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# DIVERSE MODELS/ STRATEGIES OF CHURCH PLANTING/ GROWTH AMONG MENNONITE BRETHREN

*Henry J. Schmidt*

This paper focuses on models/strategies for church planting and growth among Mennonite Brethren in the 1990s. The primary intent is to propose a diversity of church planting models and church growth strategies within a clear understanding of our Anabaptist theological/church orientation and our sociological/cultural context.

*Biblically  
anchored,  
planning  
for mission  
expansion.*

## *Mennonite Brethren Growth Patterns: 1950 - 1990*

The numerical growth patterns of North American Mennonite Brethren during the four decades (1950 - 1990) reflect the following patterns.<sup>1</sup> 1) A decreasing percentage of membership gain: 1950s, 2.4%; 1960s - 1980s, 1-2%. During these four decades, according to CGM, Mennonite Brethren basically kept up with the normal biological growth rate (2% annually). 2) A decreasing percentage of churches gained: Net annual gain: 1950s, 3.1%; 1960s - 1980s, 1.2%. The net

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gain of churches in the total denomination dropped from 5.5 per year in the decade of the 1950s to 3.1 per year during the 1980s. 3) A net gain of new churches (starts/stops) between the 1950s and the 1980s of 57%. Normally the percentage of success in new church starts among denominations is between 65 - 75%.

The four decades reflect some significant shifts which have influenced Mennonite Brethren church growth patterns: from a rural, agrarian to an urban, professional people; from lay-led, non-paid leaders to professional, salaried pastors; from single pastor churches to multiple pastoral staff; from a conference of predominantly smaller/medium sized (under 200) congregations to more larger/super churches (500 and over); from a polity of church council (coordinating board) to a polity with Board of Elders; from a predominance of Anglo, English speaking churches (dominated largely by a Russian-German ethnic core) to a growing number of multi-lingual, crosscultural congregations (i.e., French, Hindi, Chinese, Khmu, Lao, Spanish, Hmong, Portuguese, Russian, Korean, etc.).

The urbanized, multi-cultural, religiously pluralistic context of the 1990s presents a formidable challenge to North American Mennonite Brethren, given the track record of the past four decades. The vision statement of our General Conference (1990) calls for a 30% increase in membership by the year 2000 (65,000), an addition of at least 15 new congregations per year (550 total by 2000), and a targeting of 10 major North American cities with a minimum of 50 crosscultural plants in these cities by the national conferences. For this vision to be realized, churches and the denomination will need to remain biblically anchored and to plan strategically for mission expansion.

To be biblically anchored means that any models or strategies should begin with a Kingdom-of-God perspective. Moreover, such strategies should have a corporate, not just an individual base. They should be people-centered in contrast to meeting the needs of institutions. Further, it is important that strategies be anchored in a wholistic growth perspective, and that they be diverse, flexible and comprehensive.

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### *Strategies/Models for Church Planting and Growth*

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the different church models, it is helpful to look at a variety of classifications.<sup>2</sup> Earlier church models were linked to geographic location. The tremendous diversity of current church models makes patently clear that monolithic church models, worship styles and evangelization strategies are inappropriate in any decade. If it takes different kinds of church models to reach different kinds of people, then it goes without saying that it takes different strategies to build different models.

Our strategies will be linked to four factors: denominational priorities, new church planting, the revitalization of established congregations, and flexibility in making several strategic shifts in the 90s.

#### *Forging a Denominational Strategy*

Historically, Mennonite Brethren have placed a high priority on missions. Missions, however, was defined primarily as reaching people overseas, and secondarily as reaching those neighbors who were of similar ethnic background (German speaking North Americans) or who had a lower socio-economic status (i.e., children's work, rescue mission, jail ministry). In the past four decades there has been a greater emphasis on church planting and reaching diverse people groups within North America. However, missions outside North America, and higher education still remained the dominant priorities and core values of Mennonite Brethren (i.e., based on an analysis of overall budgets, salaried staff, and publication emphasis).

