

Director of Church Ministries Report Ralph and Grace Gliege

In gathering my thoughts for this report, my mind kept going to the word "LIFE". We use this word in so many ways and in such a variety of contexts. When an elderly person dies we say "he lived a long life". When a younger person dies we say "she lived a short life" but we comfort ourselves by saying "but she lived a full life". We speak of the Bible as being "the word of life".

There are four other expressions involving the word "life" and I would like to hinge my report on these expressions:

- When we are frustrated with the actions or attitudes of someone and we want to suggest that they should change we say "GET A LIFE".
- When we are enjoying good times such as a holiday to a warm spot during the cold winter months we find ourselves saying that "THIS IS THE LIFE".
- When things aren't going so well or when we face hardships we find ourselves saying "ISN'T THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS?".
- When we reach new milestones we find ourselves thinking about what we should be doing "AT THIS STAGE OF LIFE".

So join me as we reflect on the journey of the Saskatchewan MB Churches during this past year and as we anticipate future life on this journey.

L ight. John wrote concerning Christ that *"In Him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1:4&5 TNIV).

Scattered throughout this Province there are thousands of people who have realized that they needed to GET A LIFE and so they turned to Jesus, the source of light and life. Each Sunday close to 4000 people gather in 30 Mennonite Brethren Lighthouses called Churches where they receive instruction from the Word of Life equipping them to go out into their world to bring light to darkness.

I am so grateful for the faithful congregations and courageous pastors throughout this Province. From Pierceland in the northwest to Woodrow in the south to Canora and Yorkton in the east and all over in between the lights shine. Life comes to the ghost town at Kelstern and to the empty parking lots at West Portal and Forest Grove Churches in Saskatoon as Christians gather in these places to worship. From the hard to find places like Glenbush and Main Centre (in spite of its name) to the capital of the Province in Regina people gather for fellowship and corporate worship. From the youngest congregations at Faith River Christian Fellowship and Living Hope Church in Saskatoon to the oldest congregations at Waldheim and Dalmeny people of all ages gather to be renewed in their life with God so that their light can shine more clearly.

The sad news is that there are so many communities in this Province with very little light. We need more "lighthouses". God has also seen fit to bring many new people to this Province this past year. Many of those people have come here to live, but many of them need to GET A LIFE. May we be faithful in exposing them to the light.

I lluminate. God does not just want us to come to the light but He wants us to live in the light and then to give witness to the light. Jesus said: *"You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you. Those who walk in the dark do not know where they are going. Put your trust in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."* (John 12:35&36 TNIV)

I am so grateful for the many creative ways in which congregations and individuals are finding ways to illuminate their world with the light. When we spread the light we truly discover that THIS IS THE LIFE! Each congregation and each individual is unique. In Blaine Lake a beautiful mural on the outside of the church building reminds the community that Christ is the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep. In Arelee the quilting needles hardly ever rest as dozens of blankets are quilted and given to those who are cold and often homeless.

In Foam Lake and Watrous and Langian the congregations are finding creative ways to help the Wynyard Gospel Church to illuminate the light in that needy community.

Flame. All over this Province there are abandoned church buildings. They stand in prominent locations throughout the small towns and villages and even in cities. A light house that is not lit up is a real disgrace. Occasionally in the life of the church and of the individual, the flame flickers or maybe even goes out. The flame needs to be rekindled and often that happens when we find ourselves asking ISN'T THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS?

Ironically, when we face the fact that something needs to change and we act to make that change happen, not only does the flame burn more intensely but we also become the fragrance of Christ to those around us. Heat releases fragrance! *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.* (II Corinthians 2:14).

It's a thrill to visit with congregations and individuals who have worked to increase the intensity of their flame. The congregations at Beechy and Meadow Lake have recently done that through the addition of Associate Pastors who work primarily with youth. The flame in Moose Jaw has been strengthened as the people have stood with their pastor to keep his flame burning during a time of loss and then a time of gain. The church has recognized gifted individuals in the congregation and they have been commissioned to serve. The people in Borden stared into the face of death during a terrible tragedy which touched everyone in the community. However, the flame continues to burn and the congregation had the opportunity to be the fragrance of Christ reminding the community that there is more to life than this. Hafford is a place where because of addictions many people have little hope. Yet hope is being brought to many people as they receive help for their addictions and a flame is ignited in their hearts.

Then there are congregations that have worked through needed changes or overcome inward struggles that cause the flame to flicker. Hope Fellowship Church in Saskatoon is a congregation that works hard to touch the lives of people in their immediate community and this requires constant adjustment and change. In Herbert where things traditionally have stayed the same for decades, traditions are now changing as new people move into the community. Out of necessity this is causing the congregation to assess how they do things.

Effect. Churches and individuals must make a difference in their community and in the world. A bright light makes little difference in the light of day, but even a small light can be seen over a long distance in the dark of night. *"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."* (Matthew 5:16 TNIV)

Churches and individuals who understand their STAGE OF LIFE, can prepare themselves for future life and ministry. Often we chart the future course by looking back so that we might understand our present stage of life.

The congregation in Carrot River looked back over their history a number of years ago so that they could deal with issues that were hindering their present ministry. It's exciting to see the effect that this congregation has upon the lives of individuals. Years ago in Hepburn, a Bible class was held in the church nursery. That class resulted in the formation of the present Bethany College which has influenced the lives of hundreds of people around the world. The church in Hepburn continues to uphold solid Biblical teaching as an important value. The congregation at Lucky Lake determined that at their stage of life they could be effective through the teaching and ministry of a former pastor and so they "recalled" this pastor not because of a defect but because of a desire to be effective. The church in Swift Current has given support, love and perspective to the newly elected Premier of this Province. What a wonderful testimony when the church can give support to people in the marketplace and the mission field.

Life in the church is sometimes not what it should be and then "life becomes a drag". In the spring we say that things "come to life" – may it be spring time in the life of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren Churches. When life in the church is pleasant, then the church really becomes the "life of the party"! When we as individuals experience the abundant life in Christ then we truly know what it means to live.