCC policy and decision-making about international program. CIDA officers were not pleased that its grants for international development to MCC Canada were being channelled through a US-based organization. CIDA funds were supposed to be disbursed through Canadian voluntary agencies directly to the intended international project.¹²³

The issue of transferring some international program administration to MCC Canada proved much more delicate. First of all, the Memorandum of Understanding had indicated that such transfer happen only in “exceptional” circumstances; this qualifier lent considerable weight to the status quo. Secondly, it became clear that there were different ways of understanding what the “transfer of program administration” meant. One interpretation, the one generally held by MCC Canada, was that staff giving direction to international program would be located in Winnipeg and would report to the MCC Canada executive committee. MCC Canada would therefore have decision-making responsibility for a portion of the international program. The other interpretation, the one generally held by MCC, was that administrative staff would be located in Winnipeg, but they would continue to report to the MCC Binational executive committee, through the MCC executive director in Akron.¹²⁴ It was a very important distinction that would have major ramifications for the future. On this one, MCC’s view held sway.

A variety of reasons accounted for Akron's reluctance to share international program responsibility with MCC Canada. Area directors and others felt the integrity of MCC's work would be diminished in the overseas context. They believed the needs of international partners for a clear and coherent administrative structure should take priority over squabbles between US citizens and Canadians. Others worried about the additional cost and potential duplication of having international program staff in two places. It is possible that the ongoing struggles with MCC Canada over CIDA funding, the Food Bank, refugee sponsorship, and the appropriate balance between relief and development, also made MCC people less than amenable to MCC Canada's desire for change.

Under the MOU, MCC did grant MCC Canada authority to continue to direct the *Kanadier* Concerns program in Mexico.¹²⁵ But it was reluctant to transfer substantive program in subsequent years. Certain MCC international program staff would work from Winnipeg, but their lines of accountability would go to Akron. In the future, MCC Canada's unhappiness about its limited participation in direct international program would re-surface.

The Mennonite newspapers in both Canada and the US carried much news and opinion about the turmoil in the MCC system and the decisions reflected in the MOU. Yet most constituents neither knew nor cared much about the internal politics at MCC. As long as their organization was continuing to feed, clothe, and empower vulnerable people, they could continue their support.

What Did It All Mean?

MCC Canada's second decade constituted a period of tremendous creativity and growth. Only three years into that decade, a reporter commented on how MCC Canada was developing a "distinctly Canadian MCC program" which was "tailored to Canadian resources and needs."¹²⁶ Space does not allow for in-depth exploration of all the important new initiatives undertaken during this period. Besides those described in this chapter, MCC Canada helped to found Project Ploughshares, an inter-church research and advocacy initiative on Canadian military policy. It established SELFHELP Crafts Canada to provide national oversight and coordination for the work across the country. It created a committee on "East-West Concerns," bringing together Canadian constituents who could offer counsel to MCC in its work in the USSR and Eastern Europe. It also initiated a new service program for youth called SALT (Serving and Learning Together) and created a new category of Voluntary Service called Local Voluntary Service,

to supplement its regular Voluntary Service. During this second decade, MCC Canada's budget grew from \$1.9 million to \$12.2 million, and its staff from six to nearly thirty. At a twentieth anniversary gathering in 1983, one person expressed amazement at the way that MCC Canada had surpassed the hopes and dreams of all its founders.¹²⁷

Constituency criticism of course continued during this period, but constituency allegiance also increased to the point that certain observers of MCC Canada referred to it as a people's movement, "not always without criticism but generally with a loyalty so deep as to be the envy of almost every voluntary agency in the country."¹²⁸ A key reason for this deepening loyalty was the myriad ways ordinary people could be meaningfully involved in furthering the mission, beyond simply donating money. MCC Canada supporters participated in Foodgrains Bank growing projects. They volunteered in thrift shops or at relief sales. They tied comforters or sewed quilts at home. They sponsored and befriended refugee families. They visited inmates in prison or trained as conflict mediators. They hosted international trainees for a six-month period. They embraced a "More with Less" diet and lifestyle. They signed up for a term of Voluntary Service. Involvement with MCC was a way for people to give practical expression to their faith and to offer love to others. Very often these involvements were community-building endeavors.

Another reason for the increased loyalty of constituents was because the sweeping range of MCC Canada activity tapped into the diverse perspectives of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituents. Some of the work took MCC Canada in new directions, while some of it built on older foundations. The new domestic programs in Native Concerns, Offender Ministries, and Handicap Concerns, as well as some of the work of the Ottawa Office, appealed to those people who were eager to engage the social issues of the day. The work of *Kanadier* Concerns, the Food Bank, and refugee assistance built on the older foundations of MCC ministry—caring for members of the household of faith, feeding the hungry, and welcoming refugees. It is doubtful that MCC Canada intentionally and deliberately developed program on the "left" and on the "right" in order to ensure the backing of everyone from younger radicals to older traditionalists. Yet if it was not part of a plan, this was clearly one of the outcomes. MCC Canada could generally count on the support of both groups, and many in between, because within its broad canopy there was something for everyone. MCC Canada was a "smorgasbord," in the words of Dave Worth.¹²⁹ MCC Canada's "success" was in significant ways a function of how its smorgasbord of activity engaged a very diverse peoplehood.

What was MCC Canada's strength could potentially also become a weakness.

Already in 1977, a board member asked whether MCC Canada's ministry was in danger of becoming so all inclusive and so broad that it is was like a "river without banks, thus in danger of becoming a swamp." He suggested some deeper and more philosophical reflection on the organization's mission, mandate, and direction.¹³⁰ Such a discussion did not occur until some years later.

Conclusion

At twenty years of age, MCC Canada was still trying to sort out its identity. It was clearly a "Christian resource for meeting human need," as its motto indicated. It was seeking to bear witness to the reign of God on earth—a reign characterized by health and healing, reconciled relationships, and enough for all. But pushed with the question, "What exactly *is* MCC Canada?" many constituents would likely have been hard-pressed to provide a clear answer. And that is because MCC Canada was many things: ministry of and to the church, service agency, charitable organization for relief and development, public voice and face of Mennonites, a force for peace, justice, and social change in the church and society. It was also, as the *Mennonite Reporter* put it in 1983, "the leading symbol and most visible practical embodiment of Mennonite cooperation in Canada."¹³¹

CHAPTER 6

Coming of Age, 1983-1993

SONIA BLANCHETTE, A member of Eglise Chrétienne de St. Laurent in Québec, was the guest speaker at the MCC Canada annual meeting in Boissevain, Manitoba in January 1992.¹ With her striking red dress, high-heeled white boots, and fur coat, Blanchette stood out from the more plain and sombrely dressed crowd. She had come to speak on behalf of Québécois Mennonites and their hopes for the future of their province. Once again, political developments were threatening the future of a united Canada. The Meech Lake Accord, a constitutional arrangement acknowledging Québec's unique status, had been defeated, giving renewed life to the sovereignty movement. Once again, MCC Canada was struggling to respond helpfully in the midst of a constitutional crisis. It had invited Blanchette to address the annual meeting so as to better understand the perspective of the Québécois Mennonites.

Blanchette was a passionate Christian with a warm and pious faith that resonated with many of the MCC Canada board members. But she also held separatist sympathies, which some members found quite unsettling. She insisted it was only a matter of time before

Québec would leave Canada, and indicated many Québécois Mennonites shared her views. She cautioned that national unity was not the same as



Sonia Blanchette makes an impassioned plea for understanding for Quebecois Mennonites to the MCC Canada annual meeting in January 1992. To her left is Bill Janzen of the Ottawa Office. Photo credit MCC Canada.

Christian unity and urged MCC Canada not to alienate its friends in Québec by advocating strongly for a united Canada. She said to the annual meeting,

Whether we have one country or two countries at the conclusion of the constitutional debate is not so much the issue for us Christians. Our faith lies more on the manner and process in which those changes can take place. We need you to help us to become autonomous, find a good direction and keep good communication.²

As a result of Blanchette's presence, the annual meeting adopted a paper written by Bill Janzen of the Ottawa Office, acknowledging a new constitutional accord should accept Québec as a distinct society and should include "greater accommodation of Québec's concerns."³ The paper was sent to all MCC supporting congregations across the country to help them prepare for a referendum.

...

By its third decade, MCC Canada clearly possessed an ever-increasing commitment to Québec and to eastern Canada in general; it had become a national organization with a presence from east to west. It demonstrated a growing commitment to listen to and to learn from marginalized people themselves. Moreover, it was prepared to grapple with historic injustices of national scope and to speak with confidence to these issues on behalf of the wider Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family. Its service program stood at its zenith. It also continued to develop new programs and discern new ways of responding to need. At the same time, MCC Canada was showing signs and symptoms of increasing institutionalization; these would lead to struggles within the organization. Nevertheless, this third decade could rightly be identified as the period in which MCC Canada came of age.

Eastern Canada

In 1979 Canadian Programs Director Dave Dyck and board chair Newton Gingrich had made a trip to eastern Canada to explore the possibilities for additional programming there. "Eastern Canada" in the MCC world was that part of the country where MCC Canada had direct responsibility because separately incorporated provincial MCC organizations did not exist. It included Québec.

When Dyck and Gingrich made their visit, they knew the Atlantic provinces sustained the highest unemployment and lowest income levels of

all the Canadian regions. They were also aware that for years MCC and MCC Canada had earned revenue through the placement of nurses and teachers in Newfoundland and had used those funds to run Voluntary Service programs elsewhere, including in the US. This practice needed to be reversed. Dyck and Gingrich recommended MCC Canada make things right by investing more of its own resources, including personnel, in these “have-not” provinces. This meant that by the early 1980s MCC Canada had placed a regional representative in the Maritimes and begun some strategic Voluntary Service placements there, had set a new direction for work in Newfoundland-Labrador, and had deepened its commitment to Québec. It had also nearly doubled its funding for program in eastern Canada.⁴ It also began to take some important risks.

In 1986 Deborah Martin-Koop, co-pastor with her husband Robert of the Montreal Mennonite Fellowship, was appointed director of the Québec program. Martin-Koop was young and energetic, resonated with MCC values, and was fluently bilingual, having grown up in Québec. She was well-qualified to guide and lend integrity to MCC Canada’s work in the province. At the time of Martin-Koop’s appointment, *La Maison de l’Amitie* was flourishing with a daycare, language classes, and resettlement assistance for refugees, but under her leadership the Québec program grew to include a camp for children and youth, summer service opportunities, and an expanded Voluntary Service program.

MCC Canada was eager to strengthen its relationship with the dozen or so Québec Mennonite churches. Most, though not all, of these congregations were the fruit of Mennonite Brethren mission efforts in the province. Their members were Francophone, had Catholic roots, and possessed little knowledge of MCC. Martin-Koop therefore set up an office at Eglise Chrétienne de St. Laurent (a Mennonite Brethren congregation), visited the congregations regularly, and translated many of MCC Canada’s English-language materials into French. She was eager to help Québécois Mennonites participate in MCC, but also to help interpret their aspirations to MCC Canada and its wider constituency. She especially encouraged youth groups and other constituents to visit Québec, a province that seemed like a foreign country to many Canadians.⁵ In many ways Martin-Koop’s work could be described as “cross-cultural peacebuilding,” a concept that MCC would articulate in later decades.

*“cross-cultural
peacebuilding”*

MCC Canada had similar goals to connect with Mennonite churches in the Maritimes. Brian Elliot, regional representative beginning in 1982, visited the handful of small Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church, Kleine Gemeinde, and Holdeman congregations scattered across New Brunswick and Nova

Scotia. He supported the efforts of Peter and Justina Penner, a Mennonite couple in Sackville, New Brunswick to bring Mennonites in the Atlantic provinces together in an annual retreat. Elliot quickly discovered SELFHELP Crafts was an excellent way to introduce Mennonites and MCC Canada to the wider Maritimes community. Wherever he went, he took samples of crafts to do “development education” and to describe MCC’s work in communities around the world. Soon he was hosting special SELFHELP sales across the region, and before long a number of year-round stores opened. It was in fact an Anglican, Sue Daley, who helped to establish a SELFHELP Crafts store in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1987. The store was run by a multi-denominational board and some 140 volunteers from many denominations. For her enthusiastic efforts to build bonds of friendship between northern and southern hemispheres, the local YMCA/YWCA awarded Daley its annual peace award in 1990.⁶ Through Brian Elliot’s work, MCC Canada also placed service workers in a variety of social service assignments in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

MCC Canada’s presence in Newfoundland was decades old, but by the late 1970s and early 1980s the nature of its involvement had shifted significantly. It was no longer seconding teachers and nurses to government-funded positions, though it continued to place social workers with the Department of Social Services until 1984. With the encouragement of local people and former MCC workers, MCC Canada decided to invest its own resources into new and creative involvements supporting people with disabilities, ministering to victims and offenders, working with disadvantaged youth, and promoting SELFHELP Crafts. It also gave increasing attention to Innu communities on the Labrador coast, where MCC service workers first were assigned in 1975.⁷

A Second Constituency

An important aspect of this shift in Newfoundland and Labrador, as it was elsewhere, was a growing sense of accountability on the part of service workers to the people they were seeking to serve. In its international program work, MCC had become convinced of the need to listen to and learn from the beneficiaries of its work—indeed, to develop its program in response to their wishes. Other international relief and development organizations were also moving in this direction.⁸ MCC and MCC Canada workers were increasingly convinced it was not enough to simply take direction from North American constituents; it was also essential to be guided by the people being served—particularly as those people defined their needs and how those needs could be met. MCC Canada was influenced by this direction.

This new stance was put to the test in 1984 in the Innu community of Davis Inlet on the coast of Labrador. MCC Canada had assigned Dorothy Mills, a 75-year-old retired social worker from California, to serve with the Department of Social Services. The Department paid a salary to her, which she turned over to MCC Canada in exchange for regular service worker support. Part of Mills' job required she distribute welfare cheques to individuals and families who met the government criteria. At a certain point the Department insisted social assistance should be reduced where people had boarders living with them who received some kind of income. But this practice offended Innu culture which valued sharing and hospitality and where formal lodging arrangements were uncommon. Believing that her primary accountability was to the Innu people rather than the Department of Social Services, Dorothy Mills refused to implement the deductions. She and three other non-MCC social workers were promptly dismissed by the Department. The Innu people of Davis Inlet had reportedly grown to love Mills and asked that she stay. After some discernment, MCC Canada agreed that she should stay, and it used its own financial resources for her allowance and maintenance costs.

This particular incident has been called a test case for MCC Canada.⁹ Although the organization had spoken about accountability to beneficiaries and partners for some time, this was the first time its commitment was put to the test. Another incident, also in Labrador, took place a few years later.

Accountability to beneficiaries and partners

Happy Valley/Goose Bay was the home of a major air force base. Several NATO countries had contracts with the Department of Defence to use the base as a take-off point for low level jet fighter training. These fighter jets swooped over the land, sometimes at altitudes of only thirty meters, with devastating speed and deafening sound. More than 8,000 test flights took place each year.

The Innu asserted these flights harmed the wildlife, terrified the children, and seriously disrupted their way of life. They had never signed a treaty relinquishing control of the land, and they insisted the low level flights stop until a comprehensive land settlement could be reached. When the government refused to negotiate, scores of Innu began to occupy the base runways. Many of them were arrested and charged with mischief. Their protests received widespread coverage by the national media.

Bob and Dorothy Bartel of Rosthern, Saskatchewan were MCC representatives in Happy Valley/Goose Bay at the time. Their assignment was to befriend the Innu and support them in their struggle for self-determination. So the Bartels began to open their home to Innu guests, providing a telephone,

beds, and a steady supply of coffee and sandwiches. They taught some of the young people to use their computer; one of them, Peter Penashue, later



Elizabeth Penashue, an Innu grandmother, was one of the leaders of the resistance to NATO's low level flying. She became a good friend of MCC workers. Photo credit Bob Bartel.

became a federal cabinet minister. They provided transportation in their old brown Suburban truck. When media people, Members of Parliament, and other officials arrived at the Bartel home requesting interviews, the Bartels connected them with Innu spokespersons. Their role was to help facilitate what the Innu themselves wished to do. They were to stay in the background and avoid any action that would attract attention away from the Innu.¹⁰ One day, however, Bob Bartel himself was arrested and charged with "aiding and abetting mischief" for driving Innu protesters to the runway camp. He had done this many times before but suddenly the "rules" had changed.

At this point, some MCC Canada board members became quite anxious. Not only had Bartel been charged; he had also been questioned by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and his name had been mentioned in the House of Commons. Some members were quite disturbed that Bartel had

engaged in behaviour that invited arrest, while others felt that if MCC Canada was serious about solidarity with and accountability to the Innu, it should be prepared to accept such an outcome.¹¹ A special delegation visited Labrador to experience the situation firsthand. It recommended the Bartels' stance of accompaniment with the Innu should continue.

In the end, the crisis blew over. Although some of the Innu spent time in jail, charges against Bartel were dropped and he and his family soon returned to Saskatchewan, their term completed. The Bartels' witness, however, resulted in an invitation to MCC Canada from the Innu community of Sheshatshiu, an hour from Happy Valley/Goose Bay, to place service workers right in its midst. Louise and Rick Cober Bauman and their three children of Shakespeare, Ontario began an assignment there in 1989. MCC Canada also began to advocate much more intentionally with the federal government for a stop to low level flying and for action on the Innu comprehensive land claim.

The stories of Dorothy Mills and the Bartels highlighted a growing tension for MCC Canada. On the one hand, the organization was an arm of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and it was accountable to them through its

governance structures. At the same time, MCC Canada service workers were calling for more accountability to the people they were seeking to serve, the

local partners. Frequently, differences emerged between what the church constituency expected of workers and what local partners expected. As we have seen, a vocal portion of the constituency desired MCC Canada simply support international relief, whereas partners often living in the midst of great suffering urged a prophetic role that addressed larger systems of injustice.¹²

In 1986 executive director Dan Zehr learned that a southern Manitoba radio network had been editing some of MCC



Innu people walk on the runway used by NATO for low level flying. "Ntesinan" is the Innu name for their land. Photo credit MCC.

Canada's more "political" news releases before broadcasting them, so as not to offend its mostly Mennonite audience. Zehr, who had recently completed a term of service in Bolivia, wrote to the radio station's owner,

With the privilege of having looked into the eyes and having listened to the voices of many victims of hunger, strife, sickness and pain in Latin America for three years and in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East during several visits, I can no longer listen only to the constituency. Please join me in a common search for discerning the voice of God.¹³

In the 1980s some people began to speak of MCC Canada's "two constituencies" and how the organization needed to be attentive and accountable to both. Maintaining a healthy tension between the two constituencies would be an ongoing challenge.

Two Apologies

Arising from a deepening concern for justice, and accountability to marginalized people, MCC Canada offered two very significant apologies during its third decade. Early in 1985 it extended an apology to Japanese-Canadians for unjust treatment in World War II. In 1992 it apologized to Aboriginal Canadians for the ongoing conquest of their land and domination of them as peoples. Both apologies were offered on behalf of the Mennonites and Brethren in Christ people of Canada. MCC Canada had not spoken out so authoritatively in quite

this way before, nor would it afterward. These apologies marked the high point of its speaking out “as the united voice” of Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ.

John H. Redekop, a Mennonite Brethren representative on the MCC Canada board, suggested the idea of an apology to Japanese-Canadians in the fall of 1984.¹⁴ Redekop was a political scientist, a regular columnist with the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, and moderator of the Mennonite Brethren conference. As a high school student in Abbotsford, BC in the late 1940s, he had learned about Mennonites in the Fraser Valley benefiting from the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II.¹⁵ In 1942, in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the federal government removed some 20,000 Japanese-Canadian farmers and fishers from their homes in the southern part of the province and interned them in camps. Some twenty-five Mennonite families, many of whom had moved to BC to escape the Depression on the prairies, were able to lease or purchase Japanese berry, dairy, and poultry farms at “fire-sale” prices.¹⁶ At that point, it seems, few acknowledged the debt owed to the Japanese-Canadians, who were inadequately compensated for their losses. Forty years later, Redekop insisted that a wrong be acknowledged.

The MCC Canada board approved the apology and shared it with Art Miki, president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) at a news conference in November 1994. The NAJC had, in 1983, launched a major campaign for redress, demanding a formal apology and compensation from the federal government. According to the *Winnipeg Free Press*, MCC Canada

was the first organization to extend an apology to the Japanese-Canadians.¹⁷ An apology from the federal government followed four years later. As a tangible expression of the apology, MCC Canada established a scholarship for a Japanese-Canadian student whose studies were to ensure “that abuse of people because of ethnicity or national origin will never again happen in Canada.” The first recipient was Okinawa-born Winston Kiang, a human rights law student at Dalhousie University.¹⁸ After two years the scholarship eligibility was expanded to include any student addressing minority rights in Canada.



Waldo Neufeld (L, acting executive director) and Frank Epp (R, secretary) present MCC Canada's apology to Art Miki, president of the Canadian Association of Japanese-Canadians, at a news conference in 1984. Photo credit MCC Canada.

In 1991 Menno Wiebe of Native Concerns proposed MCC Canada extend an apology to the Aboriginal people of Canada. This apology occurred in the context of the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Columbus on the shores of the Americas, and the growing recognition his arrival had meant exploitation, slavery, and even genocide for the Indigenous peoples. MCC Canada's apology emerged from a call from the wider ecumenical community, as well as its own more than twenty years of working closely with Aboriginal people.

The bitterly cold Boissevain annual meeting of 1992 discussed the apology. Wiebe had invited Aboriginal friends, Clarence and Barbara Nepinak of Pine Creek First Nation in Manitoba to attend the meeting to share their story. Clarence Nepinak began his presentation by offering his own apology. Fifteen years prior he had attended an MCC gathering in Gretna, Manitoba where he had uttered harsh words about Mennonites. He now said to the group, "I don't know if you remember that, but if at that time I hurt any of you, I apologize and ask your forgiveness." He later told the *Mennonite Reporter*, "[H]ere the Mennonite people were taking steps to atone. I thought if we are going to accept an apology, then we have some atoning to do. It doesn't work just one way."¹⁹ It was a poignant moment.

MCC Canada's apology to the Aboriginal people asked forgiveness for not fully recognizing the humanity and dignity of Aboriginal peoples, for being silent about the cruel treatment inflicted on them, for sanctioning the conquest of their land, and for being "unwilling or unable to separate the intertwined goals of God, gold and imperial glory."²⁰ It pledged Mennonites to speak the truth about events since 1492 and to work with Aboriginal people toward "a fair and just life together."²¹ Soon after MCC Canada's action, MCC US and MCC Binational adopted the apology as well. As a tangible expression of its intention to work for reconciliation, MCC Canada established a Jubilee Fund to advance education and other initiatives among Aboriginal people.

*Intention to
work for
reconciliation*

Reaction to the two apologies was mixed. The National Association of Japanese Canadians and certain Native leaders expressed appreciation for them, as did many MCC Canada supporters. Some constituents, however, reacted sharply, particularly to the apology to Aboriginal people. In general, the opponents declared that Mennonites had committed no sins for which they had to apologize.²² The letters sent to Mennonite periodicals revealed a continued denial of the colonial legacy which harmed Aboriginal people while benefiting white Mennonites.

A second concern raised by critics was how MCC Canada could possibly speak on behalf of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in issuing such statements of apology. Who gave the organization the right to do so? they asked. These critics pointed to a serious weakness. MCC Canada had been mandated to be the collective voice of Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ on significant issues, but the conferences had not communicated this well to their respective church members. Some of them in fact seem to have undermined this very mandate. Moreover, MCC Canada had no effective mechanism for hearing broad input from constituents. In the 1970s it had held a major delegate assembly, but this only occurred once. The provincial MCC annual meetings assembled several hundred delegates, but these gatherings could not serve as the forum for a nation-wide discussion. MCC Canada lacked a way for grass-roots supporters from across the country to participate in and “own” the positions taken by the national agency.

A United Voice

Representing and speaking for the Mennonite people in the public sphere was one of the more challenging aspects of MCC Canada’s mandate. Yet it was in its third decade that MCC Canada embraced this role with the greatest zeal. Much of this work focused on the person of Bill Janzen in the Ottawa Office. By the mid-1980s Janzen had found his niche—carefully researching and writing letters, briefs, and positions papers that argued a particular policy stance on behalf of the wider Mennonite peoplehood. Consulting widely with key constituents, Janzen drew from Anabaptist history and theology, the wisdom of scripture, and MCC’s worldwide experience to craft his documents. During the 1980s and 1990s, he churned out innumerable dense communications on a whole range of issues. One example was a lengthy 1985 letter to new Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, introducing MCC Canada and key



MCC Canada staffpersons Stuart Clark, Bill Janzen (both on Left) and Bert Lobe (far Right), speak with Member of Parliament John Reimer (second from Right) after making a presentation to a parliamentary hearing on Canada’s aid policy, 1986. Photo credit MCC Canada.

concerns. (The organization no longer sought face-to-face meetings with new prime ministers.) Another example was a submission called “The Well-being of All” for a major foreign policy review. A third requested a variety of measures which would reduce the number of abortions across the country. There were many more.

Some of Janzen’s documents were also written directly to the supporting churches. One was an overview of Mennonite responses to militarism through Canadian history, written in the context of increased military spending. In 1992, as already indicated, he penned a major paper on constitutional reform to help prepare constituents for a national referendum. Janzen’s work, whether addressed to the Canadian Mennonite community or to government on behalf of that community, was intended to give expression to an Anabaptist identity, to articulate the best of Mennonite beliefs, values and commitments, and to remind Mennonites and Brethren in Christ of who they were as a people.²³

The vision for representing, speaking for, and expressing a Mennonite “peoplehood” also happened as staff participated in a whole range of coalitions. MCC Canada had participated in coalitions from its beginnings, but it was during the 1980s that this involvement blossomed. In the mid-1980s MCC Canada participated in some twenty coalitions (see Chart 6.1). MCC Canada had much to contribute in coalitions dealing with Native people (Project North), peace and reconciliation (Project Ploughshares), restorative justice (Church Council on Justice and Corrections), international development (Inter-church Fund for International Development), refugee assistance (Inter-church Committee on Refugees), Middle East policy (Middle East Working Group) and Southeast Asia policy (Cambodia-Canada Development Program). MCC Canada also had much to learn, as staff interacted with the wider Christian church in Canada, as well as other social justice movements.

Build a broader Mennonite peoplehood

A third way in which MCC Canada tried to reflect and also build a broader Mennonite peoplehood was through a special project commemorating the 200th anniversary of Mennonite arrival in Canada in 1986. The first Mennonites arrived from Bucks County, Pennsylvania and settled at Twenty Mile Creek in the Niagara Peninsula in 1786. A Mennonite Bicentennial Commission gave leadership to a whole series of projects to highlight this anniversary, to acknowledge a shared past, and to strengthen the ties for a shared future. As its contribution to the work of the Commission, MCC Canada helped sponsor the touring of a “Menno Van.” Two MCC Voluntary Service workers, husband and wife Reg Good and Kathy Shantz of Kitchener, Ontario, spent nearly

Chart 6.1

COALITIONS AND AFFILIATIONS IN 1988

Canada China Programme
Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native People
Canadian Council for International Cooperation
Canadian Council on Christian Charities
Canadian Foodgrains Bank
China Educational Exchange
Church Council on Justice and Corrections
Inter-Church Committee for Refugees
Inter-Church Fund for International Development
Inter-Faith Committee on Chaplaincy
Mennonite Disaster Service
Mennonite Economic Development Associates
Mennonite Historical Society of Canada
Mennonite World Conference
Project North
Project Ploughshares
Task Force on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility

Observer status

Inter Church Coalition on Africa
Social Action Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

Source: Mennonite Central Committee Annual Report 1988.

two years criss-crossing the country in a white recreational vehicle donated by Mennonite-owned Winkler business, Triple-E Trailers. From Halifax to Vancouver Island, they gave more than 350 presentations on Mennonite history, theology, and identity. They also wrote a regular column for Mennonite periodicals, chronicling their adventures on the road.

Finally, MCC Canada also generously supported the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) in the writing of a three-volume history of Mennonites in Canada. The first volume, by Frank Epp, was published in 1974, a second in 1982, and a third volume, by Ted Regehr, in 1996. MCC Canada's express purpose was to use history to help foster a national Canadian Mennonite identity. In 1997 MCC Canada began contributing to a special project of MHSC called *Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites*. Through research, publication in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, and educational conferences, held under the auspices of the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, this project highlighted the perspectives of Mennonites which, at the time, were not typically the subject of historical research; the topics included the history of women, Mennonites from Mexico, Aboriginal people, refugees, and the mentally ill. Much of the research done on the Divergent Voices project connected with MCC Canada's own work in some way.

MCC Canada had been created by the conferences to act as the "united voice" of Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ at a time when there was little unity among the different groups. Significant distance and even distrust existed between some groups, especially in western Canada. By the 1980s that reality had changed somewhat. Even the often testy relationship between "MBs" (members of the Mennonite Brethren Conference) and "GCs" (the informal designation for members of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada) had warmed considerably. Even so, MCC Canada's capacity to speak out on issues on behalf of "the peoplehood" would soon diminish.

New Approaches to Service

In 1990 Jack and Elise Klassen of Ottawa became MCC Voluntary Service workers. Nearing retirement, they gave up a large home and good-paying jobs—he in government and she in the public school system—and moved to Edmonton, Alberta. Here they lived in a 750 square foot duplex in a public housing complex. They came to participate in MCC Canada's new employment creation program (see below).

The Klassens' decision to join MCC was a sign that Voluntary Service

continued to capture the imagination of people seeking tangible ways of serving “in the name of Christ.” With respect to the number of participants, Voluntary Service reached its zenith in the mid-1980s, both in Canada and in MCC’s international program. By 1987, over 160 individuals were serving across Canada (not including summer gardening), and more than 500 MCC workers—thirty to forty percent Canadians—were serving in some fifty countries around the world. A survey conducted by sociologists J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger noted that a full third of 3,000 North American Mennonites surveyed had participated in some form of church-related service and eleven percent had served for a year or more in MCC overseas service.²⁴ This was the era in which MCC could truly claim that people—not money or material aid—were its most important resource. Service continued to be seen as part of the MCC genius.

In some ways, MCC’s regular service program functioned as a kind of “Mennonite religious order,” particularly for workers who did successive terms of service.²⁵ Workers needed to meet “the three screens” in order to be accepted into MCC service: personal faith in Jesus, active membership in a church, and a commitment to nonviolent peacemaking. They were required to participate in several weeks of formation or, in MCC parlance, “orientation.” Regular MCC



A group of new MCC workers poses for the traditional photograph taken at Orientation, 1986. In 1986 and 1987, the MCC system boasted its all-time high number of workers. Photo credit MHC.

workers committed to serve either two-year (in Canada or the US) or three-year (international) terms in a place away from home. In return, MCC paid for a basic level of maintenance and also provided a monthly allowance. Second or third term workers received an increased “continuing worker” allowance. Long-term workers developed a special sense of identity and community that likened them, in the minds of some, to members of a religious order.

Despite the continuity in the Voluntary Service program, workers were changing. In general, workers were now older—the average age was 35 instead of 25—and more skilled. In the 1950s and early 1960s, a high school education or perhaps a teaching degree was considered all the education that a sincere Christian needed to serve either domestically or internationally. This was no longer the case. MCC now deliberately recruited more experienced and more skilled workers as the needs, both overseas and in North America, became more specialized.

In response to changing times and needs, MCC and MCC Canada created new models of service to attract specific groups of people. It instituted a program called Local Voluntary Service (LVS) which made it possible for people unable to leave their homes to serve with MCC in their local community. “LVSers” worked in a range of community endeavors, many of them in the growing network of thrift shops and SELFHELP Crafts outlets.

MCC Canada also developed several new service programs for young people. A recurring theme expressed at MCC Canada meetings was a concern for the participation of youth. People knew that MCC service opportunities for youth just out of high school were dwindling. They also knew some constituent young people were drawn to short-term mission trips run by other church organizations and by para-church agencies. Certain voices insisted if MCC did not provide similar opportunities for young people, ultimately its ability to recruit more mature and skilled volunteers would diminish. However, many people within MCC—though not all—resisted the concept of “short term mission.” Dave Dyck of MCC Canada explained his views in the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* in 1989. He questioned how anyone could “do mission” in a new cultural context, with only limited knowledge of that context and no in-depth relationships. He also challenged the integrity of spending a significant amount of money for one young person’s “exotic adventure,” when that same amount could support a Mennonite pastor in Congo or Ethiopia for an entire year.²⁶

Despite a basic resistance to short-term mission, MCC did develop new opportunities for post-high school youth, however, with a focus less on “doing mission” and more on learning and preparing for longer-term service. A

specifically Canadian initiative was a one-year program called Serving and Learning Together or SALT. Through SALT, young people aged 17-20 lived in a household unit with five or six other “SALTERs.” They spent half their time serving in a community agency, while devoting the other half to Bible study, Anabaptist history, and ethics. SALT Canada units represented a partnership between MCC Canada, a provincial MCC, and a local congregation. The first two units opened in the late 1970s at Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and at Hagerman Mennonite in Markham, Ontario. Eventually, Kitchener-Waterloo United Mennonite in Waterloo, Ontario and Peace Mennonite in Richmond, BC also sponsored units.

A short time later, MCC Binational developed SALT International to provide a one-year international opportunity for 18 to 27-year-olds. These young adults plugged in to one of MCC’s country programs, primarily to learn but also, where feasible, to serve. SALT International proved to be a very popular program and was still going strong in 2012. However, SALT Canada was disbanded in the early 1990s as a result of waning interest, as well as ongoing issues with drinking, drug use, and other “lifestyle expectations.”²⁷ In a few cases, especially needy youth required levels of support which MCC and the sponsoring congregation simply could not provide.²⁸



George Klassen of Calgary, Alberta (far left) designed and developed the rower pump in Bangladesh. The simple inexpensive irrigation pump was soon in use across Asia. Photo credit MCC.

