North America

POST
MISSION

WHAT DO
YOU VALUE
THE SOUL OF

基督教
頌恩堂
PACIFIC GRACE
MB CHURCH

10 Mennonite Brethren Missions in North America[1]

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United States of America (*Peggy Goertzen*)

Every church, every conference, has its own beginnings, and with its beginnings, one must mention pivotal individuals and localities essential in shaping these beginnings. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) church from its beginning in 1860 in South Russia (today, the Ukraine) has had a heart and passion for bringing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to others, and for developing committed disciples to Jesus Christ. Support for missions among MBs initially was generated by several influential factors: mission literature from the Moravian Brethren, the missionary efforts of the Dutch Mennonites in Java and Indonesia, Baptist missionary zeal and activities promoted from Hamburg, Germany, and missionary conferences centered in Gnadenfeld, Russia, which included such prominent evangelists as Edward Wuest. Once settled in America, John F. Harms, first editor of the MB periodical, the *Zionsbote*, did much to create and encourage mission interest in a land where such pursuits were possible. The strongest mission thrust for MBs was admittedly focused on other continents, but significant strides were made in home missions as well, although on a more limited scale.

John F. Harms[2]

Initial Missions Outreach to Home Circle

The layers of mission ministry for MBs can be compared to the Acts 1:8 mandate. "You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the world." The inner circle of Jerusalem was the home circle. The priority for evangelism or "home missions" was the family, the unsaved children of members of the MB church. The goal was for the entire biological household to be saved.

To this end, ministers in the denomination were selected at conference sessions to serve as evangelists, reaching out to the as-yet-"unconverted" members of the family, holding two to six weeks of evangelistic revival meetings in MB congregations. Active evangelism often did not occur at home, although devout MBs read a passage from their German Bible and prayed every morning and evening as a devotional discipline. The expectation was for the evangelist to give out the claims of the gospel and offer a call to salvation in Christ. Evangelism was repeatedly affirmed as a priority at the General Conference or bi-national level. "If finances permit, two evangelists would suffice for the conference. These brethren evangelize among the churches under the direction of the churches, wherever the door is open, be it among our brethren or

in places outside of our churches…" (1889).[3] There was considerable disagreement regarding compensations for the elders and ministers who served as evangelists, and compensation for those who provided soul care for church members.[4] It seemed there was more money available to support the evangelistic effort than ministry to the needs of those who were already saved. Additional tensions surfaced with regard to the requests by churches for certain evangelists. Early-day evangelists for MBs with broad effective ministry included Peter Wedel, Heinrich Voth, Frank Wiens, H. S. Voth, C. N. Hiebert, H. D. Wiebe, and P. R. Lange. These evangelistic efforts in the home circle met with good success and led in the founding of numerous congregations across the United States.

Expanding Outreach to the Larger Germanic Circle

Expanding beyond the MB home circle was the Germanic circle, German-speaking people in nearby or distant communities, the common bond being the language of High German, not church tradition. The intention was to proclaim the gospel in regions with concentrations of German-speaking residents. Potential localities were presented to conference, and assignments made to willing MB ministers and elders. As early as the 1890s and 1900s, small mission stations were established by the work of the evangelists/ministers sent to Kirk, Colorado (1892), Pueblo, Colorado (1896); Westfield, Texas (1897). Loveland, Colorado (1906), Nolan, Michigan (1906), Hurley, Wisconsin (1908), and Henrietta, Texas (1910). Criteria were approved that if a mission station had up to 50 members, and there were brethren with teaching ability, plus willingness and financial means to support an elder, that station could or should be organized as a church.

Outreach Extended to English-Speaking Neighbors

Crossing the linguistic boundary, efforts to proclaim the gospel extended further to non-Germans, those who did not claim German as their *Muttersprache* [mother tongue], but to English-speaking people. In reaching out to this group, often termed in the earliest church and conference records as *die Englische* or *die Amerikanischer*, efforts were extended to different people groups on United States soil. Here the line of demarcation was language.

What would have happened if these German-speaking immigrants from Ukraine and Poland initially reached out to their neighbors of different backgrounds unfamiliar to them? The Bethel MB Church (later known as Balko), the first year of their organization (1906), held Christmas services in *both* German and English. English neighbors were present and participated. What a marvelous beginning!

Unfortunately, the English service was discontinued, and although English-speaking neighbors did sporadically attend the holiday event and receive "a Christmas sack," they did not regularly attend because they could not understand a word of German! Occasionally the early MB conference evangelists at Balko attempted a revival service or two in the English language but this was not carried over into routine Sunday services. A potentially fruitful mission strategy was aborted!

Outreach Expanded to Other Ethnic Groups

The ever-widening circle of mission expanded to include the uttermost part of the world, which in reality meant people groups who spoke neither German nor English. This resulted in mission efforts to relate to and communicate with Comanche Indians at Indiahoma/Post Oak, Oklahoma, quite early. This mission work with the Comanche Indians was considered oddly enough "foreign missions" despite its location on United States soil. Mennonite missionary Henry R. Voth was invited to consult with the MBs at their annual conference in Lehigh, Kansas, and recommended a mission field among the Comanches. N. N. and Susie Hiebert, who had been serving in India from 1899 to 1901, also supported this work. Heinrich and Elizabeth Kohfeld began this work in 1894, followed by Abraham J. and Magdalena Becker in 1901.[5] Hiebert, whose health prevented him from strenuous overseas missionary activity, became a great motivator for missions both at home and overseas. Mission strategies employed at Post Oak included visitation, engaging in life activities, evangelistic "camp meetings," and the government field matron work of A. J. Becker's wife, Magdalena, which proved critical to the success of the Comanche mission work. Many of the first converts were women, with whom Magdalena Becker had interaction in teaching health practices, sewing, cooking, childcare, and other life skills. The first Native American to be baptized was Sam Mo-Wat (No Hand) whose baptism occurred July 21, 1907. The Post Oak MB Church was officially organized later in 1907, as a congregation of one man and six women. In gratitude to God, the Beckers named their new daughter born later in the year, Herwanna, (The Day has Dawned). The light of the gospel had indeed come to the Comanches. In time, a Bible school and a parochial school were established in the late 1940s.

In 1930 A. J. Becker extended his ministry efforts to the Mexican families living at Lawton and Richards Spur, Oklahoma, and largely through the work of Joe and Anna (Hiebert) Gomez, the first MB mission work among Mexicans was established at Lawton.[6] In June of 1937 C. N. Hiebert and H. W. Lohrenz participated at the dedication of this Lawton church, described as "the first Mexican Church of the Mennonite Brethren conference."

