

Living in Hope: Canadian Mennonite University, 2005-06

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

That verse, from the book of Jeremiah, is our chapel theme this year at CMU. Jeremiah spoke these words to the exiles in Babylon, telling them that they would not be returning home in the near future. Despite this, God had plans for them. These were not to be times of despair—but of hope!

We at CMU are not in exile or despair. On the contrary; things are going well. This year there are over 1,800 students taking one or more courses, with a full time equivalent of roughly 950—a number well over double what the colleges had prior to CMU.

We have experienced financial stability—five consecutive years in the black, with an operating surplus of 4 percent, and the new campus at 500 Shaftesbury nearly paid for.

We have added new faculty members, including a number in the arts and sciences; experienced growth in our academic programs; and our degrees are being recognized at a growing number of universities across North America.

We celebrated the construction of our new residence in September—as the most energy-efficient building of its kind in the province, it is a physical expression of how we at CMU care about the use of resources from God’s creation.

Then there is the creation of our new Institute for Community Peacebuilding, along with the Centre for Leadership and Management; the leadership exercised by Menno Simons College in peace and international development studies; and the testimonies of students, who routinely say that CMU has helped change their lives.

We are grateful for all of these blessings. Yet, the future does raise some questions. Finances continue to be a challenge for all post-secondary institutions today, whether owned by the public or independent like CMU. We need to find the right mix of revenue sources (student fees, government support, private contributions) and balance that with expenses.

In facing these questions we do have some disadvantages—we are a small institution; we are relatively new and we are less well known outside the Mennonite constituency. But we also have two tremendous advantages: a large, loyal and generous church constituency, and a much-appreciated annual grant from the Government of Manitoba. Given that student fees at CMU provide a much smaller percentage of the total budget than at public universities, and given that the government grant—although substantial—is considerably less than at public universities, support from individuals, congregations and church bodies across Canada is absolutely crucial.

Finances are a challenge, but I am not alarmed. I am convinced that we can find the support we need as we show how effective we are in educating tomorrow’s Christian leaders—students who will take their faith into the workplace and the church, strong and confident in their beliefs and their trust in God. Our ongoing task is to help more people catch the vision for the kind of education that prepares students for life in the real world of studies and work.

The vision that drove the creation of Canadian Mennonite University five years ago was a good one: That by working together, Mennonites in Canada could do more in faith-based higher education—both in serving the Mennonite church community and in making a positive contribution beyond that community. This vision remains valid, even if implementing it has its challenges. As Mennonites, we need a Christian university that provides students with the tools they need to be Christian leaders in society. Other Christian churches in Canada need us, too. I believe that God wishes to use CMU to serve the world. Together, as faculty, staff, students and supporters, our goal is to seek God’s plan as we humbly serve God and others around us through CMU.

On behalf of CMU I thank Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren Conference for your interest and support of Christian higher education, especially at Bethany College, but also of CMU. May God be with you as together we inspire and equip people to be agents of God’s reconciliation in the world. If you have any questions or feedback, we appreciate hearing from you.

Gerald Gerbrandt, President

Coming to CMU was the best decision I ever made. This place has changed me. Tera Dyck, a fourth-year math major from Vineland, Ontario.