Who Serves Whom?

The discussion about service opportunities for youth surfaced an important question. Was MCC service primarily for the benefit of the people being served—people who were poor, hungry, disabled, or marginalized in some other way? Or was the service primarily for the workers, the churches that sent them, or even for MCC itself? Was the purpose to assist communities around the world in meeting human need? Or was it to shape North American individuals in ways to keep their home churches and also MCC vibrant and alive? MCC service workers,

almost without exception, returned from their assignments saying that they had gained much more than they had given. The saying in fact became somewhat of

a cliché. And while it pointed to the importance of the learning and receiving stance which MCC expected of its workers, it did beg the question of service's primary purpose. The question was impossible to answer, but nevertheless one that some people dared to ask.²⁹

Certainly many service workers made outstanding contributions, and several Canadians deserve mention. Louise Buhler of Hague, Saskatchewan was key to building a relationship with post-war Vietnam. From her base in Bangkok, Thailand, she visited Vietnam several times a year between 1981 and 1987 to negotiate MCC support for agriculture, health, and education projects. On her visits, she frequently trekked into remote mountain villages, and had no communication with the outside world for weeks.³⁰ Largely because of Buhler's efforts, the Government of Vietnam invited MCC to establish an office inside the country in 1989, the first western non-government organization to receive such an invitation. Buhler was eventually honoured by the Vietnamese government for her work.³¹

*A ministry
of "presence"
became a
priority*

George Klassen, an agricultural engineer from Calgary, Alberta, developed an inexpensive manually-operated irrigation pump for use in Bangladesh. Klassen's simple rower pumps were soon found across Asia, earning Klassen recognition in *Newsweek* magazine in August 1980, and, somewhat later, an exhibit in the National Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa.³² Kathy Bergen of Coaldale, Alberta began seven years of service in the West Bank in 1982 and was soon networking with Palestinians and Israelis at high levels in efforts to build a just peace. She went on to head up the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine in Geneva and to devote her life's work to the people of Palestine and Israel. Walter Sawatsky, originally from Altona, Manitoba, did pioneering work in building bridges with evangelicals in the USSR. Through the 1981 publication of his book, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, he also helped Christians in the West understand the realities and struggles of fellow Christians under communist rule.

But most of the workers who served with MCC overseas or in Canada went about their work quietly, with little fanfare, and some for repeated terms of service. The concept of "success" in fact would have seemed anathema to many workers, who often articulated their goal as faithfulness rather than effectiveness, or who would have counted their accomplishments in terms of relationships, rather than wells dug or gardens grown or children immunized. Indeed, during the 1980s a ministry of "presence" became a priority for MCC and MCC Canada. Some workers and former workers were increasingly critical

of the whole development paradigm and the notion that MCC service workers could “help” other people to “develop.” In their minds, service was not about helping as much as it was empowering others through friendship, solidarity, and accompaniment. A favourite saying among many MCC workers at the time was one attributed to Australian Aboriginal leader, Lilia Watson: “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”³³ The experience of Labrador workers, Dorothy Mills and Bob and Dorothy Bartel, mentioned earlier, reflected this new approach to service.

The 1980s constituted a period of tremendous turmoil within the MCC international service program. Workers were influenced by liberation struggles and liberation theology in Latin America, southern Africa, and the Philippines. They were enraged by US government support for oppressive regimes around the world, and disillusioned with the kind of development promoted by western governments, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions like the World Bank. At times, even MCC’s own “small is beautiful” type of community development came under criticism. MCC alumni like Ron Mathies of Elmira, Ontario, who later became MCC’s executive director, argued development theory was bankrupt and the only appropriate stance of workers was listening and learning for mutual transformation.³⁴ David Neufeld, a Manitoban serving in South Africa, suggested it was time for Mennonites to invite Africans to serve in North America, rather than assuming service only went in the other direction.³⁵ Others called MCC to a more radical critique of global economic systems and to sustained advocacy efforts to transform structures of oppression. Many workers in fact argued strongly for MCC to abandon notions of impartiality and adopt Jesus’ “preferential option for the poor.” They dared to suggest that if MCC Canada was to truly witness to the reign of God, it needed to take sides unequivocally—the side of the poor and the oppressed. When Bob Bartel shared the story of the Innu struggle with a group of students in Swift Current, Saskatchewan in 1990, one of them accused him of “taking sides.” Bartel’s response was:

I believe that we have to take sides. . . . Christianity is a bias. It’s the choice of Jesus over the Devil. It’s the choice of good over evil. Justice over injustice. Love over hate. That’s what it’s all about. It’s about choosing sides.³⁶

Not surprisingly, the political conscientization of some MCC workers troubled some Canadian constituents, and MCC Canada staff in Winnipeg

increasingly found themselves having to “translate” the experiences and insights of field workers so that they could be heard by the people in the pew back home. They also “translated” in the other direction, where they felt that workers had lost touch with the North American constituency and with MCC’s basic commitments. In 1987, for instance, Dan Zehr travelled to the Philippines on behalf of MCC Binational, in order to discuss with workers what seemed, from the North American side, to be support for the armed struggle of the National Democratic Front. MCC Canada’s role as vanguard was not an easy one.

The Joys and Sorrows of Service

Many service workers found their lives utterly changed by their service experience. Some chose a new career path. Others met a future spouse or



Service worker Bob Burkholder of Markham, Ontario helps Lebanese family prepare bags in which pine, cedar and cypress seedlings will be planted, 1984. In 1985 Burkholder was abducted by armed men and interrogated at length before being released. Photo credit MHC.

begun a family while in service. Some children born to parents in MCC went on to become service workers themselves. Many “alumni” who served together in a particular country, region, or province gathered for periodic reunions in later years to rekindle friendships and to recall their shared experiences. Most alumni found that, because of what they had witnessed, they had to live differently upon their return home. Peter and Margaret Peters of Winnipeg, who served both in India and China, told

their local newspaper, “You can’t come back and live selfishly after you’ve been serving the needs of the poor.”³⁷

Despite the profound blessings of service, MCC workers had to contend with numerous difficulties—culture shock, ill-defined assignments, unsatisfactory living arrangements, physical illness, and challenging relationships with MCC country representatives or co-workers. Sometimes, when difficulties could not be resolved or overcome, workers chose not to complete their assignments. Approximately five percent of MCC workers terminated before the

end of their terms.³⁸ “Involuntary terminations”—MCC code for dismissal—were always painful. In 1987 MCC chose to terminate Kathy Bergen of Coaldale, Alberta after she had already completed six years of service in the Middle East. According to MCC, the problem was a personality conflict between Bergen and a new country representative. Bergen, however, felt she was being penalized because she was female, single, and fairly outspoken. MCC partners in the Middle East learned of the conflict, and a Palestinian partner remarked, “If MCC can’t work this out, don’t ever talk to us again about Palestinian/Israeli reconciliation.”³⁹ Situations like this revealed that even as MCC sought to work for peace among conflicted groups of people, it struggled with internal conflict.

Many service workers in fact found the process of returning home at the conclusion of an assignment painful. From their perspective, people at home were busy with their own pursuits, lacked interest in truly listening, and seemed inhospitable to the new perspectives service workers gained. It was not uncommon for returned workers to claim they experienced greater culture shock going home than when beginning their assignments. Sometimes, their own need to offer a prophetic critique of their home society was perceived as arrogance and superiority.⁴⁰ At one point, a columnist for *Mennonite Reporter* urged sympathy and understanding for returning mission and service workers,

Life in the Third World has changed them. They have seen and heard and felt the needs and hurts, joys and aspirations of people whose priorities lie with essentials to survival as individuals, communities and countries. They return to discover that our lifestyle smothers spiritual growth and western priorities are part of the problem. . . . Their perspective and insights can enrich their congregations. Let’s receive those gifts as we welcome them back.⁴¹

Many congregations did, in fact, welcome returning workers with gifts of money, food, and assistance finding work or housing.

One of the unfortunate dynamics that emerged within the service program as it became institutionalized was the development of an informal hierarchy of status. Workers who served overseas attained the highest status. Those who served in Canada and the US in some kind of community ministry held intermediate status. Having the lowest status were workers who served in an MCC office, usually in a support staff role. From the beginning, both MCC and MCC Canada had used the Voluntary Service program to staff their office operations. The idea behind this was that the spirit and ethos of VS should permeate the entire organization. Using VS workers also helped to save money.

That all MCC staff should complete at least one term of service prior to

receiving a salary was a long-standing value in MCC. This meant many of the support staff in MCC offices, who were usually young and female, were on a VS stipend, while the more senior staff, who were mostly older and almost all men, received a salary. The gender dynamics of this reality proved to be problematic. In the context of an MCC office, Voluntary Service status often communicated to women that neither they nor their work was valued, because they were not remunerated.⁴² Where Voluntary Service reinforced, rather than overturned, workplace hierarchies and gender inequalities, service could be experienced as exploitation. Voluntary Service, especially in the context of an MCC office, was not always what it claimed to be.

Women's Concerns

In 1985 MCC Canada and MCC Manitoba joined together to construct a new office building in the southern part of Winnipeg.⁴³ They desired a facility large enough to accommodate the staff of both organizations, a retail outlet for SELFHELP Crafts, and a major material aid processing warehouse. A committee charged to search for a suitable piece of land reported its findings at an MCC Canada executive committee meeting. One committee member described the recommended property as being close to a shopping mall; a major advantage was that wives could go shopping while their husbands attended meetings. The comment elicited boo-ing from the gallery of staff attending the meeting, much to the shock of the individual who made it. J.M. Klassen who was present and recorded the event some years later, wrote, "Few, in MCC circles, have forgotten that statement. Times have changed."⁴⁴

*Help
empower
women in
constituent
churches*

Indeed, times had changed. Since the 1960s the women's movement had had a profound impact on Canadian society and many of the mainline churches. Change came more slowly within Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, but by the mid-1970s women in many of these churches were also agitating for new and expanded roles for themselves within the church and its institutions. The 1979 ordination of Doris Weber of Stratford, Ontario as the first Mennonite woman ordained to congregational ministry in Canada symbolized the changing times.⁴⁵

In 1973, MCC Binational had established a Task Force on Women in Church and Society as part of its Peace Section. A Committee on Women's Concerns, consisting of constituent representatives from the US and Canada,

guided the work of a staff person. By the mid-1980s significant momentum had developed for MCC Canada to establish its own program. Peggy Regehr, a native of Winnipeg and a member of the River East Mennonite Brethren Church, became the first director on a half-time Voluntary Service basis in 1984.⁴⁶

Regehr's mandate was to work with the US staffperson to produce the *Women's Concerns Report* (without a doubt, MCC's most provocative publication), to resource and help empower women in constituent churches, and to promote the inclusion of women on Mennonite committees and boards. Although Regehr was already in her sixties, she had been significantly influenced by Christian feminism, and she possessed a radical analysis and critique of the place of women in the church. She also communicated in a forceful manner which some people found problematic.⁴⁷ Given that a significant portion of the MCC Canada constituency was still reluctant to see women in leadership, Regehr was bound to encounter resistance. As it turned out, the Women's Concerns program generated almost as much constituency reaction as Native Concerns, even while it also provided a source of hope and encouragement for many women who longed for equality and full participation in the church.

Regehr quickly learned to focus on issues other than the difficult topic of women in church leadership. Together with Bill Janzen of the Ottawa Office, she developed resources promoting a "service response" to abortion, as well as encouraging understanding for women considering abortions. She collaborated with Dave Worth and the Victim Offender Ministry program on a task force on domestic violence. She also provided a listening ear to women within the constituency who carried heavy burdens. Regehr even tackled some of the inequities within MCC Canada itself.

Regehr had begun her position as a Local Voluntary Service worker, receiving \$235 a month. After her first term, she would have rightfully qualified for salary. However, she had to ask for it, and the request was not automatically granted. The rationale was that because her husband drew a good salary, she did not need one. To her, this represented a great injustice. She knew of men who been hired on full salary without having completed the prerequisite service term and of younger men who received a salary automatically after two years.⁴⁸ Other women in MCC Canada also had to request a salary, even after giving many years of Voluntary Service to the organization.⁴⁹ Only a few months after Regehr's request, she was informed her position with MCC Canada would end. Other issues possibly figured in her dismissal, but they were not communicated well to her, and she left

MCC Canada feeling that it was her challenge to the system which was her undoing.⁵⁰

After Regehr's dismissal in 1989, Kathy Shantz of Kitchener, Ontario and formerly of the Menno Van, assumed the Women's Concerns director position. One of her dreams was to organize a conference which gave expression to women's perspectives on the Bible, the church, and Christian faith. A first "Women Doing Theology" conference took place in collaboration

with Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario in spring 1992, and others followed in subsequent years. Hundreds of women attended these ground-breaking events—a sign that they fed a deep hunger.

To build

empathy,

understanding,

and practical

supports

More New Programs

In the same way that the Women's Concerns program provided a haven for women who were feeling marginalized by the church, the Mental Health program reached out to persons with mental illness who also had

not found the church to be a healing place. Emily Neufeld was one such person. Neufeld, from Blumenort, Manitoba, had struggled with schizophrenia most of her life. Her experience in the church had been exceedingly painful, as pastors and others had blamed her problems on sin. She found comfort in playing her autoharp and singing "Be still and know that I am God," even though, as she put it, God often "seemed to be off skiing in the Alps."⁵¹ She was near suicide on several occasions. At one point, the intervention of her foster sister, Irma Janzen, prevented her from taking her own life.

Stories like Neufeld's led MCC Canada to begin a mental health program in 1986 in response to a call from the Council of Moderators and Secretaries. The major thrust was to build empathy, understanding, and practical supports within constituent churches for persons living with mental illness. A second goal was to help create a network of mental health professionals within the constituency so that they might share information, and support and encourage one another. For many years, these professionals had related to the US-based Mennonite Mental Health Services; it was time for Canadians to work on meeting their own needs. Travis Reimer, a former pastor, was the first director of the Mental Health Program. Irma Janzen, mentioned above, was the second. A former teacher, Janzen became a dedicated advocate of those living with mental illness. The resources she produced to assist churches understand mental

health, depression, attention deficit disorder, and fetal alcohol syndrome were widely used within and beyond the Mennonite community.

The Employment Development program also officially began in 1986, though it had been under discussion since 1983, when a major recession sent



The Edmonton Recycling Society was one of Canada's earliest curbside recycling programs. It created employment for many individuals who faced special challenges in finding jobs.

unemployment among Canadians skyrocketing. At that point, Jacob M. Froese, a former member of the Manitoba legislature and the Old Colony representative on MCC Canada's board, urged a response to high unemployment levels. By 1986 Dave Hubert, director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, had been hired to develop an employment creation program that would tap into government funds available for job creation initiatives. According to Hubert, work was a "biblical

imperative" that fostered dignity and self-worth. By helping to create jobs, especially for marginalized people, he believed MCC Canada could address social problems such as poverty, family violence, and substance abuse.

Hubert's first big project was the founding of the Edmonton Recycling Society (ERS), a non-profit separately-incorporated agency which collected paper, glass, metals, and plastic from 60,000 homes in the northern part of Edmonton. Hubert had been inspired by the way in which MCC Ontario had helped to initiate the first curbside recycling program in Canada a few years earlier.⁵² Five years after it had begun, ERS was recycling millions of kilograms of materials valued at \$1.4 million. More importantly, it had reportedly created some ninety jobs, fifteen of which were held by people with disabilities.⁵³ Other early job creation initiatives included a landscaping project, several housing renovation projects, as well as a forestry management venture. By 1992 the Employment Development program had, according to a news release, created some 500 longer-term and 300 shorter-term jobs, and had provided job training for over 500 others.⁵⁴

Apart from its success in job creation, the Employment Development program raised a few eyebrows. Some of the concerns related to questions around the financial reporting, as well as the "fluid" boundaries between various projects, MCC Alberta, and MCC Canada.⁵⁵ Other questions arose

related to MCC Canada's capacity to run business-oriented enterprises. Hubert himself felt that MCC Canada was generally not flexible and agile enough for some of his projects.⁵⁶

A primary concern, however, was that Employment Development was almost entirely dependent on grants from federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Between 1986 and 1992 it secured a total of \$17 million in various grants. Apart from Hubert's salary and the initial loan guarantee, neither MCC Canada nor the provincial MCCs invested significant funds in the program. This meant the national and provincial MCCs did not develop the same level of ownership of Employment Development as they did of programs they funded more fully.⁵⁷ The Employment Development program represented an instance of "program following money." In other words, the national and provincial MCCs would not likely have initiated the program had government grants not been available to facilitate job creation. Interestingly, while MCC Canada regularly debated the wisdom of accepting CIDA funding for international development work, it did not entertain major discussions about accepting government money for its domestic work in Employment Development, Victim-Offender Ministries, and *Kanadier* resettlement work.

SELFHELP Crafts

In 1983 a group of ten couples from River East Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg began a community ministry called Olive Branch. The ministry grew out of a Sunday school class that explored practical ways of living out a Christian faith. Most of the twenty individuals had served with MCC somewhere—indeed, together they accounted for twenty-six years of service in nine countries. They wished to continue at home the active community involvement they had learned while in service elsewhere. Through the Olive Branch, they held educational events, wrote letters to government, participated in peace rallies, raised funds for community projects, and sponsored refugees. They also sold items from SELFHELP Crafts as a way of helping to create employment for artisans in the global south.⁵⁸ Their endeavor was part of an explosion of growth in SELFHELP through the 1980s.

SELFHELP Crafts Canada was formed by MCC Canada in 1980 as a way of consolidating and streamlining the purchase of crafts for sale within the country. Until this point, each provincial MCC had ordered crafts separately from SELFHELP in the US, resulting in many small orders, multiple customs clearances, and other inefficiencies. Centralized ordering and a centralized

warehouse could address these problems, and also better support the growing number of SELFHELP shops and seasonal sales emerging across the country. It could also facilitate the purchase of crafts directly from overseas producers. In 1980 MCC Canada hired Herman Neff, a former executive with General Foods, to establish an office and warehouse in New Hamburg, Ontario.

Partly because of Neff's entrepreneurial leadership, and partly because of the dedication of the hundreds of volunteers who picked, packed, sorted, and priced the crafts, and also ran the stores and seasonal sales across the country, SELFHELP Crafts experienced phenomenal growth through the 1980s. In 1981 it shipped \$400,000 worth of crafts across the country; eight years later the total was \$2.4 million.⁵⁹ In percentage figures, its growth amounted to fifteen percent in 1981, twenty-seven percent in 1985, and eighty percent over two-year period, 1988-1990.⁶⁰ To manage the growing operation, Neff had the first warehouse enlarged several times before building a brand new one, only to increase its size before it had even been completed. In 1990, MCC Canada held a special board meeting at the new 50,000-square-foot \$2 million warehouse in New Hamburg.

*Ambivalence
about the
success of
SELFHELP*

Within MCC Canada and among some constituents there was significant ambivalence about the success of SELFHELP—indeed, about the basic business orientation of SELFHELP. From the beginning, MCC and MCC Canada had stressed the purpose of SELFHELP was as much about “telling the story” as “marketing a commodity.” In other words, it was to do development education—to help Canadians understand the lives and context of the producers—as much as it was to sell the products.⁶¹ Some people within MCC wondered whether SELFHELP Canada's explosive growth was an indication it had abandoned a commitment to “telling the story.” Additionally, MCC alumni who had observed SELFHELP producers in the global south worried about the impact of sudden very large orders on producers; smaller and more regular orders were generally much more helpful for long-term job creation. Then too, some expressed concern SELFHELP promoted a kind of consumerism which ran counter to core MCC values of simple, sustainable, “more with less” living. Was MCC talking out of both sides of its mouth, a constituent asked.⁶²

In late 1988, in response to the rapid growth of SELFHELP, the MCC Canada executive committee resolved to limit growth to ten percent annually and to designate a portion of the surplus funds specifically to job creation projects. The decision angered Herman Neff. It also dismayed people in the

provincial SELFHELP programs, prompting volunteers to question whether their labours were in fact appreciated by MCC Canada.⁶³ Less than a year later, the executive committee withdrew the resolution, and growth in 1989 went on to top forty percent.

In his last year at SELFHELP Crafts Canada, Neff arranged for a massive purchase of Vietnamese ceramics. He had always been proud of the fact that the Canadian organization could purchase goods from Vietnam while the US organization, because of the ongoing US embargo against Vietnam, could not. Those ceramics, however, remained on the shelves for many years. A major economic recession in 1990 changed the picture for SELFHELP Crafts Canada significantly, and sales dropped significantly. A review conducted by Mennonite Economic Development Associates, concluded that if SELFHELP was to survive, it would need to operate more like a business. Moreover, it noted that MCC Canada would “have to come to terms with any ambivalence (perhaps even distaste) for the business model—Selfhelp Crafts Canada is a business enterprise.”⁶⁴

The Complexities of Pursuing Peace

In 1989 Bertha Landers, an Ontario pastor, contacted MCC Ontario with an idea for a peace project. Landers suggested the creation of a button-like pin that people could wear as an alternative to the Remembrance Day poppy. She was uncomfortable wearing a poppy because of how it seemed to glorify war, and she thought Mennonites and Brethren in Christ could use the occasion of Remembrance Day to share a positive message of peace. MCC Ontario's peace and social concerns committee embraced Landers' idea and in short order created a round red pin, with the MCC logo and the simple message: “to remember is to work for peace.” Twenty-five years later the MCCs in Canada were still distributing thousands of these pins annually.

*The issues
themselves
were complex*

If only working for peace could be as simple as distributing peace pins! But it was not. MCC Canada's ministry of advancing peace was anything but simple, for a number of reasons.

First, constituency support for peace work was often less than enthusiastic. MCC Canada staff frequently expressed the fear that the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ commitment to peace and nonresistance was eroding.⁶⁵ To be sure, a segment of the constituency continued to be supportive. As Peace and

Social Concerns director Ray Hamm itinerated within these circles, he often found himself “preaching to the choir.”⁶⁶ Hamm was charged with fanning the flame of Anabaptist peace theology, and he devoted much energy to teaching the biblical basis for this theology. Many constituents continued to believe MCC Canada was too focused on politics and protest and not enough on the spiritual dimensions of peace.⁶⁷

Interestingly, one of the very people who had earlier expressed concerns about “politics and protests,” now encouraged support for this aspect of MCC Canada’s work. Siegfried Bartel had completed many years as chairperson of MCC British Columbia and member of the executive committees of MCC Canada and MCC Binational. Bartel had grown up in Germany where the Mennonite conference had ended its commitment to nonresistance a century earlier, and he had voluntarily served in the German army, attaining the rank of captain. After immigrating to Canada, he spoke of a spiritual conversion to Jesus’ way of peace and nonviolence, publicly repenting of his participation in war.⁶⁸ Through the 1980s and 1990s Bartel addressed audiences of young people across the country, urging them to become nonviolent ambassadors for peace. He also encouraged MCC Canada to be more political. He told the 1991 MCC Canada annual meeting, obeying the government was among the biggest mistakes of his life.⁶⁹ Under the lordship of Christ, he asserted, the organization should be bold to speak out for peace.

A second reason for the complexity of MCC Canada’s peace ministry was, simply put, the issues themselves were complex: Cruise missiles, military spending, taxation for military purposes, civil wars in Central America, nuclear submarines, nuclear energy, sanctions on South Africa, and so on. The sanctions issue was a particularly challenging one. In 1987 South African pastor and longtime friend of MCC workers, Ezra Sigwela, appeared before the annual meeting, advocating for a position supporting sanctions. Sigwela had spent a decade in prison for his nonviolent resistance to South Africa’s Apartheid regime. He spoke of the intense suffering of black South Africans under Apartheid and their appeal to the international community to support sanctions as a way of bringing down the racist regime. According to Sigwela, sanctions represented a nonviolent response to the oppression of Apartheid, perhaps the only nonviolent recourse left to them.⁷⁰

Two years later, after considerable study and reflection, MCC Canada went on record as supporting sanctions, primarily because of the call from the South African church. The following year, 1990, however, board member John Redekop registered he had changed his mind. To him, sanctions represented a form of violence, and by supporting them, MCC Canada had moved from an anti-war

*Conflict
resolution,
mediation, and
conciliation*

stance to a just-war stance.⁷¹ He objected to a tactic which would inflict further suffering in the hope that some good might result. Redekop did not find support for his argument. Several board members, with considerable experience in southern Africa, argued the Apartheid system imposed the very violence which Redekop wished to avoid—simply doing business with South Africa was participating in a violent system. Besides, the South African church was prepared to accept the suffering of sanctions in order to undo the greater suffering of Apartheid. The resolution stood, but the debate illustrated the complexity of responding to structural and systemic violence, and to the impossibility of making “pure choices.”⁷² As one individual put it, “Can we refuse to kill but still be violent?”⁷³

A third factor complicating MCC Canada’s work in peace education and advocacy was the increasingly broad definition of what constituted peace. MCC workers and staff increasingly conceived of peace not only as a stance of resistance to war and violent force, but as a way of life. Influenced by new interpretations of the biblical concept of *shalom* and the experiences of service around the world, peace now encompassed justice, equality, well-being, right relations, reconciliation, health and healing and more.⁷⁴ Peace work, therefore, involved not only resisting participation in the military, but advocating for justice, reconciling victims and offenders, acknowledging abuse, preventing abortion, building healthy families, dismantling racism, caring for the earth and so on. With such a sweeping definition of peace, MCC and MCC Canada could say, with good justification, that all of their work was about building peace. But it also meant that this work lacked focus.

At the same time, the growing field of peace and conflict studies and the emergence of peacebuilding tools and strategies led MCC Canada and the provincial MCCs into more practical forms of peacemaking—conflict resolution, mediation, and conciliation. Most of these initiatives happened at local and provincial levels. However, a national crisis in the summer of 1990 drew MCC Canada into a whole new level of peacemaking.⁷⁵ In the spring of 1989 the mayor of Oka, Québec announced plans to expand a private golf course. Members of nearby Mohawk First Nations resisted the plans because the land in question was the site of a sacred Aboriginal burial ground. They had in fact been pursuing a comprehensive claim on the land for decades. When negotiations with the municipality broke down, the Mohawk erected barricades to blockade the area. The situation quickly escalated in summer 1990 as Québec police were sent in to dismantle the barricades with force and

as one of their members was shot and killed. A highly publicized armed stand-off unfolded as the Mohawk erected more barriers, as non-Aboriginal residents engaged in counter-protests, and as hundreds police and military personnel intervened.

In July certain Mohawk individuals requested assistance of MCC Canada. Others also approached the Montreal-based Centre for Nonviolence for help in contacting John Paul Lederach, a US Mennonite quickly becoming known as an expert in international and cross-cultural conflict transformation. Lederach had recently helped to mediate a land dispute between the Sandinista government of Nicaragua and Miskito Indians, and had taken on a new position with the International Conciliation Service of MCC Binational. Over a period of several weeks Lederach quietly acted as an advisor to the Mohawk communities, assisting them in building a negotiation strategy that could result in a “win-win” situation for both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups, as well as developing a plan for an unarmed inter-positioning group which could help to de-escalate the tension.⁷⁶ He worked in close consultation with and on behalf of MCC Canada, which was eager to see a “non-violent just solution.”⁷⁷ In the end, Lederach’s efforts failed because, in his view and that of many others, the Québec and federal governments were more interested in a quick fix, rather than dealing with the longstanding and underlying issues at the heart of the conflict.⁷⁸ But the events of summer 1990 pointed to a new level of peacemaking involvement.

By 1990 Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ had not been confronted with the reality of military service for over four decades. But historic concerns about participation in war surfaced with the onset of the First Gulf War in January 1991. During the short but intense war, Canadian military forces joined the US-led air assault against Iraq, thus participating in offensive operations for the first time since the Korean War. The war provided a moment when constituents once again turned to MCC Canada to help clarify the status of conscientious objectors. Although conscription was never more than a remote possibility, some people desired assurance that the rights of conscientious objectors would be upheld. Peace and Social Concerns stepped in to provide answers, as well as the tools and resources to help re-kindle faith commitments about non-participation in war.

Back to Russia

The relationship between MCC Canada staff in Winnipeg and MCC staff in Akron improved during the 1980s. With the Memorandum of Understanding

in place, the controversy around MCC Canada's involvement in international programming diminished, even if it did not disappear. To be sure, other things irritated MCC Canada staff—for example, when Akron sent news releases to Canadian media outlets with little or no Canadian content, when it made decisions affecting the Canadian MCCs without consulting them, and so on. The Canadians also irritated their US colleagues from time to time. But generally speaking, relationships were good. Staff travelled back and forth between Winnipeg and Akron and also communicated regularly by phone. Canadian constituents played important roles on the binational board and committees.

MCC Canada became intensely involved in assisting MCC Binational provide aid to Ethiopia when war and prolonged drought led to massive famine in 1984-1985. On MCC's behalf, staff negotiated massive food shipments through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and helped monitor their distribution. MCC's food aid caught the attention of the Canadian media. The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, carried numerous stories about MCC's efforts, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation filmed a major documentary about MCC for airing on national television. In the documentary, Margaret Catley-Carlson, president of CIDA, praised MCC's efforts in longterm agricultural development as "well thought out, well-effected, well-programmed, well-planned, and well-managed."⁷⁹ All the media attention—something quite new for MCC Canada—was likely the reason Fred Benson, a Guelph, Ontario resident, decided to donate a forty-three-hectare farm he owned to MCC Canada for famine relief. Benson, a "non-denominational Christian," had no prior connection with MCC. The farm sold for \$225,000, amounting to the largest single donation MCC Canada had ever received.⁸⁰

*Canadians
pushed MCC
to do more*

The one important area where tensions arose between some Canadian constituents and MCC Binational at the end of the 1983-1993 period related to new opportunities in the former Soviet Union. Revolutions throughout eastern Europe in 1989 signalled the collapse of communism. Two years later, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolved. Many Canadian Mennonites with historic ties to the USSR believed MCC should seize the moment, return to its roots, and initiate a massive aid program to the economically struggling region.

MCC had in fact been increasing its involvement gradually as the old Soviet system weakened. For example, in 1987 it appointed Walter Sawatsky, former MCC Europe director, as director of East-West Concerns, working out of the Winnipeg office. That same year it arranged for a shipment of 10,000 Bibles. It also delivered thousands of copies of a Russian-language Bible commentary, a

joint initiative spearheaded by Sawatsky with the Baptist World Alliance that had taken many years to complete. In 1988 MCC sent workers and \$900,000 to help rebuild a children's rehabilitation centre and several clinics in the wake of a major earthquake in Soviet Armenia.

When the doors of the former Soviet Union opened suddenly and dramatically in 1991, some Canadians pushed MCC to do more and to do it quickly, before the doors slammed shut again. MCC did do more. By 1993 it had opened an office and resource centre in Moscow, headed up first by Herbert and Maureen Klassen of British Columbia (Herbert was a son of C.F. Klassen who had served Mennonites from an office in Moscow in the 1920s), and then Lawrence and LaVerna Klippenstein of Winnipeg.

Ben and Erna Falk of Virgil, Ontario, were helping to establish a cheese factory in Neudachino, Siberia. Additionally, social work professors Otto and Florence Driedger of Regina, Saskatchewan, were making regular trips to Ukraine to promote social work education, social services, and restorative justice. MCC had also shipped 9,000 boxes of food for distribution to hospitals, orphanages and the elderly, through an interdenominational church agency.

