

Director of Church Ministries Report Ralph and Grace Gliege

As I contemplated writing this report the image of a tree came to mind. In Saskatchewan we value trees because of their scarcity, especially in the southern part of the Province. I think of the lone tree in the Cypress Hills Provincial Park known as the "survival tree". This tree has experienced countless numbers of storms yet it continues to live. Just north of Swift Current stands a tall lone tree affectionately known as the "Southern Saskatchewan Provincial Forest". This tree has provided a place of rest for countless numbers of birds and I'm sure it has provided a shady picnic spot for many travelers. As you travel further north the trees grow in clusters or forests. There are fruit trees. There are trees that are planted around farms or in parks for beauty and shelter. There are trees that grow large and upon maturity these trees are used for building purposes.

The church is very similar to a tree. Many of our churches stand alone in communities far from any other evangelical church. Some have survived and even thrived. Others have reached a stage of maturity because members have relocated to other communities where they have become "building material" in other churches. Some of our churches are located in clusters or even in a "forest" of churches.

The Church, just like a tree, needs certain provisions to be healthy. The Church, just like a tree, needs to be protected from harm. The Church, just like a tree, needs to be passionate about bearing fruit.

The purpose of a denomination is to provide resources to enhance the health of the church; offer protection from those things which might hurt the church; and foster passion to help the church reap a harvest. It has been our joy, together with other Provincial and National denominational leaders, to serve the churches this past year.



For the remainder of this report I will compare the growth of a tree to the growth of a church. I will list the various things that the Conference has offered or will offer the church to assist them in their growth stages of life.

Provision for Health:

A healthy tree needs basic things to survive and to thrive. So does a church.

- **Location:** A tree needs the right kind of soil and climate. Location is important not just for trees but for the church and pastoral staff.
____ The Canadian MB Conference (CMBC) Stewardship Ministries provides low interest loans for the purchase or construction of Church buildings and for pastors to purchase a house.
____ The SK MB Conference (SMBC) holds title to church properties. This provides security for the congregation during possible times of doctrinal differences. Perhaps the greatest benefit comes when and if the ministry ceases to exist.





- **Sunshine:** A tree needs sunlight and so does the church. The church needs to be a light which can only be solar powered.

___ The CMBC provides excellent resources to illuminate the ministries of the Church through Kindred Productions, the Board of Faith and Life pamphlet series and the MB Herald.

___ The CMBC Centre for MB Studies sheds light on our past which can often guide our future.

- **Moisture:** Growth simply cannot take place without rain. The provision of “rain” in the church setting appears in many different forms.

___ It’s true that “People do not live on bread alone” (Matt. 4:4), but bread is needed. Each year the SMBC Board of Management reviews the salary grid providing a guideline so churches can adequately provide for their Pastor(s).

___ The CMBC provides excellent medical, dental and pension plans so that these needs are not neglected for the Pastor and Family.

___ The SMBC provides a one year long distance phone package for new Lead Pastors who are new to ministry or to this Province.

___ The SMBC provides some financial incentive for new people in ministry within the Conference to attend the CMBC Pastors Credentialing Orientation.

- **Cultivation:** The soil around the tree must be maintained to provide proper nutrients.

___ Prior to being called by a church, each Pastor fills out a doctrinal Ministry Questionnaire which is examined by the SMBC Board of Faith and Life. This is an excellent exercise which helps pastors to think through and articulate their beliefs.

___ Each Ministry Staff person signs a Conduct Policy. Pastors face many temptations and this proactive exercise helps to keep the ground of their lives from becoming hardened. Every five years Pastors are required to renew their commitment to this conduct.

___ Welcoming of new pastors along with pastoral care is provided by SMBC.

___ Ministry Quest is an exciting program provided by Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary to help spot and begin to prepare youth with potential for leadership.

___ The SKBC and the CMBC provide funding for pastoral internships – an excellent way to cultivate the soil of gifting in young men and women.

___ The SKBC provides bursaries for Bethany College and Seminary students.

Bursaries are also made available for part time seminary students, mostly pastors, who are doing education on the run.

___ Bethany College, MB Seminary and our Camps are places where the lives of many men and women are cultivated and nurtured.

___ Throughout the years the SMBC has developed a policy and procedures manual. This contains a wealth of information to help keep the ministries of the churches and SMBC Boards functioning smoothly. Our Moderator has used his gifts to keep this document current.

- **Symbiosis:** Trees benefit when they live in close association with other trees and vegetation. So does the church.

___ The quarterly mailbox inserts help to keep pastors and congregations informed about each other.

___ The weekly SMBC prayer request that appears in your bulletin fosters prayer support for each other.



___ The CMBC and SMBS Web Sites link congregations and ministries. Provision is being made for churches to publicize their events.

___ The weekly pastoral prayer schedule encourages pastors and churches to pray specifically for each other on a weekly basis.

___ Annually an updated Church and Pastor Directory is printed to assist contact and support between the churches and pastors.

___ Churches partner to assist each other. Formal partnerships have taken place to assist the congregations at Wynyard and Pierceland.