#### *Reasons for the Decline in Mainline Denominations*

Currently, we are living in an era of decline in major mainline denominations, with the exception of Southern Baptists and Assemblies of God. Several reasons for this are highlighted here because of their relevance to Mennonite Brethren (Schaller, 1984:159 - 172).

The first reason centers on mobility and shifts in denominational loyalty. Mobility and job patterns have removed many people from their family roots, hometown church and denomination. This generation is less likely to remain in the same denomination as their parents, because of growing ecume-

nism and minimized denominational distinctives. The loyalty of a new generation must be won rather than inherited. Upward mobility in social class, education and economic standing also seems to create more denominational shifts. Moreover, the decline in the number of students attending denominational colleges has added to the denominational erosion. Students choose schools for geographic and educational opportunities rather than for a particular denominational tie. The charismatic renewal movement has resulted in major shifts in membership. Often this is linked to the more dynamic, experiential and participational base of these congregations.

Perhaps the greatest factor in denominational decline is the rise of consumerism and consumer consciousness. Company or product loyalty is not a characteristic of the present generation who tend to go where they get the best deal, or where they can get their needs met. The same values dominate their church choices regardless of previous denominational affiliations. Finally, denominations, like other aging social institutions, tend to become bureaucratic, inflexible and distant from "the grass roots." Anti-institutional sentiments, combined with a "non-joiner mentality" and a perception that denominations drain local churches more than they resource them is only cause for further erosion.

### *One Denominational Model of a Church Growth Strategy*

The Christian and Missionary Alliance have a lot in common with Mennonite Brethren in terms of theology, size and emphases. They also have a strong mission focus and are larger in size outside North America than inside. In the mid-1970s a concern arose within their denominational leadership about their limited evangelistic growth. After prayer and planning they adopted a denominational strategy to "Double in a Decade Globally" (1977 - 1987). Their plan was identical to the one adopted and subsequently abandoned by United States Mennonite Brethren in the mid-1960s. The question is, "Why were the Christian and Missionary Alliance able to more than 'double in a decade' (more than double overseas and slightly less than double in North America) while Mennonite Brethren settled for a 'Decade of Enlargement' (2% growth)?"

Francis Grubb, CMA denominational leader in 1985, out-

lined their overall strategy for North American expansion as follows: 1) They prioritized new church starts in the denomination (Anglo and cross cultural). Monies from the national office flowed only to those districts which gave priority to new church development by: engaging a district church planter resource person (initiator, catalyst, supervisor vision builder, equipper); and by starting new churches. All district church planter resource people and newly appointed church planters spent one week a year in a training school (vision building, prayer, interaction, classes) under denominational sponsorship. 2) Established churches were to 'mother' daughter congregations. Again the denomination provided resource people to help churches prepare, plan and give birth to new congregations. Dr. Grubb observed that although it often took up to five years of preparation to get existing churches into a position of health and strength in order to spawn a new congregation, they were able to change the growth pattern of their denomination.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance are dissimilar to Mennonite Brethren in two important ways. 1) They have not had to deal with the mono-ethnic agenda as have German Mennonite Brethren, Swedish Baptists, or Irish Catholics, and 2) their leadership polity is more hierarchical in structure. However, their strategy has at least three important implications for Mennonite Brethren. First, we must prioritize commitment to church growth and multiplying new congregations as a basic core value in the conference. Second, we must reorder priorities in terms of providing skilled resource personnel and adequate funding for church growth/planting. Third, we must develop collaborative structures in a mission/evangelism thrust that provide both support and accountability for all churches in the conference.