In 1937 Harry and Sarah Neufeld came to the Rio Grande Valley in search of a suitable place to begin “a Gospel work” in South Texas. P.E. Penner had held evangelistic meetings in this region prior to this time. With the assistance of the Spanish-speaking brethren, Ricardo Pena and Ricardo Zapate, they made house visitations, and held Sunday schools and Bible schools for children. This work was taken on by the Southern District MB Conference. Young men who felt called to missions among the Spanish-speaking, such as Albert Epp, trained at Tabor College, and served as leaders in this work. In time the El Faro School was built, 1946-1948. In 1960, with the expansion of the mission churches, the financial burden of the El Faro School, and inflation, the Southern District MB Conference could not continue support, and the mission churches were transferred to the MB Board of Foreign Missions, which began to form a Latin conference along the Rio Grande River; missionaries lost their support, and native pastors were left to carry on the gospel work. Three former missionary couples, Alvin and Ruth Neufeld, Henry T. and Anna Esau, and Ruben and Eva Wedel, remained on their own financial support, and were useful in building the churches into the Latin American MB Conference (LAMB). Longtime LAMB conference leader, Rolando Mireles, has been a passionate voice for church planting and cross-cultural work, and describes himself as a third generation MB, as his grandfather was the first convert as a result of MB outreach in South Texas.[7]

Mission work with the Sioux Indians on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (South Dakota) began in 1948 with Art and Isabelle Unrau, under the sponsorship of the Central District MB Conference. Unrau started the Gospel Mission, and led regularly scheduled services in homes in outlying communities, Slim Buttes, Wounded Knee and Porcupine. The strategies of ministry to the Sioux included Vacation Bible Schools, visitation, regular church services, with the singing of hymns, and being involved in the Indians’ lives, sharing meals, and other traditional celebrations. Despite a meager income and considerable traveling, Unrau and his wife wholeheartedly worked to give the good news of the gospel to the Sioux. Unrau’s response was, “What else could I do but do it?” Unrau’s primary opposition came from the Latter Day Saints Church (Mormon) and the (Roman) Catholic Church. The Gospel Mission, a.k.a. the Gospel Hall Chapel, is still functioning today.

As early as 1920 members of the Reedley MB Church (California) organized a Sunday School for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese who had come to live in the Reedley area. Initially four children were taught by Susie Richert. By 1925, the group had increased to sixty people. When the group numbered eighty, the Japanese converts

requested evening services. A desire to fellowship with other Japanese Christians prompted many of them to join the Japanese Methodist Church of Fresno. With the 1941 Japanese evacuation, Japanese people from the West Coast were brought to Reedley and attendance at the Sunday evening services at the Reedley church increased to 150. This service ceased when the Japanese were ordered to move to Poston, Arizona in August, 1942. As only a few of the original group returned after the war in 1945, the ministry among the Japanese was discontinued.[8]

Home mission efforts to reach Russian-speaking people in the US led to the establishment of the MB mission at Kief/Balfour in McHenry County, North Dakota in 1906. For some this group was simply called "The Russian MB Church." A second Russian MB group was established at Dogden, in McLean County, North Dakota, in 1911. This latter group sent delegates to the MB Conference until 1930, while Kief continued until 1965. A periodical for the Russian MBs was published in the Russian language at Hillsboro, Kansas, titled *Logos,* but no copies are extant.

Through the passion, perseverance, and encouragement of Dr. Arnold W. and Ann Schlichting to reach migrant Hispanics with the gospel, and the financial generosity of the Reedley MB Church, five Hispanic congregations were established in the Reedley area of California. Schlichting, Willie Thiessen, Jacob Eitzen, and other members of the Extension Committee of the Reedley MB Church in the early 1950s gathered funds and promoted vision, but no workers could be found. Despite the lack of knowledge of the Spanish language, the ministry began. A building—a dance hall—was rented in the "La Colonia" area west of Parlier in January, 1956 and services were held.[9] With the assistance of returned Spanish-speaking missionaries and a young teenage convert, Frank Rodriguez, who acted as translator, adult attendance increased. A church building for Parlier MB, funded by Reedley MB, was dedicated December, 1957. The Reedley MB Church sponsored similar beginnings nearby in El Faro, Orosi, Orange Cove, and Traver in the 1960s.

City Missions Outreach

City missions for MBs began in 1905 with Bernhard F. and Margaret Wiens from Henderson, Nebraska engaging in intensive evangelistic campaigns among workers in lumber camps, sawmills, and railroad camps in Superior and Hurley, Wisconsin. Strategies included street meetings and Sunday Schools in fair weather months. In the summer of 1909 A. A. and Susie Smith joined the Wienses in Hurley. In February of 1910 the MB General Conference approved relocation of the mission to Minneapolis, Minnesota which resulted in the establishing of the Southside Mission, generally recognized as the first official city mission for MBs. This church plant consisted of regular church meetings and Bible studies, and proved very fruitful especially with children. The Smiths served here for 34 years. The Minneapolis MB

Church (later known as the MB Church of New Hope) was organized in 1955. After several relocations, this church closed in 2007.

The concern for city missions in California is evident in the minutes of the Pacific District MB Conference. As early as 1913, B. J. Friesen presented the need for a city mission in Bakersfield. Two years later, in 1915, the Potomac Mission was formally organized, separate from the "mother" church of Bakersfield MB (now Heritage Bible) but supplied with workers from the mother church.[10] The first Hispanic MB congregation in the Pacific District of the US was actually a city mission— the City Terrace Mission in East Los Angeles, California, founded in 1926 in a dominant Jewish community with a growing Hispanic population. English-speaking children attended and through them, parents accepted the Lord. The congregation was "a combination of Hispanics, Anglos, and international students"[11] under the initial leadership of two brothers, Aaron and John Friesen.[12]

Related to city mission outreach was the participation and support of many MBs for Union Rescue Missions in urban areas across the US where MBs were situated. Beginning in the 1950s, MBs cooked monthly meals, prepared worship services with preaching and testimonies, volunteered at thrift shops, donated clothing, Bibles, and funds, all with the intent of sharing the gospel with the homeless, the poor, the lonely, and the "marginalized" of society, and leading them to faith in Christ.

Another home missions strategy consisted of radio broadcasts, airing sacred music through men's choruses, quartets, and choirs, combined with Gospel preaching and devotionals. The Carson MB Church, Delft, Minnesota, maintained a radio broadcast on KWOA, from 1947 to 1963, out of Worthington, Minnesota, which proved very effective.[13] After the discontinuance of the Carson Male Chorus broadcast, a new radio broadcast, Words of the Gospel, was produced in Fresno, California at the US conference level, from 1963 to 1984, under the leadership of Al Kroeker. This program, consisting of a choir and quartets of MB singers and MB speakers from the surrounding San Joaquin Valley, was also viewed as a home missions or evangelistic effort, and was well received, bringing Christian music, along with the Christian message, into listener's homes.

Initial Perception of Home Missions

The adherence to the scriptural pattern of mission activity, according to Acts 1:8, for MBs was not chronological or time-linear. MB mission activity, foreign and home, has been described as "unorganized" and lacking structure, yet in fact MB home missions evidenced a strong commitment "to go where the Spirit leads," relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance and the willingness of individuals to act on the Spirit's call to evangelize and serve.