But some Canadians remained deeply disappointed in what seemed to them a meagre and half-hearted response on MCC's part. They also felt misunderstood in Akron. Canadians were interested in a "return to Russia" not so much to provide assistance to the *Glaubensgenossen*, that is, the dwindling population of Mennonites who remained. Rather, they hoped to reach out in friendship and forgiveness to a people and a place which, for them or their families, represented terror and suffering. They were searching for a kind of redemption and a healing of the trauma of their Soviet experience, and for a way of making peace with former enemies. George Thielman of Winnipeg was one Canadian who contributed to a food shipment in 1992. His donation, he said, was a way of offering forgiveness to the country which had murdered his father in 1938. Another constituent, referring specifically to Ukraine, put it this way, "We . . . choose to be wounded healers, serving with wisdom and compassion precisely where our relatives were once executed and exiled."⁸¹

Eventually, a number of Canadian groups began to initiate their own projects



An unidentified family in Moscow opens a box of food shared with them by North American Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, 1992. Photo credit MCC.

in the former Soviet Union. Three emerged in Manitoba alone. Art DeFehr, prominent Winnipeg manufacturer, founded Lithuania Christian College in Klaipėda, Lithuania to provide a Christian liberal arts university education. A group called Kingdom Ventures established a network of Christian camps in the former USSR. Another group began shipping material aid from Canada through a German charity established by Mennonite *Umsiedler* (persons who resettled from the former Soviet Union to Germany). At the same time, certain influential Canadians continued to “hammer” staff in Akron for not doing more.⁸² MCC’s seeming intransigence, in their view, signalled the organization had become a centralized bureaucracy, unconcerned about and unresponsive to the appeals of constituents.⁸³ It was true, MCC staff in Akron did not share the same passion for work in the former Soviet Union, even though this work harkened back to MCC’s beginnings. They had to balance the needs and opportunities in the USSR with issues and priorities elsewhere.⁸⁴ The International Program Department of MCC, in particular, was oriented to the African continent. African partners had expressed the fear of abandonment if MCC, like so many other agencies, turned its attention to the former USSR.⁸⁵ Akron staff wanted to uphold MCC’s commitments to partners in the south, rather than jump on the eastern Europe bandwagon. They also wanted to ensure MCC’s work in eastern Europe developed carefully and in accordance with the wishes of local partners. Nevertheless, in 1995, MCC Europe director, Hansulrich Gerber conceded that MCC had been too slow to build its work in eastern Europe.⁸⁶

Relating to the Provincial MCCs

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as MCC Canada grew, so did the provincial MCCs. Except for MCC Ontario, the provincial organizations’ initial role had been to raise money and process material aid for national and international work. They had few staff and little program, other than that which served the wider system. MCC Alberta, for example, did not hire an executive director until 1976. But in the late 1970s and through the 1980s, the provincial MCCs hired more staff and initiated their own program activity. Some of the new provincial programs—prison visitation, refugee assistance, employment concerns, and peace and social concerns—tied in with work happening at the national level. But some of them were unique to the province. MCC BC, for example, began an innovative social housing program. MCC Alberta had its mutual aid insurance scheme and youth rehabilitation program, while MCC

Manitoba had developed several half-ways for ex-offenders transitioning out of prison. Reg Toews had been an MCC Canada staff person in the 1970s before moving to Akron to serve as MCC Binational executive director in 1982. Upon his return to Canada in 1989 he remarked, “[O]ne can feel the growth in self-confidence of the provincial MCCs. They have matured, grown in respect within their communities and increased tremendously in size. They have arrived and in no way do they see themselves as the junior partner in the MCC family.”⁸⁷

This was all fine and good, except the growth of the provincial MCCs had major revenue implications for MCC Canada and MCC Binational. In Canada, the provincial MCCs were charged with raising funds from constituents and constituent churches; in a sense they “owned” the dollars in a way the national and binational levels of MCC did not. The provinces kept a portion of the constituency contributions which they collected, and then passed on the majority to MCC Canada; MCC Canada also kept a portion, and then passed on the remainder to MCC Binational. For years, a formula guideline had existed, allotting twenty percent for the provincial bodies, twenty percent for the national body, and sixty percent for MCC Binational. A major study completed by Reg Toews in 1989, however, revealed the guideline was not being met. The percentages fluctuated wildly from year to year. Some provinces came close to meeting the targets, but other consistently did not. Moreover, at no point between 1984 and 1989 did total provincial and national forwardings to MCC Binational reach the 60 percent target. In two of those years, they amounted to less than 50 percent.⁸⁸

Revenue sharing was not the only irritant in the relationship between MCC Canada and the provincial MCCs. Another one was “turf.” Some provincial MCCs were not happy MCC Canada ran programs in their province. The summer gardening program was an example; it was run by MCC Canada’s Native Concerns. The Voluntary Service program was another. The provincial MCCs believed they should be running program within their respective boundaries, and the role of MCC Canada program staff should be to act as consultants, guiding, resourcing, networking, but not actually doing program or delivering services themselves. It was appropriate



Patty Burdette, with friend, was a service worker at the Christian Outreach Program in Prince Alberta, Saskatchewan. Photo credit MCC Canada.

for MCC Canada to run program in eastern Canada, where no official provincial MCC bodies existed. But this should not happen where provincial MCCs did exist. In many ways the provincial MCCs' concerns were similar to the kinds of concerns MCC Canada had when "Akron" initiated activity

on Canadian soil.

Metaphor of a bumble bee

The debate revealed some of the inherent problems in the MCC organizational structures. The various MCC bodies were legally separate and autonomous. They worked together because of their shared history and because of an abiding commitment to a shared mission. However, structurally they were not accountable to one another. MCC Canada depended on the provinces for resources, but it had no real authority over them other than moral suasion. The provincial MCCs, on the other hand, contributed resources to MCC Canada but had no significant input into national policy-setting and decision-making.

Some staff used the metaphor of a bumble bee to describe MCC structures. A bumble bee violated the laws of aerodynamics and should not be able to fly; yet, somehow it managed to do so. Similarly, MCC structures defied the logic of sound organizational management, yet somehow the MCC system was able to accomplish amazing things—no doubt, because of the good will of the people involved. But as the entire system grew and became more complex, good will alone was insufficient. Mechanisms for joint decision-making and for mutual accountability were needed.

Over the next few years, administrators and board members negotiated changes to address both the revenue and the turf issues. An agreement called the Red River Accord committed the various levels of MCC to "own" constituency contributions together.⁸⁹ The national and binational levels would no longer be penalized simply because they were one or two steps removed from the proverbial "Mrs. Klassen" and her cheque.⁹⁰ More specifically, the national and provincial MCCs agreed that a minimum of sixty percent of constituency contributions raised across Canada should go to MCC Binational for the international program. It would take many more years and some fractious debate to identify how to divide the remaining forty percent. Moreover, it would be 1997 before the national and the provincial MCCs would actually reach their target of forwarding sixty percent of donations to MCC.

Subsequent to the Red River Accord, MCC Canada changed its by-laws to facilitate greater representation of the provincial MCCs on the national board and executive committee. Eventually, MCC Canada also agreed to turn

over to the provincial MCCs (from BC to Ontario) the administration of all direct program activity and Voluntary Service. MCC Canada would continue its program work in eastern Canada where no provincial MCCs existed.

The jockeying between the provincial MCCs and MCC Canada was not unlike the one a decade earlier between MCC Canada and the binational level of MCC. In the late 1970s, MCC Canada had been seeking a new relationship with MCC. In the late 1980s, the provincial MCCs, because of newfound strength, were eager for a new relationship with MCC Canada. The Memorandum of Understanding (1981) and the Red River Accord (1992) were helpful and necessary to uphold these new relationships; they would be re-negotiated regularly in the future. At the same time, they signalled the increasing bureaucratization of the MCC system. In the coming years, vast amounts of time and institutional energy would be devoted to tending the intra-institutional relationships through the entire MCC system.

Some Personnel Challenges

If MCC Canada was at times on the defensive in the relationship with the provincial MCCs, it also found itself in hot water with respect to specific personnel issues. Three times in this decade, MCC Canada dismissed staff in ways that generated much unhappiness.

The first instance involved John Wieler in 1984. As previously indicated, Wieler was a creative, energetic, and committed staffperson, who had played an important role in the development of the Foodgrains Bank, refugee sponsorship agreement, and CIDA relationship, to name just a few. But his spontaneous administrative style did not mesh well with that of executive secretary, J.M. Klassen. Moreover, their visions for the Foodgrains Bank and for MCC Canada's role in the international arena differed. Several MCC colleagues in Akron also found it a challenge to work with Wieler's management approach. Klassen finally released Wieler. Arthur Driedger, a close colleague of Wieler, resigned in solidarity.⁹¹ There was lingering hurt within the MCC Canada office for some time, though Wieler and Klassen eventually reconciled.

The second instance involved Peggy Regehr, mentioned earlier. She was terminated in 1989, without ever receiving an adequate explanation.

The third instance happened in the context of SELFHELP Crafts Canada in New Hamburg and was by far the most complex of these personnel crises. Vera Isaak, a former MCC worker, became the director in 1990, just as the country entered a new recession. She was soon confronted with plunging sales, excess

*A major
weakness
within MCC
Canada*

inventory, and a massive building debt. Even more daunting, however, was a personnel issue involving warehouse staff that had been brewing for some time. One of the staff was acting in ways deemed emotionally abusive by other staff.⁹²

This, in itself, made for a delicate state of affairs. A complicating factor was the man's wife was the warehouse manager and therefore his supervisor. Over the course of a two-year period, Isaak attempted to confront both the problematic behaviour and the awkward and inappropriate arrangement of one spouse supervising another. Her efforts only seemed to make things worse, and the involvement of MCC Canada, both staff and executive committee, did not seem to help. The crisis grew to include SELFHELP staff and volunteers, local pastors, mediators, lawyers, the media, and outside consultants.⁹³ By

1993 both the warehouse worker and warehouse manager had been released from their positions, and Isaak had been asked to resign.⁹⁴ Much anger was directed to MCC Canada from within and without, for how it did—and did not—handle the whole affair. Some people felt the warehouse worker had been victimized. Others felt that sexism within MCC Canada prevented the organization from supporting Isaak more fully.⁹⁵

These three instances revealed a major weakness within MCC Canada, namely, that it lacked a strong human resource system. A personnel department, filled with good people, existed. But that department's role was primarily to recruit, process, and place workers. The organization lacked training and development in human resource management and the wherewithal for working through difficult personnel challenges. Although MCC Canada possessed mechanisms for the regular evaluation of staff and policies for internal problem-solving, these tools were not always used, nor did they always lead to resolution. A consultant hired by MCC Canada to examine the SELFHELP Crafts crisis pointed out the irony of MCC Canada's situation—it claimed that people were its most important resource, but its practices and procedures around personnel were outdated and ineffective. He suggested, "[L]ike the proverbial shoemaker who fails to recognize his child is in need of new shoes, the key people at MCCC haven't recognized the need to address the internal personnel requirements of their people."⁹⁶

The consultant also pointed out that MCC Canada's lack of capacity in the area of human resources was compounded by an organizational culture of "compromise and permissiveness." By this he meant, people tended to smooth over disagreements, rather than encouraging their conflicts to be dealt with openly.⁹⁷ This culture of conflict avoidance allowed tensions to stew and fester for a long period, resulting, sometimes and as demonstrated in the three cases mentioned

here, in ugly terminations. More than one person claimed that “secular” agencies did a better job of terminating workers than a Christian organization like MCC.⁹⁸ The consultant urged MCC Canada to “modernize the human side” of its work. Eventually it would do so.

Conclusion

In 1983, upon entering its third decade, MCC Canada had quietly dropped the parentheses from its name: it changed from “MCC (Canada)” to “MCC Canada.” It was a small thing, but the decision was nevertheless significant. It conveyed that the organization had come of age.

Through most of this third decade MCC Canada exhibited strength and confidence as the national embodiment of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ commitment to a gospel of compassion, service, justice and peace. Together with the provincial MCCs, its programmatic involvements now spanned the country. It addressed numerous social needs in Canada through people-to-people encounters, while also educating and engaging the churches in a fuller and more faithful Christian witness. It participated significantly in the international work of MCC. It possessed a deeper understanding of partnership with and accountability to people in need, and it was prepared to take some risks to speak out on their behalf.

But an era of growth and strength was coming to an end, signified in part by the resignation in spring 1993 of Dan Zehr as executive director of MCC Canada. Over a thirty-year period, J.M. Klassen and Zehr had been the only two men in the executive director position, except for Waldimar Neufeld’s brief stints in an acting director role in 1983 to 1984 and 1984 to 1985. Zehr’s resignation coincided with the beginning of a much more challenging era for MCC Canada. Indeed, as MCC Canada began its fourth decade, it entered some uncharted territory.

CHAPTER 7

Searching for Purpose, 1993-2003

AILEEN HOEBACH, A young MCC worker from British Columbia, was on her way home from the Haitian school where she taught French to a class of over sixty. The day was very hot as she trudged along with several of her students. Suddenly, Hoebach noticed the familiar MCC truck coming down the road and, without a thought, flagged it down and crawled in. Watching the students from the window, she quickly wondered if she had made a mistake. Her simple decision to get into the truck, she thought, communicated she valued her comfort more than the walk home with them. She later wrote, “[I]n a world where I am rightfully seen as wealthy, this decision screams of the fact that yes indeed, I have all the resources in the world, and they do not.”¹

Hoebach’s experience was not unique. As noted earlier, in Canada and around the world, MCC service workers were often confronted with their tremendous wealth in the face of great poverty. They quickly learned about the injustice of life, and how their prosperity and privilege were tied up in systems which impoverished others. At the same time, they recognized the resilience, generosity, and often profound faith of people living in poverty. They acknowledged the people they had come to “help” were in fact teaching them about deeper understandings of life, faith and hope.

In another account, Henry J. Rempel, a Winnipeg biology teacher who served in refugee camps in Somalia in the 1980s, and Uganda and Ethiopia in the 1990s, told the *Winnipeg Free Press*, his experience in Africa totally changed his life. “I witnessed extreme poverty and people dying. Yet I also experienced the largest human generosity in my lifetime. I saw people give away much of what they owned in the name of friendship.”²

Hoebach and Rempel expressed the view of MCC from the “edges”—from the distant places where service workers encountered material need, as well

as, spiritual abundance. At its edges, MCC was alive and healthy, even if the number of service workers was in decline. At the centre of the institution, however, it was a different story. In the offices and around the board tables, the MCC system, including MCC Canada, was struggling.

...

In 1995 the MCC system celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. As part of the anniversary, MCC Canada shared the stories of persons who could still remember having been directly helped by MCC in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Ninety-seven year old Sara Kornelsen of Coaldale, Alberta remembered waiting in line at the MCC kitchen to receive her daily ration. Eighty-five year old Gertrude Huebert of Saskatoon recalled how wonderful the hot cocoa, rice or bread tasted after surviving for weeks on watery soup and even the occasional sparrow. Eighty-three year old Jake Dyck of Abbotsford remembered the arrival sixty Ford tractors sent by MCC.

For decades, MCC—and especially MCC Canada—had relied on the unflagging support of Mennonites who had been recipients of MCC aid after World War I and II. But many of those people had died and younger generations did not necessarily inherit the same loyalty to MCC and its work. Telling the stories of the past, it was hoped, would generate renewed support for the future. But even as MCC rehearsed its history, many voices were calling for change. They argued it was not enough to recall the stories of the past for MCC to remain viable; it needed new ways of engaging people. The world had changed, the supporting churches had changed, responses to human need had changed, and MCC needed to change as well. The anniversary therefore prompted significant introspection.

MCC Canada was only in its fourth decade, but, as part of the wider MCC system, it too found itself wading through waters of uncertainty. A



Though the 1990s, MCC sent regular shipments of material aid to the former Soviet Union. Some of the aid went to a shelter for abandoned and abused children, who are shown here dancing and singing for MCC visitors who photographed them in 1994. Photo credit MCC.

global recession and other economic realities forced reductions in program. The influence of denominational conferences and congregations weakened. Relationships with the provincial MCCs became competitive and at times testy. A critical review by CIDA communicated a new and less friendly era. The complexities and complications of service challenged some dearly held commitments. Towards the end of its fourth decade, MCC Canada was regaining vitality and purpose, but not before some people dared to ask whether a national level of MCC was really even necessary. In the midst of the organizational turmoil, creativity and innovation continued as staff, volunteers and service workers like Aileen Hoebach and Henry Rempel carried on, giving their best in service to others.

Soul-searching

The global recession of the 1990s affected MCC Canada significantly. After decades of almost continuous growth in income, contributions dropped and then plateaued. In 1993, income stood at \$22 million. Five years later, in 1998, it was just over \$20 million. A massive hurricane in Central America in late 1998 and war in Kosovo in 1999 motivated relief contributions which resulted in a staggering income of \$33 million for 1999. But before that happened, MCC Canada had to consider the possibility that it might have reached the limits of growth.

After several decades of substantial program expansion, the MCC Canada executive committee and board now contemplated program cuts. They also returned to old questions about whether MCC Canada was trying to do too many things and therefore lacked focus. In 1989 at a twenty-fifth anniversary conference, renowned Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby had criticized MCC Canada for “doing very little about very much.” He asked why MCC Canada tended to see every existing social problem as falling within its domain, rather than focusing and developing expertise in a few.³ Other people had been asking the question about focus for several years. Staff and board ruefully noted that they were great at starting new programs but bad at shutting them down. Once those programs had begun, they developed clients, committees, and networks of loyal supporters who were loathe to see them end. So an initial round of program cuts, considered in 1992, turned out to be quite minor.

For the Canadian MCCs, it was easier to try to raise more money for existing work, than to eliminate program. But new realities were also prompting change with respect to raising money for the work of MCC in Canada. The concept of

fundraising was fairly new to the Canadian MCCs. In earlier days, the MCC system simply identified a particular need and how it proposed to respond, and the money and material aid arrived at MCC offices and centres across the country, quite spontaneously.



Mennonite children ride in the back of their family's buggy in northern Mexico. In 1992, widely publicized news about drug smuggling among colony Mennonites encouraged MCC Canada to increase its presence and ministry in Mexico. Photo credit MCC Canada.

Also in earlier days, most Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations gathered monthly offerings for MCC, regardless of the specific need. Those days were seemingly over. But discussions about more assertive or strategic fundraising were difficult.

People who remembered the old ways resisted the word “fundraising.”⁴ They wanted MCC to find better ways of “telling the story” rather than

resorting to what they associated with fundraising—glossy publicity, slick ads, and direct mail appeals. However, even the oldtimers had to admit the traditional ways no longer generated the same level of giving. An increasing percentage of donations now came from thrift shops and relief sales and from individual donors, rather than from congregations and conferences. Moreover, many people now sent their charitable gifts to a variety of parachurch organizations; they no longer saw MCC as “their” agency. MCC would need to be much more deliberate and intentional about what it called “resource generation.”

Without doubt, the traditional Canadian constituency had changed considerably, even since MCC Canada's founding in 1963. Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church members had become increasingly urbanized, educated, and integrated with the wider Canadian society. They had, for the most part, become prosperous people, living comfortable lives, and participating readily in a consumption-oriented culture. While much of an earlier generation of supporters had experienced war, hunger, and refugee flight personally (at least among Dutch-German Mennonites), most Canadian constituents had now grown up with peace and plenty. They focused less on community and more on individual pursuits. They were also influenced by a wider spectrum of Christian perspectives and therefore represented a more diverse theological

continuum than earlier.⁵ Young people in particular, it seemed, were drawn to other organizations offering more exciting opportunities to make a difference in the world.⁶ Some observers noted the increasing fragmentation of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family and a waning sense of peoplehood.⁷

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Also by the 1990s, MCC Canada was experiencing a different relationship with the denominational conferences which had created it. In the very early years, the conferences had designated their “leading men” as representatives to MCC Canada. These men were powerful individuals, usually church leaders, who strongly identified with MCC Canada, and who shaped its ministry in significant ways. MCC Canada’s “united voice” function, in fact, largely depended on having this kind of leader at the table. But, for some good reasons, conference leadership was now more democratic, dispersed, and decentralized. Conference representatives on MCC Canada’s governing bodies no longer felt they could speak for their people.⁸ Besides, many

of the conferences themselves were preoccupied with their own declining budgets and memberships.

The conference voice at the MCC Canada table was further diminished because of the increased representation of the provincial MCCs on both the board and executive committee. Provincial representatives, according to some observers, used the executive committee platform to advance provincial interests.⁹ They resisted MCC Canada’s program work within their respective provincial borders, bristled at suggestions of collaborative program planning, and held out against a revenue sharing agreement that would split the forty percent of constituency contributions between the national and provincial bodies equally. Discussions about revenue-sharing became increasingly tense.

These new 1990s realities prompted considerable soul-searching within MCC Canada. They begged the question of whether MCC Canada had a sufficient mission and mandate. The national organization continued to do important work through its Ottawa Office and its eastern Canada program. However, the provincial MCCs had taken on considerable program work, especially in Native Concerns, Victim Offender Ministries, Employment Development, and Peace and Social Concerns, raising questions about the need for a national responsibility in these areas. Additionally, MCC Canada’s role as the “united voice” for Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ was clearly

*Perhaps MCC
Canada was
not necessary*

diminishing. Moreover, its place in directing any international program was still very limited. With MCC Canada having little to do but coordinate, facilitate, and network with the provincial MCCs on the one hand and the binational level of MCC on the other, a few individuals dared to suggest that perhaps MCC Canada, as an intermediary level of administration was not necessary. Perhaps it should even be eliminated.

A variety of people posed the provocative question. The provincial directors, who had the most to gain by the elimination of MCC Canada, asked the question.¹⁰ But so did Marv Frey, soon to become new executive director for MCC Canada, and so did George Richert, soon to become new executive committee chairperson.¹¹ Even some service workers asked why MCC Canada was necessary. One of them was Gerhard Pries of Winnipeg. Formerly an accountant in the MCC Canada office, Pries was now a service worker in Happy Valley/Goose Bay, Labrador, working with Innu and other partners in community economic development. From his new perspective, he saw the MCC system, including MCC Canada, as a stodgy and bloated bureaucracy, in danger of growing stale and irrelevant. He wrote, "Get rid of the bureaucracy, get rid of MCCC, get rid of much of the middle management." Any savings should be invested in better training, orientation and support for service workers, strengthening them and encouraging them to take more risks in "the service of love."¹²

The conversation about dismantling MCC Canada did not proceed much further, but the fact that people from the edges and from the centre were asking the question indicates the extent to which the national organization had reached a crossroads.

Modernizing the Systems

When Dan Zehr left MCC Canada in the spring of 1993, the search committee for his successor quickly determined they needed a new kind of leader for the organization. Zehr was a pastor by profession and inclination. MCC Canada had become a mature and complex entity within an even more complex web of organizations. It needed someone with strong administrative skills, and someone who could envision and articulate a new role for the organization for the future.

John Dyck was hired as an interim director for a year and a half. He was followed from 1995 to 2000 by Marv Frey. The two men were very different but had similar ideas about the kind of change required in MCC Canada. Dyck had

worked most recently as a senior administrator in the Department of Education for the Government of Manitoba. He had no MCC service experience, but had been the treasurer of the MCC Canada executive committee for a time and had also helped to organize Winnipeg's first relief sale in 1993. Frey was an auto mechanic by training. He had spent most of his career working with MCC in Jamaica and several African countries. Though he lacked much formal post-secondary education, Frey read widely in organizational theory and was known as an astute thinker and problem-solver.

Both Dyck and Frey believed MCC Canada needed to modernize and professionalize. For Dyck this meant a new management structure, a more skilled and sophisticated staff, a focus on long-term strategic planning, attention to women in leadership, and a more professional office culture. He encouraged punctuality at staff meetings and a respectful dress code—some staff were known to wear torn jeans and even go barefoot in the office. He challenged the practice of the entire staff of forty people travelling across Canada to attend the annual meeting. He also brought greater efficiency to decision-making by eliminating several layers of internal consultation. Some staff chafed under what they perceived as a shift from a “family” style of operation to that of a “business.”¹³ Others welcomed the energy, focus, and professionalism which Dyck brought to the task.

When Frey took over the reins in January of 1995, he continued the strategic planning that Dyck had begun. For over thirty years, MCC Canada had done its program planning on a year-by-year basis. Each year staff presented sets of goals, objectives, and projected activities, which the annual meeting approved. Frey believed that this was no longer adequate; the organization needed to plan for five-year periods so as to better address long-term needs and to give greater attention to focus. Moreover, it needed to pay more attention to results of its work, rather than simply the activities it carried out. Frey thus introduced the concept of results-based management (RBM) to MCC Canada *modus operandi*. From here on, staff would be asked to document not the activities that they carried out, but on how those activities were bearing fruit in the kind of long-term change desired. Instead of sharing stories of “presence ministry,” staff would now be expected to supply hard data on how their work was making a difference. In the words of one Canadian staffer in Akron, the focus on results changed the work of MCC “from art to science.”¹⁴

Frey also favoured decentralization in the MCC system. He resisted the idea of one vision and one administration guiding the work of MCC. He believed that within the MCC system there should be many visions—or, as he put it at a seventy-fifth anniversary conference in 1995—a place for

“letting a thousand flowers bloom.”¹⁵ And he felt that the MCC system should welcome decentralized administration. He resisted what he called the elitism, defensiveness, and centralized control that he saw emanating from Akron.¹⁶

But if Frey advocated decentralization for MCC in Akron, he also advocated it for MCC Canada. In other words, he was prepared to have MCC Canada give up some control and resources in favour of the provincial MCCs. Therefore, in order to break the deadlock with the over how to divide the forty percent share of constituency contributions for use in Canada, in 1995 Frey brought forward a proposal that MCC Canada receive only fifteen percent—not twenty percent—of constituency donations. In other words, he was prepared for the national body to diminish so that the provincial ones could grow. The provincial MCCs, especially the three westernmost ones, welcomed this offer, and the agreement—known as the Burnaby Accord—became history. The agreement had profound and painful implications for MCC Canada programming and staff.

The kinds of changes which John Dyck and Marv Frey initiated were not unique to MCC Canada. Long-term strategic planning, results-based management, and decentralized authority structures were all part of the changing landscape for nongovernment or voluntary agencies engaged in addressing human need.¹⁷ Many other organizations, in fact, had made the shifts earlier. Some of the impetus for change came from CIDA, but it also came from a public demanding more accountability, transparency, and effectiveness from the organizations to which it entrusted its donations and volunteer labours. In 1995 the national media reported inappropriate spending of funds donated to Care Canada for its relief work in Somalia. The charity was eventually exonerated, but the entire episode impacted public perceptions and expectations of aid agencies at a time when the federal government was cutting back on foreign aid. Charities were expected to demonstrate clearly that they were accomplishing what they set out to do.¹⁸

*Public
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more
accountability*

MCC supporters across Canada were not unaffected by this increased demand for accountability. They made their views known primarily at the provincial level. For example, in 1995, MCC Manitoba supported a bid to have a colony Mennonite man from Mexico transferred from a US prison to a Manitoba facility. He had been convicted of bringing drugs across the Mexico-U.S. border in 1992. After the transfer had taken place, volunteers through MCC Manitoba’s prison visitation program, Open Circle, began to visit the contrite man. But when they learned of this, volunteers at several Manitoba

thrift shops threatened to stop working if MCCM continued to spend time, money, and effort to support drug smugglers and their, seemingly, immoral lives. MCC Manitoba staff spent time with the volunteers, explaining how their efforts on the man's behalf were motivated by compassion and were in keeping with their restorative justice ministry.¹⁹ The story nevertheless revealed the extent to which constituents were demanding accountability.

Another example occurred in BC that same year. A group of women, including members of the local Women's Concerns committee, planned to host a conference on women in ministry. They invited Filipina theologian Elisabeth Tapia to be their guest speaker. They requested and received MCC BC's endorsement. However, several BC pastors learned about the event, read about Tapia, and became concerned the event was to be a platform for, in the words of some, "radical feminist" and "new age" views.²⁰ They threatened MCC BC with the withdrawal of their congregations' and possibly even their conference's support. The board of MCC BC did withdraw its endorsement, despite the pleas of staff throughout the MCC system not to do so.²¹ This action greatly disheartened the organizers of the conference. It also polarized the BC Mennonite community for a time.

The Complexities of Service

As the MCCs in Canada continued to minister to people in need, both domestically and, through MCC the wider world, they encountered numerous complexities and complications. MCC service had always been accompanied by complexity, and even at times contradiction, but in some ways it seemed the dilemmas multiplied in the 1990s. MCC was not unique in this regard. Many other church agencies, inter-church coalitions, and nongovernment organizations were reassessing some of their basic assumptions and strategies for addressing poverty and injustice. After all, the realities of war, debt, environmental degradation, and intense human need seemed ever-present. After the optimism of the 1960s and 1970s, and the waning resolve of the 1980s, people in the wider development community seemed less sure they knew the answers to overcoming human suffering.²²

In the early 1990s, for example, Eric Rempel, formerly a Native Concerns staff person, completed a detailed review of the summer gardening program which MCC had operated in Native communities since the mid-1970s. As part of his review, Rempel had frank discussions with numerous chiefs and other Native representatives. He observed most Aboriginal communities had

no more gardens than when the program had begun; in some place, gardens did not even make sense. However, several chiefs had identified other needs MCC could help to meet. Rempel recommended MCC Canada end its summer gardening program. He proposed MCC Canada continue a summer program with Aboriginal communities, but one that broadened its scope to address whatever need specific communities identified.²³ He and others recounted the genius of the summer gardening program in building relationships across

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patterns

the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal divide, but argued it was no longer appropriate to prescribe what Native people needed. Gardening was MCC Canada's agenda, not necessarily that of the communities themselves.²⁴

Although Rempel did not use the word "paternalism" to describe MCC's relationship to Native communities, this is essentially what he was describing. He was not alone in raising concerns about paternalistic patterns in MCC programming. At a seventy-fifth anniversary conference in

Fresno, California, Ted Koontz, professor of ethics at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, addressed the way MCC's understanding of service contributed to paternalistic relationships. In a presentation on the "commitments and complications of doing good," he noted paternalism was rooted in the essence of MCC's service theology. "We are servants, helping others in ways that they are unable to help themselves," he suggested. "We have; they have need; we give them what they need. In a deep way the patterns of our thinking may contribute to the very sense of disempowerment which we seek to overcome."²⁵ Koontz called for a new paradigm and language to express MCC's mission. He suggested replacing the slogan, "serving in the name of Christ," with a new one, "sharing God's blessing." His suggestion seems to have died at the conference.

The MCC system became attuned to other complexities in the 1990s, many of them related to work done in the international context. In 1994, for example, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ across Canada and the US contributed very generously to an MCC response to the Rwandan genocide. Working with Mennonites in Zaire (later the Democratic Republic of Congo), MCC provided food, clothing, blankets, and money for Rwandan refugees in camps just inside the Zairean border. MCC workers assisted whoever was in need, as was their practice. Eventually, however, they learned some of the people they were feeding and sheltering were guilty of great atrocities, men who were in fact planning the next step in their military strategy.²⁶ As he watched these men play with children, MCC worker Terry Sawatsky of Winnipeg reflected, "How

can we be a witness in understanding and loving *all* those involved in the many facets of this conflict?”²⁷

Later on, aid organizations came under harsh criticism for the way their assistance helped to strengthen armed militias intent on continuing the conflict. According to critics, the aid actually prolonged the war.²⁸ This charge

Aid could fuel hostility

was not a new one. MCC personnel had been aware of how aid could fuel hostility since at least the Ethiopia famine of the early 1980s. But the debate pointed to the ongoing difficulties of providing assistance in a truly life-giving way. Eventually, the wider aid community developed tools to ensure that humanitarian assistance would “do no harm” and would help build peace rather than exacerbate war.²⁹

The Child Sponsorship program, run by MCC since the 1950s, offered another example of the complexity of helping others. By the 1980s, many Canadian aid organizations had abandoned child sponsorship-type programs because they required a significant amount of administration and because they represented, according to the experts, a less helpful mode of development.³⁰ Child sponsorship initiatives typically provided support to individual children (rather than entire schools or entire communities), thereby setting those children apart from others and contributing to conflict and division. MCC struggled with this very dilemma in its own Child Sponsorship program. On the one hand, some staff considered the program marginal to the work of MCC and wanted to see it disappear. On the other hand, many supporters loved it and donated faithfully because, through receiving photos, reports, and sometimes letters, they developed a relationship with a particular child. Helen Fast of Kleefeld, Manitoba, supported MCC’s Child Sponsorship program for four decades, helping nine children receive an education. MCC tried to resolve the difficulty by gradually shifting its Child Sponsorship program to support entire schools or communities rather than individual children, and by changing the name to “Global Family.” It also integrated the Global Family program more intentionally with its other international development work.

At times, MCC’s efforts to educate constituents about the deeper realities of poverty and injustice seemed flawed.

Over the years, the various provincial MCCs in Canada had developed a variety of short-term experiences to expose middle class constituents to inner city realities and the lives of homeless people. Youth groups and others could spend a week or weekend “living” in downtown Toronto, Winnipeg, or Vancouver,

*Expose
middle class
constituents
to inner city
realities*

sleeping in shelters, eating in soup kitchens, and generally learning about life on the streets. The experience was intended to help participants better understand the roots of poverty and to gain empathy for homeless people. Often it accomplished that goal, but sometimes it had the opposite effect. Sometimes the weekend exposure actually reinforced people's stereotypes and strengthened the "us/them" division. In 1995, Jennifer Mierau, an MCC worker coordinating Toronto's program, resigned because she felt it fostered a "zoo mentality," providing a brief moment for middle class visitors to "tour the ghetto," but in her mind doing nothing to foster honest and authentic engagement with people living in poverty.³¹ She felt the program went against her basic beliefs about working for justice. Within MCC, people continued to raise similar questions about short-term service in general.³²

Even MCC's beloved regular service program came under question. In 1995, for example, CIDA challenged MCC's practise of placing North American service workers overseas. It argued the presence of such workers represented "a lack of confidence in local people and a desire to control development." It advised MCC to do more to build the capacity of local people, especially the national staff it hired, so they could do the work normally done by North American service workers. Similar counsel came from some former workers themselves. Dale Hildebrand of Toronto argued MCC should send money to partners rather than people.³³ Hildebrand had completed two terms of service in the Philippines at a time when Filipinos were struggling to overcome the legacy of direct American colonial rule, as well as US support for a brutal dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. Sending people, especially to places trying to recover from colonial histories, Hildebrand insisted, simply reinforced the very colonial patterns people were trying to escape. His critique cut to the heart of MCC ministry and mission, its precious service program. Over the years, MCC had upheld international service and the sending of service workers as the heartbeat of its work.³⁴ People were MCC's "most precious resource," the saying went—and the vehicle through which social change happened.³⁵ Now that bedrock commitment was being questioned.

*Good people
and good
intentions
were not
enough*

These are just a few of the many complications and complexities which the MCC system—including the Canadian MCCs—encountered in its ministry of service to a hurting world. Many of these challenges were rooted in the sheer difficulty of meeting human need, and they were not unique to MCC. Others were linked to the distance between and divergent demands of MCC's

two constituencies. These challenges continued, even as MCC continued to learn from and adapt to new realities and new understandings. What was exceedingly clear was that good people and good intentions were not enough to meet human need in the twenty-first century. New frameworks, new tools of analysis, new ways of building relationships, and much critical reflection, were all necessary to ensure MCC's work did in fact alleviate suffering.

