

September 2004, *Equipping*



The *Canadian Mennonite* of August 2 contains reports on the annual assembly held in Winkler. If you missed the event, I hope you have read the reports and also checked the reports on our web site (www.mennonitechurch.ca – follow the links).

Though the Assembly has occupied much of our denominational life in the last couple of months, many other important things have also been happening. I especially want to note another event that is reported in the August 2 edition of *Canadian Mennonite* (p. 30): the Anabaptist-Reformed Reconciliation Conference held in Zurich, Switzerland, on June 26.

Those of us with family roots in Switzerland (one of my ancestors, by the original name of Neuenschwander, is named in Swiss Anabaptist documents as early as 1537) may have felt a particularly personal connection with the historic significance of this reconciliation. But its future implications connect with all Mennonites—six of the ten Mennonite Church Canada persons present at the conference trace their ancestry to the North German rather than the Swiss roots, and others present there included African, Native American and Latin American Mennonites.

I believe that this act of reconciliation has immediate and future significance for Mennonites and the various expressions of the Reformed church (Christian Reformed, Presbyterian, United, etc.) in Canada and other countries as well as in Switzerland. Only by facing up to the facts of the past can the spiritual descendants of Zwingli and the spiritual descendants of Felix Manz stand shoulder-to-shoulder as reconciled siblings in the family of Christ. Events like this gathering in Zurich enable and force us to stop seeing ourselves either as sectarian victims of persecution or as more favoured by God because of the martyrdom of some of our forbears.

It was a delight to make personal acquaintance with members of the Swiss Reformed church and to worship with them as sisters and brothers in Christ who share many theological convictions, missional visions and spiritual experiences. It was also gratifying to talk with members of the Swiss and other European Mennonite churches, and to experience this reconciliation together. Such experiences hold forth the promise of future relationships.

But reconciliation requires more than one meeting, and there are still questions to be answered. Some of the questions have already begun to be discussed in meetings between the Reformed churches and Anabaptist churches in 1983 and 1989.* These previous meetings have called for local congregations of our two traditions to get acquainted and to find ways to serve Christ together. Mennonite World Conference and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches continue to work on common interests. MC Canada and the Christian Reformed Church in Canada plan to have formal meetings next spring to talk about our common calling and convictions.

What might your congregation and your area conference do to connect with your neighbours in the Reformed tradition (or other Christian traditions)?

Sincerely,



Dan Nighswander

* See *Baptism, peace and the state in the Reformed and Mennonite traditions*, edited by Ross T. Bender and Alan P. F. Sell; Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991—essays presented at a symposium held in Calgary in 1989.