In the early years of the United States conference, there was a clear perception that the most "honorable" mission work was overseas, demanding sacrifice, separation from home and family, and physical hardship, as obedient servants of Jesus Christ. The early financial accounts printed in the MB periodical, *Zionsbote,* testify to the fact that foreign missions was where the money was sent. The "home mission" field was largely neglected and ignored in print. It was considered easier and more legitimate to go the distance overseas, both physically and financially, than to share the Gospel with a non-Christian neighbor on local soil. Churches were admired publically for their foreign missions giving. The Mountain Lake MB church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, raised money and purchased a Model T Ford for the J. N.C. Hiebert family, missionaries to India, for use on the foreign mission field in 1938-1939, and had the car shipped overseas.[14] The Balko MB Church, a small congregation in the Oklahoma Panhandle, was also known for sacrificial giving to foreign missions, to the extent that modern restroom facilities were deemed unnecessary and frivolous in view of the compelling needs of the peoples overseas without the knowledge of Christ.

Merger of MB and KMB Home Missions

The history of MB missions in the United States must by necessity include the mission vision and activity of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB), which denomination officially merged with MBs in 1960. Cornelius F. Plett, KMB Conference chairman, described the merger as "a step of historical and vital significance,"[15] a step which should be well-pleasing to God because it was a step of unity and oneness motivated by the missionary mandate to bring others to salvation in Christ. "Together our Christian witness will be stronger than separately."[16] With the merger, the mission history and work of KMB was absorbed into the mission history and work of MB, adding new vitality and dynamic along with new mission fields.

The earliest home mission work of KMBs was begun by Henry and Lizzie Wiebe from the Springfield KMB Church, rural Lehigh, Kansas, who felt a missionary call, and originally intended to serve overseas in India, working with children. Delays in decision-making led the KMB Conference to send the Wiebes provisionally to the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee to work with African-American children, answering a call for missionary teachers from a Presbyterian missionary, Emily Prudden.[17] This was an English-speaking work crossing racial lines, using education as the entry point for ministry. Jacob M. and Katharine Tschetter from the Salem KMB Church, South Dakota, joined the Wiebes in 1903 and added

evangelical mission to the education strategy.[18] This small beginning led eventually to the establishing of the North Carolina MB Conference, consisting at one time of thirteen small congregation in its earliest years.

The KMB Church conference met annually and its Home Mission Board supervised its home mission activities, preaching the Gospel, gathering believers, and building churches. The Home Mission Board suggested pastors and church leaders for each congregation, and the conference approved the suggestions. KMBs moved away from the German language in their annual conference yearbooks a bit sooner than MBs, in order to include the English-speaking black people in North Carolina.

Missions Training and Christian Education

Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren early recognized the need for higher education for their young people with the underlying motivation of providing properly-educated workers for the church. Concerted efforts were made to start several high schools, Bible schools, and academies but without long-term success. After an interim period of using the German Department of McPherson College, McPherson, Kansas (1896-1908), Tabor College in Hillsboro, KS was established in September 1908 with thirty-nine students and three full-time faculty to provide Christian higher education for their young men and women. Tabor College became the hope for the MB denomination to provide trained leadership for the ministry, the mission field, the Sunday School, the Bible school, as well as a biblical basis for life and perspective for its constituency.[19] Many MB conference leaders, ministers, missionaries, teachers, church workers, and church planters received their formal education at Tabor College. With the founding of Pacific Bible Institute, Fresno, CA (now Fresno Pacific University) in 1944, and in 1955 the MB Biblical Seminary (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary), more opportunities for leadership training became available.

Additional Perceptions of Home Missions

Criticism of early home mission efforts, both MB and KMB, centered on the strategy of reaching out to children first, not adults. It was felt by some constituents that a viable congregation could not be built on children, but rather adults with a heart and will to continue as disciples of Jesus Christ and the financial means to support such a ministry. Working with children has been at the forefront since the early years in the US and has led to a deep commitment to building Sunday Schools, Bible clubs, and Awana programs. Yet work with children is time-consuming and

labor-intensive, and often slow in showing fruit. A "Double in a Decade" program to revitalize Sunday School was initiated by MBs in 1963, through the leadership of Elmo Warkentin, in coordination with the National Sunday School Association, in an attempt to reach more families.[20]

In spite of these difficulties, "success stories" inspire continued work with children. Luella Pankratz, Zelma Lohrenz, and others set up Child Evangelism classes in Wichita, Kansas in the early 1940s under the Home Mission Board of the Southern District. Children accepted the Lord, which led to the conversion of the adults in their families, out of which over time grew a large urban congregation—First MB Church, Wichita, Kansas. This church now holds three services and has a membership of 892 with an average Sunday morning attendance of 950 to 975.

USA Conference Evangelist Position Created

Efforts to legitimatize and promote MB home missions efforts led to the establishing of a permanent position of the US Conference evangelist. Evangelism at home was deemed so crucial, that conference funds were allocated to support this position. Waldo Wiebe, known for his frequent probing ("how is it with your soul?"), served as the first full-time conference evangelist (1957-1963) for the US MBs, followed by David Wiens (1963-1966). From 1966 to 1971, there was no conference evangelist. Henry J. Schmidt was appointed US Conference evangelist in 1971, and was available to congregations for evangelistic and renewal meetings and Bible conferences, moving on in 1978 to involvement in world missions through the MB Biblical Seminary. A forceful and passionate speaker, and conference visionary, Schmidt dramatically shaped the MB denomination through "his energy and commitment to biblical preaching, evangelism, and practical theological training."[21] He pushed for unity around a strong mission mandate, and became the spokesperson for a church planting and evangelism thrust in 1983, affirming the "mother-daughter" church planting strategy of the US regional districts, and the urban "metro-ethnic strategy" of the US conference.

District ministers for the three larger regional conferences in the US (Pacific, Central and Southern) also carried the weight of responsibility to build and support the vision of home missions or church planting in their respective districts. In November of 1986, the five-member District Minister Management Board drafted a job description for the position of District Minister for the Southern District which specified an individual with "a vision for the Southern District, serving as pastor to the pastors, giving leadership to church planting, recognizing and assisting in the struggles of church planting pastors, as well as the struggles of pastors in small struggling congregations."

Development of Mission USA and Related Ministries

A lack of direction and coordination in evangelism resourcing and church planting in all conference levels led to a refocusing and restructuring at the US Conference level. With the Great Commission as *the priority* for MBs in the US, goals were adopted to pursue the training of church planters, the establishing of urban congregations, the development of cross-cultural communication skills, and the motivating of established churches towards evangelism. The sponsoring agencies in this thrust—termed Mission USA—were the US Board of Evangelism and Christian Service, chaired by Henry Schmidt, and district home mission boards. Optimism was high as it was reported that "the open doors for ministry in evangelism, church planting, and Christian service are unprecedented." Ambitious vision statements were implemented: annual growth goals of 3.3 percent, five new churches, 50 percent non-Anglo, 900 new members, and 2 percent of membership becoming pastors/missionaries/church workers during the nineties.