CIDA Sends a Message

In 1993 CIDA initiated an institutional review of MCC Canada. This was the first time CIDA had undertaken such an extensive and comprehensive review of the organization as a whole. The reviewer, Andrew Hamilton, recommended CIDA continue to provide MCC Canada with \$3.3 million annually for the international program of MCC, but he also recommended changes. One set of recommendations related to the area of women and development, a field in which CIDA was known as an international leader.³⁶ Hamilton provided specific suggestions for how MCC Canada should advance women in leadership in middle and senior management and move towards better gender balance on boards and committees. He also counselled the development of an MCC gender policy and environment policy.

A second set of recommendations had to do with MCC Canada's role in the overseas program of MCC. CIDA funds for international development were to be spent by Canadian organizations. Because grants provided to MCC Canada went via MCC—that is, through the US—Hamilton felt Canadians should have more input into decision-making regarding international programming. He proposed a variety of internal mechanisms to strengthen MCC Canada's position in that regard, arguing these measures would contribute to a more "equitable sharing of responsibilities" between MCC and MCC Canada and would also strengthen the binational nature of the organization.³⁷ We will return to a more in-depth examination of how MCC Canada responded to the recommendations regarding women and international program administration elsewhere in this chapter.

What was very clear was that the CIDA-MCC Canada relationship was entering a new era. Gone were the days of warm cozy relationships with men like Romeo Maione. Gone were the days when CIDA attached few strings to the grants it provided and made few demands for reporting on how those grants were spent. Gone, very soon, were also the days of grants of over \$3 million per year. The Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney

had begun to make major cuts to foreign aid in the late 1980s, a trend that continued under the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien. Over the next ten years the government reduced official development assistance by 33 percent.³⁸ MCC Canada was not unaffected. In 1995 CIDA reduced MCC Canada's block grant of \$3.3 million by \$565,000 or seventeen percent. CIDA explained the cuts were due to issues identified by Andy Hamilton earlier, as well as MCC's seeming weakness in "building capacity" of international partners.

MCC Canada staff tried to reverse CIDA's decision about a funding cut, but they were unsuccessful. The funds were not recovered that year, nor in any succeeding year. In the future, CIDA would provide larger grants for emergency response to major disasters, but the amount available for ongoing development purposes, would not again reach the levels experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s.

It should be noted that the CIDA-MCC Canada relationship, while different than it had been in the 1970s and 1980s, was not an entirely one-way relationship. If CIDA asked certain things of MCC Canada, it also learned from MCC Canada and the larger MCC system, especially in relation to work in Palestine-Israel and in the field of peacebuilding in general. MCC had worked in Palestine-Israel since 1949 when the creation of the State of Israel had resulted in nearly a million Palestinians losing their homes. Since that time, MCC Canada had taken a position that peace in the Middle East required a just resolution for Palestinians. In the 1980s, Canadian MCC workers in Palestine-Israel—Kathy Bergen, Harry and Agnes Huebner, and Harold and Judith Dueck—had played a key role in exposing Canadian Embassy personnel to the realities of Palestinians and their efforts for nonviolent change. In subsequent years, the embassy initiated a range of projects with Palestinians. Later on, one of these officials remarked to Bill Janzen of the Ottawa Office, "When we planned our program to assist the Palestinian people we modelled it on yours."³⁹

CIDA also borrowed from MCC when it came to peacebuilding initiatives. Key MCC Canada staff people participated in helping CIDA shape its language, frameworks, and programmatic involvements around the theme of peacebuilding in the 1990s. At a special meeting in Ottawa in 1995, an official of the Department of Foreign Affairs noted that "peacebuilding is now the 'in thing' and therefore Mennonites represent the 'flavor of the month.'"⁴⁰ His comment, one observer noted, while warm and congratulatory of MCC, was somewhat cynical of the way CIDA was swayed by certain development "fads." Indeed, CIDA's interest in peacebuilding and support for Palestinians would soon give way to new interests.

The Work Continues

During this at times discouraging decade, MCC Canada experienced disappointment over several major projects. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, it embarked on a major employment creation initiative—a tire recycling facility. Though only a minor shareholder in the quasi-business venture, MCC Canada played a key role in developing the plan for the facility. But in 1998, after a whole series of setbacks, it pulled out of the project, before any recycled rubber was even produced.⁴¹ Another ambitious undertaking was a special dairy project in Mexico intended to help colony Mennonites increase their milk and cheese production. A group of US Amish farmers provided investment capital. Unfortunately, the 200 imported New Zealand heifers contracted a disease and did not produce as expected. Another problem was that the dairy was organized on a cooperative basis—cooperatives worked well among Mennonites in Paraguay, but evidently not in Mexico.⁴² The heifers and equipment were eventually sold off. With both the tire recycling and dairy projects, MCC Canada had taken significant risks and had failed.

But not all was doom and gloom through the 1990s. Despite the organizational soul-searching, the complexities of “doing good,” the reduced support from CIDA, and some project failures, MCC Canada staff, volunteers, and service workers continued to engage in important ministries and develop innovative responses to human need.

One of these innovations was a code of conduct for sharing stories and photos of the people with whom MCC Canada worked. In February 1993 the national media captured video images of Innu children at Davis Inlet, Labrador. These children were sniffing gas and screaming they wanted to die. The story garnered the attention of Canadians from coast to coast, as well as international media. Carrie and Mike Koplinka-Loehr of Ithaca, New York were serving as MCC workers in Davis Inlet at the time. In response to the outcry, Carrie wrote an article about what she and Mike saw in their daily interactions with the Innu. She acknowledged sniffing was a problem among children, but wrote the majority of kids attended school, played sports, transformed old cardboard into slides and plastic containers into boats, and accompanied their families on trips into the bush. She described how a youth council ran a canteen, and planned dances, tournaments, fishing trips, and storytelling sessions with elders. She noted especially how the Innu cared for one another, even amidst their daily struggles.

Human connections rarely make national news. Yet it is precisely human connections that transform each of us and embody the hope

of change. The Innu understand well the value of human connections, evidenced by how they visit each other, stand by each other, live with each other.⁴³

*Share stories
and photos
of strength,
resilience and
hope*

Koplinka-Loehr's thoughtful response to the negative portrayals of Innu on TV reflected MCC Canada's new code of communications, adopted in 1994. The code was spearheaded by director of communications, John Longhurst, in response to the kinds of images and messages many relief organizations used to promote their work and raise money. He and others objected to photos of starving children with distended bellies and flies crawling in their eyes, accompanied with emotionally manipulative appeals to donors. Such "famine pornography" violated the dignity of people by portraying them as victims and incapable of helping themselves.⁴⁴ The code of conduct committed MCC Canada to report honestly about needs in Canada and around the world, but also to share stories, as well as photos, conveying strength, resilience, and

hope.⁴⁵ An authority on humanitarian response remarked in 1995 that MCC Canada's actions helped to raise the communication bar for other agencies.⁴⁶

Under Longhurst's leadership, MCC Canada became increasingly sophisticated in its communication strategy. It nurtured relationships with the non-church media, and put itself forward as a reliable source of information and interpretation on Labrador, the Middle East, food aid, and other topics. It engaged in "audience research" to better understand supporters and potential supporters. It also developed a website for the very new "world wide web"—or at least it gave the go-ahead to a volunteer to create a website. That volunteer was Ryan Rempel, a law student and husband of Joanne Epp, MCC Canada staff person in the Ottawa Office. On his own, Rempel created the initial website in the spring of 1995, when only about 50,000 websites existed worldwide. Rempel showed his efforts to John Longhurst a few weeks later, when the latter was visiting Ottawa.⁴⁷ Longhurst sent MCC materials to Rempel for posting: news releases, submissions to parliamentary committees, essays, a video resource catalogue, a guide to Mennonites in Canada, and much more. They created MCC's website "on the fly." By December, it boasted 125,000 visits, and, within a few years, was logging one million visits per month. The website would revolutionize MCC Canada's style and strategy of communication.⁴⁸

Through the 1990s, the Victim Offender Ministries continued to develop new and innovative ways of responding to crime. One new initiative was called

Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA). Piloted by Harry Nigh, pastor of the Welcome Inn Mennonite Church in Hamilton, with support from MCC Ontario and MCC Canada, COSA was intended to help reintegrate released sex offenders by surrounding them with a circle of trained volunteers. It all began in 1994 when Nigh, in his work in prisoner visitation, met a man completing a sentence for sexual offenses he had committed against children. “Eddie” was to be released into the community without any supports or supervision from a parole officer. Nigh pulled together a group of friends who covenanted with Eddie to support him, help him reintegrate, and keep him from re-offending; Eddie, in turn, covenanted to be accountable to them for his behaviour. Given society’s abhorrence of sex offenders, it was a highly controversial step to take, and for a time Nigh was subject to a major media assault.⁴⁹ But within a short time, similar circles emerged in Toronto. The experiment was so successful—none of the “core members” committed new offences—that Nigh presented a proposal to Correctional Services Canada for funding of a larger program and it was accepted. COSA circles soon spread across the country. By 1999 twenty-two circles existed within Ontario and twelve beyond, from Victoria, BC to St. John’s, Newfoundland.⁵⁰ A decade later, an extensive evaluation of COSA, funded in part by Correctional Services Canada, determined that released high-risk sex offenders who participated in COSA circles reoffended at a rate seventy percent less than offenders not in COSA programs.⁵¹

MCC Canada’s VOM program also spearheaded a new initiative around the person and story of Winnipeg writer, Wilma Derksen. In late November



In 1994 VORP celebrated its twentieth anniversary. On the occasion, MCC honoured VORP Dave Worth (L) and Mark Yantzi (R). Photo credit MHC.

1984 Derksen’s thirteen-year-old daughter had vanished on her way home from school; seven weeks later her bound and frozen body was found in a shack not far from home. The murder of Candace Derksen touched the Winnipeg community in a profound way, and also thrust Derksen and her husband Cliff into the public eye in a way the soft-spoken couple would never have sought. Deeply devout people, the Derksens strove to extend forgiveness to the stranger who had abducted and killed Candace, even while they gave

expression to the depth of their rage and intense grief. A killer would not be charged and convicted until 2011.

In 1996, Derksen joined MCC Canada to spearhead a program called Victims' Voice. The point of Victims' Voice was to bring a victim perspective to the work of restorative justice. Although Derksen was committed to the restorative justice vision of healing and reconciliation, she felt most of MCC Canada's work was too oriented toward the healing of offenders and too geared towards men. She was determined to find ways to give priority to victims' and women's needs within the restorative justice paradigm. She was also committed to an exploration of what true forgiveness meant. Her personal experience, and the grace and strength with which she lived it, made her a powerful advocate for others. Without her, Victims' Voice would not have come into being.

After twenty years of existence, the Victim Offender Ministries (VOM) program could argue, with some modesty, it had helped to make the criminal justice system more humane. In most parts of the country, federal and provincial corrections systems funded projects related to victim offender reconciliation, mediation, prison visitation, COSA, or victims' advocacy. They had even begun to speak the language of restorative justice, including its emphases on truth-telling and healing, rather than judgment and punishment. This "success" left people within the VOM network with mixed emotions. On the one hand, they were grateful their ideas, experiments, and pilot projects were being embraced by others. At the same time, they feared the vision and spirit of restorative justice would be lost as the concept became institutionalized.⁵² In any case, Pierre Allard, director of chaplaincy for Correctional Service of Canada, summed up MCC's contribution as follows, "What has happened in restorative justice could not have happened without MCC."⁵³

*Give priority
to victims'
and women's
needs*

A third area of significant innovation in MCC Canada was the work of the Women's Concerns program on family violence and sexual abuse. Abuse was a very "hot" topic in the 1990s, within society, but also within the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ context. Before the mid-1980s, few of the church periodicals carried any material on physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; a decade later, the situation was drastically different. Many of the numerous articles related to the disciplining of prominent church leaders due to sexual abuse or boundary crossing.

As indicated in Chapter Six, MCC Canada's work in domestic violence and sexual abuse had emerged in the 1980s out of a Domestic Violence Task Force, jointly run with the Victim Offender Ministries. But it was in the 1990s that this work came into its own. A major help was the completion in 1991 of a

study on abuse among Mennonites in Winnipeg. The study funded by MCC Canada, entitled *Assault on God's Image*, was undertaken by Isaac Block, a Mennonite Brethren minister and professor at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. It revealed significant numbers of Mennonites in the city had experienced physical, emotional, and or sexual abuse in the context of family or intimate relationships. That a reputable male church leader had completed the study helped to break down some of the denial that existed around the truth of abuse. Block called on Mennonites to invest the same amount of energy into dealing with abuse in the churches, as they did into serving disadvantaged people around the world.⁵⁴

Naming the reality of abuse

MCC Canada's efforts to address abuse consisted primarily of naming the reality of abuse within the Mennonite community, providing a safe context in which victims could tell their stories, and equipping pastors, caregivers, and other to respond to the needs of victims in healing ways. It hosted conferences, workshops, seminars, and retreats, and produced a wide range of resource materials. Three educational resource packets on abuse, produced jointly with MCC US, became some of MCC's most popular resource materials.⁵⁵ Twenty years later, a comprehensive survey of the Canadian churches and their policies on abuse, called these packets "groundbreaking" for their radical yet restorative justice approach.⁵⁶ Some of the provincial MCCs developed significant front-line ways of supporting survivors of abuse.

Women's Concerns work on domestic violence and abuse was controversial at a number of levels. Simply breaking the silence about long held taboos was one thing. Challenging traditional and tightly-held theological assumptions was another. Using the writings of authorities like Marie Fortune and Carolyn Holderread Heggen, the women who worked on abuse prevention and healing within the MCC network linked patterns of abuse to distorted understandings of submission, suffering, and nonresistance.⁵⁷ They noted that where the church had taught women and girls they must submit, suffer, and keep the "peace," female victims found it extremely difficult to confront their abusers. They called for a theology that promoted equality, mutuality and respect between women and men, and a peace that confronted evil and injustice. They challenged the irony of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ—as peace churches—resisting participation in war but allowing abuse to occur.

As in many Christian institutions, sexual abuse also occurred within the MCC Canada context. As one example, it came to light that a former MCC Canada leader had committed sexual abuse while in office. The disclosure was widely publicized within the Mennonite media in early 1994, just after the

former leader contacted the MCC Canada chairperson to admit to inappropriate sexual behaviour involving a young teenage female over a two-year period in the 1970s.⁵⁸ He explained he had undergone a disciplinary process with appropriate church authorities, and he and the victim, after counselling, had been reconciled. He desired the MCC Canada executive committee and staff to know about the situation before it became news in the Mennonite press.

Members of the executive committee expressed profound sadness, while staff reacted with shock and dismay.⁵⁹ Many staff persons felt deeply betrayed and victimized in their own way, while others were moved with compassion for the former leader. What compounded the difficulty for many people was the important and cutting edge work Women's Concerns was doing on abuse awareness and prevention. It was deeply troubling that a person in an executive position had admitted to the very behaviours MCC Canada worked so hard to address. MCC Canada issued a public statement distancing itself from the individual very soon after the disclosure, though it also took steps somewhat later to reach out to him.⁶⁰ It was a sad time for the entire organization and the wider Mennonite church.⁶¹ The episode did, however, confirm the importance of the work being done to address domestic violence and abuse.



Jeannette Neufeld (L) of Regina, Saskatchewan and Mary Burkholder (R) of Kitchener, Ontario were members of MCC Binational's Executive Committee in the 1990s. Neufeld was also on MCC Canada's Executive Committee. At a meeting in 1996 Neufeld called for one combined agency to do mission and service. Many more women served on MCC boards and committees in the 1990s than previously. Photo credit Canadian Mennonite.

Women in Leadership

In 1995 Dale Taylor was appointed associate executive director of MCC Canada, with responsibility for all Canadian Programs and Communications work. Taylor had encountered Mennonites through her studies at the University of Alberta. Intrigued by their faith and commitment to peace, she had eventually sought baptism in the Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church. She had served with MCC in China, studied theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in California, and taught at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. Taylor's appointment as associate

director was significant in many ways: she was not an “ethnic Mennonite” and she was a woman.

The issue of women in leadership was not a new one to the MCCs in Canada, but it received the most deliberate attention in the 1990s. Andrew Hamilton’s CIDA review of 1993 lent strength and legitimacy to the cause. When John Dyck took over the reins as interim executive director in mid-1993, he created a new management structure with two men and two women. He also designed the associate director position and strongly encouraged MCC Canada hire a woman to fill it. More women were also hired into “middle management” roles.

Advancing gender equality at the governance level was much more delicate. This is because all but a few of the persons on the MCC Canada board were appointed by the denominational conferences and by the provincial MCCs. Some of the conferences appointed women to the national board, but others did not. A handful of “member-at-large” positions could be used to bring women onto the board, but those positions were also intended to bring other diversities to the table: people from eastern Canada, people of colour, and youth. In 1998 MCC Canada achieved equal representation of five men and five women on its executive committee, but it proved difficult to maintain this balance in subsequent years.

Culture of patriarchy

Besides this, the issue was more complex than simply having more female bodies at the board table or in senior staff positions. The culture of patriarchy which had shaped the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, as well as the broader church and society, also shaped MCC Canada. Attitudes and behaviours reflecting male dominance died hard, even among those who gave intellectual assent to gender equality. In the Winnipeg office, female staff were deeply hurt by sexist or insensitive comments, and annoyed by the way some men dominated staff meeting discussions. Most of them, however, remained silent.⁶² They knew that women who spoke up for gender equality, whether in the office or around the board table, often found themselves labelled and ignored, or opportunities denied them.⁶³

In 1997 Agnes Hubert, a former service worker and staff person, conducted a gender “audit” of MCC Canada, MCC Ontario, and MCC Saskatchewan. One of her key observations was that MCC Canada’s understanding of itself as “church” rather than as “employer or institution” actually militated against gender equality. She argued this self-understanding, along with the general “tendency to non-directiveness common in development agencies,” meant MCC Canada was reluctant to adopt policies or set and implement measurable goals advancing gender equality.⁶⁴ It relied on the goodwill of its workers

to ensure good things happened. In Hubert's view, a reliance on goodwill discouraged accountability.⁶⁵ She called for clear measures that would advance the basic and strategic needs of women within MCC Canada and its ministries.

When Hubert's specific recommendations came before the board, most were passed, though not without expressions of concern. A Mennonite Brethren representative suggested MCC should be cautious on the gender issue because such action was a step down the slippery slope of advocacy for homosexuals. A Sommerfelder representative suggested MCC focus more on peace and justice around the world and less on gender issues at home. Representatives from the EMC and EMMC expressed concerns about the theological direction of Women's Concerns programming.⁶⁶ MCC Canada found itself being pulled between its commitment to conference ownership on the one hand, and to gender equality on the other.

Despite the continuing struggles, it could not be denied MCC Canada and the provincial MCCs were changing with respect to gender equality. Gradually, more women were at the board tables. Pauline Hogan, a Brethren in Christ representative from St. Catharines, Ontario, served as vice-chairperson of MCC Canada, while MCC Alberta could boast the first female chairperson in Anne Harder. By 2000, both MCC BC and MCC Ontario had appointed women as executive directors: Laura Loewen and Arli Klassen, respectively. In 2001 Lois Coleman Neufeld became Director of Canadian Programs at MCC Canada. And—perhaps most significant of all—Mary Friesen, a Winnipegger who had grown up in a Mennonite colony in Paraguay, became director of the Low German program (formerly *Kanadier Concerns*) in 2002.

Less visible than these appointments were the quiet ways MCC Canada's work changed to address needs specific to women. In Mexico, service worker Anne Peters held special classes for Old Colony women on literacy, parenting,

pregnancy, and birth control. Back home, MCC Canada placed service workers with sexual assault centres and programs for pregnant teens or single mothers. One such placement was Open Door, begun by Vancouverite Elvera Corban. Corban, an emergency room nurse, had cared for a single mother who had shot herself and two of her children; the mother and a daughter survived.

Learning that the pressures of being a single parent factored in the woman's desperate act, Corban was moved to do something to help women like her.⁶⁷ Additionally, MCC Canada's Refugee Assistance program identified "women at risk" as a special category of refugees needing protection and deserving priority sponsorship. As well, a special research

Address needs specific to women

project by Jennifer deGroot, a young MCC intern from Sarnia, Ontario, determined that sexual harassment was a common experience of female service workers. She developed materials for a sexual harassment training session that was incorporated into MCC's regular orientation sessions for new workers.⁶⁸

Even so, the struggle for women's equality continued. Martha Klassen, coordinator of the MCC Manitoba thrift shop network, noted the thrift shops—traditionally the domain of women—were increasingly dominated by men. After a managers meeting in 2000, attended equally by male and female managers, Klassen wrote, “[T]he men did the talking, asked the questions and gave the answers. I was saddened by this. It is so easy for women to slip into a submissive role.”⁶⁹

The Most Difficult of Times

As indicated earlier in the chapter, the Burnaby Accord of 1995 committed MCC Canada to spend only fifteen percent of total constituency donations, rather than twenty percent. This required major cuts to program, much more significant than the tinkering which took place in 1992. The MCC Canada budget needed to be reduced by a full \$336,000. Consequently, in late 1995 MCC Canada administration informed a total of nine staff, some part-time and some full-time, their jobs would end. Two of these individuals were Personnel Services staff who screened, approved, and placed service workers, functions which would now be handled at the provincial level. The remaining seven were either program directors or support staff within the Canadian Programs department.

The Canadian Programs department was not eliminated entirely, but the positions were reduced. Native Concerns, for example, went from two full-time staff positions, to one half-time position. Directors could re-apply for the new positions, but only two chose to do so. Irma Janzen continued in a half-time role in Mental Health and Disabilities, and Wilma Derksen continued her work with Victims' Voice. Menno Wiebe of Native Concerns, Wayne Northey of Victim Offender Ministries, Kathy Shantz of Women's Concerns, and Gloria Nafziger of Refugee Assistance did not re-apply. The Peace and Social Concerns position was vacant at the time. The positions of three Canadian Programs support staff were also eliminated—computer technology had made the role of secretary more or less obsolete. When the dust settled, the Canadian Programs department was a shadow of its former self.

*A shadow
of its former
self*

Reaction to the change, both from within and from without the organization, was strong and sustained. Some of the staff who lost their jobs felt MCC Canada treated them reasonably well, by offering significant advance warning, opportunities to “vent,” career counselling, and so on.⁷⁰ Others felt differently. Menno Wiebe and Wayne Northey, director of Victim Offender Ministries, were the most vocal in their opposition. Both questioned MCC Canada’s ongoing commitment to peace and justice, and demanded to know how MCC Canada could continue to offer a national voice on broad issues of injustice, if most of the work now happened at the provincial level. Northey asked, “Will MCC Canada willingly and knowingly let its prophetic mantle slip?”⁷¹

But if these individuals framed the issue in terms of peace, justice, and a prophetic stance, they also took the cuts quite personally. The reality is that since its founding, MCC Canada had engaged passionate, idealistic, and visionary champions to lead its various social change portfolios—individuals who came to embody particular programs because they identified so closely with them. Menno Wiebe was perhaps the best example, having served as Native Concerns director since 1974. When Native Concerns was drastically cut back, he was deeply hurt.⁷² MCC Canada leadership possibly could have done more to ease the pain. But the days of a certain leadership style were coming to an end.⁷³ The work needed to be done differently now. Most importantly, it needed to be shared more deliberately with staff, committees, and volunteers at the provincial level.

Ed Barkman, director of Human Resources, referred to 1997 as “the most difficult of all years” for MCC Canada staff since the organization’s founding.⁷⁴ It was tough for the people whose jobs were eliminated or reduced, for the people charged with making the restructuring happen, and for the entire staff. Morale in the office was at a low ebb for a considerable time. But the process went forward. Marv Frey and the majority of MCC Canada’s board members felt that change was necessary, both to re-orient Canadian constituency donations more toward the international program, and to eliminate the duplication of services between the national and provincial MCCs. They were also looking to improve relationships with the provinces. They did not want the Canadian MCCs to reflect the same kind of rancorous federal-provincial relations which existed within the Canadian political system.⁷⁵ The hope was for a new and more focused role for MCC Canada.

Domestic versus International

When the Red River Accord was approved in 1992, the MCCs in Canada together affirmed the idea of restoring constituency donations to international programs to a sixty percent level. This decision was not made easily. Many people—including staff, board members, service workers, alumni, and general



Two women in Bangladesh create gift cards using small strips of wheat straw at one of MCC's job creation projects to provide income for poor women. The cards were sold through SELFHELP Crafts. Photo credit MCC.

supporters—believed MCC Canada should be doing more to meet local needs in Canada. They felt MCC's international work lacked integrity if it was not accompanied by similar work at home. It was hypocritical, in their view, for MCC to try to address issues of justice and peace elsewhere—Apartheid in South Africa or the Israeli occupation of Palestine, for example—if it did not oppose similar realities of oppression at home. Some people argued for an emphasis on domestic work because the best way to engage constituents was at the local level, where they could get more directly involved. Some people also pointed to the widening gap between rich and poor in Canada and the need for churches to help address basic human needs at home. They recognized the social safety net developed in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s was, in the 1990s, being dismantled by governments with different priorities.

But other people offered equally strong arguments for allocating the greater portion of Canadian resources for the overseas program.

Human needs overseas were much greater than “at home”—after all, no one in Canada starved. Overseas work was in keeping with MCC's origins, history, and experience, and an international focus would align reality with the widely held perception MCC was primarily meeting needs beyond North America.⁷⁶ Some people insisted that as North American culture increasingly turned inward, some groups—including MCC—must maintain an outward focus.⁷⁷ Few people mentioned it publicly and openly, but within MCC and MCC Canada, staff generally recognized it was easier to raise support for international rather than domestic work, especially where the latter involved controversial topics like Aboriginal land rights, gender equity, and peace advocacy.

In the debate over domestic versus international, no one suggested that

MCC Canada should be doing only one or the other. It was always a question of balance and proportion. With the implementation of the Red River and Burnaby Accords finally completed by 1997, however, MCC Canada was on a new track. From here on, its primary interest would be the international program. The role and significance of MCC Canada as a force for change within Canada would diminish.

China Program

MCC Canada continued to participate in the wider overseas work of MCC in a variety of ways. Staff channelled Canadian funds, material aid, and personnel to the international program. They played a critical intermediary role in negotiating food aid through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) and development grants through CIDA. They also continued to give direction to SELFHELP Crafts Canada and the Low German program in Mexico which expanded significantly in the wake of media attention on drug smuggling among colony Mennonites. At times, Bill Janzen in the Ottawa Office assisted the international program. For example, in 1997, when severe famine overwhelmed North Korea, he helped persuade the Department of Foreign Affairs to lift its restriction against CIDA matching funds for aid to the politically isolated country.

One context where MCC Canada took significant initiative in MCC international programming was China. MCC Canada had demonstrated a strong interest in China in the 1960s. The Winnipeg office had also been the home base for China Educational Exchange (CEE) for a number of years. CEE was a joint project of MCC, the North American Mennonite colleges, and some denominational conferences, providing English teachers to China, as well as welcoming Chinese professors and scholars to North America.

In the mid-1990s CIDA approached MCC Canada with the request that MCC act as a service provider for a major poverty alleviation project in western China. The project was very big—it aimed to spend \$11 million over five years to improve soil and water conservation, enhance nutrition and sanitation, advance functional literacy, and increase economic sufficiency over four provinces. The project was also very different than anything undertaken by MCC before. It was a “bi-lateral” project—in other words, a joint initiative of the Chinese and Canadian governments, with MCC acting as the facilitator or service provider. It was also very complex, involving the sale of Canadian canola oil to the Chinese government which in turn sold

the oil on the market in order to create a fund to finance the activities of the project. Officials from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) provided technical expertise at various stages.

MCC Binational was, according to the perception of MCC Canada, rather reluctant to get involved in the China project. For some people in MCC, the project surfaced old concerns about CIDA funding and close ties with the state; this project would essentially turn MCC into an agent of the Canadian government. For others, the project was simply not in keeping with “the MCC way.”⁷⁸ It lacked MCC’s traditional emphases of grassroots people-to-people relationships, and partnering with local churches and community groups. Moreover, it was driven primarily by the availability of funds, not by the request of partners in the country, and therefore violated a basic principle within MCC’s international program department.⁷⁹

MCC did eventually agree to accept the project as part of its Asia portfolio, with the insistence that Amity Foundation be accepted as a partner.⁸⁰ Amity Foundation was an independent Chinese voluntary organization created in 1985 by Chinese Christians to promote education, social services, and health and rural development within the country. It had been a longtime partner of MCC and CEE in China.

Marv Frey was eager to see MCC and MCC Canada take hold of the China project. He recruited Tony Enns to serve as a manager for the project. Enns was a former MCCer who had also spent many years with CIDA in Ottawa. He had retired back to Manitoba in the early 1990s and had most recently headed up the *Kanadier* Concerns program. He was someone who, from time to time, urged MCC to think more creatively, take bigger risks, and demonstrate greater flexibility. His experience suited him well to the task. However, there was awkwardness in the appointment.⁸¹

The project ran from 1998 to 2003. A final report prepared by Enns reflected a clear results-based approach. The project had benefited some 75,000 individuals in ninety-one villages in four provinces, with projects ranging from land terracing to adult literacy classes to chicken-raising to the installation of community water supply systems. An especially successful aspect of the project was a micro-finance loan facility for women.⁸² Women had taken out small loans for all kinds of projects intended to benefit their families, and they demonstrated an excellent rate of repayment.

Not everyone was convinced the project had been worth the effort. Reviews were mixed as to whether it had benefitted Amity Foundation, and doubts persisted as to whether such a massive hands-off project was in

keeping with MCC's overseas identity.⁸³ MCC chose not to pursue it beyond 2004, much to the disappointment of MCC Canada, as well as Tony Enns, who wrote,

[I] am saddened by the fact that, to date, MCC has not found a way in which to build on this successful experience. . . . China is poised to play an increasingly important role in the world and I believe that MCC is missing the boat by not increasing rather than decreasing its contact with China at this critical history of the world.⁸⁴

As indicated, Marv Frey invested considerable energy in making the China poverty alleviation project happen. It appears he may have been using it to test some ideas about a new role for MCC Canada. He did not share the view there was only one MCC way of operating internationally; he believed MCC should seize opportunities like the China project. Moreover, Frey was eager to have MCC Canada more actively engaged in MCC's international program. He favoured decentralized ownership and decision-making. At one point he even suggested MCC drop the word "central" from its name. Frey admitted that he came to this position, not through his own overseas experience, but as a result of his years in the Winnipeg office and the western Canadian Mennonite context. At one point he wrote to John Lapp, "Maybe . . . the further you're removed from the buttons, the harder you reach for them."⁸⁵

In any case, Frey was not alone in his views. A growing number of voices suggested that MCC Canada must become more integrally involved in decision-making with respect to the international program. These individuals pointed to the desire for a closer link between Canadian constituents and international partners; the special interests of some Canadian constituents for work in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, and among *Kanadier* Mennonites in Latin America; the concern to reflect a broader cultural and social orientation in MCC's overseas work; and improved accountability to CIDA and other agencies for the grants they provided to MCC Canada.⁸⁶ Some people also pointed out that more responsibility for international program would give MCC Canada a new *raison d'être*. If MCC Canada's role in Canada was reduced primarily to serving as a coordinator of the work of the provincial MCCs, one person argued, then the "calls for its demise will become louder and more frequent." One way to give MCC Canada a new legitimacy and a stronger reason for being is "if it would become a real partner in the administration of international program."⁸⁷

Through the 1990s, MCC Canada and MCC had again tackled the issue of how international administration might be done from Winnipeg. Several

key positions in the International Program Department were re-located to the MCC Canada office. But, as indicated in Chapter Five, placing binational staff in the Winnipeg office did not necessarily satisfy MCC Canada's interest in international work, as long as those staff continued to report to MCC in Akron. In 2000, interim executive director Dave Dyck suggested it was time to re-open the debate around MCC Canada's role in international program.⁸⁸ A year later, when Don Peters assumed the directorship, he declared his vision for MCC Canada to "take its place alongside MCC as a player."⁸⁹ So the clamouring for a relationship of equality within the MCC system and an authentic role in international program administration resumed.

Good Things Happening

One of the strengths of MCC in Canada was that despite the financial setbacks, internal power struggles, and organizational soul-searching, MCC continued to be an important way for people to express their faith through service to others. Often this happened on the periphery, far from the headquarters and central offices. Indeed, it was often in the midst of ordinary service workers and volunteers that MCC was its best. A few stories deserve mention.

