

Editorial

Irma Fast Dueck

This year some faculty from Canadian Mennonite University and from St. Paul's College in Winnipeg have been meeting to study "Called to be Peacemakers," a document prepared for Catholic-Mennonite dialogues. Our discussions have frequently turned to themes of church unity, and CMU participants have tried to explain to our Catholic sisters and brothers why there are so many varieties of Mennonites (at least ten in Manitoba alone). During one discussion, a CMU professor exclaimed, "Mennonites seem to think that unity is dependent upon intellectual agreement. If this is really true, we will never have unity, for we will never all agree. Our unity must be based on something more than intellectual assent!"

As I listened to my colleague's outburst, I remembered the words of a Catholic bishop who reminded church leaders attending an ecumenical gathering in Winnipeg that God has already given us the gift of unity in Jesus Christ, and we're invited to live into that unity. This issue of *Vision* focuses on reconciling, and the articles included help us understand both the unity that has been given to us and what it means to live into it.

This issue of *Vision* is focused on the theme of reconciling, and in various ways the articles contained here help us understand both the unity that has been given to us and what it means to live into it.

The issue begins with a communion sermon by Rudy Baergen, on Jesus' prayer for his followers in John 17, which testifies to the origin of our unity in the action of God. Betty Pries, a long-time mediator, reminds us that in

Christ we're shackled together. She draws on biblical texts to develop theological principles for understanding and responding to the conflict that is inevitable in church life.

Marva Dawn and Allan Rudy-Froese reflect on the theme of reconciliation through a consideration of two practices of the

church: worship and preaching. Just as our reconciliation originates in God, our worship also begins with God. Dawn explains how the rites of confession and absolution bear witness to God's merciful work of reconciliation in Christ. Rudy-Froese offers a spiritual exercise designed to help preachers and others experience and participate more fully in the reconciling work of God.

Matthew 18:15-20 has shaped historical Anabaptist-Mennonite practices of church discipline and forgiveness. Tim Kuepfer carefully revisits this text, reminding us that in its Gospel setting the central concern is for "the least of these," and the goal is to bring restoration and wholeness. Joseph Liechty, who has spent many years working at reconciliation in Ireland, analyzes the meaning and practice of forgiveness, especially developing the relationship of forgiveness to reconciliation.

Nan Cressman and Kerry Strayer work with issues of conflict and decision making in the church. Out of her extensive experience in church conflict transformation, Cressman tells stories about—and proposes principles for—constructively engaging congregational conflict. Strayer examines decision-making models, highlighting the value of consensus-oriented approaches in fostering healthy relationships in congregations.

Finally, Susan Kennel Harrison and Jeremy Bergen reflect on the church's witness of reconciliation to the wider world. Harrison, who has been involved with Muslim-Christian dialogue and relationships, examines what it means for Christians to live in reconciling ways with people of other faiths. Bergen compares ecclesial and governmental apologies and explores how the church's apologies embody an understanding of the church's nature and its ministry of reconciliation.

This issue is seasoned with the wisdom of authors who have studied and worked at reconciliation in places of deep animosity, brokenness, and alienation. Their writing nevertheless reflects a profound but perhaps understandable hope. After all, the church in reconciling proclaims its faith, a faith rooted in Jesus Christ and the generous love and mercy of God.

About the editor

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