In 1991, a ministry was initiated among the Slavic immigrants in metropolitan Seattle, Washington, through the leadership of Gordon and Esther Balisky, with three separate congregations, each numbering over 300 people, asking to affiliate with MBs, coming under the MB "umbrella" as it were, adopting our 1902 MB Confession of Faith. In 1994, the MB work among the Slavic peoples was described as "a modern-day miracle" by evangelism director Loyal Funk. "For many decades, our own conference, born in the Ukraine, has prayed for the people behind the 'Iron Curtain.' God has answered our and their prayers. The walls came down and the very people we prayed for have come in large numbers to America."[22]

In 1994, cross-cultural ministries which emerged as newly-planted or adopted congregations under the Mission USA initiative, were reported in five people groups on US soil: East Indian (Santa Clara, CA; Queens, NY); Hispanic (Hillsboro, KS; Portland, OR; Omaha, NE; Laredo, TX); Japanese (Fresno and San Diego, CA); Chinese (Upland, CA); and Slavic (Seattle and Vancouver, WA; Portland, OR; Milwaukee, WI; Salem, OR; Sacramento and Fresno, CA; Parma, OH; Tulsa, OK).[23] The work of Loyal Funk from the Pacific District, who began as Director of Evangelism in 1988, was critical in this effort, serving as church planter catalyst, fundraiser, networker, and encourager.

In 1996 Ed R. Boschman, who had served as founding pastor of the Laurel Glen MB Church in Bakersfield, California (1978-1989), and lead pastor of the Willow Park MB Church in Kelowna, British Columbia (1989-1996), became the Executive Director of Mission USA. Serving in this role for six years, Boschman, with both church planting and church renewal experience, pushed MBs to move past the status

quo: "Unless Jesus saves and transforms people's lives, we're missing the mark of being a faithful people." During his tenure Boschman became "the evangelistic conscience of the MB Conference."[24]

One notable Mission USA church plant, in partnership with Pacific District MB Conference and the Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., intentionally pursuing Boschman's goal to "mobilize everyday MB Christians to befriend and develop relationships with people who need to find peace with God, was begun in 1998 among "disenfranchised" Mormons (officially Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) in the greater Salt Lake City area of Utah. Under the leadership of Paul Robie, this ministry developed into a large thriving MB congregation, known as South Mountain Community Church, Draper, Utah. The Utah MB family grew to include a daughter church, Shadow Mountain Community Church, and two satellite campuses, Daybreak in South Jordan and The Springs in St. George. The spiritual battle is severe, however, as evidenced by the closure of one Utah MB church plant, New Hope in West Valley in 2012. The most recent MB church plant in Utah is The Greenhouse at Saratoga Springs, Utah, established in 2014.

Home mission or "church planting" strategies shifted from more traditional methods to relational evangelism. Building trust and credibility in a personal relational context, rather than presenting a "canned" summary of the gospel or a tract, became the emphasis. Inviting your non-Christian neighbor to a barbeque steak dinner rather than handing him a *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet became the ideal for evangelism for MBs within cultural lines.

Boschman was succeeded by Don Morris, who became the Executive Director of Mission USA in 2004. Morris promoted and still promotes a four-point plan: 1) church planting, 2) church renewal, 3) evangelistic vision, and 4) leadership development. Morris emphasizes that despite changes in methodologies, the focus of home missions/evangelism remains the same—that of life transformation through Jesus which includes not only salvation but discipleship as well. We now plant churches by various means, using various funding streams, and various means of isolating/choosing church plant couples. In essence, there is no one set way of planting a new MB church. And, our church planting is always in partnership with our districts. Mission USA does not plant churches on its own. The current explicit goal for Mission USA is to be involved in planting six new churches per year over a ten-year period which began January 2012, all in an effort to retain our God-given vision…to see more people come to know Jesus. Up to this point twenty-seven churches have been planted under the Mission USA initiative.

Prior to the dissolution of the binational General Conference of MB Churches, Ed Boschman, Executive Director, articulated the denominational vision of spiritual

renewal and ethical faithfulness to the Great Commission in the context of change. New times demand new methods. "We have opened our doors, homes, and hearts to those near us, but we must move ahead and do things differently than in the past. We must be 'crazy for God and our neighbor in a crazy world.' We must be madly passionate and in love with God. In the midst of our crazy world characterized by information, change, corrupted normalcy, fragmentation, and relativity, we must find new and effective ways to communicate God's love to our pre-Christian neighbors. 'Have I told you lately that I love you?' This is mission."

Canada (*Bruce L. Guenther, Erika M. McAuley*)

Stamped into the DNA of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) movement is a vigorous and enthusiastic commitment to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. Both the courageous heroism of their sixteenth-century Anabaptist forbearers, along with nineteenth-century Baptist and German Pietist influences, reinforced this missional impulse as part of a spiritual renewal within the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia.[25] The renewal was part of a much larger evangelical awakening taking place in western Europe, England, and North America. The priority given to missions by the new movement was more than simply an extension of historical influences: it was, and continues to be, driven by a serious desire to shape personal and church life according to the life and words of Jesus Christ, and the example of the first-century apostolic church portrayed in the New Testament.[26] It emerged as a spontaneous and grateful response of obedience to a biblical imperative that gradually came to be expressed both through individuals and institutional structures.

The centrality of missions in the life of the MB Church has been arguably one of the most significant unifying forces within an increasingly global MB movement. In this chapter we show how it served as a catalyst for change and the development of creative outreach strategies by challenging persistent tendencies towards ethnocentrism and institutionalization; it inspired considerable sacrifice on the part of countless individuals; and it motivated collaboration with other like-minded Christians and denominations. The story, however, is not without difficulties: the sacrosanct status of the missionary mandate has meant that mission initiatives have not always been transparently assessed for fear that commitment and motivation of volunteers or donors might be diminished. Along with the considerable achievements resulting from MB missionary endeavors both in Canada and beyond, there are occasional examples of insensitivity, inflated reports of success, exploitive use of religious language ("white-unto-harvest," "fast closing door," etc.) to generate financial support, and pragmatic, impulsive decision-making practices that sometimes resulted in unnecessary conflict and wasted resources.

Only a year after their secession from the larger Mennonite Church in Russia in 1860, MB leaders launched a program of house visitation and Bible distribution in an attempt to reach their Russian neighbors. Despite legal restrictions and the threat of imprisonment or exile to Siberia, evangelists such as Johann Wieler managed to baptize a number of Russian laborers in 1862. In less than a decade, the MBs organized an independent Russian Baptist congregation. Church members routinely participated in mission prayer circles, and contributed financially to local evangelistic initiatives and foreign mission societies. After years of directing missionary candidates to Baptist missionary societies, in 1889 the Russian MB Church sent its first missionary couple to India.

The central concern for mission remained intact among those MB individuals who left southern Russia during the 1870s to settle in scattered communities throughout the central United States. Despite the hardships of pioneer life, they organized regular conferences to foster a common sense of identity and to consider collaborative mission initiatives. Without a mission agency of its own, they followed the example of their counterparts in Russia by supporting Baptist missionary efforts in India and Africa. The move towards establishing their own organization took a step forward with the opening of a mission station among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma in the late 1880s. A decade later, in 1900, the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union was formed and sent four missionaries to India. Mission initiatives were regularly discussed at conference meetings and received higher financial support than any other cause. Many MB leaders were actively involved in outreach as evangelists or mission board members, while congregants encouraged, prayed for, and financially supported such mission endeavors.[28] Out of this environment, a deliberate mission effort was sent to the north, and thus begins the dynamic and often complex story of MB missions in Canada.