Protection from Harm:

The worst enemy of the tree can be itself. Life is directed toward the growth of leaves rather than fruit. Fruit trees often need to take a year of rest from excessive fruit bearing. Disease infects and spreads within the tree. The church is fairly similar.

- **Pruning:** Pruning seems so cruel, but it is always done not to hurt or hinder the tree but to help it bear fruit.

___ One of the greatest times of pruning for the church is during a pastoral change. The SMBC helps churches through these transitions and seeks to help them find a new pastor or interim pastor.

___ The CMBC and SMBC are working together to help pastors and church leaders become focused leaders. This focusing time often becomes a pruning time in which unnecessary "stuff" is stripped from ones life.

- **Rest:** Fatigue comes from a lack of rest.
___ Sabbaticals rejuvenate. The SMBC is becoming more active in providing guidance for good and profitable sabbaticals.
___ The annual Pastoral Retreat provides a great time for "recharging".
___ The SMBC staff are available for preaching ministry to provide encouragement to the church and a "Sunday off" for the pastor.
- **Cutting:** Disease and dead branches hinder healthy growth and must be cut off.
___ The SMBC provides assistance when churches request help in conflict resolution and other difficult matters.
___ Conference staff are ready to guide the church through assessments. The Natural Church Development (NCD) is one tool that helps a church understand what needs to be strengthened to help prevent disease from setting in.



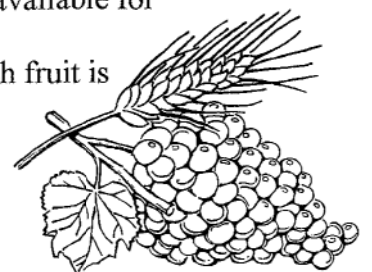
Passion to Harvest:

Trees must serve a purpose and so must the church. The Conference desires to foster a passion to harvest.

- **Fruit:** Fruit trees that bloom but produce no fruit are beautiful only for a short time. Fruit trees that produce fruit are desirous. So it is with the church.

___ The SMBC through "Project Reach Your World" makes funding available for churches to reach out to their community with the Gospel.

___ Redberry and West Bank Bible Camps are great places where much fruit is harvested.



_____ Missions and Services International help us think globally but also provides great resources to help us reach locally.

_____ CMBC and SMBC work together to provide training for potential church planters and resources for churches to reach out to those who need Christ. Excellent inspirational and motivational resources are made available through Church Planting Conferences.

_____ The SMBC Harvest Saskatchewan Team will be offering Regional Prayer Trips in the Province to encourage churches to see their potential in reaching into their community.

- **Shelter:** Trees provide a place of shelter from the wind, shade from the sun and a place of lodging for the birds of the air. The church needs to be a place of shelter and safety.

_____ The MB Confession of Faith provides a solid place of doctrinal shelter for our churches.

_____ The CMBC and SMBC Boards of Faith and Life provide doctrinal oversight and protection from some of the prevailing winds of false doctrine.

_____ The regular Gatherings of the Mennonite Brethren Churches in Conventions, Study Conferences and Leadership Forums provide a secure place of “lodging” for new and established believers.

_____ Our connection with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) provides a place for us to be involved in providing physical and spiritual shelter for people in our communities and around the world.

- **Beauty:** Trees add so much beauty to the landscape. Healthy churches add such beauty to our communities.

_____ It’s a beautiful sight when churches pause to recognize the work of the pastor(s) every 5 years. The SMBC helps churches to make these into great times of celebration.

_____ Commissioning services are highlights in the life of the Church. Cheers and laughter erupts when the SMBC “toques” the new pastor.

_____ Church anniversaries become special moments when the Church, community and Conference leaders celebrate what God has done.

- **Maturity:** Trees reach maturity at different times. Some grow for many years before being used as building material. Some simply get old and have served their purpose. It seems that this is true for many churches.

_____ Throughout the years several churches have closed due to change in demographics. Those congregations, after deciding to close, ask the SMBC Board of Management to disperse the property. The sales of these properties make it possible for the Conference to take on new projects. Because the Conference owns the property title, the congregation is blessed not to have to disperse the property and the Conference is blessed with some cash infusion.

_____ After a local congregation has decided to close the SMBC helps them plan a closure celebration service and helps existing members incorporate into other churches.

_____ Over the years many cemeteries were established in places where there no longer is an MB Church. The SMBC has established a cemetery fund to help restore these cemeteries into a respectable condition.





The topic of cemeteries is a rather solemn note on which to end this report, but the reality is that death is part of the cycle of life. There is not life without death. Paul said it well when he said "I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10 & 11).

As a denomination and as denominational staff persons, we are pleased to offer the services listed in this report equally to all churches. This list is long but I'm sure it is not complete and new services are constantly being added. Your contributions to Conference ministry both provincially and nationally make it possible for us to provide the majority of these services at no additional cost to you.

I encourage you to read through the list carefully. Place a check mark beside those sections where the Conference has been able to partner with you to give assistance. Give thanks to God for that partnership. Place an asterisk beside the section which describes an area in which we could help. Then contact us. We are here to serve you.

