

NOTES TAKEN
at the
Friends of Low German Mennonites Meeting
Wednesday, September 30, 2009 1:30 – 4:30 p.m
The Multi-Purpose Room at MCC Canada
134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg



AGENDA:

1. Welcome and prayer: John Janzen

The questions “Who are we as Mennonites” and “Who are we as Low German speaking Mennonites” were presented along with various answers that are often given. These answers range from being people of genuine Christian faith and integrity to having a religious form and lacking integrity. We were challenged to become what we believe. The Shared Convictions of the Mennonite World Conference were shared as a common basis of our beliefs. . Christ said to the blind men before they were healed “Become what you believe”. As a people we need to become what we say we believe about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the work of the Church. What is our individual and our Mennonite response to Christ’s question...”and who do YOU say that I am....our answer will make all the difference...

2. Introductions (name, church or conference and/or relationship and interest with LGMs). 30 individuals introduced themselves to the group.

3. Sharing of information: John Janzen, MCC Canada



The newest staff placements were shared including the short term teachers. Sara Thiessen and Dorothy Unrau who will

be going to Cuauhtemoc to train teachers for three weeks. A full complement of staff has been placed in Mexico BUT we will need new Program Directors in Mexico this coming July, and Bolivia is looking for MCC positions - Low German Coordinators, German publications editor(s), and a community agricultural worker(s). The attached report below was discussed with additional information added. The recent stabbing and kidnapping in Durango was shared and a call for continued prayer for our workers and for safety, peace and wisdom in the midst of the violence, most of which involves the “drug war” or the “drug trade”. MCC will continue to monitor the situation.

MCC LOW GERMAN PROGRAM REPORT - 2009
 John Janzen, Low German Coordinator, MCCC

BUDGET MCC LGP Mexico \$414,877 MPOST/BLATT \$174,230

STAFF NAMES

MEXICO LGP		MENN POST/BLATT	
John Janzen, LGP Coordinator	.8	Kennert Giesbrecht	1.0
Ron and Carol Neisteter	2.0	Anne Froese	1.0
Sarah Giesbrecht, presently on leave	1.0	Wilfried Klassen	1.0
Mary Enns	.8	Lois Reimer	1.0
Lena Wiebe	.4	Connie Barkman	1.0
Dave and Tina Letkeman	2.0	Louella Toews	.8
Margie Giesbrecht	.6	Agatha Klassen	.15
Eva Guenter	1.0	Dorothea Rempel	
Sara Redekop	.4	Kampen	.5
Christine Wiebe	1.0		
TOTAL FTE	10.	TOTAL FTE	6.45

MCC Canada’s Low German Programs are specifically directed towards the Low German-speaking Mennonites in Mexico to address educational, economic, social, spiritual and health needs. In Mexico three offices in Cuauhtémoc, Casas Grandes and Durango deliver programs and resources to the surrounding colonies. German periodicals published by MCC help inform and connect Low German-speaking people.

Highlights:

- **Significant steps have been taken toward registering the Low German MCC Program in Mexico as a “not for profit charity”.**
- **Increased circulation of the Low German periodicals – the MPost and Das Blatt.**
- **Full slate of staff has been found for all LGP Positions in Mexico**
- **Coordinator has visited LGP programs in northern and southern Mexico, Bolivia, Belize, Paraguay and Texas.**

An increasing number of assaults, break-ins, thefts, kidnappings and murder in Mexico have impacted the Mennonite colonies and the workload of our staff. Many of these incidents are related to Mexico’s “war on drugs” and the “economic downturn”. In the colonies a general

sense of fear, uncertainty and impending danger are evident and require new supports. MCC is available to work with colonies to work for future safety and security.

The Low German Coordinator is asked to connect and coordinate Low German programs wherever MMCC has a presence. Because the Low German network is scattered in many different countries the Coordinator has recently visited most of the MCC programs. The cancellation of the bi-annual Low German networking meetings has also resulted in more telephone, print and email contacts.

IMPACT STORY

Evelyn (name changed to hide the identity) had lost the will to live, cook, wash, sew and get up in the morning. Her husband was not helping the situation due to his compulsive use of alcohol, loss of employment and unpredictable assaults and outbursts of anger - she couldn't help him and he couldn't help her. They both deepened their anger, frustration and withdrawal. The larger community noticed that the children were not receiving the care they should get. Over a period of a few years the husband had repeatedly entered the Mennonite addictions' treatment centre where he was always helped but the struggle was too difficult when he got out. Three of the five children were taken into care at the children's home. Here they responded well to love, care and a disciplined orderly life. Evelyn was also taken into care in a Mennonite care facility where she could recover from all of the pain and suffering in her life. She responded to the love and care that she received on a daily basis and became a human being again. God's love shone into the lives of all the family members through the various agencies that all received support from MCC. While today the family is not yet able to live without the supports of the loving caring community, they have come a long way individually and as a family. The journey continues with light, hope and security dispelling the darkness, despair and hopelessness. Such is the power of the caring community of love – caring in the name of Jesus.

NEW WINE/WINESKINS Work in Progress Report

These four principles have been adopted by MCC as a work in progress for further discussion – this is not a final statement.