### *Priorities in a Mennonite Brethren Denominational Strategy*

How should Mennonite Brethren prioritize agendas as they move into Century 21 with a strategy for church growth?<sup>3</sup>

*Focus a clear vision based on a call to spiritual renewal and ethical faithfulness.* The General Conference Board of Faith and Life is asking the right question, "Why does the denomination exist?" Quite properly it has assumed leadership for expansion and growth in this decade. Furthermore,

the vision statement is anchored in a call to spiritual renewal, personal/corporate repentance, prayer/fasting and a call to ethical faithfulness and confessional integrity. The vision is driven from above (God-centered, God-based) not from below (survival, technique-oriented). It has prioritized mission/evangelism as a core value for North American Mennonite Brethren. The challenge that remains is twofold: 1) An implementation plan that includes: the appointment of full-time resource persons, the reassessment of funding allocations, the coordination of an overall plan with national conferences/districts/provinces/local churches; 2) The support, cooperation and enthusiastic ownership of the vision statement of all conference agencies/pastors/leaders/churches on all levels within the denomination.

*The priority of starting new congregations.* The reasons for this focus are numerous. First, denominations that are starting new churches are also growing numerically, while those experiencing no new church increase have no numerical growth. Second, new churches are the most effective means of reaching new people who have no religious affiliation (a new generation, lapsed members, new people groups etc.). Third, new churches tend to grow most rapidly during the first five years (and up to the twelfth year) of their existence. Fourth, new churches can be more innovative, flexible and creative in their style to attract new people. Fifth, the organization of new congregations gives denominational leaders a greater degree of authority in implementing an overall strategy. Sixth, a denomination can broaden its outreach to serve and reach people it is not likely to touch through existing congregations. According to the demographics, the largest growth in the 1990s will come from ethnic immigration (Spanish speaking - United States; Asian Canada) and baby boomers (people born between 1946 - 1964) (Barna, 1990). This means Mennonite Brethren strategy must continue to include new congregations among different language/cultural groups, and evangelization among international students and new immigrants.

*Encourage numerical growth in larger churches.* Mass urban society calls for churches with a larger critical mass. Our earlier models of larger churches (500+ attendance) were predominately a reflection of the major population concentrations of Mennonite Brethren people (e.g., Coaldale,

Winkler, Winnipeg, Hillsboro, Reedley, Mountain Lake, Fresno, etc.). In the past decade the growth of larger churches is reflective of major urban areas and a greater heterogeneity (Vancouver, Burnaby, Visalia, Bakersfield, Abbotsford, Wichita, St. Catharines, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Collinsville).

Larger churches have greater potential for growth for the following reasons. First, they are full service churches, offering specialized programs and ministries in age/group/need specific areas which, appeals to the urban values of quality and options. Second, given the option, a disproportionate number of baby boomers are choosing larger congregations. Third, the larger congregations can become "flagship churches" in a conference and can most easily hive off daughter congregations with a nucleus and trained leadership staff. Fourth, the larger the congregation the more experience they have in identifying, attracting and receiving new members. In some ways it is easier to refine and expand a new member enlistment system in a larger congregation than it is to launch a church growth effort in a small or medium sized plateaued church.

A focus on larger churches raises some important questions about their compatibility with Mennonite Brethren theology. Is there something inherent in Mennonite Brethren theology and history that makes it easier for us to grow small and medium-sized churches than larger congregations? Do larger churches strengthen our theology? Do they downplay it? Does Schaller's observation that larger churches tend to be "less attached and become mini-denominations" have validity for Mennonite Brethren? If the larger church is unique in terms of structure, style, program and leadership, (i.e., it is not merely an enlargement of a small or medium sized church), then its "being different" does not necessarily mean "being less Mennonite Brethren or Anabaptist." Larger church models are simply a part of the massiveness of urban life and should be embraced as a healthy expression of Mennonite Brethren theology with their unique style.

*Change the reward and reporting systems in churches and the denomination.* The current reward system tends to be inwardly-focused on maintenance agendas (i.e., serving on boards, ministries inside the church, meeting suggested conference norms, etc). New churches are expected to show growth and to show reason why they are worthy of continued

support. If new churches need growth goals and specifically outwardly-focused ministries, established churches need them even more because of institutionalization, plateauing and survival instincts that subtly become priorities over time. All congregations need to prioritize goals of reaching the unchurched, and to hold themselves accountable for the attainment of these goals. There must be greater freedom both in conferences, and particularly in local churches to initiate ministries that are need-oriented, outwardly-focused and evangelism-driven.