Heinrich Voth[27]

Born of Mission: The Early Years (1880 - 1920)

The MB Church in Canada began as an evangelistic initiative by MB settlers in the United States. In 1883, Heinrich Voth (Minnesota) and David Dyck (Kansas) were commissioned to do itinerant evangelistic work among German-speaking Mennonites living in southern Manitoba. Although their insistence on rebaptism by immersion aggravated the inter-Mennonite conflict that surrounded the MB

origins in Russia, in 1888 the first MB congregation in Canada was organized at Burwalde near Winkler.

The ongoing work of these itinerant ministers, combined with a steady trickle of incoming MB immigrants from both Russia and the United States led to a string of new congregations in southern Manitoba and in Saskatchewan. Spiritual leadership was provided to these widely scattered congregations through itinerant ministers such as David Dyck, David H. Klassen, Jacob Lepp, Benjamin Janz, J.W. Thiessen, John F. Harms, H. A. Neufeld, and Johann Warkentin. The crucial role that this itinerant strategy played in promoting unity and facilitating church extension cannot be overemphasized.[29] By 1913, the dozen congregations in Canada had joined to create the Northern District Conference, one of four regional districts in the newly organized General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America.

A vision for expansion beyond the rural Mennonite communities was already evident in this early period. In 1906 a group began meeting and conducting weekly Sunday schools, attracting up to forty children in the Elmwood area of Winnipeg. In 1909 this group became the first urban MB congregation in Canada. The ongoing needs in Winnipeg, which served as a gateway to the prairies for thousands of new immigrants, prompted the appointment of William and Helena Bestvater as city missionaries in 1913, and of Anna Thiessen two years later.[30] Thiessen's forty-year ministry in Winnipeg included teaching Sunday school, conducting sewing classes, making home visitations, and serving as the matron of the Mary-Martha Home, which helped young Mennonite women working in the city as housekeepers. The city mission of Winnipeg, which included outreach to people of many nationalities, served as a template for subsequent city missions in Saskatoon (1933) and Vancouver (1936).

Immigrant Growth, Consolidation and New Initiatives (1920 - 1960)

The desire to escape the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent civil war, famine, and persecution brought a wave of approximately 20,000 traumatized German-speaking Mennonite immigrants. Approximately 20-25% of these immigrants were MB. These *Russlaender* Mennonites, as they came to be known, dramatically changed the MB demographics in Canada as they established new congregations in rural regions of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, as well as in urban centers such as Winnipeg and Saskatoon.[31] Larger congregations often assisted in the organization of new congregations, including several "mission" churches. By 1940, membership exceeded 7,800, more than quadruple the total in 1920.

Although several outreach initiatives were started during this period, considerable attention was given by the first-generation immigrants to grounding successive

generations in the Mennonite faith, language, and way of life. The primary means were the more than twenty Bible schools that MBs established in the years prior to 1960.[32] John F. Harms from Kansas started the first school in Herbert, Saskatchewan in 1913. Teachers used both German and English textbooks, which introduced MB young people to the larger evangelical Protestant world and helped legitimize the use of English in outreach and ministry. The Winkler community welcomed several former staff members of the Tschongraw Bible School including A. H. Unruh, who in turn founded a Bible school in Winkler in 1925.

Other Bible schools followed in quick succession. All began either as educational extensions of congregations, or as the efforts of like-minded individuals who formed a society to organize and promote a Bible school in their region. At the outset, the schools served predominantly rural constituencies, creating a kind of invisible link binding congregations together in a common cause. Advances in communication and transportation during the 1940s, and the growing economic burden created by what were, in many cases, redundant institutions only a few miles apart, precipitated a trend towards consolidation and amalgamation. Many of the smaller, congregationally-based schools closed, and the survivors, particularly those located in regions with a large number of congregations in close proximity, served ever-larger geographical areas. By 1960, only four MB Bible schools remained in western Canada: Winkler Bible Institute; Bethany Bible Institute, started in 1927 in Hepburn, Saskatchewan; Alberta Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, started in 1929 in Coaldale, Alberta; and Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, began in 1936 in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

The schools emphasized the preparation of young people for service within congregations: the setting was ideal for identifying individuals with interest, good character, and leadership ability. They created a common religious experience, a high level of biblical literacy, and an enthusiasm and predisposition for participation in the life of the church that was an ongoing source of vitality and energy for local congregations and that, over time, shaped the ethos of the entire denomination.

These schools played a crucial role in expanding a vision for mission. They led the way in adopting the use of English as a primary language decades before a similar transition was made in congregations. The desire of eager mission-minded students to obtain training in order to minister in non-German, non-Mennonite settings militated against a rigid insistence on the preservation of the German language. The pressure from students for more English-language instruction occasionally became intense: for example, in 1935, an entire class confronted the teachers at Bethany Bible Institute with an ultimatum threatening "to go elsewhere for their training" (i.e., Prairie Bible Institute or Briercrest Bible Institute) if there were not more English-language courses.[33]

The Bible schools led the way in mobilizing young people for pioneer outreach initiatives at home and abroad at a time when opportunities for missionary service on behalf of the denomination were limited. For example, in 1935 the staff at Bethany Bible School led by Jake H. Epp formed the "interdenominational, international, evangelical, and evangelistic" Western Children's Mission, which sent dozens of young people into rural communities across northern Saskatchewan to conduct vacation Bible schools for children. Other Bible schools organized similar ventures. In 1939 the idea of a children's mission traveled to British Columbia, where the West Coast Children's Mission was formed and soon became the center for MB home mission (*Randmission*) initiatives. Workers were sent to organize Sunday schools and evening services, to do colportage work and home visitations, with the hope of starting new congregations.

Leaders involved in Vacation Bible School (VBS) ministry quickly recognized the evangelistic and leadership development potential of camping ministry. By 1950, MBs were operating two summer camps in Saskatchewan and two in Manitoba; several more started during the 1950s in Ontario and British Columbia. These outreach strategies were more an "arms-length" approach that involved gospel proclamation, but not incorporating new believers into MB congregations. Many new believers were encouraged to join other denominations rather than expecting English-speaking converts to enter a predominately German-speaking denomination.[34] By the end of the twentieth century, camp ministry had become one of the denomination's most effective forms of evangelistic outreach.

Virtually all the early MB overseas missionaries had roots within the Bible school movement. Interest in foreign missions was promoted by visiting missionary speakers, missionary conferences, prayer bands, and involvement in summer VBS ministry programs. Many prospective missionaries gained their first experience in evangelism and cross-cultural ministry during their time at Bible school.