Siegfried and Margaret Janzen had established and run the Gronau and Backnang refugee camps for MCC in Germany after World War II. In the 1990s they were living in Petitcodiac, New Brunswick where Siegfried, as a Local Voluntary Service worker, engaged in prison ministry. He visited inmates and led Bible studies in two institutions, acted as a mediator between victims and offenders seeking reconciliation, and also trained other mediators. He regularly consulted with prison officials on difficult cases. One inmate Janzen visited regularly, "Doug," had a mental disability, and, because he could not speak for himself, had spent twenty years in jail for a ten-year sentence. Janzen became Doug's advocate and arranged for him to move to a half-way house. Another inmate, "Jim," was tormented with guilt for killing his wife. Janzen helped Jim find forgiveness for his crime by assisting him to write a letter to his deceased wife.⁹⁰ The Janzens hosted parolees in their home, as well as the wives of inmates who travelled a distance to visit their husbands. Siegfried Janzen received several awards for his work with offenders to advance restorative justice.⁹¹ Through the 1990s, thousands of colony Mennonites from Mexico moved to Canada due to the multiple stresses of drought, diminishing land, and the harsh effects of the North America Free Trade Agreement. The second largest concentration settled in southern Alberta. Abe and Kathy Fehr were

commissioned by MCC Alberta to assist the newcomers find jobs, a place to live, and connect with schools, doctors, and nearby churches. It was not uncommon for them to receive a call at any hour from a family which had just arrived from Mexico, having nothing and knowing no one. Part of the Fehrs' assignment included helping local people understand the colony Mennonites, since the distinct Low German language, dress, and cultural practices of the newcomers were not always well received. On one occasion, Abe Fehr addressed a group of teachers who had dealt harshly with recently arrived students. Afterwards, one of the teachers apologized profusely: "We just did not know. . . ."⁹² In the spring of 1997 the MCC meat canner crossed the border into Canada for the first time in its fifty-year history. A mobile canning factory, pulled by a tractor trailer, had been travelling to Mennonite and Amish communities across the US since 1946, providing a simple way for volunteers to process and can donated meat for relief purposes. A group of Ontario volunteers spent months negotiating with different levels and departments of government, before finally receiving approval. The canner crew set up operations at the University of Guelph, where an agricultural school and federal food inspectors helped meet government regulations. Some 400 volunteers toiled in shifts over four days to process 30,000 pounds of beef. At one point, women from the conservative Waterloo-Markham conference worked on the assembly line across from a group of youth from Windsor. The women wore their plain dresses and head coverings, while the youth sported purple hair and assorted body piercings; together they canned and sang gospel songs. In the words of Dave Worth, MCC Ontario director, it was "a taste of the Kingdom."⁹³ A total of 11,900 cans, with MCC's yellow label and distinctive slogan—"A Christian resource for meeting human need"—resulted from their efforts.

Public Recognition

In the spring of 1997 Manitoba's Red River flooded its banks to levels unknown since 1826. People called it "the flood of the century." Although the city of Winnipeg was protected reasonably well by a massive floodway built in the early 1950s, the damage beyond city limits was substantial. Volunteers from Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) mobilized to put up sandbags, and, later, to restore damaged properties. The effort quickly became the largest operation MDS had ever undertaken in Canada. MDS in fact served as the umbrella organization for the clean-up effort, coordinating the work of thousands of volunteers.

MDS had formally separated from MCC Canada years earlier, but it

continued to have an office at the MCC building on Plaza Drive in Winnipeg. The small MDS office quickly became a command center which flowed into the hallways and board room of the MCC building. Numerous MCC Manitoba and MCC Canada staff became involved, because much of the public (and even some Mennonites) did not differentiate between MCC and MDS. So MCC staff fielded media calls, hosted interviews, developed press releases, and answered the ever-ringing phone. One staff person noted, it was an exciting and invigorating time.⁹⁴ The experience gave both MDS and MCC much greater visibility and respect in the Manitoba public view and beyond.

It is possible the Red River flood influenced the public's response to a more significant disaster a year later. Hurricane Mitch, which hit Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala in late 1998, registered as one of the worst hurricanes on record in Central America. Torrential rains and subsequent flooding killed more than 12,000 people and left millions homeless. MCC put out a call for donations of money, blankets, and relief buckets—large plastic buckets filled with food and toiletry items, as well as, and at the request of Central American partners, Bibles. The response was astounding and far exceeded MCC's targets. Within two months, across North America MCC had received not 10,000 buckets but 52,000, and not \$1 million but \$6 million in donations. At least \$3 million of the donations came from Canada. MCC Manitoba alone gained 5,000 new donors in the weeks following Hurricane Mitch. One new donor was Susan Goyer; her home had been seriously damaged by the Red River Flood and she and her three children spent five months living elsewhere.⁹⁵ It seems that she, like other Manitobans recently impacted by flooding, now wished to help the victims of a much more devastating disaster.

Most of the people who contributed to the Canadian MCCs for the first time in the wake of Hurricane Mitch had no connection to a Mennonite or Brethren in Christ church. They were simply people who had learned about MCC and trusted it enough to make a contribution. For these donations,



Margaret "Weed" De Jong, a nurse from New Brunswick, delivered these triplets by the side of the road, while serving in Haiti in 1995. This photo was used in a promotional poster to encourage young people to consider service and to "expect the unexpected." Photo credit MCC Canada.

MCC Canada likely had the media to thank. During and after the Red River Flood, the *Winnipeg Free Press* and other media gave glowing coverage to the work of MDS and, by inference, MCC. But newspapers, TV, and radio also praised MCC's work in refugee sponsorship, restorative justice, and especially in international development. In 1996, for example, the *Free Press* described MCC's "internationally renowned skills."⁹⁶ In 2000, *The Globe and Mail* listed MCC as one of Canada's ten best charities, commenting, "It has earned kudos for its practical no-nonsense approach to community based development overseas."⁹⁷ The following year, after the start of a US-led war on Afghanistan, *The Globe* again recommended MCC as one of eight Canadian charities with reputable "history and expertise" in Afghanistan.⁹⁷ In the next decade, the MCCs in Canada would benefit tremendously from a public outpouring of compassion to major disasters. As a result of increasing public recognition, they would also find themselves increasingly "media driven." These realities would contribute to new challenges.

Conclusion

In 1996 SELFHELP Crafts was re-named Ten Thousand Villages. Begun in the 1940s, the original name was intended to convey the idea that when women made traditional crafts and sold them through SELFHELP, they were helping themselves and their families to a better life. But fifty years later, the name communicated something else. Many people thought SELFHELP was a do-it-yourself craft supply store or an art therapy group. The name Ten Thousand Villages was inspired by a quotation by Gandhi, "India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 700,000 villages." Soon the new name, new logo, and distinctive red and brown colours adorned Ten Thousand Villages shops across Canada and the US. Along with its "re-branding," Ten Thousand Villages began to promote the concept of fair trade more assiduously, becoming known as the largest fair trade craft organization in Canada by 2001.⁹⁹

Beginning in the mid-1990s and continuing into the new millennium, MCC Canada re-named many of its programs and departments. Handicap Concerns joined with Mental Health to become Mental Health and Disabilities, while Native Concerns became Aboriginal Neighbours. Victim Offender Ministries was renamed Restorative Justice, Peace and Social Concerns became Peace Ministries, and *Kanadier* Concerns program became the Low German Program. Personnel Services was renamed Human Resources. In addition, in a new governance model, the executive committee became the board, and what

had been known previously as the board or “membership” became the delegate body. Somewhat earlier, Child Sponsorship was renamed Global Family, while somewhat later International Visitor Exchange Program became International Volunteer Exchange Program.



No grand scheme guided all these name changes. The changes occurred individually over a decade, and most of them were implemented simply to communicate more effectively. For example, it was no longer acceptable within the disability community to talk about “handicapped people.” Similarly, the term *Kanadier* was rather archaic and required too much explanation. Despite the lack of a plan to re-brand MCC Canada, it seems that, at least at a subconscious level, the new names signalled MCC Canada’s search for relevance and

renewed purpose.

By the early years of the new millennium, MCC Canada had come through a difficult decade of soul searching. It had survived losses of revenue, a scolding from CIDA, a devolution of program and authority to the provincial bodies, much internal turmoil, and some basic questioning as to whether it still had a purpose. It had confronted a changing world, a changing Canadian constituency, and the growing complexity of meeting human need. It had made initial efforts to modernize, focus, and adapt. It had begun to imagine and test a new role for itself. Its future was not yet assured, but for those who cared about an inter-Mennonite witness of compassion, service, justice, and peace at the national level, hope was on the horizon.

CHAPTER 8

Adapting to Change, 2003-2012

IN APRIL 2009 a women's sewing group from the North Leamington United Mennonite Church hosted a gathering for eighty-nine Muslim women from nearby Windsor, Ontario. Together the women knotted comforters for MCC and then shared a lunch of *borscht* (cabbage soup) and *zwieback* (two-layered rolls), prepared by the Mennonites, and homemade baklava (sweet Middle Eastern pastry), prepared by the Muslims.¹ Mennonite women had been making blankets and comforters for MCC for decades, but sharing the experience with Muslims was a new thing.

This women's gathering was just one piece of a deepening relationship between the congregation and the Windsor mosque. The previous year the church had, with MCC Ontario's assistance, sponsored a Palestinian refugee family who had been forced by war to flee their home in Iraq. The family was Muslim, and so the congregation had introduced them to the Muslim community in nearby Windsor. In the process of getting to know the Windsor group, the Mennonite congregation learned about the particular challenges facing Muslims in Canada. One thing led to another, and soon the groups were visiting back and forth, doing what in MCC parlance was called "inter-faith bridge-building."² Similar bridge-building efforts were happening in other communities across the country.

...

On the morning of 11 September 2001, MCC Canada staff huddled around a television hurriedly set up in their office building. They were watching TV coverage of the "9/11" terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists on the buildings of the US World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. They sat in hushed silence, many of them wondering what the attacks could mean for the world and for

MCC. In the weeks and months after the attacks, they recognized MCC's calling was to continue doing what it had always tried to do: feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, reach out to the marginalized, and love the enemy. These kinds of responses, they believed, represented a faithful antidote to the heightened fear and insecurity swirling around them.

As suspicion, distrust, and racial profiling of all Muslims erupted across North America in the weeks after 9/11, staff also began to promote grassroots bridge-building initiatives between Mennonites and Muslims as a new way of demonstrating love for those who many people considered "the enemy." MCC had worked with Muslims in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa for decades. It was eager to convey the message that Muslims were not all terrorists (as many North Americans perceived) and that, in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, Christians had much blood on their hands. MCC staff across Canada and the US encouraged Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations to reach out to Muslim neighbours in a spirit of friendship and acceptance. The initiative of the North Leamington congregation was an example of this new direction of inter-faith bridgebuilding.

A New Context

In its fifth decade, MCC Canada operated in a new and different context. Canada was at war. In the wake of 9/11, the US launched a military offensive against Afghanistan in October 2001 and another against Iraq in March 2003. Canada chose not to participate officially in the war on Iraq, but it did join the "war on terror" in Afghanistan. This was the first time Canadian soldiers had engaged in outright combat since the Korean War, marking a significant shift from the peacekeeping orientation that had characterized Canada's engagement in the world since the 1950s. Canadian military forces continued to engage in combat operations in Afghanistan as part of a UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force until 2011. Over the decade, some 40,000 Canadian soldiers served in Afghanistan, and 158 were killed. Throughout this period, Canadians were drawn into a kind of militarized patriotism unknown for decades.

Additionally, a new Conservative government, first elected in 2006 and led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, introduced a new vision for the country. It touted Canada's history in warfare and its military heritage. It increased military spending, and refashioned the Canadian Forces toward a more combative role.³ It tightened the requirements for refugees entering Canada and removed some of their supports. It shifted priorities in its Correctional Services from

restorative justice to “tough on crime” approaches. To be sure, it did offer an apology to Indigenous people for the residential school system which had harmed them so egregiously over generations, but it pursued resource extraction projects at their expense, while also weakening the mechanisms aimed at protecting the environment. The government also shaped CIDA so as to more intentionally advance Canada’s economic interests in the world; this resulted in a more difficult relationship with NGOs. Moreover, it pursued a foreign policy which, among other things, affirmed full and unflinching support for the state of Israel in its dealings with Palestinians.

MCC Canada found itself in a difficult situation. The causes it had advanced and policies it had long advocated—policies regarding nonviolent responses to conflict, the welcoming of refugees, a restorative approach to crime, reconciled relationships with Aboriginal people, justice for Palestinians, and so on—seemed very much at odds with the Harper government’s agenda. However, as a registered charity, MCC Canada was constrained from engaging in partisan politics. More importantly, as an arm of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, it was guided by sensitivity to, as well as dependence on, its supporting church constituency. And many Mennonites and Brethren in Christ across the country supported the Conservative government and

its vision for Canada; in some parts of the country, the support was overwhelming.⁴ Several individuals of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ background were in fact elected members of the Conservative caucus and some even held cabinet posts.

These realities prevented MCC Canada from offering a strong and sustained critique of the priorities of the Harper government, even though staff continued to do the kind of advocacy they had always done. People on both ends of the political spectrum found reasons for disappointment in MCC Canada. Many constituents still

perceived MCC Canada as too political and too critical of the government.⁵ Others felt MCC Canada had lost the vision, courage, and prophetic



Refugees greet refugees. Ebatsam Elsheikh and her daughter Zeze El Galad of Altona, Manitoba, former refugees from Sudan, welcome Palestinian refugee, six-year old Wafaa Abukhousa, to Canada, 2006. Also in the photo are (from left) Wafaa’s mother Amal Abueraihan and two-year old Abdulaziz, Assil Al Hassani and Doaa Abukhousa. Photo credit MCC Canada.

imagination of earlier decades, and saw its advocacy work as weak and ineffectual.⁶

Within this new context, MCC Canada nevertheless carried on. In many ways the mission of MCC Canada had not altered greatly over the decades. It still provided personnel, money, food, and other material resources via MCC Binational to help people in need around the world. Global Family, the International Volunteer Exchange Program, the Low German Program, Ten Thousand Villages, and partnerships with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and CIDA continued to be important linkages to the larger international work. Coordinating closely with the provincial MCCs, MCC Canada continued a resourcing role in peace, restorative justice, refugee assistance, and work with Indigenous peoples, though it ended three programs: Women's Concerns, Mental Health and Disabilities, and Victims' Voice. It continued some program in eastern Canada, while the Ottawa Office continued to facilitate policy advocacy. MCC Canada still participated in many inter-church, social justice, and humanitarian assistance coalitions. (See Chart 8.1)

MCC Canada also continued to struggle with many of the same complexities and dilemmas it had dealt with for decades, even as it encountered new ones. It continued to try to hold together an increasingly diverse Canadian constituency, while also seeking to be responsive to partners. At the end of the decade, MCC Canada suddenly found itself taking on a new role in the midst of a radically transformed MCC system.

Relationship-building as Peacebuilding

A desire to offer a prophetic peace witness had been one of the impulses that led to the formation of MCC Canada in 1963. Canada's participation in war in Afghanistan provided a new urgency to this work. MCC Canada supported relief and development projects in Afghanistan, called for comprehensive peace talks in Afghanistan, advocated for US war resisters (soldiers who refused to participate in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) seeking refuge in Canada, and invited constituents to fast, pray, and engage in public witness for peace.

MCC Canada's understanding of peace had evolved over the years, and it continued to broaden, influenced by the new discipline of peace and conflict studies, developments within MCC, and the post 9/11 context. One new direction was an emphasis on relationship-building as peacebuilding. MCC had always emphasized relationships. It now promoted the building

Chart 8.1

COALITIONS AND AFFILIATIONS IN 2012

MCC Canada held membership in or was affiliated with the following coalitions and organizations in 2012:

Canadian Christian Relief and Development Association
Canadian Churches in Action
Canadian Council for International Cooperation
Canadian Council for Refugees
Canadian Food Security Policy Group
Canadian Foodgrains Bank
Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability
Church Council on Justice and Corrections
Inter-agency Coalition for AIDS and Development
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
Mines Action Canada
National Association Active in Criminal Justice
Peacebuild: The Canadian Peacebuilding Network
Project Ploughshares

of healthy relationships as a way of building peace, especially where those relationships crossed divides not easily bridged.

At a time when some people considered a “clash of civilizations” between the Muslim and Western worlds inevitable, MCC’s efforts to build friendships with Muslims represented a counter-narrative, or a “dialogue of civilizations.”⁷ The gathering of Mennonite and Muslim women at Leamington, described earlier, was one example. Another was an educational exchange involving Shiite Muslims from Iran.

MCC first provided disaster relief and recovery assistance to people in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1990, after a massive earthquake killed hundreds of thousands. Because US-Iran relationships were very poor, MCC also looked for ways of reaching out to Iranians in friendship and understanding.⁸ This eventually led to an educational exchange, with two Iranian Islamic scholars doing doctoral studies at the Toronto School of Theology, hosted by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.⁹ The two men, Mohammad Farimani and Yousef Daneshvar, and their families lived in Toronto and then Kitchener-Waterloo, relating closely to Mennonites in both communities. Some of their children even attended Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener. Over the decade of the two families’ stay in southern Ontario, many Mennonites developed friendships with Muslims for the first time.

*Relationships
of trust,
respect
and deep
friendship*

As Mennonites and the two Muslim families interacted in homes, schools, and churches, at seminars and meetings, many of the stereotypes each group held of the other melted away. Daneshvar told an MCC Binational gathering that his experience through the exchange had taught him to distinguish between “the West” and “Christianity”—they were not the same, as he had previously believed. He also said that, before his dialogue with Christians, he had not recognized the significance and importance of peace in his own religion. He reported to an MCC Binational gathering, “We as Muslims and Christians have to take advantage of the common language that we have for the wellness and peace of our world.”¹⁰ If the exchange pointed to the commonalities between the two faiths, it also revealed deep and significant differences. Nevertheless, it demonstrated that Muslims and Christians could build relationships of trust, respect and deep friendship, thereby “creating a new kind of history.”¹¹ According to Lydia Harder, one of the Toronto hosts of the Iranian families, “Our relationships with each other may not change our countries, but we have touched each other’s lives and we have been changed profoundly.”¹²

The educational exchange led to a series of inter-faith dialogues between Muslim and Mennonite theologians, some of which took place in Iran and some in Canada. One of these dialogues, held in 2007 at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, received much media attention when some Iranian-Canadians publicly protested the event and succeeded in shutting down an open session with guest clerics. The protesters charged that MCC, by hosting conservative Iranian clerics, was being “used” to build support for the unpopular regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.¹³ MCC staff asserted the dialogue was rooted in an Anabaptist commitment to peace, reconciliation, and love of enemy.

Another example of relationship-building as peacebuilding was the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP). By 2010, IVEP’s sixtieth anniversary, it had brought 3389 individuals from seventy-seven countries to North America for vocational training and cross-cultural awareness. Increasingly, IVEP defined its purpose as providing a context for international peace and reconciliation, because it had demonstrated how cross-cultural relationships could build understanding. Some IVEPers embraced peace and nonviolence as a result of their relationships with host families and new friends. In 2006 one IVEPer shared at a mid-year seminar in Abbotsford, BC, he had come to North America determined that one day he would avenge his sister’s death by killing her murderer, his brother-in-law. At the end of the seminar he told the group his heart had been touched and he had resolved not to kill his brother-in-law, but rather to seek reconciliation with him.¹⁴

Many IVEP participants had in fact gone on to engage in significant peacebuilding work in their home countries as a result of their IVEP experience. One such person was Matji Pataki from South Africa. He was an IVEPer in the early 1990s, working at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg (later Canadian Mennonite University). His experience at the college led him to seminary, where he became a pacifist and committed his life to peace and justice ministry. Twenty years later, in 2012, he was the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches where he was a strong advocate for peace within church and society.¹⁵

Under the leadership of Harley and Sue Eagle, MCC Canada’s work with Indigenous peoples also focused on relationship building as peacebuilding. Harley Eagle, a member of the Dakota/Saulteaux First Nation in Saskatchewan, was the first Aboriginal staffperson to lead MCC Canada’s work in this area. The Eagles emphasized authentic relationships which healed the brokenness between broader Canadian society, including the Mennonite community, and Indigenous peoples. Authentic relationships, in their view, involved members

of the dominant society, including Mennonites, owning their power and privilege, as well as acknowledging the sins of a colonial past and ongoing colonial present. A specific example for MCC in Canada related to the Indian Residential School System.

Between the 1870s and 1996, the federal government of Canada placed Aboriginal children (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) in church-run (Anglican,

Catholic, Presbyterian, and United) residential schools. Some 150,000 Aboriginal children attended these government-funded schools where they were separated from their families and communities, and frequently denied their language and their culture. In the 1990s survivors of these schools began to sue the federal government and the churches for the cultural genocide, as well as the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse which many students experienced. In 2007 the federal government agreed to a mechanism for compensating survivors of the school system.



Participants in International Volunteer Exchange Program point out the location of their home countries to other participants. Photo credit MCC Canada.

The following year it established the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a mandate to “learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians about what happened in the schools.”¹⁶

MCC Canada possessed no direct connection to any of the residential schools identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, though it was aware of several residential schools in northern Ontario, run by a US-based Mennonite group called the Northern Gospel Light Mission.¹⁷ However, MCC Canada held a connection to a dormitory where Aboriginal children lived while attending a public government-run school. The Timber Bay Children’s Home at Montreal Lake, Saskatchewan was owned by the Canadian Conference of Brethren in Christ Churches for several decades. MCC Canada placed Voluntary Service workers there from 1973 to 1989.

Over time, MCC Canada and MCC Saskatchewan became sensitized to how the home, like the residential schools, harmed the children by separating them from their families, communities, and cultural traditions.¹⁸ Over the years, Menno Wiebe had encouraged the home to become more accountable to the local communities and to foster greater respect for the Cree language and traditions.¹⁹ But in the late 1980s one worker noted, “[I]t is still an institution for the Native People run by white people,”²⁰ and Voluntary Service director

Joan Barkman noted the home was “not squarely in line with our philosophy of native accountability and native initiated projects.”²¹ In 1989 MCC Canada stopped placing workers at the home, and a few years later the Brethren in Christ conference sold it. In 2010, in consultation with the Brethren in Christ conference, MCC Canada and MCC Saskatchewan issued a letter to the four communities whose children had resided at the Timber Bay home. The letter requested a dialogue with persons in those communities, in the hope that such a dialogue might contribute to healing on both sides.²² In the same spirit, the other provincial MCCs worked with Indigenous leaders to educate Mennonites about the reality of the residential school system. These efforts were part of a larger initiative to build authentic relationships—and peace—between Mennonites and Aboriginal people.

MCC even began to frame the provision of relief as a way of building relationships and building peace. In the wake of the Rwandan genocide and the charge that some of the relief provided had actually exacerbated hostilities, MCC developed policies and practices to ensure that its provision of humanitarian assistance would lessen tensions between antagonistic groups. But it also knew that relief assistance could build relationships and understanding between the peoples of North America and those considered their enemy. In the same way MCC had provided aid to North Vietnam in the 1960s and North Korea in the 1990s, it now provided aid to another “enemy”—Iraq.

The letter requested a dialogue

Throughout the 1990s, Iraq was under UN-imposed sanctions. Because those sanctions had a devastating impact on the health and well-being of Iraqis, especially children, MCC sent food, medicine, and school and health kits, valued at \$6.8 million over a decade, while also advocating for the lifting of the sanctions. In 2002 the US threatened war against Iraq, and once again MCC provided relief supplies that could help victims in the event of war. In the Ottawa Office, Bill Janzen sent a letter to officials in the Iraqi Embassy, explaining MCC’s actions. He enclosed a copy of a recent letter to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, signed by Mennonites across the country, urging Canada not to participate in any hostilities against Iraq. A short while later, a high-level diplomat from the Embassy visited the Ottawa Office to say thank-you for the expression of peace and friendship.²³ Just a few months later, a US-led coalition unleashed its firepower on Iraq.

Over the years, MCC and MCC Canada’s understanding of peace and peacemaking had evolved tremendously. From a concern for military exemption for conscientious objectors, to addressing the root causes of social problems, to

advocating for justice, to training for conflict resolution and peace practice, to building relationships with the “other,” the scope of its vision and activity had grown astonishingly. No wonder the MCC system increasingly referred to its priorities as “relief, development and peace.”

Whatever Happened to Service?

On 22 January 2003, two young SALTers serving in Indonesia drowned in a flash flood as they were hiking with friends. Alana Fife of Winnipeg was 21 and Hannah Showaker of Newville, Pennsylvania was 24. The accidental deaths of two vibrant young women sent shock and anguish through the MCC system. The sad occurrence, however, did not stop young adults in Canada and the US from signing up for the one-year international experience of service and learning. The SALT program continued to attract significant numbers of young adults. In 2005, for example, an all-time high of twenty-eight Canadians served

in the program, while in 2008 an all-time high of forty-four Americans served.²⁴ For many participants, SALT proved to be an entry point into longer term service in MCC. In 2012, in fact, nearly sixteen percent of MCC workers throughout the world had completed a term of service with SALT.²⁵



Jared Klassen of Abbotsford, BC with friends in South Africa. Jared served one year with SALT, working alongside small-plot farmers to improve their corn crops and also bring healing to the soil. Photo credit MCCBC.

SALTers learned much in their one-year sojourn outside of North America. They learned to eat new foods, adjust to new sights, sounds, smells, and customs, and even speak new

languages. They learned to slow down and wait, to accept help and hospitality from others, and to see beauty amidst great need. Many were touched by the strength, resilience, and generosity of the people with whom they worked. Stefan Epp of Camrose, Alberta taught school in Zambia. Upon first arrival, he noticed the poverty—crumbling buildings, garbage, foul smells. As he got to know the people, however, those physical things receded into the background. He was touched by the “incredible strength, faith and capacity of the poor.”

Wade Snowdon of Winnipeg, serving in Uganda, was also struck initially by the garbage, pollution, and devastation of war. He also encountered “the kindest, most gentle people.”²⁶

Many SALTERs also gained a critical perspective on their own culture. Kristina Toews of BC, who served in Bolivia, said, “At home we put far too much importance on accomplishing tasks, thereby often neglecting relationships.” Tricia Prosser of Finch, Ontario, who served in Vietnam, learned new respect for elders and the aged. DeLayne Toews of Winnipeg, who served in Tanzania, learned Canadians—and especially Christians—should not equate wealth and comfort with the “the good life” or even with “development.”²⁷ Most SALTERs returned to their communities with a much transformed worldview.

Apart from SALT, however, MCC’s traditional service programs were not attracting the same numbers of people that they had in earlier decades. From their peak in the 1980s, Voluntary Service numbers had declined steadily. Human Resource staff had been sounding the alarm about declining numbers, particularly among young people, since the 1990s. Throughout the MCC system, the number of service workers dropped from a high of 800 in 1987 to less than 400 in 2012.²⁸ Within Canada, the number of service workers dropped from over 160 in the early 1990s, to just ten in 2011.²⁹

Many factors explained the decline in applicants for traditional service. For one thing, partners were requesting fewer service workers, but required more specialized skills of those they did request. At the same time, the MCC system was intentionally working at “capacity building”—equipping partners and their staff to do work that, in an earlier era, North American service workers would have done. In several instances, in Canada and abroad, partners expressed a preference for financial grants rather than service workers.³⁰ So there was less need for the kinds of personnel that MCC had traditionally supplied in the past.

Additionally, young adults now had many more opportunities to travel, explore, and encounter the wider world. They preferred short-term experiences of service and engagement—the one-year SALT program was about the maximum length most would consider.³¹ Then, too, many young university graduates had developed a critical understanding of colonialism and the historic role of the church in sharing a gospel too enmeshed with a western cultural worldview. They expressed reluctance to participate in cross-cultural relationships that might be perceived as colonial.³² Economic realities, such as large student debts and the difficulty of finding employment, also prevented some young adults from considering a longer service assignment.

As mentioned earlier, MCC Canada had over the years used many service

workers in its head office. But early in the new millennium, the MCC system determined that a prior term of formal service with MCC or another church agency would no longer be a prerequisite for a salaried position. In fact, all positions within MCC that were deemed permanent were now eligible for salaries. This decision was linked to the push to professionalize and the need for greater continuity of personnel. It was also becoming increasingly difficult for MCC to find individuals prepared to do office work on a Voluntary Service stipend.³³

Changing government regulations with respect to employment posed a final challenge to the Voluntary Service system. Service workers were supported financially by an imprest or stipend system—that is, according to their need for basic food, shelter, and maintenance. But as far as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) was concerned, service workers were employees. It did not have categories for people who were prepared to work at a very basic level of support (even below minimum wage) because of a faith commitment. At a certain point, CRA challenged MCC Manitoba because of some inconsistencies relating to the reporting of support for service workers.³⁴ It conducted an investigation and demanded an “adjustment” to bring MCC Manitoba’s practices in line with employment standards regulations.³⁵ This in turn raised questions about the entire financial support package for service workers across Canada. It was perhaps another nail in the coffin of the old service model, though some provinces managed to work with the regulations in such a ways as to continue a modified service formula.³⁶

The MCC system continued to support overseas workers on the Voluntary Service imprest system. But here too there were rumblings of dissatisfaction among many workers, particularly those of a younger generation.³⁷ For some of these individuals, particularly those in very demanding assignments, “service” had come to mean, simply put, low pay. These workers chafed with the knowledge that they were often working much harder and in more difficult circumstances than their North American counterparts. They also noted that other North American NGOs compensated their overseas staff at much higher levels than MCC.³⁸

Around 2003, MCC quietly removed the term “service” from its tagline. For years, MCC had included on all its literature, promotional material, and website, the tagline, “relief, development and *service* in the name of Christ” (emphasis added). The new tagline stated, “relief, development and *peace* in the name of Christ” (emphasis added). Although minimal discussion accompanied the change, it represented a significant shift. While the inclusion of “peace” was a welcome development, the removal of the term “service” signaled Voluntary

Service was no longer core to the mission of MCC. To be sure, MCC supporters still served as they volunteered in thrift shops, at relief sales, on committees, and so on. But the “religious order” model—in which individuals immersed themselves for a time in a very different social, economic and cultural context—was rapidly disappearing, especially in Canada.

Service as a witness of peace

Many people who had been powerfully shaped by the Voluntary Service system were troubled by the erosion of something they saw as fundamental to MCC identity. They continued to regard service as a witness of peace, a means of faithful discipleship, and a form of resistance against the consumerism of mainstream North American culture. They also saw it as a means whereby sheltered and privileged individuals might be transformed through genuine encounter with people on the margins of society. A decade earlier, when declining VS numbers in Canada had already roused considerable concern within MCC Canada, Ed Barkman, Human Resources Director, said,

“If direct service and advocacy with marginalized people is at the heart of MCC’s ministry, we are clearly losing our heart in the Canadian program.”³⁹ Around the same time, Nelson Scheifele, program director in Newfoundland and Labrador asked whether MCC could continue to offer a prophetic voice to society without sending people “out of their comfort zones and into the realities of the inner cities, the north, the east, Québec, the native communities and other dimensions of our Canadian mosaic”?⁴⁰ Could MCC in Canada continue to be authentically MCC without Voluntary Service? Scheifele thought not.

But by MCC Canada’s fifth decade, most people in MCC were acknowledging that the old models of service, at least in Canada, no longer met current realities. Perhaps they were also recognizing that when MCC sought to provide service opportunities, especially for young people, the motivation was perhaps as much about mentoring those young people to become MCC supporters, as it was to help meet a need in a marginalized community. So the Canadian MCCs began to provide many new ways for young adults to participate in the work. Internships, student seminars, peace camps, and international learning experiences were some of them.

The Canadian MCCs also deliberately began to hire more young adults to fill staff positions. They had typically placed a high priority on previous service experience—especially international experience—to carry forward a service-oriented narrative. Some of them now recognized that the energy, enthusiasm, and fresh perspective which young adults brought to the work was at least as important.⁴¹

By 2012, more than 5,000 Canadians had served with MCC in an official service assignment in Canada, the Americas, or overseas for at least a year; many of them had completed more than one term.⁴² Despite the fact that



Volunteers Cara Rempel, with her parents Brian and Anne Rempel, help unpack Ten Thousand Villages crafts at the Petitcodiac Mennonite Church in New Brunswick to help prepare for a series of forty special sales held each fall in the Atlantic provinces, 2008. Photo credit MCC Canada.

the traditional service model was on the wane, the impact of service on those who participated, and on their families, communities, and churches continued to be felt. Especially where congregations supported their service workers and welcomed them home, these “alumni” often brought wisdom and vitality to their home churches, an appreciation of cross-cultural relationships, a passion for justice and peace, and a commitment to live more simply and sustainably.⁴³

Many years after he had served in Africa, Henry J. Rempel of Winnipeg remarked, “Today I try to live in a way

that reflects the reality that many in the world don’t have the abundance we do. . . . When I think of how our Canadian lifestyles create life-threatening climate change for others, I see the faces of my friends. If more people had this same direct connection, they too might be led to further change in how they live.”⁴⁴ Rempel’s words expressed the ongoing impact of service on his life, and, likely its impact on those around him.

Raising Money

In 2002 several members of Foothills Mennonite church in Calgary, Alberta came to MCC Alberta staff person Kim Thiessen with an idea. They suggested that Thiessen, a gifted singer, produce an audio recording of children’s songs and lullabies. The group decided to designate all proceeds toward supporting MCC’s work with persons and families affected by HIV-AIDS. MCC had begun a ten-year global initiative aimed at providing care for orphans and vulnerable children, homecare for patients not able to be in hospital, blood testing kits for medical clinics, awareness and prevention education. In a short time Kim Thiessen and her musical partner Daryl Neustaedter Barg of Winnipeg, had produced “To Such as These.” One recording led to another and to another and

by 2012 Thiessen and Barg had recorded a total of four CDs to raise funds for MCC's HIV-AIDS work. They had sold nearly 40,000 copies and had raised over \$700,000.⁴⁵ A fifth CD was in the plans.

Thiessen's CD project was one of many new initiatives begun by MCC in Canada to raise funds for its work. MCC Alberta was especially bold and creative in piloting new fundraising ideas. Alberta was the province with the smallest and most scattered Mennonite constituency. It had very few Mennonite institutions—schools, universities, or conference headquarters—to advance the Mennonite “brand.” Consequently, it worked hard to generate support. It began to host annual fundraising events for HIV-AIDS projects with well-known Canadian personalities such as Stephen Lewis (politician, diplomat and international humanitarian envoy), Ovide Mercredi (national chief of the Assembly of First Nations) and Cindy Klassen (Olympic speed-skating champion), herself from a Mennonite Brethren church in Manitoba.