The strength of parachurch agencies is their ability to focus on specific affinity groups in society for evangelism. Many congregations could adapt the same strategy with even greater effectiveness. People must be mobilized in the areas of their giftedness and according to the church's outreach ministry priorities, rather than being drafted for inwardly-focused, maintenance-oriented programs. A change of the reporting and reward system in churches and the conference will not only focus the core values and priorities, but it will also fundamentally reshape the spirit and ethos of a conference.

*Help revitalize middle-sized churches in high population areas that have been on a plateau in size for several years.* There are some crucial questions that middle-sized churches on a plateau must face. What is God calling us as a church to be in this community at this time? What image do outsiders have of our church and what do they perceive to be our strengths? What is the specialty focus of our church's ministry? Are we staffed for plateau or for growth? Do we provide adequate secretarial/support staff so leaders can fulfill their calling (Acts 6)? Who is responsible for the mobilization of people and the management of ministry? How is the church working on the expansion, development and care of a network of lay volunteers? Schaller says this last question is most crucial if middle-sized congregations are to move off a plateau into a growth mode (1983: 77). A further discussion of plateaued churches is given below.

*Encourage smaller, rural congregations to refocus their mission vision in keeping with contextual realities.* Since many Mennonite Brethren churches are in rural, highly churched contexts they do not have the same potential for numerical growth (a more limited critical mass and less people traffic in church services) as do urban congregations.

Nonetheless, every church can be “salt and light” where it is located and can develop a vision that is beyond itself. In addition to commitment to evangelism on a local level, smaller rural churches can focus their mission vision beyond the community in numerous ways. First, they should do a realistic assessment within a fifteen mile radius of the church to determine the number of unreached and unchurched. Second, they can help sponsor (pray, support and help fund) a new church in church in a nearby city together with the district/home mission board. Third, they can participate in an “adopt-a-sister-church program” either nationally or internationally. Fourth, their youth, early retirees and “winter snowbirds” can be involved on short-term global mission teams and ventures as an extension of the local church. Fifth, they can initiate specific targeted outreach ministries in their community to people in need (e.g., hospitals, jails, schools, the elderly, the handicapped etc.) Sixth, they can play a vital role in praying, calling out and preparing workers for “equipping ministry roles” in the church (i.e., pastors, missionaries, evangelists).

*Prioritize practical evangelism training programs in our educational institutions and churches.* With the increasing paganization of North American culture, evangelism training will need to become more intentionally focussed personally, in our churches and in our schools. Since North American Mennonite Brethren core values are higher education and overseas mission, practical evangelism training is more a matter of prioritization and implementation than of change in direction. Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary has already made major revision in mission/evangelism training through the intensive Mission Training Institute. All of our Colleges and Bible Institutes need to be encouraged to revise and strengthen their training programs in evangelism, leadership development, church planting and cross-cultural mission. The next generation will not be trained in evangelism without a passion, commitment and confidence in mission among current pastors and those being prepared for leadership by our schools.

These seven recommendations revolve around two primary issues: sorting out Mennonite Brethren core values and priorities by the criteria of where we invest our resources (people, time and money); and insisting that a growing conference must provide the resources, an overall plan, redirection,

and encouragement to local congregations. The price to pay is investment in full-time resource people and financial support for expansion and new church development in North America. This is not to suggest another layer of conference bureaucracy. However, direction and coordination of all of our efforts are essential. The national conferences (Canada and United States) and several provinces (British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario) already have full-time resource personnel in place. The U. S. Districts and a number of Canadian provinces need to move in the same direction in securing evangelism/church planting resource persons. An overall North American strategy for church growth is not in place at this time.

### *New Church Planting Models*

If new church starts are the most effective means of implementing the Great Commission, and if Mennonite Brethren embrace church planting as a core value, what are the most helpful models and strategies?