Interest in foreign mission was already evident in 1898 at the first MB conference held in Winkler at which the Canadians discussed the possibility of organizing their own foreign mission program.[35] Although the Canadian MBs actively supported the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union's (renamed the Board of Foreign Missions in 1909) decision to send American missionaries to India in 1899, they struggled to have the Board support the sending of Canadian men and women. The first missionary from Canadian circles to be ordained and sent under the auspices of the Board was Helen Warkentin from Manitoba, who was sent to India in 1919.[36] The limited geographical scope of MB overseas missions, and the perception that prospective missionary candidates from Canada were being discriminated against when they applied, prompted many to volunteer with independent "faith missions."[37]

When interest emerged in Africa as a potential location for missionary work, students, and staff from Winkler Bible School helped organize the independent (and controversial) Africa Mission Society under whose auspices Henry and Anna Bartsch were commissioned in 1932 to go to the Belgian Congo.[38] The society was organized partly because of reticence by the Board of Foreign Missions to allocate resources towards Africa, and partly due to the ongoing dissatisfaction among Canadian (mostly *Russlaender*) leaders with the Board. The Board was concerned about the allegedly inadequate education of many of the missionary candidates from Canada who had not completed high school and some college training.[39] It took more than a decade for tensions to subside so that the work of the Africa Mission Society could be placed under the direction of the Board, and Canadian representation on the Board was substantially increased.[40] As a result, Canadian participation in activities of the Board expanded dramatically after 1945. The struggle for greater inclusion contributed towards the formation of a unique sense of identity among Canadian MBs, and strongly influenced their determination to set up their own missionary training college in Canada and obtain their own independent denominational charter in 1945.

By the mid-1940s the MBs in Canada outnumbered their counterparts in the United States, a disparity that was amplified by the influx of another wave of 6500 Mennonite refugees from Europe after World War II. Its size, recent independence and organizational maturity prompted leaders to centralize home mission initiatives in 1949 under the auspices of the Canada Inland Mission. Within a decade, however, a process of decentralization transferred responsibility for home missions to provincial conference bodies.

In 1944 the MBs in Canada established a degree-granting college—a "higher Bible school"—called Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC), which quickly became another symbol of Canadian Conference autonomy and maturity. Prior to this time most Canadians who wanted a more advanced education in the context of a church institution enrolled at Tabor College located in Hillsboro, Kansas. Frustrations about the number of Canadian students who remained in the United States, and a sense that their American counterparts exercised too much control over cooperative programs, created a desire for greater freedom in training and preparing Canadians for church and missionary work. The new school was strategically located in Winnipeg, a metropolitan area of considerable significance for Canadian Mennonites and for western Canada in general. Abraham H. Unruh, until then the principal of Winkler Bible Institute, spearheaded the new institution, but quickly recognized the need for a leader who was more fluent in English. The declared purpose of the school was

to train Bible school teachers, missionaries, and church workers to fill positions of leadership in Bible schools, congregations, and mission agencies. In three years it became the largest MB theological school in Canada. By 1960, the enrolment at MBBC equaled almost 50% of the total enrolment in the four MB Bible schools in existence at the time. MBBC became the main institution for the training of MB pastors and church workers as well as for missionaries and evangelists at home and abroad until the 1970s.

The home mission activities that had been sponsored for three decades by the Northern District Conference was limited primarily to itinerant evangelism and the city mission work in Winnipeg and Saskatoon. To a large extent they were intended for retaining existing members within the MB fold, and only secondarily for reaching others.[41] The success of these early city missions prompted MBs in other locations to start a variety of new missions with the hope of seeing them become established congregations. Some began as extensions of VBS and Sunday school ministries (e.g., Niagara, Ontario).[42] Some targeted specific ethnic or religious groups (e.g., Russian immigrants near Arelee, Saskatchewan, the Japanese population in Port Edward, British Columbia, and Jews living in Winnipeg). Still others were organized to support MB young people employed in a particular location (e.g., the Gospel Light Mission in Brandon, Manitoba, which became a congregation in 1960). In the late 1950s, a group of fifteen individuals in "mobile professions" used the "colonization" method by relocating to Prince George for the purpose of evangelizing in a new area, and succeeded in starting a new congregation in 1959.[43]

Although never on the same scale as the enormously influential women's missionary societies in more established Protestant denominations, women in MB congregations organized their own means for supporting home missions, assisting the destitute, and helping fund overseas missionaries and special projects. Early in the twentieth century, women in many congregations organized sewing circles (*Naehverein*) or women's missionary fellowships. These groups helped raise funds for missionaries abroad, furnish local congregations, and provide food for Bible school kitchens. During the 1950s local groups started banding together to collaborate on larger projects, and to organize inspirational and educational events (e.g., the formation of Mennonite Brethren Church Ladies Aid of British Columbia in 1953, and the Mennonite Brethren Mission Auxiliary in 1959 in Saskatchewan). These organizations played an integral role in raising funds and promoting the cause of home and overseas mission within congregations.[44]

Denominational growth, economic prosperity, and more established denominational structures made it possible for the MBs to diversify further their

outreach ministries by mid-century. As suspicion of radio technology diminished, and as English-language fluency increased among MB leaders, efforts at "gospel broadcasting" proliferated. The Gospel Tidings program aired on a Saskatoon radio station as early as 1940.[45] In 1946, students at MBBC in Winnipeg started the Gospel Light Hour, which came to be recognized in several provinces as the voice of the MB Church. It is known today as Square One World Media, (though its previous name—Family Life Network—may be known more broadly). By 1955, individual congregations or schools were producing at least twenty different broadcasts often modeled after popular gospel programs like the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour.[46] They were not exclusively intended to be an evangelistic witness, but were sometimes used as a strategy for connecting with German-speaking groups and those unable to attend regular services.

After World War II the MBs in Canada took an increasingly active role in relief and service work. This took place primarily through the international inter-Mennonite organization Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), which began in 1920 following efforts by Mennonites in North America to help their co-religionists escape from Russia. Those who succeeded in escaping wanted to express their gratefulness by helping others facing similar emergencies such as the refugee crisis in Europe after World War II. Before long MCC expanded its humanitarian ministry both at home and abroad by becoming involved in projects on behalf of people who did not necessarily have any prior connection with Mennonites. "Service in the Name of Christ" became the motto for aid work among those victimized by famine, natural disaster, or war. In more recent decades, MCC Canada diversified its activities by engaging in a wide range of social issues including settlement of new immigrants, economic development and advocacy on behalf of First Nation communities, victim-offender mediation services, and programs to address the needs of women, disabled persons, the unemployed, and the mentally ill.[47] Despite general appreciation for enabling large-scale acts of compassion, some MBs are suspicious of MCC's intermingling of political advocacy with aid and development work, the politicization of "peace" theology, and the general reluctance to use aid and service work as opportunities for evangelism. MBs have contributed both financial support and volunteer workers to other agencies such as the inter-Mennonite Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) started in the early 1950s, and the interdenominational Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFB), which began in the 1980s. MDS focuses on assisting communities in North America that have suffered severe loss from natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods. CFB channels surplus grain grown by Canadian farmers to needy locations overseas.

