

# Mennonite Church Manitoba

## Thanksgiving Report | September 2020



### Introduction

“How do you weigh the fruits of the labor of love? This past season has brought all of us into the difficult work of discerning, adapting and inventing. Our commitment to our congregations and ministries caused us to ask again and again; how do we best serve and lead in these days? As Board, staff, reference groups and Camp Leadership Team discerned the best ways forward, many steps brought challenges, yet all felt like the labor of love. Our trust in God assures us that our work will be used and honored by the Spirit and it is this truth that we celebrate. Our shared stories are a witness both to the faithfulness of God and to the commitment we have to each other. Together we hold the hope that the labor of love bears good fruit in this day and the next, to the glory of God.



### Leadership Ministries

Rick Neufeld

**Connecting...Caring...Creativity... Collaborating** are key words that come to mind as I think about the Pastors of MCM during the past few months.

Pastoral work during this pandemic time is centered in a love for God and for one another in finding new ways to continue being the church together. Connecting church members with one another through online worship and daily devotionals; caring for family members at times of death and funeral planning as well as finding ways to be present with families through crisis brought on by anxiety from economic uncertainty and social isolation; creativity is flourishing where endings become opportunities for new beginnings; collaborating together with other congregations and/or agencies in order to respond to a particular need. These expressions are nothing less than a labour of love for the church.

Connecting with the sixty (60+) Pastors with-

in MCM has been at the top of my “to do” list. Regular bi-weekly ZOOM gatherings with each of our four (4) pastoral cluster groups gives me opportunity to hear firsthand about their own personal well-being as well as congregational concerns. Listening and being attentive to what is shared is certainly a privilege, but also a way to grow our continued commitment and support for pastoral leadership within our congregations.

Although it is true that much of the regular church activities have been placed on pause, the Leadership Ministries have connected pastors with search committees in discernment process’ resulting in congregation/pastor covenants for the future. Pastoral reviews through online surveys and peer group conversations have discerned direction for a number of pastors. Credentialing for pastoral ministry has been celebrated virtually.

In the midst of changing times Pastors of MCM have been open to new opportunities where creativity has blossomed and thrived.

### Leadership Ministries

Kathy Giesbrecht

**Pastors, Platforms and Practices: being Pastors amid a Pandemic.**

Within our MCM community there is a strong Circle of youth/young adult/family pastors. We call ourselves YMF, Youth Ministers Fellowship, but over the years our ministry areas have expanded and many within the Circle carry responsibilities far beyond youth ministry.

Within the last six months we have needed each other more than ever. As soon as we entered the lockdown, the YMF was finding ways to connect. A Facebook page was created for the sharing of resources/ideas and a prayer space and connecting space were created on the Zoom platform.

***“How do we best serve and lead in these days?”***

As the host for these spaces, I began to realize how critical our connections were and how our ministries were being strengthened because we were finding our way together. We were all learning new skills, trying out new ways of pastoral care and experimenting with platforms that would help our congregations make connections.

Amid all our doing, we also knew we needed to tend to our being. Our weekly prayer space, using the spiritual practice of Examen (reflective prayer) helped us ground ourselves in the care of God and each other. Over the months, we learned to turn off our video when entering into prayer for one another. Each week I was moved by the way we were holding each other in prayer, it was a labor of love.

As pastors we were holding on to the hope that God was with us and that the Spirit would provide all we needed to be the pastors we hoped we could be in...in these days.

## Staffing Changes

June marked the completion of two long-serving staff members - Ken Warkentin (Executive Minister) and Dorothea Kampen (Frohe Botschaft Radio Ministry Coordinator). Ken has begun an assignment of congregational ministry at Jubilee Mennonite Church and Dorothea has retirement plans. We are very grateful for the contributions and service that they have given to MCM over the past decades.

Michael Pahl has been appointed to serve as the new Executive Minister beginning in January 2021. Michael's pastoral experience (Morden Mennonite) and his theological background will bring strength to the MCM's vision and mission for the future.

Rick Neufeld was appointed as Interim Executive Minister as of July 1. Rick continues in his role as Director of Leadership Ministries as well as providing leadership for the staff and representing MCM at the Nation-wide level.

Peter Rempel began an interim part-time position in administration support. His responsibilities include oversight of accounts receivable and receipting and numerous other important tasks. We welcome Peter to MCM staff family.

## Mission/ Camping Ministries

Dorothy Fontaine

Like many organizations, the impact of COVID-19 on Camps with Meaning has been significant; particularly from a financial point of view. Camp Assiniboia and Koinonia lost almost all of their spring rental groups. We anticipate heavy losses this fall and coming winter well. Despite this, our camps remain open to small groups, families and individuals who wish to rent a cabin, hold a small gathering or enjoy the outdoors. If you are looking for a place to either get away or hold a small event, please keep us in mind.