Since the recession of the 1990s, the MCCs in Canada had been developing new ways of raising funds. These included golf tournaments, cyclathons, motorcycle rallies, house against hunger projects, furniture thrift shops and so on. Many of these new projects were initiated, not by MCC staff, but by groups of keen constituents. MCC was blessed to have amazing supporters who initiated such special fundraising projects. But like so many other charities and non-government organizations, the MCC offices recognized the need to invest greater time and expertise in raising money and other resources. By 2005 or so, MCC Canada and all the provincial MCCs had appointed professional “donor relations” staff to work at strengthening the ties to the supporting constituency, as well as to branch out in new directions. MCC still did not call them “fundraisers.”

Despite the new shifts, many of the old tried and true fundraising channels continued to be very important. Chief among these were the relief sales and thrift shops. In 2010 the Winnipeg relief sale committee ended its annual event due to the difficulty of finding new volunteers. But other sales—now often called festivals or fairs—carried on, some of them now more



Sabrina Minich, a high school student, earns a community service credit by volunteering at the Niverville, Manitoba thrift shop, 2009. Thrift shops have become extremely important source of revenue for MCC in Canada. Photo credit MCC Canada.

*The old tried
and true
fundraising
channels*

than forty years old. Most successful among the festivals were those events that incorporated children's activities, music performances, Ten Thousand Villages crafts, and foods reflecting a much more diverse Mennonite constituency. In addition, it seems that where organizing committees demonstrated a willingness to try new things, the relief sales thrived. In 2003 a single quilt at the New Hamburg, Ontario sale brought in \$44,000 while at the 2009 Abbotsford sale a specially baked loaf of bread with the MCC logo on it sold for \$213,600.⁴⁶ In 2012 relief sales across Canada generated a total of \$5.2 million.

The thrift shops had become the true "cash cow" for MCC across Canada. The number of thrift shops, as well as the funds the shops raised, had grown phenomenally since the first one was established in 1972 in Altona. Fifty-six shops existed across Canada. In 2011 these shops raised a total of \$7.2 million for MCC work.⁴⁷ Over the years the thrift shops had changed. Many of them had grown to department-store size, employing one or two paid staff. A thrift shop network and a national coordinator linked the shops, helping them learn from each other and gain marketing and retail expertise. Most of these shops were owned and directly administered by the provincial MCC. In Manitoba, shops were separately incorporated but bound to MCC Manitoba in an agreement to contribute virtually all of their profit to MCC. All shops shared a brand that linked them to MCC and announced to customers that "each purchase is a gift to the world."

The thrift shops did more than raise money for MCC. By providing low-cost clothing, furniture and household items, many of them—particularly those in poorer neighbourhoods—provided a service to low income persons. Many shops became a context for community building among the many volunteers, as well as between volunteers and regular customers. In some instances regular customers became volunteer workers. Some shops even offered internships for young people, new immigrants, or others needing work experience. The shops also helped to promote an environmental consciousness by emphasizing re-using and recycling, though it could also be argued that in some ways the thrift shops encouraged consumption: well-off people could justify buying a new wardrobe because last year's could go to the thrift shop. If MCC in Canada could still be called a people's movement, likely the best evidence was its thrift shops.

The funds raised by MCC in Canada rose steadily during its fifth decade. This included donations from the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituency and the general public, from the relief sales and thrift stores, and from grants.

Income had generally plateaued through the 1990s, but after Hurricane Mitch and the Kosovo crisis in 1999, it grew and grew. In 2002-2003 total income stood at \$27 million; by 2010-2011 that amount had grown to \$48.2 million (See Appendix D).

The primary reasons for this phenomenal increase were two catastrophic disasters—the Asian tsunami of December 2004 and the Haiti earthquake of January 2010. These two events, so sudden and so devastating, unleashed a global outpouring of support. In both cases, MCC offices across Canada were inundated with donations. So steady and so strong was the response, that the Winnipeg office set up extra phone lines, recruited special volunteers, and diverted staff from their regular work to handle the extra calls and visits. For years, MCC Canada's Communications department had been nurturing its relationship with the public media, and those efforts now bore much fruit. As a result, MCC was now promoted by TV, radio, and print media as one of several reputable organizations to which the public could contribute. MCC in Canada received \$8.9 million for the Asian tsunami response, not to mention \$6.75 million in CIDA grants.⁴⁸ It received \$8.7 million for Haiti, as well as \$2 million from CIDA.⁴⁹ In both instances, the Canadian MCCs raised more funds than MCC in the US. MCC in Canada also received significant funds for Pakistan flooding in 2010 and an earthquake and resulting tsunami in Japan in 2011, even though MCC had no direct work in either country.

*Global
outpouring
of support*

Material Resources

The dramatic response to these major disasters prompted thoughtful people to ask whether these calamities were transforming MCC from an organization known for long-term community development and peacebuilding to one focused on emergency response. To be sure, MCC tried to bring a holistic approach to its disaster response—working closely with local partners, bringing a trauma healing and peacebuilding



Volunteers Colin Epp (right) and John Martens (left) load relief buckets bound for Haiti in the wake of devastating earthquake in January 2010. Photo credit MCC Canada.

approach to its work in the disaster-affected communities, and committing to reconstruction projects over a minimum of five years. Moreover, it continued to work at “slow onset” and less dramatic emergencies, such as food shortages in eastern Africa and water shortages in the occupied Palestinian territories. But within and beyond the organization, some people questioned the organizational energy bound up with channeling the vast quantities of material resources and money to the media-hyped disasters zones, while longstanding injustices, ongoing conflicts, and grinding poverty festered elsewhere, largely un-noticed by media.

One of the continuing dilemmas that confronted MCC in Canada was how to engage supporters at home, while also responding to human need in ways that conveyed dignity and respect and promoted long-term wellbeing.

As noted earlier, these two goals were sometimes in tension. One of the areas that focused this dilemma was the material resources program. MCC Canada had moved away from shipping clothing overseas in the early 1970s, but it still encouraged constituents to sew blankets and knot comforters, to can beef or turkey, and to pack relief buckets and health kits. It had learned that these were excellent ways to educate and engage Canadian supporters, because they stirred people’s hands and hearts in ways that writing cheques did not. MCC Canada loved to tell the stories of Manitobans like Ruth Stoesz of Altona who sewed 1,500 school kit bags in one year, or 92-year-old Cornelius Harder of Niverville who sewed 2,000 blankets over a period of several years.

*Symbols
of healing,
friendship
and peace*

Blankets in particular had come to mean much more than material aid. They had become symbols of healing, friendship, and peace. In the wake of Haiti’s earthquake, several Haitian Canadians joined to help knot blankets in MCC centres in Winnipeg and Montreal. It was a way of coping with the grief of losing loved ones. At a women’s prison in Kitchener, Mennonite volunteers and prison inmates made comforters for refugees fleeing the war in Iraq. As they sewed and knotted, they became friends. Friendship also happened as Mennonites and Muslims made blankets together in Leamington and Floradale, Ontario, as well as other communities. At special gatherings with Indigenous neighbours in Richmond, BC, Stoney Hill, Saskatchewan, and Timmins, Ontario, Mennonites shared knotted comforters as gifts expressing the hope of restored and reconciled relationships. Blankets had become icons and symbols of ordinary people seeking to extend compassion and friendship in tangible ways.

*Did not resolve
long-term or
chronic needs*

MCC workers heard numerous anecdotes about how its material resources were valued and appreciated. In the Darfur region of eastern Sudan, MCC distributed over 80,000 blankets in 2005. When Willie Reimer of the Winnipeg office visited eight months later, he was told the displaced women and children who received them loved the blankets because they were colourful, each one unique, and all handmade. Many of those who received the rough grey UN-issued blankets asked to exchange theirs for “Mennonite blankets.”⁵⁰

But the concern remained that, while material resources provided helpful relief in emergency situations, they did not resolve long-term or chronic needs.⁵¹ Refugees needed an end to the wars that drove them from their homes. Farmers needed agriculture and trade policies that allowed them to sustain their families and market their produce. People needed governments which respected their human rights. Material resources did not meet those needs. Moreover, sometimes the provision of material resources could be downright unhelpful. It could foster dependency on the part of recipients and harm local economies, not to mention the financial and environmental costs of shipping goods long distances. More than a few people questioned the wisdom of MCC sending relief buckets from North America to Indonesia in 2005, when much of the contents of the buckets had in fact been produced in Asia.⁵² Moreover, material aid frequently reinforced unjust relationships and the old “us helping them” paradigm. Material aid could be, at the same time, both a beautiful expression of Christian love, as well as a symbol of a world fraught with inequality.⁵³

So this was one of the ongoing dilemmas that MCC Canada faced. Its work with material resources engaged Canadian constituents well, but this work did not always meet the deepest needs of partners and beneficiaries. Moreover, the more attention was focused on the collection of material resources in the wake of major disasters, the more people’s perceptions of what MCC was all about became skewed, according to its staff. A major survey conducted by



Darryl Klassen of MCC BC presents a “Mennonite blanket” to elder Ruth Adams of the Tswassen First Nation at a special gathering in Richmond, BC in 2010. Photo credit MCCBC.

MCC in both US and Canada in 2007 revealed that while staff, service workers, and board members believed MCC was essentially engaged in sustainable development and peacebuilding, donors and others believed it was primarily about relief and disaster response. In other words, a significant gap existed between the perceptions of people within the organization and those somewhat further removed.⁵⁴

Without doubt, the Canadian MCCs had become very successful in mobilizing Canadian constituents and many others in charitable responses to human need. But the national and provincial bodies struggled to rally their supporters to address the deeper causes of need, to seek alternatives to existing power structures, and to engage in justice advocacy and solidarity. In general, Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ had become wealthy by global standards. They saw themselves primarily as called to give generously out of their abundant material wealth to those with less. Most were unsure whether and how to work with the poor and oppressed for systems which would redistribute wealth, increase human dignity, and build a more just and sustainable global order. In turn, MCC Canada seemed less willing—and perhaps even less able—to help its supporters move from charity to solidarity. It seemed somehow more reluctant to play the vanguard role.

Complexities Old and New

The paradox of trying to be both a ministry of the churches and a ministry to the churches on behalf of partners was one that continued to perplex MCC Canada. On the one hand, the organization sought to be accountable to the Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, even while, on the other hand, it sought to challenge those same churches with the questions and calls for action from partners, including the global church. But this was a difficult space, especially for MCC administrators in Canada, who were caught between these two constituencies. Administrators frequently spoke of this dynamic as a “polarity to be managed.”⁵⁵ In other words, it was a tension that could not be resolved, but one that simply must be accepted and tended with care.⁵⁶

New complexities continued to challenge the Canadian MCCs in the new millennium. One of them was that of racial equity. In previous decades, people had asked why women were not represented equally with men on MCC Canada’s board and delegate body and at the senior staff level. In this decade the question arose as to why MCC Canada did not reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of its supporting church constituency and the wider Christian church. Mennonite

and Brethren in Christ congregations now embraced more than a dozen languages and ethnicities besides English, German, and French. These included Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Vietnamese, Hmong, Tamil, Arabic, and Amharic. But MCC Canada staff and governance structures consisted predominantly of white Mennonites of European descent. Moreover, several formal complaints of racial discrimination made against Canadian MCCs demonstrated rather starkly that the organization was not always a welcome place for “outsiders.”⁵⁷



The 2008 participants in Summerbridge have fun in front of the camera. The Summerbridge program developed in the late 1990s to strengthen relationships between the MCCs and Mennonite congregations of non-Germanic descent. Workers work for their home congregations to help meet needs in their local communities. Photo credit MCC Canada.

MCC Canada was a latecomer to this “equity agenda.” MCC Binational and MCC US had been intensely involved in what they called “anti-racism work” since the early 1990s, and MCC Ontario since the late 1990s. The arrival in 2001 of Lois Coleman Neufeld, as director of Canadian Programs (following Dale Taylor) gave the “equity agenda” a significant push at the Canadian national level. Coleman Neufeld was passionate about ethnic and racial equity and pushed for all MCC Canada staff and board members to undergo anti-racism training specifically developed for a Canadian context. This eventually included all provincial MCC staff and some of the provincial boards as well. Staff were encouraged to scrutinize all their work with an equity lens. Specially trained equity teams were established to assist with this work.

But progress was slow and difficult. Finding the language to talk about equity was hard enough—Coleman Neufeld and her colleagues finally settled on “equity” rather than “anti-racism.” Trying to identify and dismantle the culture, practices, and structures within MCC Canada which excluded some people was even more challenging. The work was difficult and controversial and encountered significant denial. It was not unusual for some board members and staff to ask why it was even necessary to do anti-racism work.⁵⁸ Some people within the Canadian MCCs, themselves deeply committed to inclusion, felt that “the equity agenda” was counter-productive. They argued that by categorizing certain individuals as “people of colour”—and therefore as “other”—the equity agenda actually accentuated differences and fostered

division within the organization.⁵⁹ Coleman Neufeld and her colleagues broke important ground in getting the Canadian system to talk about racism, but when she left MCC in 2009, attention to racial equity became less prominent.

Another one of those complexities related to the climate change crisis and MCC Canada's environmental practices. In some ways, environmental awareness had been part of MCC consciousness for some time. There was the 1970s More with Less movement and its repackaging in the 1990s as "Trek: living with enough."⁶⁰ There were the recycling initiatives in Edmonton and elsewhere. There were the thrift shops with their re-purposing of used goods. But it was only in the new millennium that MCC Canada began to identify "caring for creation" as a key priority informing all its work as well as internal organizational practices. At its Winnipeg headquarters, it implemented the use of recycled paper and other products, encouraged staff to walk, cycle or bus to work, offered its outdoor green space for gardening use, and installed a geo-thermal heating and cooling system in the office building.

A much greater challenge was decreasing the air travel of staff.⁶¹ An energy audit of all MCC offices in North America noted a full twenty-five percent of MCC's carbon emissions derived from air travel.⁶² With the growing consensus that a rapidly warming earth and climate change were linked to carbon emissions from the use of fossil fuels, it behooved MCC to change its practices. But how could it do its work without the travel that seemed so necessary? Travel was important for maintaining relationships with national and international partners and with colleagues in other levels of MCC. Travel also seemed essential to engage Canadian constituents through learning tours, short-term Work and Learn teams, and so on. To be sure, in 2010 the entire MCC system did set a target of reducing emissions by twenty percent by the year 2020. But it seemed a rather meager goal, given that so many of the vulnerable people MCC worked with, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, were already experiencing the impact of climate change. As *Canadian Mennonite* editorialized, "[MCC's] goals are much too modest."⁶³ It remained to be seen whether the MCC system could commit to a more radical transformation.⁶⁴

*Complexities
related to
the climate
change crisis*

If MCC Canada had learned anything in its fifty years of existence, it was this: the organization was continually learning—learning more appropriate ways of doing its work, learning more life-giving ways of helping to heal the wounds of the world, and learning how its own structures and systems sometimes hindered the implementation of these lessons. The learning

process was ongoing. The complexities and contradictions, the polarities and paradoxes, continued.

Professionalization

In 2007 the Winnipeg office building underwent a major renovation project. The original structure, completed in 1986, had reflected certain MCC priorities. The church-like entrance was intended to symbolize the spiritual mandate of the organization. The spacious lobby was to double as an exhibit and display area. Its open-concept office landscape was to signal the equal importance and value of all staff.⁶⁵ An exceptionally large board room, with space for a large gallery of staff and even some visitors, conveyed the transparency of the work of the board.

The renovated facility reflected new and different priorities. The new foyer was smaller and classier and, to some people, suggested the entrance of a corporate office.⁶⁶ Enclosed office spaces for key staff members provided privacy and enhanced productivity, while also signaling where the organizational power lay. A much smaller but “wired” board room reflected a new style and system of governance. The MCC Canada board no longer concerned itself with the specifics of program but with strategic direction and larger policy issues, and, for a variety of reasons, no longer encouraged broad attendance by staff. The renovated facility reflected priorities of efficiency, productivity, privacy and specialization—in a word, it signified the increasing professionalization of MCC Canada and its work.

Another visible sign of professionalization at MCC Canada was its computerization and technological sophistication. By now, all staff had access to excellent computer technology, with several information technology specialists keeping the system up to date. Video conferencing and electronic instant messaging enabled staff, service workers, and board members to connect quickly and easily from almost anywhere in the world. Sophisticated databases tracked all donors and their preferences. Perhaps most importantly, MCC’s website became the site where people could learn about global needs, make donations, sign up for Global Family sponsorships, apply for service assignments, participate in advocacy campaigns, order resources, obtain instructions for making school kits, locate the nearest thrift shop, and more. MCC Canada had come a long way from the typewriters, telephones, and telegrams of the early years.

MCC Canada personnel were increasingly well educated. Many of them

held university degrees in the newer fields of international development and conflict transformation. As noted earlier, almost all headquarters staff were now salaried or waged. A much more sophisticated Human Resource department attended to staff needs, encouraged professional development, and managed a fat binder of policies. The organization also tried to deal more professionally—that is, according to specified protocol—with service workers and staff who it felt needed to be terminated. This, however, did not necessarily involve a compassionate or redemptive approach, nor always succeed in diminishing the pain for the persons involved.⁶⁷

*The feel of a
professional
development
& humanitarian
organization*

MCC Canada also increasingly took on the feel of a professional development and humanitarian organization, particularly as it engaged the international program of MCC. Its internal documents were peppered with the terminology of the wider aid and development community: “capacity-building,” “best practices,” “complex emergencies,” “outcomes and outputs,” “stakeholders,” as well as “planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting” or “PME/R.” Across the MCC system, the organization developed more effective strategic and collaborative planning systems and more rigorous reporting on results and outcomes. A deepening concern for “aid effectiveness” and accountability to donors, and especially to CIDA, drove the increasing professionalization of MCC.⁶⁸

Yet another indicator of professionalization was the percentage of MCC revenue that was allocated toward administration and fundraising. Through the 1980s, MCC had prided itself on its low “overhead” of roughly seven percent. In fact for many years it won accolades from Money Magazine for its lean and efficient operations.⁶⁹ Nevertheless in 1994, a new way of charting financial data revealed the entire MCC system (all levels) was spending eleven percent on “overhead.”⁷⁰ By 2011-12 that amount had increased to between fifteen and nineteen percent.⁷¹ MCC Canada’s own overhead always registered much lower, but that was because much of the fundraising activity occurred at the provincial rather than the national level.⁷²

In many ways the movement toward professionalization within the MCC world was inevitable, since that same shift was happening among NGOs and faith-based agencies across Canada and even around the globe. MCC was, in some ways, a latecomer to this entire agenda and was playing “catch-up” with other organizations which had made the transition in the 1990s.⁷³

Even so, many people close to MCC, particularly those who had helped to shape it in the 1970s and 1980s, resisted the shift. They felt it threatened some of MCC's core emphases—namely, respectful relationships, listening and learning, and mutual transformation. These individuals felt that asking international partners to fill out MCC's complex planning forms was patronizing, demeaning, and colonial.⁷⁴ Some argued that privileging measurable results over the nurturing of relationships represented “the triumph of technocratic logic.”⁷⁵ Critics insisted MCC continue to uphold an understanding of community development as a two-way encounter—one in which people in the global north might come to recognize their own poverty and violence, and not just attempt to “help” people in the global south overcome theirs.⁷⁶ Some also insisted if MCC was concerned about accountability to donors like CIDA, it should be equally concerned with accountability to the wider global church, especially the Mennonite World Conference. Ron Mathies, who served as executive director of MCC Binational from 1995 to 2006, framed the dilemma about results, effectiveness, and professionalism as a basic paradox. He put it this way in 2010, “Will MCC try to become a more effective NGO, or will it serve the church?”⁷⁷

Others did not see MCC's choice as being one or the other—a professional development NGO or a ministry of the church—and, to be fair, neither did Mathies. They saw MCC as both: a ministry of Anabaptist churches seeking to incorporate the very best wisdom of development practice in a mission of mutual capacity building.⁷⁸ Needless to say, the debate probed the identity of MCC.

The Anabaptist Constituencies

When MCC Canada was formed in 1963, a total of eleven different Mennonite denominations were members. At the beginning of 2012 seven denominations claimed membership. (See Chart 8.2) Some of the conferences represented a merger of groups that had existed separately in 1963.⁷⁹ One group, the Old Colony Church, had allowed its membership to lapse.⁸⁰ Additionally, some groups which had congregations in only one or two provinces chose to retain their involvement at the provincial MCC level, rather than at the national level. This included, for example, the Northwest Conference in Alberta, and the Markham-Waterloo Conference in Ontario.

Across the country, Mennonite groups not formally members of MCC at either the national or provincial level nevertheless participated in the work of

Chart 8.2

MCC CANADA MEMBER GROUPS IN 2012

Canadian Conference Brethren in Christ Church
Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches
Chortitzer Mennonite Conference
Evangelical Mennonite Conference
Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference
Mennonite Church Canada*
Sommerfeld Mennonite Church**

*Mennonite Church Canada brings together what were in 1964 the following groups: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Conference of Ontario, Western Ontario Mennonite Conference.

**The Sommerfeld Mennonite Church withdrew its formal membership from MCC Canada late in 2012.

MCC through involvement at relief sales, thrift shops, meat canning events, and other activities. This included, for example, the Old Order in Ontario, the Berghaler in Saskatchewan, the Kleine Gemeinde in Alberta, the Church of God in Christ Mennonite in BC, and the Hutterites across western Canada.

MCC Canada, together with the provincial MCCs, continued to be the broadest and most representative of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ entities across the country. Moreover, it drew financial and other kinds of support from among the most conservative to the most liberal of Mennonites. It even attracted the involvement of those who had left the Mennonite church but who still cherished values expressed in MCC—values such as peace, justice, simplicity, community, and compassion.⁸¹ That MCC continued to engage such a theologically diverse “family” was no small feat. Its success, in that regard, was largely related to its wide range of activity and program work—the smorgasbord phenomenon described in Chapter Five.

Despite this strategy and despite strong support from many sectors of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community, persons from within that community continued to challenge the actions and positions of MCC and MCC Canada. Many were deeply troubled by MCC Canada’s advocacy calling for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories; they felt the only truly Christian position regarding the Middle East was full support for Israel.⁸²

Others could not understand why MCC would expend so much attention on the well-being of Muslims and so little on the plight of endangered Christians in India and elsewhere; these priorities seemed to fly in the face of MCC’s identity as an arm of the church.⁸³ Some people also doubted the Christian spirituality of MCC workers.⁸⁴ A Time magazine interview with MCC Iraq worker Edward Miller, who told the magazine he did not engage in “evangelization,” caused considerable reaction back in Canada.⁸⁵

Several of the MCC Canada member conferences also registered official concerns during this decade. In the spring of 2002, for example, the Board of Faith and Life of the Mennonite Brethren Conference expressed anxiety about MCC Canada’s involvement in inter-faith dialogue and its perceived support for homosexuality. (An issue of the Women’s Concerns Report on sexuality had included, among other things, articles by a lesbian and the parents of a lesbian.) Several years later the leadership of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in Manitoba raised similar questions about what it perceived as MCC’s acceptance of other faiths and its seeming failure to clearly articulate the centrality and uniqueness of Christ. It also critiqued

*Ever-widening
range of
perspectives*

MCC's work in justice advocacy, creation care, and sexuality.⁸⁶ In both instances, leaders from all three levels of MCC met several times with the respective conference leadership to seek to answer the concerns. These were difficult discussions, both theologically and emotionally.⁸⁷ In late 2012, after several years of internal debate, the Sommerfeld Church decided to withdraw formal membership from MCC Manitoba and MCC Canada, though it did not prohibit members from continuing to volunteer in MCC thrift shops and other projects. Its decision signaled that the ever-widening range of perspectives present within the Canadian MCC "constituency" may have stretched as far as it could.

The critique of MCC came not only from the more conservative wing of that constituency, but also from the more liberal end. Some people felt MCC should be working more actively on issues such as a peace tax fund, seeking legal means for conscientious objectors to divert the military portion of their income tax to nonviolent peacebuilding purposes. It should be doing more to put statements about environmental sustainability into concrete practice. It should do much more to address systemic injustice rather than to continue to give such a high profile to disaster response. It should more boldly critique the priorities and vision of the federal government.

Some others challenged MCC's human resource policies, particularly with respect to homosexuality. Mostly these were younger Mennonites who had been influenced by changing social mores and by new biblical interpretations regarding loving, committed same-sex relationships. Many of them found it contradictory that MCC demonstrated significant concern for equality of women and racialized groups, but not for equality relating to gender identity and sexual practice.⁸⁸ Even some older persons expressed openness to homosexuals as full participants in the mission of the church. At MCC Canada's annual meeting in 2003 Vern Ratzlaff, a retired pastor from Saskatoon and former MCC Manitoba director, addressed the theme "Around God's Table." He stated simply that in his view, "God's table does not exclude gays and lesbians."⁸⁹

MCC's stated policy was that all staff and service workers, unless in a heterosexual marriage, were expected to remain celibate. The organization was not against accepting persons into service who identified a homosexual orientation, but it insisted that while in service such individuals practice celibacy. MCC's policy reflected the basic positions of all the member conferences on their understandings of marriage. Over the years, going back at least to the 1980s, some persons in MCC service "came out" as gay or lesbian while in their assignments. As long as these individuals upheld the

celibacy clause, they were allowed to continue their assignments. Where they did not, MCC quietly terminated them. In a few cases, individuals threatened to launch human rights challenges, but did not take action.⁹⁰

In 2006 a former service worker applied for a new position in MCC Manitoba. When she was denied a new assignment on the basis of her relationship with another woman, members of the woman's congregation wrote to MCC Manitoba leadership, requesting a reconsideration. Leadership at both national and provincial levels indicated that the MCC policy would not depart from the stated positions of the member conferences. MCC Manitoba, however, did agree to host a 2009 conference on "healthy sexuality," along with several other institutions. One of many workshops at the conference provided a context for Mennonites who identified as homosexual to express their pain and sense of alienation from the church. The conference gave the Sommerfeld Church a reason to withdraw from MCC Canada and MCC Manitoba, among other concerns.⁹¹ It seemed the issue was not likely to go away.

The cluster of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups who had come together to found MCC Canada in 1963 had represented a fairly wide spectrum of theological perspectives. That spectrum had expanded significantly in fifty years. Could this diverse "family" continue to work together in and through MCC, given the divergent perspectives found therein? Would other groups choose to break formal ties, as the Sommerfeld Church had? What about MCC Canada's relationship to people who contributed to MCC because they appreciated its work and the values for which it stood—people who had no connection to a Mennonite or Brethren in Christ church, but who sometimes resonated with MCC more than many Mennonites? Could or should they also be considered "constituency"? Should MCC in Canada speak of its "emerging constituency" or its "many constituencies"? These were questions the Canadian MCCs struggled with as they considered who their supporters were. Questions about who "owned" MCC would receive major attention in an extensive visioning and discerning process called New Wine/NewWineskins.

One thing became very clear about MCC Canada and the member denominations through this fifth decade. MCC Canada's capacity to speak publicly and officially on behalf of the broader Mennonite peoplehood was much more limited. The organization continued to write letters to government officials and make submissions to parliamentary committees on specific issues, but it did not claim to speak on behalf of a wider people. At times, it spoke on behalf of MCC partners in Canada and around the world. Mostly, it spoke on its own behalf. When it wished to lend greater weight to its petitions, it sought the additional endorsement of church leaders of the member

denominations. This occurred in 2003, for example, when MCC Canada sent a letter to Prime Minister Chrétien, urging the government of Canada not to join the US war on Iraq.⁹² The letter was signed by executive director Don Peters, as well as the moderators or executive secretaries of all the member conferences of MCC Canada. The incident symbolized MCC Canada needed the explicit endorsement of the church leaders when speaking on major topics to government.

Ongoing Organizational Politics

In 2008 the MCC system entered into an extensive visioning and discernment process regarding its future. This process originated with the hiring of Robb Davis, MCC Binational executive director in 2005. Davis began his assignment with a mandate to make changes in the eighty-five-year-old MCC. His arrival heralded a new and hopeful era. His unexpected resignation in October 2006, however, seemed a fairly clear indictment MCC was actually not open to change—certainly not change instituted at the executive level. It sent the MCC system into a paroxysm of uncertainty. Eventually, an appreciative inquiry process called New Wine/New Wineskins (NWS) emerged to help move the system forward.

*The system
had become too
complex and
cumbersome*

The NWS process, begun in 2008, intended to clarify three things. First, it was to articulate MCC's mission for the twenty-first century. The most recent mission statement was nearly twenty years old. Second, the process was to ascertain whether the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, now collectively referred to as Anabaptist churches, were still the primary "owners" of MCC. In both US and Canada some of the denominations were indicating that MCC was not as

accountable to the churches as it should be. Besides that, there was a growing push to "internationalize" MCC, that is, to make it accountable to the global Anabaptist communion through the Mennonite World Conference, rather than simply the churches in the US and Canada. Thirdly, the process was to determine the appropriate organizational structures for effective programming. There was widespread consensus that the MCC system, which operated with twelve different boards at three levels (binational, national and provincial/regional), had become too complex and cumbersome. A more nimble and flexible governance structure was needed for the expeditious adoption of

policies.

The NWS undertaking lasted nearly two years, involving 2,000 people from fifty countries in three major summits and sixty regional gatherings at a cost of \$2 million. Specially hired consultants and a task force of thirty-four individuals guided the appreciative inquiry process. At the end of two years, MCC possessed a new mission statement—its “new wine”—which read: “Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation.”

Additionally, MCC’s accountability to the US and Canadian Anabaptist churches—that is, to their official denominational bodies—was confirmed and strengthened. (A gathering of worldwide Anabaptist service agencies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2010, hosted by the Mennonite World Conference, determined that MCC should remain a North America-directed, rather than internationally-owned, entity.) Thirdly, a new organizational structure—the “new wineskins”—was beginning to take shape. The binational level of MCC was being dismantled, with its international program now being directed jointly by MCC Canada and MCC US. A small ministry council was mandated to oversee overall governance, and to guide the vision, set standards, and protect the MCC “brand.”

In 2012, it was impossible to predict what all this would mean for the future of MCC. Time would be needed to assess the impact of both the new wine and the new wineskins. One thing was clear, however: MCC Canada, as well as MCC US, would undergo a rather swift and radical transformation. They would both now become directly involved in decision-making related to international program work. One of the conditions related to the founding of MCC Canada had been that it do all its international work through MCC Binational. This condition, long an irritant to some Canadians, though definitely not all, had been lifted. MCC Canada would now share this work directly as an equal partner with US Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, rather than indirectly through MCC Binational.

People in MCC Canada, both staff and board members, had been raising the issue of MCC Canada direct involvement in MCC programming for decades. Don Peters had set his sights on an expanded role for MCC Canada when he assumed the executive director role in 2001. By 2008, he and chairperson Neil Janzen, were forcefully advocating for direct administration of MCC program in Afghanistan, Cuba, Iran, and North Korea. They were

also advancing proposals for a re-configured MCC system.⁹³ To some people, including some Canadians, they sounded shrill and uncompromising, as if MCC Canada wished to take a totally independent path. To others, they were giving voice to a long pent-up sense of frustration, and insisting on a genuine partnership with their US counterparts. In any case, this US-Canada dynamic became a significant component of the NWS process and outcome, even though many other critical concerns surfaced as well.

One very strange irony emerged, related to the NWS outcome. It had to do with CIDA funding for MCC's development work. For years, CIDA had expressed discomfort its grants were channeled by MCC Canada to MCC Binational in the US and then overseas. At a number of points it had made suggestions for enhancing MCC Canada's influence in decisions about the international program. In late 2011, precisely at the moment when MCC Canada was poised to gain direct decision-making authority, CIDA rejected funding for a new three-year proposal. The \$8.7 million proposal was to finance food, water, and income assistance projects in India, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mozambique, and Vietnam.⁹⁴ This decision did not affect two reconstruction projects CIDA had funded in Haiti, nor the matching grants it continued to provide for donations to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Still, CIDA's decision came as a shock, especially since no explanation for the decision was provided.

One possible reason for the decision is that MCC Canada's proposal did not measure up to those of other NGOs.⁹⁵ CIDA had recently initiated a process whereby NGOs had to compete against each other for grants in CIDA-specified countries on CIDA-set priorities. An organization's prior relationship with CIDA no longer factored into decisions on the awarding of grants. Some observers speculated the decision was really more political and was related to advocacy work MCC Canada had done which did not reflect well on the Government of Canada.⁹⁶ KAIROS, an ecumenical social justice coalition, of which MCC Canada was a member, and several other NGOs engaged in work critical of the federal government's priorities had already been "de-funded" by the agency in the previous few years. Whatever the reasons for CIDA's decision, the irony of its arrival, just when the new MCC Canada structures were taking shape in a way CIDA would earlier have favoured, was most striking.

In 2012 it was unclear what the impact of the loss of CIDA funding meant. MCC Canada was fortunate in that only thirteen percent of its income came from CIDA grants, whereas many other Canadian NGOs received upwards of sixty percent.⁹⁷ Still, the delegate body and board of directors began a

conversation they had not entertained for many years—namely, whether in fact to continue to apply for CIDA grants.⁹⁸

Clearly, the New Wine/New Wineskins process represented a turning point for MCC and for MCC Canada. Perhaps CIDA's decision represented a turning point as well. It would be several decades before the impact(s) could be assessed and evaluated.