Adapting to a Rapidly Changing Canada (1960 - 2000)

The 1960s marked a watershed decade for Canada in general, and the MBs in particular. Technological advances in transportation and communication, along with a post-World War II economic boom, made the vastness of the country less formidable and helped create new metropolitan centers. The movement of the MBs from being a largely rural, German-speaking ethnic sub-culture, to becoming a predominately urban, multi-cultural community mirrored many of the broader patterns of change taking place in the country.[48]

These transitions did not always occur easily. The changeover from German to English created conflict in many older congregations: some tried to maintain a link between German and Christian values, while others pressed for rapid change on the grounds that it was essential for retaining young people and incorporating new converts into the church. Urbanization brought more educational opportunities and occupational diversity, but it also diminished the ethnic homogeneity and sense of community that had previously existed. Congregations moved from using a model of shared leadership to elected church councils and salaried pastors. Pressure increased to include women in decision-making and leadership roles. By the end of the twentieth century the majority of MBs were comfortably middle-class urbanites, with some having become very wealthy. This new prosperity enabled the support of innumerable mission initiatives in Canada and around the world, but affluence also brought the temptations of materialism and indifference. The changing relationship to society carried with it considerable anxiety about the impact of new cultural influences on young people, but it also positioned the denomination for new approaches to mission.

The ongoing use of the German language, public discussions about exemptions from military service during World War II, and the steady move towards greater levels of acculturation prompted a re-evaluation of MB identity and the relationship between faith and ethnicity. Federal government support for multiculturalism during the 1970s, which resulted in support for the retention of ethnic identities, amplified the issue as some claimed the term "Mennonite" as an ethnic label. Some congregations however considered the ethnic associations with the word "Mennonite" to be a barrier to outreach and removed the word from their name. During the 1980s the denomination considered a name change proposal and debated the deeper issues of ethnocentrism, theological identity, and the multi-ethnic vision inherent within the Great Commission.[49]

The gradual identification on the part of the MBs with a larger multi-denominational evangelical Protestant network in Canada coincided with the process of acculturation. As evangelical Protestants became more affluent and better

educated, they began to feel less like estranged outsiders in Canadian culture, and more like cultural insiders with a sense of responsibility for the character of Canadian society. As the different denominational groups that made up the evangelical mosaic emerged from their respective enclaves they began to discover one another, interest emerged in creating a network of interlocking institutions comprised of a mutually supportive fellowship of organizations and individuals. This desire was formalized by the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), an organization started in 1964 to further the collective social action interests of evangelical Protestants. Although MB involvement with EFC created some ambivalence regarding its identity as a faith community and its place within the larger Mennonite world, it is consistent with the collaborative ecumenism that is present throughout MB history. In comparison to their counterparts in the United States, the MBs in Canada have played a much more prominent role in the development and life of innumerable evangelical institutions and ministry organizations throughout the country.

Acculturation and interaction with other evangelical denominations generated a search for new ways of doing outreach, particularly church adoption and urban church planting. When the interdenominational Canadian Congress on Evangelism was held in Ottawa in 1970, MBs were one of the best-represented groups. During the 1980s the Canadian Board of Evangelism began promoting the "scientific" methods of the church growth movement, led by people such as Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner. The church growth movement strategy insisted on a strong centralized leadership model, and the "homogeneous unit principle," which suggested that people become Christians most easily when they do not need to cross racial or linguistic barriers. While the emphasis on church growth signaled a renewed commitment to mission in Canada, particular components of the church growth movement generated controversy.[50] The MBs in British Columbia in particular allocated significant resources towards an aggressive church planting campaign aimed at doubling the number of congregations during the 1990s: the initiative led to a 46% increase in membership. Much of their initial success came through establishing or adopting congregations made up of recent immigrants from a variety of ethnic groups including Chinese, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Laotian, Arabic, Persian, Indonesian, and Korean.

By far the largest non-white MB group is the Chinese with the majority found in the greater Vancouver area. Since the formal organization of the first Chinese congregation in 1977, at least a dozen more have been started to reach out to the successive waves of Chinese immigrants who came to Canada in the latter part of the twentieth century. The task of leadership within these congregations was complicated

as congregations tried to integrate more recently arrived, predominately Mandarin-speaking immigrants, older first-generation, mostly Cantonese-speaking immigrants, and second and third generation Canadian-born English-speaking Chinese. The difficulties surrounding the transition to English in this ethnic group are remarkably similar to those experienced by the German-speaking immigrants from Russia. The Chinese congregations have demonstrated their commitment to missions by sending several pastors to plant churches among the Chinese diaspora living in Venezuela.[51]

The rapid growth of urban centers in Canada prompted the Canadian Conference Board of Evangelism (in partnership with provincial conferences) to launch an ambitious outreach strategy in 1998 called the Key Cities Initiative. The plan called for one new city to be targeted for church planting every two years for a ten-year period. Mission Calgary was identified in 1998, Love Toronto in 2000, *Rendez-vous Montréal* in 2002, Ignite Vancouver in 2004, and both Dream Manitoba and Harvest Saskatchewan in 2006. In its first decade, the program served as a catalyst for starting thirty new congregations.

Unanticipated developments abroad, rather than a carefully-planned strategy of outreach in Canada, presented unexpected opportunities. In 1960, political circumstances forced most of the missionaries in the Belgian Congo to leave the country. Their fluency in the French language made it natural for them to look to Quebec as an alternative field of missions. Ernest and Lydia Dyck were among those evacuated from the Belgian Congo and became pioneer missionaries in Quebec. At the time the province was experiencing its "Quiet Revolution," which significantly reduced the Roman Catholic Church's influence in Quebec culture and politics. The spiritual vacuum created by the wide-scale rejection of the Roman Catholic Church generated new opportunities for other denominations. The first MB congregation was organized in 1964. Twelve MB congregations were started by the end of the 1980s. In 1976 a Bible school (*Institut Biblique Laval*, now *École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal*) was founded. Later the periodical, *Le Lien*, was begun, as well as Camp Peniel.

During this period, Canadian congregations continued to support hundreds of missionaries serving around the world under the auspices of a broad range of mission agencies including MB Missions and Services, as the Board of Foreign Missions came to be known in the 1970s (now known as MB Mission). In 1969, the Mission supported a total of 224 long-term missionaries and ninety-two short-term mission workers. Since then, the number of long-term missionaries has declined, replaced in part by a distinct trend towards more short-term cross-cultural mission projects often organized directly by MB congregations and schools. The recent relocation of

the Mission headquarters from Fresno, California to Abbotsford has strengthened connections between MB leaders and congregations in Canada with MBs in other parts of the world.

A Vision for Global Missions in the Midst of Diversity (2000 - present)

Without minimizing the Dutch-German-Russian ethnic heritage of the early MBs, the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for *all* people has enabled the creation and celebration of an unprecedented ethnic mosaic—MBs in Canada worship in more than twenty languages. Discussions continue about the nature of denominational multiculturalism: some prefer congregations in which ethnic homogeneity is preserved, while others suggest that congregations are the ideal place to be intentionally "intercultural." Despite the ethnic diversity that now exists within MB congregations, the same diversity cannot yet be seen within the denomination's leadership structures.