Despite the hardships that COVID has wrought there have been many stories of resilience, faith, hope and love. This was evident throughout the summer when our Leadership staff, counselors, SLT's and Teen Volunteers poured their hearts & souls into a summer program that looked nothing like any summer before - but was still fun and meaningful. It was also evident in the campers who learned to play, worship and be in community together while remaining six feet apart.

I think we'd be remiss however, if we didn't acknowledge the fruits of God's labour as well. This has been evident in the way that God has walked with our year-round

staff who hold sacred (even though they were recently laid-off) the task of tending the flame and discerning where the Spirit is leading us in this time. This kind of resilience comes from a strong sense of God's in-dwelling spirit and faithfulness.

And so we are exploring new ideas for camping ministry during COVID times: such as making our trails available at Camp Assiniboia once a week to whomever wants to come, small group retreats and

possibly making our facilities available for people in need of respite. Should you have ideas, we'd be happy to hear them. We hope to announce more on these shortly.

We are also hoping for your continued support, through prayer, donations, volunteering and use of our facilities. To this end, we're excited to announce that on October 25th at 7 pm Camps with Meaning will be hosting an online fundraiser in lieu of our Celebration banquets. The evening will be filled with great stories & music (Kim



Kayaks on the lake at Camp Assiniboia

Thiessen & Neustaedter Barg, Steve Bell, Fred Penner, and our own camp staff) so please save the date and plan to join us!

## Camping Ministries

Janet Peters

The shifting landscape of camp settled into a completely new routine with familiar elements, and it was good. Our 13-person leadership team jumped in with both feet and

planned some great one-day Pop-up camps for the month of July. These days provided the staff with an unexpected blessing - a new appreciation for and connection with our supporting church communities, families and pastors. 18 staff brought camp to 5 locations and to 78 campers.

Our 2 week-long day camps brought 81 campers to Assiniboia, where a total of 45 staff made camp happen! Bible lessons happened outdoors and included small group discussions, body prayers, humming along to camp songs, and learning all about growing in faith - from seeds to roots to trunk to branches to fruit. We added in some new activities, including science, biking, and kayaking on Assiniboia's new lake. We even managed to have fireside worship in the afternoon and had a wedding theme meal in the barn.

Staff connections were also a high priority for the summer, and we managed to do this in a number of new and familiar ways as well. We started in spring with regular zoom meetings for all staff, and then puzzled out a way to gather at camp as well. Staff training took place in the middle of summer in two groups, and our 17 SLTs were able to go on a shortened out-trip. Modifications were made and we all got a lot better at wearing masks and physical distancing, but we were together and we were at camp.

After all the wondering and planning and re-planning, it was truly good to be together and to do camp. Although it did look different, it also felt the same – the silly and the serious created good soil for the camp connections and community to flourish.

## Finances

Peter Rempel

Contributions to Mennonite Church Manitoba support our operations and our ministries of supporting congregations and pastors (\$433,648) and our camp ministry (\$125,000). Our expenses for operations and ministries are within budget but Camps with Meaning will probably need at least \$200,000 from MC Manitoba funds due to the drastic reduction in summer camp programs and rentals this year even with the regrettable staff lay-offs.



[www.campswithmeaning.org/banquet](http://www.campswithmeaning.org/banquet)

MC Manitoba is also the channel for congregations to support Mennonite Church Canada, including International Witness and Indigenous-Settler Relations (\$400,000), Canadian Mennonite University (\$87,500), the Canadian Mennonite (\$20,400), and the Inter-Mennonite University Chaplaincy (\$6,000). We are on track to meet those commitments.

To the end of September MC Manitoba has received ca. \$480,000 from its constituency. This represents ca. 44% of our income budget of \$1,091,000 instead of the 75% of the income desired at the three quarter point in the year. Fortunately MC Manitoba has also received ca. \$187,000 from the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program to offset income losses, especially at Camps With Meaning. We trust that contributions in the closing months of the year will permit us to meet all our actual and annual expenses.

## Closing

In light of the difficulties that the pandemic has had for our congregations and ministries, we are confident that the labors of love of our MCM faith community will continue to bear life-giving fruit of God's giving. Your support will grow and strengthen the ministries of spiritual leadership, camping program and the ministries of the wider church. Our labors are not in vain.

We draw on each other's strengths and gifts. We practice generosity and we share resources together for that which we cannot do alone. Together we celebrate God's faithfulness. We trust in God's way for the future.

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