Conclusion

As MCC Canada pondered its future, its journey represented both continuity and change. MCC Canada, together with the provincial MCCs, continued to be the singular means through which most Mennonites and Brethren in Canada worked together to meet human need, even though it could no longer claim to be the “united voice,” and even though its support base now extended far beyond the Anabaptist churches. MCC Canada continued to be a ministry “in the name of Christ,” even though it was also increasingly influenced by the professional humanitarian and development “industry.” It continued to channel people, money, and material resources to alleviate suffering in various parts of the world, though its service component had weakened. It continued to work for social change within the Canadian context, though this work had diminished in relation to international work. It continued to discern how to respond most helpfully to human need, though it struggled to confront deeper systemic causes of injustice. It continued to partner with US Mennonites in the wider work, though the relationship was entering a very new and different phase.

MCC Canada's search for an identity was far from over. Many questions remained. But at the end of the fifth decade, it appeared MCC Canada had positioned itself for a more focused role: becoming one of Canada's pre-eminent Christian international relief, development, and peacebuilding agencies.

Conclusion

IN 2006, A group of 130 people gathered for a special ceremony at a place called Stoney Knoll near the town of Laird, Saskatchewan. The group included Mennonites, Lutherans, and descendents of the Young Chippewayan (Plains Cree) band. The event marked the 130th anniversary signing of Treaty Six, which had allotted Stoney Knoll to the Young Chippewayan in 1876.

The ceremony represented, in part, the fruit of years of relationship building between MCC Saskatchewan and Chief Ben Weenie. The coming together of three groups of people at Stoney Knoll on that sunny summer day expressed, on the one hand, their shared allegiance to that place, and, on the other hand, a very public acknowledgement of its fractured history.¹ In 1897 the federal government, without adequately consulting or compensating the Young Chippewayan, had opened the land for settlement to new immigrants. Mennonites and later Lutherans had made their home on land promised earlier to the Young Chippewayan

The August gathering included prayers, story-telling, food, dance, a pipe-ceremony, an exchange of gifts, and the signing of a memorandum that all three groups would live in peace and harmony with each other. As part of the memorandum, Mennonites and Lutherans pledged to support the Young Chippewayan band's ongoing struggle to obtain compensation for the land owed to them under Treaty Six.² In making this pledge, they were acknowledging how they had benefitted from others' loss. They were taking responsibility for the colonial legacy of which they were a part. It was a healing and holy moment.

...

MCC in Canada had its genesis within the heartfelt desire of Canadian Mennonites to provide relief assistance, and then immigration hospitality, to fellow Mennonites in the wake of war, revolution and famine in the Soviet

Union. During and after World War II, this impulse of compassion grew to include the provision of relief to other people experiencing the devastation of war. It also embraced a witness of service as a positive expression of a commitment to nonresistance and non-participation in warfare. MCC Canada had been built by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ on these foundations of feeding the hungry, welcoming the refugee, serving the suffering, and sharing a message of peace.

As MCC Canada approached its fiftieth anniversary, those same impulses remained important to its work, even as they had shifted in importance, and even as they found new interpretations and expressions. Indeed, MCC Canada's understanding of how to meet human need had evolved to include: fostering development, accompanying the marginalized, addressing root causes, seeking justice, speaking to government, and building capacity. Along the way, it had also learned that connecting people in relationships of respect was essential.

As the story above demonstrates, MCC in Canada continued to build bridges between people who were often separated by wide divides, whether race, religion, class, geography, or vastly different life experiences. Connecting people at a very human level was one of the key ways it sought to foster understanding, peace, and reconciliation in a world that continued to groan with hostility, injustice, and suffering. MCC was at its best when it drew people out of their comfort zones and built relationships across the divides. It was at its best when these people-to-people encounters were mutually transformative—and where giving and receiving flowed in both directions.

After fifty years MCC Canada, together with its provincial counterparts, had developed an excellent reputation in the wider community. They had won numerous awards for their work and were often designated in the mainstream media simply as “MCC”—a sign of wide recognition. They continued to win the financial support of widening circles of people beyond the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world. Staff members of the national and provincial MCCs frequently encountered people from government or the civil society sector who had nothing but accolades for MCC.

People closer to the organization—staff, board members, service workers, and alumni—were often mystified by MCC's glowing reputation. They knew the organization had many warts. They knew the values which MCC Canada professed and held most dear were also ones that it embodied imperfectly. MCC Canada touted peace, but harboured power struggles and at times divisive conflict. It claimed to work for justice, but gave more visibility to charitable solutions. It spoke of two constituencies, but was more beholden to the one providing the dollars. It said people were its greatest resource, but more than

a few workers felt badly about their experience. The compassion which MCC Canada offered to the world remained flawed and imperfect.

And yet, despite its foibles, MCC in Canada remained a beloved and iconic expression of Mennonite identity in the Canadian context. One of MCC's most ardent Canadian critics, wrote, "For many of us who have lived in huts abroad, sorted blouses at thrift stores, sold pies at relief sales, written cheques or otherwise invested ourselves in MCC, the organization is close to the heart of what it is to be Mennonite. It creates commonality among North American Mennonites and it connects us to the rest of the world."³ Without a doubt, part of the genius of MCC in Canada was the way that it enabled Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, from the mainstream to the margins, to join hands, hearts, and minds in a common cause.⁴ If in 1963 MCC Canada was formed because Mennonites and Brethren in Christ shared enough of a common story, fifty years later MCC had *become* the common story, the bond that held them together, if at times weakly. For some Canadians, MCC had become their identity marker, the thing that defined them as Mennonites.

In many ways the genius of MCC in Canada also lay in the way it engaged thousands of grassroots people across the country—people who donated money, performed service assignments, served on boards and committees, volunteered in thrift stores, relief sales and Ten Thousand Village shops, hosted IVEPers, sponsored refugees, visited prisoners, joined advocacy campaigns, sewed blankets, grew wheat for the Foodgrains Bank, supported Global Family projects, or simply prayed for the world-wide ministry. It counted 17,000 individuals across the country who lovingly volunteered their labours to "do MCC."⁵ If MCC in Canada had become an institution, it was also much more. It continued to be a people's movement which embodied faith, caring, and compassion.

As it approached its fiftieth anniversary, MCC Canada was aware its history had been blessed—blessed by the vision, dedication, passion, and faithful witness of thousands of people who had helped shape it. In 1970, at MCC's fiftieth anniversary, Orie Miller had called the organization, "God's miracle among us."⁶ The same could be said of MCC Canada at its fiftieth anniversary.

As it looked ahead, MCC Canada faced many questions. Would it continue to work together with US brothers and sisters in a cooperative mission nearly a century old? Would it remain a ministry of the increasingly divergent Anabaptist churches, serving them, but also challenging them? Would it continue to hear and be transformed by the wisdom, faith, and counsel of partners at home and abroad? Would it find an appropriate way of being both church and professional humanitarian agency? Would it overcome institutional racism

and paternalism? Would it boldly build peace and advocate for justice in those places, in Canada and elsewhere, where enmity, strife, and oppression reigned? Would it continue to provide a means whereby ordinary people could express their faith and their deep yearning to help heal the world? Time would tell.

After many decades, MCC in Canada continued to connect people in profound ways in places like Stoney Knoll and Steinbach, Montreal and Moncton, La Crete and Chilliwack and Timmins. In many ways the wider story of MCC in Canada, and the more defined account of MCC Canada, is more than a story about an organization, an institution, a program, or even a mission. It is also a collection of stories of people sensing that, as they encountered “the other,” they saw the face of Christ. Often, these encounters meant the lessening of suffering, the growing of understanding, the building of friendships, the righting of wrongs, the healing of wounds, and the practise of peace. Often, they led to mutual transformation. Inasmuch as these encounters reflected a vision of the reign of God, they held the key to a future for MCC in Canada.

APPENDIX A

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMRIC	Alberta Mennonite Relief and Immigration Committee
BCMRIC	British Columbia Mennonite Relief and Immigration Committee
BIC	Brethren in Christ
CCC	Canadian Central Committee
CCJC	Church Council on Justice and Corrections
CD	Civil Defence
CEE	China Educational Exchange
CFGB	Canadian Foodgrains Bank
CHPC	Conference of Historic Peace Churches
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMBC	Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization
CMRC	Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee
CMRIC	Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council
CO	Conscientious objector
COSA	Circles of Support and Accountability
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
CRALOG	Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany
DPI	Disabled People's International
EMC	Evangelical Mennonite Conference
EMMC	Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference
ERS	Edmonton Recycling Society
GC	General Conference Mennonite Church

HC	Handicap Concerns
HPCCC	Historic Peace Church Council of Canada
IVEP	International Visitor Exchange Program
LVS	Local Voluntary Service
M2	Man to Man
MB	Mennonite Brethren
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MCCA	Mennonite Central Committee Alberta
MCCBC	Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia
MCCM	Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba
MCCO	Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
MCCS	Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan
MCCUS	Mennonite Central Committee US
MCRC	Mennonite Central Relief Committee
MDS	Mennonite Disaster Service
MHD	Mental Health and Disabilities
MMRIC	Manitoba Mennonite Relief and Immigration Committee
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRCWS	Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers
NAJC	National Association of Japanese Canadians
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NC	Native Concerns
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRRO	Non-Resistant Relief Organization
NWS	New Wine/New Wineskins
OMRIC	Ontario Mennonite Relief and Immigration Committee
PSC	Peace and Social Concerns
RBM	Results Based Management
RRA	Red River Accord
SALT	Serve and Learn Together
TAP	Teachers Abroad Program
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VOM	Victim Offender Ministries

VORP	Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
VS	Voluntary Service
W2	Woman to Woman
WC	Women's Concerns

APPENDIX B

German and French Terms

Aeltestenkomitee

Literally “Committee of Elders.” Name given to group of *Kanadier* Mennonite leaders who attended to military service related concerns on behalf of the *Kanadier* Mennonites of southern Manitoba during World War II.

Aussiedler

Literally “re-settler.” Used interchangeably with *Umsiedler*. Name given to Mennonites and other German-background individuals who moved to Germany from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1990s.

Borscht

A cabbage soup which became part of the cuisine of Mennonites in Ukraine and *Russia*.

Front de libération du Québec (FLQ)

Québec Liberation Front. A separatist para-military group which promoted Québec separatism between 1963 and 1970. It was responsible for the October Crisis of 1970.

Glaubensgenossen

“Household of faith,” from Galatians 6:10. Some Mennonites understood the scriptural injunction from Galatians to call MCC to give greater priority to helping fellow Mennonites in need.

Kanadier

Literally “Canadian.” A term used to distinguish those Mennonites who arrived

from Russia between the 1870s and World War I and those who arrived from the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

La Maison de L'Amitie

House of Friendship. A social service ministry begun in 1973 by MCC Canada in Montreal in cooperation with the Mennonite Conference of Ontario.

Reiseschuld

Literally “travel debt.” A term used to designate the amount of money a Mennonite immigrant family from the Soviet Union owed to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Russlaender

Literally “Russian.” A term used to distinguish those Mennonites who arrived from the Soviet Union in the 1920s from those who arrived between the 1870s and World War I.

Umsiedler

Literally “re-settler.” Used interchangeably with *Aussiedler*. Name given to Mennonites and other German-background individuals who moved to Germany from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1990s.

Zwieback

Literally “twice-baked.” A yeast roll with one bun baked atop another somewhat larger bun. Mennonites baked *zwieback* in the Vistula Delta of Danzig and possibly even the Netherlands. When baked a second time, these rolls could be preserved for long periods of time, thus helping to sustain migrants and refugees on their journey.

APPENDIX C

Chairpersons and Executive Directors

MCC CANADA

Chairpersons

David P. Neufeld	1963 to 1972
Newton Gingrich	1972 to 1978
Hugo Jantz	1978 to 1981
Ross Nigh	1981 to 1987
Ray Brubacher	1987 to 1989
Jake Harder	1989 to 1993
George Richert	1993 to 1999
Ron Dueck	1999 to 2006
Neil Janzen	2006 to 2012
Peggy Snyder	2012 to present

Executive Directors

J.M. Klassen	1963 to 1970
Daniel Zehr	1970 to 1976
J.M. Klassen	1976 to 1983
Waldimar Neufeld (interim)	1983 to 1984
J.M. Klassen	1984
Waldimar Neufeld (interim)	1984 to 1985
Daniel Zehr	1985 to 1993
John Dyck (interim)	1993 to 1995
Marv Frey	1995 to 2000
Dave Dyck (interim)	2000 to 2001
Don Peters	2001 to present

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF PROVINCIAL MCCs*MCC Alberta*

Bill Thiessen	1976 to 1982
Kathy Good (interim)	1982 to 1983
Bill Thiessen	1983 to 1990
Bill Janzen	1990 to 1992
Dick Neufeld	1992 to 1996
Abe Janzen	1996 to present

MCC British Columbia

Vernon Reimer*	1972 to 1975
Wally Kroeker	1976 to 1979
Harold Koslowsky	1979 to 1986
Bill Wiebe (interim)	1986
Waldimar Neufeld	1986 to 1994
Ed Janzen	1994 to 2000
Laura Loewen	2000 to 2007
Wayne Bremner	2007 to present

* According to Lescheid, Helen Grace, ed. *Footprints of Compassion: The Story of MCC-BC, 1964-1989* (Clearbrook, BC: MCC BC, 1989), Roy Bauman (1964-1967) and Fred Kathler (1968-1971) were the first executive directors of MCCBC. Rather, Bauman and Kathler were managers of the Yarrow Material Aid Centre which belonged to MCC Canada. So Bauman and Kathler were technically MCC Canada workers. In 1972, MCC Canada turned the Material Aid Centre over to MCCBC, at which time the provincial organization also hired its first executive director Vernon Reimer.

MCC Manitoba

Arthur Driedger	1970 to 1977
Vern Ratzlaff	1977 to 1982
Jake Letkemann	1982 to 1988
Peter Peters	1988 to 1999
Ken Reddig	1999 to 2002
Daniel Loepp Friesen	2002 to 2005
Ron Loeppky (interim)	2005
Peter Rempel	2005 to 2012
Ron Janzen	2012 to present

MCC Ontario

Harvey Taves	1964 to 1965
Daniel Zehr	1965 to 1967

Doug Snyder	1967 to 1975
Ray Schlegel	1975 to 1977
Erwin Wiens (interim)	1977 to 1979
Ray Schlegel	1979 to 1989
Dave Worth	1989 to 1999
Arli Klassen	1999 to 2008
Rick Cober Bauman	2008 to present

MCC Saskatchewan

Fred Peters	1967 to 1981
Edgar Epp	1981 to 1986
Ed Barkman	1986 to 1989
Werner Froese	1989 to 1995
Bruno Baerg	1996 to 2008
Claire Ewert Fisher	2008 to present

APPENDIX D

MCC Canada Total Income, 1964-2012

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Income</i>	
1964	\$149,768.93	
1965	\$705,620.54	
1966	\$836,942.49	
1967	\$1,142,287.54	
1968	\$1,055,689.63	
1969	\$1,220,246.63	
1970	\$1,149,205.82	
1971	\$1,542,041.85	
1972	\$1,460,459.60	
1973	\$1,792,056.62	
1974	\$2,337,589.84	
1975	\$3,363,159.59	
1976	\$4,073,172.87	
1977	\$4,326,021.64	
1978	\$5,478,963.33	
1979	\$6,483,336.72	
1980	\$9,069,327.30	
1981	\$8,582,048.93	
1982	\$8,718,312.43	
1983	\$14,507,144.15	
1984	\$16,596,888.26	<i>11 month fiscal year</i>
1985	\$21,245,658.00	
1986	\$14,656,209.00	
1987	\$14,974,558.00	
1988	\$16,553,800.00	
1989	\$21,411,460.00	
1990	\$22,939,223.00	
1991	\$21,583,760.00	
1992	\$19,497,089.00	<i>10 month fiscal year</i>

1993	\$22,483,988.00	
1994	\$20,896,159.00	
1995	\$22,138,365.00	
1996	\$23,364,772.00	
1997	\$21,728,124.00	
1998	\$20,357,355.00	
1999	\$33,160,936.00	
2000	\$24,937,180.00	
2001	\$24,615,837.00	
2002	\$27,553,329.00	
2002-2003	\$27,836,838.00	
2003-2004	\$24,759,671.00	
2004-2005	\$38,787,693.00	
2005-2006	\$43,283,115.00	
2006-2007	\$43,816,358.00	
2007-2008	\$49,644,641.00	
2008-2009	\$45,697,622.00	
2009-2010	\$48,245,245.00	
2010-2011	\$48,166,826.00	
2011-2012	\$31,746,227.00	<i>7 month fiscal year</i>

Notes

PREFACE

1 Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

2 Menno Simons, "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, c. 1496-1561 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1955), 307.

3 See Margaret Loewen Reimer, *One Quilt, Many Piece: A Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2007) or Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia On-line, www.gameo.org.

4 Frank H. Epp, ed., *Partners in Service: The Story of Mennonite Central Committee Canada prepared on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary, 1963-1982* (Winnipeg, MCC Canada, 1983), 9.

PROLOGUE

1 Ted Friesen, interview with the author, 7 July 2011.

2 The parentheses in the name were dropped in 1983. For purposes of simplicity, I have chosen to dispense with them throughout this book.

3 Vern Ratzlaff, interview with the author, 22 July 2011.

4 Quoted in Editor, "Canadian brotherhood gives birth to national inter-Mennonite committee," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 17 December 1963, 1, 6.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Mrs. John Schultz, letter to Levi Mumaw, 17 August 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, Mennonite Central Committee (hereafter MCC) Files, Akron, PA.

2 Mrs. J.B. Shank, letter to Levi Mumaw, 2 September 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

3 *Gospel Herald*, 24 June 1920, 253.

4 James Juhnke, "Turning Points, Broken Ice, and *Glaubensgenossen*: What Happened at Prairie Street on July 27-28, 1920?" in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011), 73.

5 Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1988), 22.

6 *Gospel Herald*, 19 August 1920, 414.

7 Quoted in Helmut Harder, *David Toews Was Here 1870-1947* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2002), 109.

8 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 62; Harder, *David Toews*, 109.

9 Johann Thiessen, letter to Levi Mumaw, 21 October 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

10 For more information on this group, see T.D. Regehr, *Faith, Life and Witness in the Northwest, 1903-2003* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003).

11 For more on the founding of NRRO, see Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 28-30.

12 See Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 31-34.

13 Johann Thiessen, letter to Levi Mumaw, 21 October 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35; Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, Mennonite Central Committee Files, Akron, PA.

14 Peter H. Rempel, "The First Canadian Mennonite Central Committee 1920-1924," *Mennonite Historian* 21:4 (December 1995), 1. The exchange of correspondence between Thiessen and Mumaw is instructive in the way it begins to articulate a relationship between Canadian Mennonites and MCC. The letters demonstrate: 1) the shared desire of Canadians and Americans to cooperate, 2) the willingness of Canadians to follow the lead of Americans, at least for a time, 3) the possibility of Canadians having full membership in MCC.

15 Kreider and Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger*, 27. Another source suggests that the first MCC relief sale was held in Reedley, California in 1922. *MCC Contact*, April 1988, 2.

16 C.K. Unruh, letter to Levi Mumaw, 4 December 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, Mennonite Central Committee Files, Akron, PA. It is unclear whether initially Canadian Central Committee funds were sent to Istanbul, to M.C. Cressman in Ontario for forwarding, or directly to Scottsdale.

17 P.C. Hiebert, *Feeding the Hungry: Russia Famine 1919-1925* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929), 324.

18 See, *Gospel Herald*, 30 December 1920, 789 and 27 January 1921, 870.

19 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 133.

20 Levi Mumaw, letter to M.C. Cressman, 28 June 1922, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

21 Levi Mumaw, letter to Fred Huseman of Near East Relief, 4 February 1921, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

22 Johann Thiessen, letter to Levi Mumaw, 7 December 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

23 Levi Mumaw, letter to M.C. Cressman, 30 September 1920, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

24 The flour arrived in spring 1923. *Gospel Herald*, 19 April 1923, 64. The arrangement of the flour shipment was actually quite complex. See Peter Rempel, "The First Canadian Mennonite Central Committee."

25 A.A. Friesen, letter to A.J. Miller, 15 December 1922, File 128, Volume 1182, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection, MHC.

26 Levi Mumaw letter to D.H. Bender, 18 July 1922, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA. MCC actually recorded quite precisely how much each conference donated and how much came via the Canadian Central Committee.

27 A.C. Kolb, letter to Levi Mumaw, 14 November 1921, Russian Relief 1918-35, Levi Mumaw Correspondence, 1918-31, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

28 Alvin J. Miller, letter to A.A. Friesen, 4 April 1921, File 84, Volume 1175, Canadian Men-

nonite Board of Colonization Collection, MHC.

29 Alvin J. Miller, letter to A.A. Friesen, 12 July 1921, File 84, Volume 1175, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection, MHC.

30 Anna and Jacob Funk's story is told in Katie Funk Wiebe, *The Storekeeper's Daughter: A Memoir* (Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1997), 151-161.

31 For a detailed account of MCC's work through the 1920s, see P.C. Hiebert, *Feeding the Hungry: Russia Famine 1919-1925* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929).

32 The use of the term "colonization" requires explanation. The term conveys the notion of separate and semi-autonomous colonies, similar to the ones Mennonites had populated in Russia or the "reserves" they had been granted in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the 1870s and 1890s, respectively. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization had no intention of settling Mennonite refugees of the 1920s in separate colonies or reserves; that era was long gone. But today the word "colonization" also connotes Indigenous people being removed from their land to make way for European settlers. In the sense that the Board of Colonization enabled Mennonites from the Soviet Union make a new home on land which had been taken from Indigenous people, it did participate in a colonizing and colonial project. It could be argued that the earlier migrations of Mennonites (to Ontario in the 1780s, to Manitoba in the 1870s) participated more directly in the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Still, immigrants of the 1920s, who arrived under the aegis of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, stood to benefit greatly from the land and resources previously taken from the Indigenous people. Canadian Mennonites would eventually have to grapple with the implications of this colonial legacy.

33 John B. Toews and Paul Toews, eds., *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922-1927): Mennonite and Soviet Documents* (Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011), 14-16.

34 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 282.

35 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 145.

36 See Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 165-175.

37 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 282; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 178.

38 Frank K. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 236.

39 J.M. Klassen, *Jacob's Journey from Zagradowka toward Zion: The autobiography of J.M. Klassen* (Winnipeg: self-published, 2001), 4-5.

40 See Sam Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1988).

CHAPTER TWO

1 Edna Hunsperger Bowman, interview by Linda Hubert Hecht, 22 April 1998, MCC Ontario Oral History Project, MAO; Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 56-57.

2 For an in-depth discussion, see Chapter Two of T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

3 Esther Epp, "The Origins of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980), 53.

4 Esther Epp, "Origins," 56.

5 Swalm's difficulties lay in the fact that the Ontario registrar who heard Swalm's claim for exemption did not recognize Swalm's church (the Tunkers, later called Brethren in Christ) as a pacifist sect. See E.J. Swalm, *Nonresistance under Test* (Nappanee, IN: E.V. Publishing House,

1949).

6 Esther Epp, "Origins," 54.

7 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 452, footnote 85. Approximately 4,500 men and women of "ethnic Mennonite background" were drafted or enlisted voluntarily for active military service. Regehr, 56.

8 Quoted in Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 55.

9 See comments by Henry Funk and Henry Brandt, in Alternative Service in the Second World War, "Hospital Work," accessed 3 October 2012, <http://alternativeservice.ca/service/hospitals/> and <http://alternativeservice.ca/service/hospitals/hospital5.htm>.

10 See comment by George Groening, in Alternative Service in the Second World War, "Teachers," accessed 3 October 2012, <http://alternativeservice.ca/service/teachers/>.

11 John L. Fretz, quoted in Alternative Service in the Second World War, "Life of Service," accessed 3 October 2012, <http://alternativeservice.ca/sowhat/life/service4.htm>.

12 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 215-16.

13 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 42-43.

14 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 25.

15 Irvin B. Horst, *A Ministry of Goodwill: A Short Account of Mennonite Relief, 1939-1949* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1950), 4.

16 Some *Russlaender* in Winnipeg were identified to have links with *Deutsche Zeitung Canada*, a pro-Nazi publication. James Urry, *Mennonites Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada: 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 237.

17 The US was not yet at war, and so MCC, as a US organization, could still send relief and relief workers to the European continent; because Canada was already at war, this was not possible for Canadian organizations. Canadian money, material aid, and workers would only reach continental Europe after war had concluded.

18 Although *Kanadier* Mennonites also lived in Saskatchewan, they did not separate from the MCRC as in Manitoba. See Esther Epp, "Origins," 54.

19 For an overview of MCC's work in England and elsewhere, see John D. Unruh, *In the Name of Christ: A History of the Mennonite Central Committee and its Service, 1920-1951* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1952).

20 Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the Rubble* (Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1991), 28.

21 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 67; Unruh, *In the Name of Christ*, 55. Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 56, indicate that 24 Canadian Mennonites served in England, but this actually represents the total number of Canadians and Americans. The Canadians were as follows: John E. Cuffman, Mabel Cressman, Cornelius J. Dyck, Peter J. Dyck, Elfrieda Klassen Dyck, Edna Hunsperger, Evangeline Matthies, George Neufeld, Frederick Peters, Susie Peters, Arlene Sitrler, Vernon Toews, and Harry Willems.

22 For a description of initial hesitation on the part of some Ontario representatives, see Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 67-68.

23 Esther Epp, "Origins," 128.

24 C.F. Klassen, letter to David Toews, 4 April 1943, File 871, Volume 1321, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection, MHC.

25 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 76-77.

26 Mennonite Central Committee Canadian Headquarters Letter #39 (1 July 1947). (Hereafter Canadian Headquarters Letter.)

27 Linda Huebert Hecht, "Legacy of Service," *Ontario Mennonite History* 19, no. 2 (November 2001): 11.

28 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 75.

29 C.J. Rempel, letter to J.N. Byler, 31 July 1945, File 24, Box 23, Mennonite Central Committee Correspondence, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

30 Report of the Canadian Office of the M.C.C. for 1947, File 1, Box 32, Mennonite Central Committee Correspondence, MCC Files, Akron, PA; Canadian Headquarters Letter #33 (January 1, 1947).

31 Canadian Headquarters Letter #46 (1 February 1948).

32 Canadian Headquarters Letter #24 (1 April 1946).

33 Alice Snyder, letter to her family, 17 January 1949, in Lucille Marr with Dora-Marie Goulet, *Alice Snyder's Letters from Germany* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2009), 142-143.

34 Canadian Headquarters Letter #30 (1 October 1946).

35 Larry Kehler, "The Many Activities of MCC," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 298-317.

36 The Canadian government rationed consumption of several foods for varying lengths of time during and after the war. Government-issued coupons enforced the ration system.

37 Joanna R. Buhr, "Pursuit of a Vision: Persistence and Accommodation among Coaldale Mennonites from the Mid-Nineteen Twenties to World War II" (M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1986), 77.

38 *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 3 December 1945, 3.

39 Canadian Headquarters Letter #18 (1 October 1945).

40 MCC Report to NRRO Executive Committee Meeting, 1 February 1946, File: Minutes 1917-1948, NRRO- XV.11.2.1, MAO.

41 Canadian Headquarters Letter #17 (1 September 1945), 3.

42 Irvin B. Horst, *A Ministry of Goodwill: A Short Account of Mennonite Relief, 1939-1949* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1950).

43 MCC Report to NRRO Executive Committee Meeting, 1 February 1946, File: Minutes 1917-1948, NRRO- XV.11.2.1, MAO.

44 Esther Epp, "Origins," 61-62 [author's translation].

45 Canadian Headquarters Letter #7 (1 November 1944).

46 Toews indicated, "[I]n organizing for relief work, we believe it is our Christian duty to relieve suffering, besides this, however, we believe that we act wisely not to arouse hostility of the Canadian people as would be the case if we do not do anything." Quoted in Esther Epp, "Origins," 62.

47 Canadian Headquarters Letter #7 (1 November 1944).

48 John A. Lapp, "The Peace Mission of the Mennonite Central Committee," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970), 281.

49 Lapp, "Peace Mission," 281.

50 Unruh, *In the Name of Christ*, 51-52.

51 Unruh, *In the Name of Christ*, 52.

52 Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 28.

53 The list which follows is incomplete. Names are taken from MCC's Canadian Headquarters Letter.

54 An initial diagnosis was acute appendicitis, but there were complications. See Lorraine Roth, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* (Waterloo, ON: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1992).

55 S. Fred Peters, "As Remembered: Life and Times of, and by, S. Fred Peters" (Unpublished memoir, 2001).

56 *Canadian Mennonite*, 12 April 1999, 4.

57 For an overview of the post-World War II resettlement, see Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962). For a personal account, see Peter and Elfrieda Dyck,

Up from the Rubble. For a gender analysis, see Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

58 See Dyck for their telling of the story. For a different perspective, see Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 83-84.

59 Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 250.

60 This was reported by Helen Quapp, an MCC worker, in Canadian Headquarters Letter #68 (1 December 1949).

61 Esther Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen: A Leader for his Time* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001), 177.

62 The total debt with interest was \$1,947,398.68. It would have been significantly higher if the CPR had not cancelled much of the interest. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 335-44.

63 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 94.

64 Esther Epp, "Origins," 133-44; Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen*, 176-77.

65 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 60.

CHAPTER THREE

1 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 4 December 1953, 8.

2 Editorial, "Those MCC Marriages," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 24 January 1958, 2. The editorial called inter-group marriages one of the happy by-products of MCC service.

3 Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain how many Canadians served with MCC prior to 1963, because citizenship information was not recorded in the MCC statistics in the early years. Kiersten Hoffman, e-mail message to the author, 27 November 2012.

4 T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 126.

5 Statistics are from Wilfred J. Unruh, "A Study of Mennonite Service Programs" (Unpublished paper, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, 1965), A-109.

6 For an extensive analysis of Taves' contribution, See Chapter 4 of Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003).

7 Mennonite Central Committee Canadian Headquarters Letter #102 (15 September 1953). (Hereafter, Canadian Headquarters Letter.)

8 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 28 January 1955, 2.

9 Canadian Headquarters Letter #102 (15 September 1953).

10 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 116.

11 For an extensive description of the development of the Ailsa Craig Boys Farm, see Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 114-28.

12 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 127.

13 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 115.

14 Canadian Headquarters Letter # 113 (15 November 1954).

15 Betty Pries, ed., *Seawindrock: The History of MCC in Newfoundland and Labrador 1954-1993* (Winnipeg: MCC Canada, 1993), 19.

16 Pries, *Seawindrock*, 28.

17 Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1988), 100-1.

18 Robert Kreider, "The Impact of MCC Service on American Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no.3 (July 1970): 247-48.

19 Waldemar Janzen, *Growing Up in Turbulent Times* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007), 229-30.

20 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 21 March 1958, 3.

- 21 Canadian Headquarters Letter #107 (15 February 1954).
- 22 Canadian Headquarters Letter #109 (15 May 1954).
- 23 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 10 August 1956, 1.
- 24 Statistics derived from Table I in Paul Classen, "Statistics on Mennonite Central Committee Personnel," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 326. Classen notes that the statistics may be inaccurate for the earlier years.
- 25 After the US brought back the Draft in 1951, the numbers would change on the US side. Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 99.
- 26 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 209-12.
- 27 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 145; Beth Graybill, "Writing Women into MCC's History," in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011), 241.
- 28 See Lydia Neufeld Harder, "Singing a Subversive Song of Hope," *Conrad Grebel Review* 19, no. 3 (Fall, 2001): 13-32.
- 29 See Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
- 30 Esther Epp, "The Origins of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)," (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980), 133-135.
- 31 Esther Epp, "Origins," 136.
- 32 Larry Kehler, "Mennonites willing to love, but only a select few – Fast," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 11 February 1955, 1.
- 33 Esther Epp, "Origins," 140.
- 34 Clearly, the perception at MCC was that MCRC was not adequately interpreting and promoting MCC in western Canada. Harold S. Bender, a member of the Executive Committee, believed "the Canadians" were responsible for declining MCC revenue in the early 1950s. See Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 475-76.
- 35 See Esther Epp, "Origins," 138-44.
- 36 Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada Since 1994*, revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 42.
- 37 See Calvin W. Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ, 1951-1976* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2001).
- 38 Menno Wiebe, letter to Gerhard Ratzloff, 28 February 1997, File 2916R 1997Y, Volume 5194, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 39 Canadian Headquarters Letter #97 (April 1952) and #101 (15 August 1953).
- 40 Civil Defence began under the Department of Defence, was shifted to the Department of Health and Welfare, and then returned to Department of Defence jurisdiction in 1959. Esther Epp, "Origins," 90.
- 41 Lowell Detweiler, *The Hammer Rings Hope: Photos and Stories from Fifty Years of Mennonite Disaster Service* (Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2000), 91-2.
- 42 Esther Epp, "Origins," 98.
- 43 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 10 May 1957, 5; Esther Epp, "Origins," 99.
- 44 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 6 March 1959, 2.
- 45 Esther Epp-Tiessen, "New Wine for New Wineskins: MCC and the Formation of MCC Canada," in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011), 52-53.
- 46 This situation occurred in Steinbach, Manitoba. J.M. Klassen, *Jacob's Journey from Zagradowka toward Zion: The autobiography of J.M. Klassen* (Winnipeg: self-published, 2001),

206-207.

47 Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen*, 50-51.

48 See Esther Epp, "Origins," and Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen*.

49 Minutes #1, MCC Canada, Founding Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 12-14 December 1963.

50 Klassen, *Jacob's Journey*, 209-11.

51 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 169-79.

52 See David Neufeld, "My Dream About Canadian Mennonite Council," File 1577, Volume 1397, Canadian Mennonite Broad of Colonization Collection, MHC.

53 For a much more detailed description of the lengthy process and the challenges leading to December 1963, see Esther Epp, "Origins," 151-92.

