

The MENNONITE CHURCH BRITISH COLUMBIA (MCBC) Story to the Nationwide Regional Churches for 2020, Submitted by Garry Janzen, Executive Minister

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Hebrews 12:2

A popular song that many of us have sung in our churches over the past number of years is, “Jesus, Be the Centre.” Over the past decade we have become familiar with the clear understanding of what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian from Palmer Becker’s writings: *Jesus is the Centre of our Faith, Community is the Centre of our Lives, and Reconciliation is the Centre of our Work*. We have come to embrace centredness as an image of our relationship to Jesus. MCBC has had a Restructuring Task Group that has been working over a period of two years to find a way to live into MCBC’s key themes. After a year of much theological discussion, the Task Group has moved to a centred model, and is suggesting Hebrews 12:2 as our MCBC theme verse, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Our ministry themes are: Cultivating Anabaptist Vision, Engaging God’s World, and Growing Community. The MCBC Leadership Board is proposing the outcomes of this restructuring process to our 2021 Annual Gathering in February for discernment and approval.

A task group was formed this year to figure out the sale of the property of the former Clearbrook Mennonite Church. The progress of this work will be presented to the 2021 MCBC Annual Gathering.

Ever since March of 2020, our congregations have been trying to figure out what they can and cannot do according to the COVID-19 government restrictions, and according to what we understand to be safe practices. The amazing piece about these restrictions is that they are like the Gospel – they ask us to stay six feet away from others and to wear masks in order to keep the other person safe. This is the Gospel in that we are being called to think of others first before thinking of ourselves.

We had the privilege of conducting our 2020 Annual Gathering in person at Cedar Valley Church in Mission on February 29th. It was one of the last things we did safely in person without masks on. We have converted our monthly pastors’ lunch gatherings into virtual gatherings on Zoom. We started weekly in the spring and have now gone to bi-weekly and monthly. Our congregations have learned so much about how to meet virtually. While most of us long for the day when we can meet in person, without masks, and give each other hugs, we have found meaningful ways to be the church in a pandemic. Even our Nationwide gatherings of the Executive Staff Group and the MC Canada Joint Council have managed as fully virtual meetings, but with a deep longing for the day when we will be in person again.

As we are now in a stage of extensive transmission of the COVID-19 virus, we will not be meeting in person until probably Easter 2021. This means that our MCBC Annual Gathering will be virtual on February 27th, 2021. We plan to keep it to three hours on Saturday morning. All the verbal presentations will be pre-recorded, and delegates will be expected to watch these ahead of time, as well as read the written reports. Our meeting will primarily be discussion in response to these reports and related decision making.

In the midst of all the pandemic restrictions, we have had an ordination, with a small group gathered in person and the rest of the participants gathered on Zoom, including family members from other parts of BC and the USA. We have also done pastoral searches, candidated and welcomed new pastors. We have not yet done an installation service, due to the latest restrictions on in person gatherings.

2020 will certainly be a year to remember – with God at work, and the church trying to figure out what engaging in God’s work looks like in the midst of a pandemic on a daily basis. Many good plans were just not able to happen. We have also learned some things that will serve us well into the future which we will keep.