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Mennonite Central Committee

New Wine/New Wineskins

Summit Results | The New Wineskins

June 5, 2009

Principle 1

In 2006 Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee convened a meeting of Anabaptist service agencies from around the world. That group called for the "creation of an ongoing forum" among the MWC community of churches. Principle #1 responds to their conclusion.

We affirm the convening of a global forum for ongoing conversation and to explore the coordination of global Anabaptist service initiatives.

Principle 2

We affirm the establishment of the Mennonite Central Committee to replace the current MCC Binational, to maintain identity, purpose and vision, and to lead an interdependent MCC system.

Principle 3

We affirm the principle that the MCCs in Canada and the MCCs in the U.S each structure themselves internally within their own national contexts.

- Clarify roles within each national body
- Identify roles between national bodies
- Cultivate a spirit of inter dependency between national bodies
- Develop guidelines for where decisions are made, so that a unified voice can be presented in a timely manner.

Principle 4

We affirm the transfer of international program to MCC Canada and MCC U.S and other entities as they develop. We strongly desire the long term goal of national/multi-nation entities (not necessarily MCC) that:

- **Manage program within their own region**
- **Commit to covenantal relationship with the centre**
- **Develop inter dependent relationships between them, including flow of resources**

4. POST/BLATT Report by Anne Froese since Kennert is away...way away...

- We print a total of 8,700 copies of the POST currently. 5,050 in Steinbach (for our readers in Canada, the US, Mexico, Belize, and some European countries); 2,050 in Paraguay (for our readers in Paraguay); and 1,600 in Bolivia (for our readers in Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia).
- Our POST has grown to be a 28 page paper. Only once last year did we publish a paper with 24 pages. We have dozens of regular contributors out of the colonies, mostly in the form of a letter. We have a growing number of new writers who have started sending in letters regularly.
- Our sales in the bookstore continue to go up which is very encouraging. Compared to previous years, we have an annual increase in sales of almost 10%.

COFFEE BREAK

Worthwhile discussions took place over coffee and “platz”.

Ray and Nicky Peters returning from Forest Hill Christian School. Ray and Nicky Peters shared their experiences at the Old Colony Forest Hill Christian School. They served for three years, developed good friendships and had many opportunities to relate to students and parents. They saw the importance of learning to read and write. Students were anxious to learn and sad when they had to stay home or were kept home by parents.

Questions for discussion:

Emerging documentation issues – who needs what to travel where or how do we find out...Tina Fehr Kehler gave us a quick overview of the whole area of documentation, the required visas for Mexicans without Canadian papers, and the major issues surrounding Canadian citizenship. More than ever it is essential that documentation work be done by reliable workers with accurate recent information. MCC seeks to resource a select group of documentation workers to provide this service.

5. Information sharing around the table – Come prepared to tell us about your involvements, ideas, concerns – everyone gets a turn.

A variety of questions were raised and concerns/ideas expressed. Issues address were the Bolivia rapes and “death by hanging, discrimination right within our Mennonite communities of other Mennonite groups, future priorities for MCCC with respect to Low German programs, teacher training, water use issues, and more than are included here...

Participants were encouraged to complete the LGP Priority Survey. If you have not yet completed it, please do so now. Thanks.

RESPONDING TO MCC CANADA LOW GERMAN PRIORITIES

1. Rank in importance the following program areas for MCC Canada's future involvement with the Low German colonies in Mexico. Thank you for taking time to think about these priorities.

(1 = Very important 2 = Important 3 = Not important)

- Literacy and language development
- Teacher training
- Evening /extension classes
- Post secondary education, including Bible Schools
- Support for documentation workers - immigration, citizenship, legal documents, work permits, etc.
- Economic/business development
- Capacity building within the colonies- becoming self-reliant
- Medical, health assistance
- Family planning
- Nutrition
- Health and Safety at the workplace
- Creation care of the land
- Personal and family counseling
- Mental health issues
- Rehabilitation for addictions – men and women
- Prevention of abuse, addictions, illness
- More/new publications for the Low German speaking
- Land issues
- Radio programs specifically for the Low German colonies
- Networking, sharing information, connecting with different Low German-speaking colonies
- Promoting reconciliation and peace
- Orientation for travelers and new residents

2. From your point of view what are the most important issues that need to be addressed in the Low German communities. Name at least two issues, not necessarily from the above, but not more than four. Please feel free to provide further detail.

CONTACT NAME FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Return to johnjanzen@mennonitecc.ca or Attention John Janzen, MCCC – LGP, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 5K9. THANKS.

5. FURTHER SHARINGAmong others Ed Zacharias shared about his Low German dictionary (Good Work!) and musical CD, John J Friesen shared about his Mennonite studies (classes) at CMU and the Chair presented his excellent publication "Building Communities", Henry Unger shared his "schools starts" in Kansas and Texas, Rev Abe Wiebe provided meaningful background info about MCC's involvement with the Low German program, Koby Wiebe shared about the documentation work in the Arborg area, other supportive comments were made which were unfortunately not recorded.... I'm sure we missed something....

6. Closing at 4:30 pm...thanks to all who participated.