54 Robert S. Kreider, compiler and editor, "Oral History Interviews: Reg Toews: Experiences in Mennonite Central Committee Service" (Unpublished manuscript, 2002), 139.

55 Esther Epp, "Origins," 191.

56 Esther Epp, "Origins," 190.

57 Klassen, *Jacob's Journey*, 210-11.

58 Klassen, *Jacob's Journey*, 210. The telegram did eventually make its way into the MCC files. C.J. Rempel, telegram to W.T. Snyder, 13 December 1963, Box 111, File 112, MCC Central Correspondence, MCC Files, Akron, PA.

59 "Constitution of the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), as amended by the organizational meeting held on December 12-14, 1963, at the Portage Ave. M.B. Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba," File 65EOO38, Volume 1471, MCCC Collection, MHC.

60 Esther Epp, "Origins," 166.

61 In my 1980 thesis, "The Origins of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)," I noted only the first two of these three factors. I now believe that the third factor was equally important as the other two.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 MCC (Canada) Annual Report 1967, File: MCCC Mailings, Volume 1520, MCCC Collection, MHC.

2 Leo Driedger, *At the Forks: Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 31-33.

3 Driedger, *At the Forks*, 36.

4 Minutes #8, MCC (Canada), Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 30 April-1 May 1965.

5 Minutes #13, MCC (Canada), Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15-16 April 1966.

6 Harvey Plett, interview with the author, 28 November 2011.

7 See, for example, Minutes #102, MCC Canada Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 21-22 March, 1980. The conferences/groups could nominate one delegate to MCC Canada's membership for every 5000 members in the respective congregations.

8 They were formally organized as follows: MCCBC—Oct 24, 1964; MCCS—Oct 28, 1964; MCCO—Nov 28, 1964; MCCM—Dec 1, 1964; and MCCA—February 1965. J.M. Klassen, *Jacob's Journey from Zagradowka toward Zion: The autobiography of J.M. Klassen* (Winnipeg: self-published, 2001), 215.

9 David P. Neufeld, letter to W.T. Snyder, 4 December 1964, File 49, Box 114, MCC Central Correspondence, MCC Files, Akron PA.

10 "Proposed Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Representation on the Mennonite Central Committee," File 65EOO42, Volume 1472, MCCC Collection, MHC.

- 11 Klassen, *Jacob's Journey*, 215.
- 12 Daniel Zehr, interview with the author, 24 November 2011.
- 13 William T. Snyder, letter to J.M. Klassen, 15 September 1965, File 65EOO43, Volume 1472, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 14 William T. Snyder, letter to J.M. Klassen, 21 December 1966, File 244, Volume 1483, MCCC Collection, MHC; William T. Snyder, letter to J.M. Klassen, 6 November 1967, File: Wm T. Snyder, Volume 1496, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 15 News release, 16 February 1965, File 65EOO41, Volume 1472, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 16 Mennonite Central Committee Workbook 1973, 135.
- 17 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 18 February 1969, 1-2.
- 18 William T. Snyder, letter to Urbane Peachey, 10 April 1964, File 112/48, MCC Central Correspondence, MCC Files, Akron, PA.
- 19 Exhibit 7: Newton Gingrich, "Observer's Report from The Central Committee of the Canadian Council of Churches Meeting," Minutes #40, MCC Canada, Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 27-28 November 1970.
- 20 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 22 February 1966, 1; see also 11 January 1966, 1.
- 21 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 11 January 1966, 1.
- 22 One can interpret the basement location and its symbolism for women's involvement in two ways. On the one hand, the basement was definitely a subordinate location to the sanctuary. On the other hand, the basement provided the foundation upon which the sanctuary stood. Women definitely held secondary positions within MCC, yet their work in material aid and fundraising was foundational to its work.
- 23 *The Canadian Mennonite*, 11 February 1969, 7; *The Canadian Mennonite*, 23 January 1970, 3.
- 24 Jennifer A. Keahey, Mary A. Littrell, and Douglas L. Murray, "Business with a Mission: The Ongoing Role of Ten Thousand Villages within the Fair Trade Movement," in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, in Alain Epp Weaver, ed. (Telford, PA: Cascadia Press, 2011), 268.
- 25 For a more in-depth description of the New Hamburg sale, see Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 206-11.
- 26 Margaret Brubacher, interview with the author, 10 September 2011.
- 27 Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 208.
- 28 Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Kitchener, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 368.
- 29 News release, 9 December 1975, File IS-24, Volume 2504, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 30 1973 MCC Canada Financial Statement, Schedule I, 1974 MCC Canada Minute Book.
- 31 Kreider and Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger*, 364.
- 32 Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop and Vernon E. Jantzi, *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 50.
- 33 Selma Loewen, interview with the author, 1 April 2011.
- 34 Selma Loewen, interview with the author, 1 April 2011.
- 35 D.G. Friesen, "History of the Community Self Help Centre, Altona, Manitoba: 1972-1987" (Unpublished booklet, 1987), 4.
- 36 Gladys Terichow, *From Old to Gold: Stories from the Steinbach MCC Thrift Shop* (Winnipeg: MCC Manitoba, 1997), 9.
- 37 Ontario women had already established a number of thrift shops, but the St. Catharines shop was the first one opened specifically to raise funds for MCC. Marr, *Transforming Power of a Century*, 220-21.

- 38 *Mennonite Reporter*, 5 February 1979, 4.
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CHAPTER FIVE

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CHAPTER SIX

- 1 Because of a change in the fiscal year, MCC Canada held two annual meetings in 1992: one in January in Boissevain, Manitoba and one in November in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
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- 4 Exhibit 15: Pauline Steinmann, "Review of the MCC Program in Eastern Canada," August 1998, Minutes #251, MCC Canada, Board of Directors, Petitcodiac, New Brunswick, 2-3 October 1998.
- 5 Ontario resident, quoted in J. Robert Charles, "Report and Recommendations, Québec Review and Goal-Setting," File 654R 1995Y, Volume 5059, MCCC Collection, MHC.
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- 7 Betty Pries, *Seawindrock: The History of MCC in Newfoundland and Labrador 1954-1993* (Winnipeg: MCC Canada, 1993), 44.
- 8 Tim Broadhead and Brent Herbert-Copley, *Bridges of Hope? Canadian Voluntary Agencies and the Third World* (Ottawa: The North-South Institute, 1988), 45.
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- 10 Bob and Dorothy Bartel, interview with the author, 22 July 2011.
- 11 Minutes #178, MCC Canada, Executive Committee Meeting, Telephone Conference, 23 March 1989.
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- 14 Minutes #138, MCC Canada, Special Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 28-29 September 1984.
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- 19 *Mennonite Reporter*, 10 February 1992, 2.
- 20 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 21 February 1992, 16-17.
- 21 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 3 April 1992, 22.
- 22 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 3 April 1992, 11, 22.
- 23 Bill Janzen, telephone conversation with author, 28 March 2012.
- 24 J. Howard Kauffmann and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1991), 176-77.
- 25 Dave Worth, interview with Lucille Marr, 31 October 1998, MCC Ontario Oral History Project, MAO.
- 26 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 17 February 1989, 3.
- 27 Marilyn Funk, interview with the author, 21 March 2012.
- 28 *Mennonite Reporter*, 16 October 1995, 4; Sophie Tiessen-Eigbike, e-mail to the author, 22 March 2012.
- 29 *Mennonite Reporter*, 27 April 1981, 9.
- 30 Louise Buhler, interview with the author, 22 July 2011.
- 31 *Canadian Mennonite*, 2 July 2001, 4-5
- 32 *Canadian Mennonite*, 9 September 2002, 31.
- 33 *Mennonite Reporter*, November 16, 1992, 14.
- 34 Minutes #148, MCC Canada, Special Membership Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 31 August 31 to 2 September 1985.
- 35 *Mennonite Reporter*, 16 November 1992, 14.
- 36 *Mennonite Reporter*, 19 March 1990, 8.
- 37 *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 September 1988, 36.
- 38 *MCC Contact*, June 1990, 8.
- 39 *Mennonite Reporter*, 20 February 1989, 3; Kathy Bergen, interview with the author, 27 September 2012.
- 40 Larry Kehler, "MCC Canada Info Study," 25 August 1992, private collection of Larry Kehler.
- 41 LaVerna Klippenstein, "Welcome back; the problem of re-entry from abroad," *Mennonite Reporter*, 5 March 1979, 6.
- 42 Larry Kehler, "MCC and the Volunteer," 25 May 1985, File 164R 1985Y, Volume 4519, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 43 The office had moved progressively from Winnipeg's downtown area to its suburbs.
- 44 J.M. Klassen, *Jacob's Journey from Zagradowka toward Zion: The autobiography of J.M. Klassen* (Winnipeg: self-published, 2001), 319.
- 45 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 276-282.
- 46 Peggy Regehr, "Reflections," 5 December 1984, File: Committee on Women's Concerns Canada, Volume 4406, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 47 Joan Barkman, interview with the author, 11 April 2011.
- 48 Peggy Regehr, "Canadian Women's Concerns," *Conrad Grebel Review* 22, no.1 (Winter 2005): 81, accessed 12 March 2012, <http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/academic/cgreview/documents/CGR-Winter-2005.pdf>
- 49 Sophie Tiessen-Eigbike, interview with the author, 13 February 2012.
- 50 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 81.
- 51 Emily Neufeld, "My name is Emily," personal collection of Irma Janzen.
- 52 Dave Hubert, interview with the author, 26 March 2012.

53 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 24 January 1992, 16-17.

54 News release, 30 September 1992, File 278R 1992Y, Volume 4000, MCCC Collection, MHC. Ed Barkman, who was director of Canadian Programs for MCC Canada, indicates there were different ways of counting the number of jobs created. Ed Barkman, interview with the author, 11 April 2012.

55 Reg Toews, "Mennonite Central Committee Canada Canadian Programs Review Report" (Unpublished paper, 1989), 21, in the possession of the author; Exhibit 15: Reg Toews, "Employment Development Review," Minutes #207, MCC Canada, Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 17-19 September 1992; Ed Barkman, e-mail to the author, 1 November 2012.

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62 Ed Pries, letter to the editor, *Mennonite Reporter*, 11 June 1990, 6.

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69 Minutes #194, MCC Canada, Annual Meeting, Clearbrook, British Columbia, 17-19 January 1991.

70 Minutes #158, MCC Canada, Annual Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 22-24 January 1987.

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73 *Mennonite Reporter*, 5 February 1990, 1.

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75 See Special Issue: "Mennonites and the Oka Crisis," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 9:2 (Spring 1991) for an extensive overview of this incident.

76 John Paul Lederach, interview with the author, 4 December 2012.

77 Ruth Teichroeb, "Military Extended Conflict," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 September 1990, 4.

78 Ruth Teichroeb, "Crisis mediator breaks silence," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 September 1990, 3-4; Jean Paul Lederach, "Facing the Oka Crisis: A Conflict Resolution Perspective," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 9:2 (Spring 1991): 125-127.

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- 81 *Canadian Mennonite*, 29 March 1999, 11.
- 82 Ray Brubacher, interview with the author, 7 September 2011.
- 83 Art DeFehr, letter to Ray Brubacher, 15 January 1992, File 922R 1993Y, Volume 5039, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 84 Mary Raber, "History of MCC Programs in the Former Soviet Union" (unpublished paper, 2008), III-2.
- 85 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 23 February 1990, 18-19.
- 86 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 8 December 1995, 16-18.
- 87 Reg Toews, "Canadian Programs Review Report," 10.
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- 91 Arthur Driedger, interview with the author, 28 January 2011.
- 92 Vera Isaak, interview with the author, 5 March 2012; Pauline Steinmann, interview with the author, 12 November 2012.
- 93 Vera Isaak et al, letter to Dave Cressman, 25 May 1993, File 152R 1993Y, Volume 5043, MCCC Collection, MHC; *Mennonite Reporter*, 29 June 1992, 3; *Mennonite Reporter*, 13 July 1992, 8.
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- 98 Stu Clark, interview with the author, 8 March 2012; Marilyn Funk, interview with the author, 21 March 2012.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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- 8 Minutes #230, MCC Canada, Annual Meeting, Kitchener, Ontario, 17-18 November 1994.
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13 Wendy Kroeker, interview with the author, 26 September 2011.

14 Ray Brubacher, interview with the author, 8 September 2011.

15 Marv Frey, Response to Heisey and Toews' papers at 75th anniversary celebration, Fresno, March 1995, File 3237R 1995Y, Volume 5060, MCCC Collection, MHC.

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26 Dave Klassen, interview with the author, 6 June 2012; *Mennonite Reporter*, 4 March 1996, 7.

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- 36 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 19.
- 37 Hamilton International Services, "Institutional Evaluation, MCC Canada, for the Non-Government Organizations Division, Partnership Branch, Canadian International Development Agency," August 1993, Volume 5039, MCCC Collection, MHC.
- 38 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 422.
- 39 Bill Janzen, "Three Stories About Palestine/Israel," personal collection of Bill Janzen.
- 40 Ray Brubacher, memo to MCC Executive Council, 8 February 1995, File 923R 1995Y, Volume 5059, MCCC Collection, MHC.
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- 42 Mary Friesen, interview with the author, 19 March 2012.
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- 45 *MCC Contact*, May 1994 (Vol 17:2), 3.
- 46 Larry Minear, "New Opportunities and Dilemmas for Independent Agencies, Conrad Grebel Review 13, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 346.
- 47 Interview with John Longhurst, 27 April 2011.
- 48 *Mennonite Reporter*, 10 July 1995, 6; *Mennonite Reporter*, 11 December 1995, 16; Interview with John Longhurst, 27 April 2011.
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- 53 Quoted in Dean E. Peachey, "Doing the Work, Telling the Story: An Examination of MCC Canada's Ministry in Restorative Justice" (unpublished paper, 1999), 14.
- 54 *Mennonite Reporter*, 29 April 1991, 1.
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- 56 Tracy J. Trothen, *Shattering the Illusion: Child Sexual Abuse and Canadian Religious Institutions* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 101.
- 57 See, for example, Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence—the Unmentionable Sin* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1983) and Carolyn Holderread Heggen, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* (Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993).
- 58 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 21 January 1994, 22; *Mennonite Reporter*, 27 December 1993, 4. The news reports named Dan Zehr as the former leader.
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- 65 Hubert, "Less-than-central Irritant," 10.
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70 Jon Nofziger, interview with the author, 29 April 2011.

71 Wayne Northey, letter to to MCCC senior staff and board executive, 8 June 1985, File 923R 1995Y, Volume 5059, MCCC Collection, MHC.

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79 Ron Flaming, e-mail to the author, 20 November 2012.

80 Minutes #289, MCC Canada, Annual General Meeting, Winnipeg, MB, 25-26 November 2005; Tony Enns, "Report on China Poverty Alleviation Project," personal collection of Tony Enns.

81 Ron Flaming, e-mail to the author, 20 November 2012. Enns was technically under the International Program Department of MCC, but he worked out of the MCC Canada office, which actually felt greater ownership of the project. Enns never really found his place within the International Program Department.

82 Minutes #289, MCC Canada, Annual General Meeting, Winnipeg, MB, 25-26 November 2005, Tony Enns, "Report on China Poverty Alleviation Project," Tony Enns personal collection.

83 Bert Lobe, interview with the author, 10 September 2011; Ron Flaming, e-mail to the author, 20 November 2012.

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85 Marv Frey, memo to John Lapp, 21 January 1991, File 922R 1993Y, Volume 5039, MCCC Collection, MHC.

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91 Mennonite Central Committee Canada Eastern Canada 2005 Annual General Report; *Canadian Mennonite*, 24 February 2003, 29.

92 *Mennonite Reporter*, 9 June 1997, 1-2.

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- 97 Peter Dalglish, "Ten places to put your money," *The Globe and Mail*, 29 December 2000, A17.
- 98 Bronwin Drainie, "Compassion is not enough," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 December 2001, A15.
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CHAPTER EIGHT

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- 2 Bruce Wiebe, North Leamington United Mennonite Church, telephone conversation with the author, 21 August 2012.
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- 4 James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada, 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 250. See also John J. Friesen, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007), 167.
- 5 Wayne Bremner, "Three Challenges Facing Mennonite Central Committee," 16 April 2008.
- 6 Ted Regehr, e-mail to the author, 13 September 2012.
- 7 Roy Hange, "A Dialogue of Civilizations: The Encounter of Iranian Shi'ites and North American Mennonites," in *Border & Bridges: Mennonite Witness in a Religiously Diverse World*, ed. Peter Dula and Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Press, 2007), 105.
- 8 *MCC Contact*, August 1993, 9.
- 9 The educational exchange was the brain child of MCC Area Director Ed Martin. Because of the poor relations between the US and Iran, it was necessary to locate the Iranian scholars at a university in Canada. This meant that MCC Ontario, and to a lesser extent MCC Canada, were involved with the exchange.
- 10 Quoted in Minutes #588, MCC (binational) Board, Waterloo, Ontario, 13-14 June 2008.
- 11 Roy Hange, "A Dialogue of Civilizations," 105-116.
- 12 Lydia Harder, interview with the author, January 2012.
- 13 *Canadian Mennonite*, 25 June 2007, 32-34.
- 14 Kim Thiessen, telephone conversation with the author, 29 November 2011.
- 15 MCC, "Walking in Faith among New York's Skyscrapers," 29 November 2011, accessed 29 November 2012, <http://www.mcc.org/stories/news/walking-faith-among-new-york-s-sky-scrapers>.
- 16 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "About us," accessed 24 December 2012, <http://www.trc.ca>.
- 17 *Canadian Mennonite*, 23 August 2010, 10. See also, Peter Campbell, "An Oji-Cree Student in Two Worlds in Northwest Ontario," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 19 (2001), 168-70. Some Mennonites from southern Ontario helped out at these schools from time to time.

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20 Carmen Good, MCC Report, 24 August 1987 to 23 August 1988, File 737R 1988Y, Volume 1436, MCCC Collection, MHC.

21 Joan Barkman to Rick Janzen, 7 April 1987, File: Timber Bay Children's Home 1985-87, MCC Canada Files.

22 Gladys Terichow, "MCC seeks dialogue with former residents of children's home in northern Saskatchewan," 25 February 2010, MCC Canada Electronic Files.

23 *Canadian Mennonite*, 2 December 2002, 17.

24 Information provided by Kiersten Hoffman, MCC US Human Resources.

25 Wade Snowdon, SALT coordinator, MCC Canada, e-mail to the author, 4 July 2012.

26 2006-2007 Yearbook—IVEP, YAMEN, SALT.

27 2006-2007 Yearbook—IVEP, YAMEN, SALT.

28 MCC Workbook 1987 and 2011. In some ways the figures are distorted, because in 2011 MCC included all IVEPers as service workers, whereas they were not included in the 1987 totals.

29 Kiersten Hoffman, Human Resources MCC US, e-mail to the author, 1 October 2012.

30 Eileen Klassen Hamm, interview with the author, 16 January 2012; Dorothy Bartel, interview with the author, 22 July 2011; Tom and Judith Snowdon, interview with the author, 20 November 2012.

31 *Canadian Mennonite*, 2 February 2009, 4-7.

32 *Canadian Mennonite*, 2 February 2009, 4-7; Bert Lobe, interview with the author, 10 September 2011.

33 Melaney Reimer, interview with the author, 4 July 2012.

34 Deborah Martin-Koop, e-mail message to the author, 20 August 2012.

35 MCC Canada Human Resources staff, interview with the author, 8 June 2011; Deborah Martin-Koop, e-mail message to the author, 20 August 2012.

36 Sophie Tiessen-Eigbeke, interview with the author, 13 March 2012; Deborah Martin-Koop, e-mail message to the author, 20 August 2012.

37 Dan Leonard, interview with the author, 11 September 2012.

38 Dan Leonard, e-mail message to Don Peters, 1 March 2012, Executive Office, MCC Canada Electronic Files.

39 Quoted in Berry Friesen, memo to Ron Mathies, 20 September 1996, File 923R 1996Y Volume 5085, MCCC Collection, MHC.

40 Exhibit 22: Nelson Scheifele, "A National Consciousness for MCCC," Minutes #250, MCC Canada, Board of Directors, Winnipeg, MB, 5-6 June 1998.

41 Abe Janzen and Kim Thiessen, interview with the author, 26 June 2012.

42 According to Kiersten Hoffman, e-mail message to the author, 26 November 2012, as of that date MCC's alumni totaled 18,031 individuals (quite a few had served more than one term). Of this total, 4,343 identified Canada as their primary citizenship. Another 6,345 identified as US primary citizens. For an additional 6,587 (mostly from the early years), citizenship was not recorded prior to 1963; a good number of these were likely Canadians. According to Paul Classen, "Statistics on Mennonite Central Committee Personnel," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 326, approximately 945 Canadians served more than a year with

MCC between 1940 and 1970. One can conclude that the total number of Canadians to serve with MCC for more than a year would have been more than 5,000, and could have been significantly higher.

43 Bruno Baerg, e-mail to the author, 6 December 2012.

44 *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 January 2012, accessed 18 November 2012, <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/serving-with-mcc-changed-his-life-137551448.html>

45 Abe Janzen and Kim Thiessen, interview with the author, 26 June 2012.

46 *Canadian Mennonite*, 5 October 2009, 32.

47 Gladys Terichow, "'Mustard seed' grows into thrift shop network that has generated \$167 M for MCC," accessed 11 September 2012, <http://mcccanada.ca/stories/news/%E2%80%9Cmustard-seed%E2%80%9D-grows-thrift-shop-network-has-generated-167-m-mcc>.

48 Mennonite Central Committee Canada 2005 Annual General Report.

49 Information provided by MCC Canada.

50 Willie Reimer, interview with the author, 4 July 2012.

51 Shirley B. Yoder et al, "Material Resources Program Review: An Integrated Report of Findings and Recommendations," 2007, MCC Electronic Files.

52 Don Peters, interview with the author, 4 July 2012.

53 Rosalind Eyben, quoted in William Reimer and Bruce Guenther, "Relationships, Rights, and 'Relief': Ninety Years of MCC's Integrated Response to Humanitarian Crises," in Alain Epp Weaver, ed. *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Press, 2011), 363.

54 The results of the survey, conducted by Barefoot Creative, were summarized in "Mennonite Central Committee: Communications Survey Report," 2008, supplied by MCC Canada.

55 Arli Klassen, interview with the author, 5 October 2011.

56 Bruno Baerg, interview with the author, 10 December 2012.

57 Vidya Narimalla, interview with the author, 4 December 2012.

58 Exhibit #7: 2003 Annual General Meeting Evaluations—Delegate Body Summary, Minutes #280, MCC Canada, Board of Directors (Joint with MCCO Board), Kitchener, ON, 6-7 February 2004.

59 Abe Janzen, e-mail to the author, 29 June 2012; Peter Rempel, interview with the author, 12 December 2012.

60 *Trek* was a series of books that MCC produced in the 1990s and early 2000s which encouraged more sustainable and joyful living.

61 *Canadian Mennonite*, 22 January 2007, 17.

62 An article in *Canadian Mennonite*, 17 May 2010, 4-8, called "How green in my MCC?" reported a recent sustainability study of MCC identified nearly 50 percent of carbon emissions resulted from air travel. A 2011 version of the sustainability study, obtained from MCC Canada, noted that only 25 percent of emissions resulted from air travel. In a telephone conversation on 3 December 2012, Dan Wiens, former co-chair of MCC's Environmental Task Force, indicated that the earlier percentage of 50 percent was later deemed inaccurate. Mennonite Central Committee 2011 Sustainability Report.

63 *Canadian Mennonite*, 17 May 2010, 2.

64 *Canadian Mennonite*, 17 May 2010, 4-8.

65 *Mennonite Reporter*, 29 September 1986, 1.

66 Will Braun called the foyer "shlitzky" in *Canadian Mennonite*, 14 June 2010, 13.

67 James Loewen, interview with the author, 10 October 2012.

68 Reimer and Guenther, "Relationships, Rights, and 'Relief,'" 363.

69 *Intercom*, March 1992, 7; *Intercom*, February 1994, 7.

70 Minutes #224, MCC Canada, Executive Committee Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 4-5

February 1994.

71 Mennonite Central Committee Canada, "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed 7 December 2012, <http://mcccanada.ca/about/faq>.

72 Don Peters, e-mail message to the author, 22 November 2012; Rick Fast, e-mail message to the author, 22 November 2012.

73 Bruce Guenther, telephone conversation with the author, 12 July 2012.

74 Bert Lobe, interview with the author, 10 September 2011.

75 Quoted in Alain Epp Weaver, "A Missiological Shift? Reflections on the Introduction of Results-Based Management within Mennonite Central Committee," *Mission Focus* 14 (2006): 39.

76 Robb Davis, "MCC's Development Paradigm(s)" in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Press, 2011), 351.

77 Quoted in *Canadian Mennonite*, 29 November 2010, 4-9.

78 Reimer and Guenther, "Relationships, Rights, and 'Relief,'" 364; Neil Janzen, interview with the author, 26 June 2012; Epp Weaver, *A Table of Sharing*, 42.

79 The Mennonite Conference of Ontario (later, the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Québec) had merged with the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference to form the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada or MCEC in 1988. In 2001 MCEC merged with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in the making of Mennonite Church Canada.

80 For many years, Jacob M. Froese had represented the Old Colony Church on MCC Canada. When he died in 2003, he was not replaced. Several years later, the Old Colony withdrew its membership from MCC Manitoba. It seems that a withdrawal from MCC Manitoba also meant a withdrawal from MCC Canada, though this was never formalized. Don Peters, e-mail to the author, 18 December 2012.

81 Royden Loewen, interview with the author, 21 September 2011.

82 See, for example, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 13 October 2006, 4; *Canadian Mennonite*, 5 October 2009, 9 and 30 November 2009, 8-9.

83 Vidya Narimalla, interview with the author, 4 December 2012.

84 Vidya Narimalla, interview with the author, 4 December 2012.

85 David Van Biema, "Religion: Keeping the Faith Without Preaching It," 30 June 2003, *Time*, accessed 19 December 2012, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1005108,00.html>; Minutes #279, MCC Canada, Annual Meeting, Winnipeg, MB, 21-22 November 2003.

86 Bishop Dave Wiebe et al, letter to Arli Klassen et al, 9 December 2010, Executive Office, MCC Canada Electronic files.

87 Abe Wiebe, interview with the author, 13 September 2012.

88 See J. Alicia Dueck, *Negotiating Sexual Identities: Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Perspectives on Being Mennonite* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2012), 117.

89 Exhibit 5: Vern Ratzlaff, "Around God's Table," Minutes #279, MCC Canada, Annual General Meeting, Winnipeg, MB, 21-22 November 2003.

90 Arli Klassen, e-mail to Peter Rempel et al, 14 September 2006, Executive Office, MCC Canada Electronic Files.

91 Peter Rempel, interview with the author, 12 December 2012.

92 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 28 February 2003, 8-9.

93 *Canadian Mennonite*, 7 July 2008, 17; interview with Ron Flaming, 22 August 2012.

94 Gladys Terichow, "MCC explores new options to fill \$2.9 M funding gap," MCC Canada news release, 1 February 2012.

95 Don Peters, interview with the author, 4 July 2012.

96 This is the assessment which Nikolas Barry-Shaw, co-author with Dru Oja Jay of *Paved*

with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2012), made on CBC Radio, on 23 April 2012. Don Peters, e-mail to MCC Canada board and others, 26 April 2012, Executive Office, MCC Canada Electronic Files.

97 Barry-Shaw and Oja Jay, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 60.

98 Don Peters, interview with the author, 4 July 2012.

CONCLUSION

1 Eileen Klassen Hamm, interview with the author, 16 January 2012.

2 *Canadian Mennonite*, 9 June 2008, 18; Eileen Klassen Hamm, interview with the author, 16 January 2012.

3 Will Braun, *Canadian Mennonite*, 29 November 2010, 4-9.

4 Donald B. Kraybill, "From Enclave to Engagement: MCC and the Transformation of Mennonite Identity" in *Unity Amidst Diversity, Mennonite Central Committee at 75: MCC and the 20th Century North American Experience*, Robert S. Kreider and Ronald J.R. Mathies, eds. (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1996), 38.

5 "MCC Canada 2011", accessed 23 August 2012, https://help.mcc.org/system/files/Resources/maps/Canada%20map%20poster%2011_print.pdf.

6 Orie O. Miller, "The Mennonite Central Committee. God's Miracle Among Us: The Meaning of the Past Fifty Years," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 316-17.

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PERIODICALS SEARCHED

Canadian Mennonite

Gospel Herald

Mennonite Brethren Herald

Mennonite Reporter

The Canadian Mennonite

The Chronicle

The Globe and Mail

The Messenger

Winnipeg Free Press

Canadian Mennonite began in 1997 as a bi-weekly publication of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

Gospel Herald was published from 1902 until 1998 as the official organ of the Mennonite Church. The weekly periodical was published in Elkhart, Indiana and was read widely by Canadians who were members of Mennonite Church congregations.

Mennonite Reporter was published bi-weekly by Mennonite Publishing Service, of Waterloo, Ontario between 1971 and 1997. Its primary readership was the Conference of Mennonites in Canada constituency, though the newspaper sought to serve an inter-Mennonite audience.

Mennonite Brethren Herald is the official publication of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Begun in 1962, its format and frequency of publication have altered over the years, while sponsorship has remained unchanged.

The Canadian Mennonite was an independent weekly newspaper published from 1953 to 1971. Initially published by D.W. Friesen and Sons of Altona, Manitoba, ownership transferred to an inter-Mennonite group of shareholders called the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Association. The newspaper folded in 1971.

The Chronicle is the monthly English-language publication of the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference. It was founded in 1980.

The Messenger is the English-language periodical of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. It was founded in 1963 and continues to be published in Steinbach, Manitoba.

The Recorder is the English-language periodical of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. It was founded in 1964.

MCC MATERIALS RESEARCHED

A Common Place

Intercom

MCC Canada Annual Reports

MCC Canada Minutes

MCC Canadian Headquarters Letter

MCC Contact

MCC Workbook

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario (MAO)

Conference of Historic Peace Churches Collection

Frank H. Epp Collection

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario Oral History Project

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario Southeast Asian Refugee Oral History Project

Non-Resistant Relief Organization Collection

Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba (MHC)

Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council Collection

Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection

Mennonite Central Committee Canada Collection

Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pennsylvania (MCC)

Mennonite Central Committee Collection (This collection was at the Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana when I viewed it. It has since been moved to Mennonite Central Committee U.S. in Akron, Pennsylvania.)

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Baerg, Bruno	10 December 2012
Barkman, Ed	11 April 2012
Barkman, Joan	22 April 2011
Bartel, Bob and Dorothy	22 July 2011
Bartel, Siegfried	25 April 2012
Bontrager, Herman	2 July 2012
Braun, Will	22 May 2012
Bremner, Wayne	6 July 2012
Brubacher Good, Margaret	10 September 2011
Brubacher, Ray	8 September 2011
Bueckert, Joan Cambridge	21 December 2012

Buhler, Jake and Louise	22 July 2012
Clark, Stuart	8 March 2012
Cober Bauman, Rick	8 September 2011
Coleman Neufeld, Lois	21 June 2012
Da Silva Storie, Ilda;	
Marsha Jones, Lydia Walker	8 June 2011
Doell, Leonard	16 February 2012
Driedger, Arthur	28 January 2011
Driedger, Leo	10 January 2012
Dyck, Dave	24 March 2011
Dyck, John	5 July 2011
Eagle, Harley and Sue	2 February 2012
Elliot, Brian	1 May 2012
Enns, Frieda and Tony	14 June 2011
Epp Weaver, Alain	24 August 2012
Epp, Ed	20 April 2012
Ewert Fisher, Claire	27 June 2012
Fast, Rick	4 July 2012
Flaming, Ron	23 August 2012
Frey, Ardith	8 September 2011
Friesen, Dorothy	3 May 2012
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Funk, Marilyn	21 March 2012
Hamm, Ray	7 July 2012
Harder, Elaine	22 July 2011
Harder, Gary and Lydia	25 January 2012
Heidebrecht, Paul	16 September 2011
Hiebert, Bev	27 September 2012
Hubert, Agnes	3 November 2011
Hubert, Dave	26 March 2012; 11 April 2012
Isaak, Vera	5 March 2012
Janzen, Abe; Kim Thiessen	26 June 2012
Janzen, Bill	13 September 2011; 15 September 2012
Janzen, Ed	18 April 2012
Janzen, Irma	22 May 2012
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Janzen, Neil	26 June 2012
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Jones, Marsha	10 December 2012
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Lapp, John A.	6 February 2012
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Steinmann, Pauline	12 November 2012
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Suderman, Kathi and Rod	27 June 2012
Taylor, Dale	4 May 2012
Tiessen-Eigbike, Sophie	13 March 2012
Toews, Reg	4 May 2011

Warkentin, Abe	15 February 2012
Warren, Marg and Norm	12 December 2011
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“This history of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada comes out of a rich historical tradition, eloquently telling the fascinating and complex story of this well-loved organization. Each chapter illustrates the myriad of ways that people and programs have come

together to create a work that we know as MCC, but which is much more than an institution. MCC in Canada is a movement that has linked Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada—young and elderly, rural and urban, women and men—in a deep desire for the wellbeing of others.”

Lucille Marr, from the Preface

“Connecting people at a very human level was one of the key ways that MCC sought to foster understanding, peace, and reconciliation in a world that continued to groan with hostility, injustice, and suffering. MCC was at its best when it drew people out of their comfort zones and built relationships across the divides. It was at its best when these people-to-people encounters were mutually transformative—and where giving and receiving flowed in both directions.”

from the Conclusion



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