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October 2, 2024

Dear congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba,

We stand between two dates of significance: September 30 and October 7.

September 30, of course, was the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, also known as Orange Shirt Day. For the first time this day was recognized as a statutory holiday in Manitoba, enabling Manitobans to take time during the day to engage in learning and action related to reconciliation of settler and Indigenous peoples.

October 7 will be the anniversary of Hamas' horrific terror attack on Israel, killing over 1,100 people, injuring nearly 9,000, and kidnapping 251 to hold as hostages. Israel's disproportionate military response is even more horrific: over 41,000 Gazans killed, mostly civilians, mostly women and children, along with nearly 100,000 people injured and destruction to buildings and infrastructure that will take decades to rebuild. Oxfam reports that more women and children have been killed by the Israel Defense Forces in Gaza in the past year than in any one-year period in any conflict in recent memory.

These two dates of significance remind us that Jesus calls us to "seek first God's reign and God's justice" (Matthew 6:33). We are blessed, Jesus says—favoured by God and promised flourishing in God's reign—if we mourn with those who mourn, if we are merciful to those in need, if we act as peacemakers in the world, if we hunger and thirst for justice, if we are willing, even, to experience opposition for the sake of God's kingdom justice (Matthew 5:3-10).

We are called, then, as followers of Jesus, to pursue a just peace both here at home for Indigenous peoples and across the globe for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. We are called to pursue a just peace for all peoples we encounter who are in need, and so fulfill Jesus' command to love God by loving our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40). I encourage you to continue the work you are doing, the work of prayer and lament in solidarity with those in need, the work of advocacy and action on behalf of those in need.

As we do this important work, being salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16), I encourage you also to attend to your own hearts and minds, to maintain your own spiritual health. Centre yourselves on Jesus, bringing your burdens to him, learning from him in his gentleness and humility, and so finding rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28-30). Take time to rest in the infinite love of our eternal Creator, who loves each of us with a deeply intimate love (Matthew 6:25-34).

Walking in the way of Jesus requires this balance of spiritual nourishment and active peacemaking, both individually and collectively. May we continue to find this balance in our

*"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."
1 Corinthians 3:11*

lives and in our communities, for the sake of God's reign and the flourishing of all God's creation.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael".

Michael Pahl
Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Manitoba