The book of Acts and the strategies of Paul in evangelization/church planting are most instructive. While one cannot assume that the Pauline pattern is the only model, or that Acts is comprehensive in reporting all new starts in the the first century, Paul followed basic principles. Pauline principles in church planting include: the establishment of churches under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6; 17:16); the choice of strategic locations for establishing new churches; the use of teams in starting new churches; the evangelization strategy which began in the synagogue and then moved to the marketplace; the development and training of future leaders; the establishment of churches on brief personal tenures; and the maintenance of a follow-up nurture program.

Current church planting models normally involve several strategies.

### *The Division/Multiplication Model*

This model is often referred to as "the division of a cell for the purpose of multiplication." A church, out of mission motivation, overcrowded facilities or a geographic shift of its membership base, decides to make two congregations out of one. The total congregation functions as a unit in the planning, in obtaining property/facilities, and in the division of the leader-

ship and membership. The advantages of this model are that the new church starts with a strong support base, a large critical mass, and adequate finances and qualified leaders. Moreover, the model creates new options for reaching out because the two churches will attract different people. It is one way for immigrant groups to deal with the language transition problem for the second generation.

The main disadvantage of this model for the new church is that unless the nucleus transferring has a clear vision for mission, it will tend to plateau, repel newcomers, or become a “clone” of the sending church. The main struggle of the sending church is twofold: regrouping after the loss of a significant part of the total church family and workforce; and refocusing the church’s vision in an older, stable neighborhood where people are more settled and more difficult to reach. There have been times when the division/multiplication model has functioned among Mennonite Brethren, less by plan than as a result of a conflict or split. In such cases, good can still come out of a bad process, but both churches have major hurdles to overcome in terms of healing, reconciliation and developing an outward focus and a healthy growth pattern.

The intentional division/multiplication model has been used with good effectiveness in areas where there was a larger critical mass of Mennonite Brethren. Examples include Fresno (Bethany and Butler); Calgary (Highland and Dalhousie); St. Catharines (Scott Street and Fairview/Grantam); Kitchener (Kitchener M.B. and Glencairn); Winnipeg (North Kildonan and McIvor).

### *The Mother-Daughter Church Model*

In this model the initiative may come from a local church, a conference agency, or a group of believers concerned with starting a new church in a given geographic area. When such a model is initiated by a mother congregation, it is usually a reflection of a strong mission vision, a multiplication mindset and a strategy for expansion. The new church may be the outgrowth of Bible studies, outreach ministries or preaching meetings in a given geographic area. It may be with people of the same culture/class or it may be a cross-cultural church plant, where an unreached people group is identified, an indigenous leader is secured, and the church facilities are shared. The model of some larger churches is to “hive off” a significant

nucleus of members (40 - 75) together with one pastoral staff member. The Willingdon Church in Burnaby is a good model of starting both same-culture and cross-cultural churches. In the past seven years they have daughtered three churches: two in the greater Vancouver areas by sending a nucleus and pastoral staff (Cornerstone in Surrey and Hyde Park in Coquitlam) and a Spanish language church which meets in their facility. The advantage of this model for the new church is that it has a start with a good prayer, financial and people support base; it is a good way to reach new people in new areas; and it tends to involve and develop more younger couples/singles from the mother church. The advantages to the sending church are that it revitalizes the mission vision; it is one of the most effective strategies of new leadership development; and God often rewards obedience by replacing the "sent-out nucleus."

Mennonite Brethren, historically, have drawn heavily on this model of church planting for both new Anglo and cross-cultural starts. The Hispanic churches in Orosi, Dinuba, Parlier, Reedley, and Orange Cove were outgrowths of the Reedley and Dinuba Mennonite Brethren churches under this pattern. Other examples include: Central District (Onida and Gettysburg, S.D.); Fresno (North Fresno and Butler); Abbotsford (South Abbotsford and the East Indian Church); Vancouver (Frazerview and Richmond Bethel/Hindi Punjabi Chapel); Washington (Birch Bay and Ferndale); Denver (Garden Park and Belleview Acres); Kansas (Newton and Hesston); Winnipeg (Central Church and Portage Ave; Portage Ave and Westwood Community); St. Catharines (Grantham and Fairview-Louth/Westview); Edmonton (Lendrum and Mill Woods/West Edmonton); Langley (South Langely and North Langely); Regina (Parliament and East Regina/Chinese Community).