As the Key Cities Initiative came to completion, a new initiative called Re:Generate 21-01 was proposed in 2007 to continue and improve the work started by Key Cities. It promised a nationwide partnership with provincial conferences that would help MB congregations "build health and capacity to reproduce" by shifting the onus for church planting away from denominational structures. Instead of implementing Re:Generate 21-01, a re-thinking of MB church planting strategies based on the experience of the Board of Church Extension in British Columbia resulted in the formation of the C2C Network. It functions as "a catalyst for multiplication and church planting throughout Canada." Like previous mission initiatives C2C Network focuses on urban areas in Canada, and operates as an MB-based, interdenominational network that facilitates collaboration with other denominations in assessing, training, and coaching church planters. The current strategy illustrates well how mission initiatives within the MB denomination sometimes prompt the abandonment of old structures in favor of new alliances and methods of ministry. During the first decade of the twenty-first century the pace of numerical growth among MBs in Canada slowed from 20% to less than 10%, indicating the difficulty of outreach in an increasingly indifferent, and sometimes hostile, post-Christian culture.[52]

Conclusion

Although mission has remained a core component of MB identity in Canada, the means by which and the structures through which it is expressed have changed. The twentieth century began with the formation of a Northern District, itinerant evangelists, and the opportunity to be increasingly involved in Canadian society. The twenty-first century began with Canadian MBs actively participating in the emerging

International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), which helped to rejuvenate a common sense of identity and facilitate global mission. Leaving behind the internal struggles of ethnicity and an antiquated structure, ICOMB was initiated as a "concrete step to translate biblical principles and a mission dynamic into strategic realities. ICOMB has become one of the most important instruments enabling the MB Church to live out its commitment to internationalism and multiculturalism."[53]

George W. Peters, a prominent MB missions specialist, summarizes the Canadian MB experience well: "Mission is a demanding enterprise. It is not static, an establishment that seeks to maintain itself, but a living institution with a steady purpose, and unchanging message, an expanding horizon. It does, however, require continuous adjustments in a dynamic society in order to keep up with ever-changing demands and new situations."[54] The MBs manifested the same blend of commitments and qualities that sparked the renewal movement in 1860: the Anabaptist courage to proclaim the gospel boldly regardless of cost, the pietistic innovative and collaborative practicality that recognized the importance of combining acts of compassion and theological education along with proclamation as integral aspects of mission, and a deeply Biblicist theological identity that is motivated by the desire to act in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ to make disciples.

Notes

[1] Portions of this chapter are based on a previously published essay co-authored by Abe Dueck and Bruce Guenther, "The Mennonite Brethren in Canada," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe Dueck, 49-71 (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010). This material is used by permission from Pandora Press and Kindred Productions.

[2] Source: www.gameo.org

[3] "Yearbook of the General Conference Mennonite Brethren Church, US, convened in Minnesota, Cottonwood County, 7-8 October 1889." Minutes translated by Otto Reimer. (Editor's note: This is one of many archival references cited by the author and available only in centers for MB studies. The interested reader is encouraged to contact the author for a full list of other archival references).

[4] John B. Toews, "Salary for the Elder?" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Fall 2013.

[5] Mrs. H. T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro: MB Publishing House, 1954), 26-27.

[6] Marvin E. Kroeker, "Reverend A.J. Becker" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Spring 1999. 1-4.

[7] "Mireles: An effective but reluctant leader" in *The Christian Leader,* June 2004, 26-27.

[8] Esther Jost, *The Church Alive in its 75th Year: 1905-1980* (Reedley: Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church, 1980), 70.

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[10] Bernice Richert Cox, personal interview by Peggy Goertzen, 11 Nov. 2011. Also Henry J. Schmidt, "Telling the Good News" in *75 Years of Fellowship: Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1912-1987* (Fresno: Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1987), 34.

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[12] Schmidt, "Telling the Good News" in *75 Years*, 34.

[13] Elaine Ewert Kroeker, *A Culture of Call: The Story of the Carson Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Tabor College, Carson Center for Global Education, 2014), 83-85.

[14] Kroeker, *Culture of a Call*, 2. Phyllis Martens, personal interview, 26 July 2014.

[15] 1960 KMB Yearbook. 1.

[16] 1959 KMB Yearbook, 18.

[17] Peggy Goertzen, "Ministry in the Mountains. Earliest Beginnings of the North Carolina Conference" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Spring 2012, 9-10.

[18] Wesley G. Tschetter, "Rev. Jacob M. Tschetter (1873-1956)" in *CMBS Newsletter*, no. 33, Spring 2012, 2.

[19] Peggy Goertzen, "Birth of a Vision: Our Own School 1908-1931" in *Tabor College: A Century of Transformation 1908-2008* (Hillsboro: CMBS, Tabor College, 2008).

[20] "Can We Double in a Decade?" *The Christian Leader*, 25 June 1963, 17

[21] Connie Faber, "From the editor," *The Christian Leader*, February 2011. 2.

[22] Minutes and Reports of the 20th Convention of the MB Churches of the US… 1994, 19.

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[25] G. W. Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1947), 43-50.

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[29] J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 156, 196, 222. The strategy has been used throughout the history of Christianity including the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. See Hans Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission: A Vision as Relevant to the Twenty-First Century as it was to the Sixteenth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 59.

[30] Anna Thiessen, *The City Mission in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1991).

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[32] Bruce L. Guenther, "'Wrenching Our Youth Away from Frivolous Pursuits': Mennonite Brethren Involvement in Bible Schools in Western Canada, 1913-1960," *Crux* 38, no. 4 (December 2002), 32-41.

[33] Margaret Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee! The Story of Bethany Bible Institute* (Hepburn: Bethany Bible Institute, c. 1976), 44.

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[38] Anna Bartsch, *The Hidden Hand* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1986); and Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 97-107.

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[40] Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), 141.

[41] Wally Unger, "Broadening our Horizons," in *For Everything a Season,* 173.

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[43] Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 49.

[44] Valerie Rempel, "The Life of the Congregation," in *For Everything a Season*, 140-141.

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[51] Joseph Kwan, "We are in the Same Family: The Growth of Chinese MB Churches," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 40, no. 21 (9 November 2001), 2-8.

[52] Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length,* 150-156; and Abe J. Dueck, ed., *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010).

[53] Victor Wall, "ICOMB: Its Vision and History," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World,* 360.

[54] Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions*, 5.

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Study Questions

1. One of the challenges faced by both US and Canadian groups was the missional shift from preservation of identity and the faith of the children of immigrants to reaching out into the culture in which the church lived. What principles could be derived from this shift that could speak to the core values of mission within a new immigrant context? Within an established context (second or third generation)?

2. Compare the approaches to “foreign” mission and “home” mission (church planting) by the North American churches. Would you say “home” mission enjoys equal status with “foreign” mission? If so, why? If not, why not? Should it?

3. Consider the George W. Peters quote in the final conclusion – mission is “not static” but a “living institution” requiring “continuous adjustments.” What adjustments – or even new paradigms – might be needed in mission in your particular areas of interest, be they geographic areas or demographic areas?