### *The Nucleus/Association Model*

The nucleus approach has been used extensively by the Evangelical Free Church, particularly in the Los Angeles area. The model is centered on one or several Bible study groups and their initiative to start a church. Often the regional church planter resource person is drawn in for consultation, organization and the calling of the first pastor. The association dimension refers to a planned strategy in some denominations that seek to plant new churches in a city by drawing a nucleus from

two or more existing congregations in that city. The nucleus/association model has some real advantages, particularly if its start and early development is supervised by a specific denominational resource person or one of the local pastors. It is a model that takes the people resources from surrounding churches/groups and is able to avoid the "small church syndrome" in the early stages. The chief hazards of the model are twofold: different groups coming from different churches struggle with bonding and developing a common vision; and unless ultimate responsibility is lodged with a supervising person or church, "everybody's responsibility becomes nobody's responsibility."

One of the best Mennonite Brethren illustration of the nucleus/association model is Laurelglen in Bakersfield. It was started in 1978, under the supervision of the Pacific District Board of Home Missions, with a nucleus from three different churches in the area (Heritage, Rosedale, Shafter). Today it has an attendance of 750 with a steady growth history over the past 12 years. In the same city in the past five years, it should be noted that two subsequent attempts at church planting under the nucleus/association model have started and ended (Southside Fellowship and Olive Drive). Modified versions of this model have also been used in new church starts in other major Mennonite Brethren population centers (i.e., Vancouver, Winnipeg, Fresno, St. Catharines, etc.).

### *Pioneer Church Planting Model*

This model most commonly represents the Pauline strategy, that is, establishing churches in areas where there is no Christian witness, church or denominational presence. It may be initiated by the church planter, a Home Mission Board, or a concerned nucleus. It can be used effectively in Anglo and cross-cultural church planting. The model focuses heavily on the gifts, vision and leadership of the church planter.

If this model begins without a nucleus it is essential that the church planting couple or team be gifted in evangelism, people-skills, initiating relationships, and risk-taking/management abilities. The strength of this approach is that it can be more creative and flexible in style because it focuses specifically on evangelism; it tends to be one of the most effective models for reaching unchurched; it establishes a witness for Christ in a new area, and often becomes a base from which to

multiplying more churches. The weakness of the model is that it tends to be higher risk because of cost, leadership selection and transition; it tends to become dependent on the initial planter and so the transfer to a subsequent leader can result in an erosion in attendance; and it often lacks a good support system of prayer, counsel and encouragement from other churches.

Mennonite Brethren have used this model to establish a witness in many cities. Examples include: Central District (Omaha, Sioux Falls, Rapid City); Southern District (Wichita, Denver, Kansas City, Tulsa, Houston); Pacific District (Portland, Bellingham, Visalia, Los Angeles - Arleta: Cristo es la Respuesta, Sacramento); British Columbia (Prince George, Dawson Creek, North Vancouver, Vancouver - Bethel Chinese, Surrey, Fraserview - Hindi Punjabi); Alberta (Calgary, Red Deer, Ft. McMurray); Saskatchewan (Lloydminster, Yorkton, Regina - Chinese Community); Manitoba (Thompson, Snow Lake, The Pas, St. Boniface, Native Canadians); Ontario (Simcoe, Niagara Falls, Ottawa, Toronto - Christian Chinese); and churches planted in Quebec and the Maritimes.

Two summary comments are appropriate. First, there appear to be more healthy models of church growth/planting in Canada than in the United States. The reasons for this are probably related to contextual factors as well as to conference/leadership priorities. Second, the British Columbia Mennonite Brethren conference has been the most aggressive in church growth/planting over the past two decades. While population trends and critical mass are factors, the most important factors seems to have been visionary leadership along with implementation strategies involving prayer, resource people and funding. The result is a conference that embraces and exudes church growth/planting as a core value.

### *People Group-Priorities for Mennonite Brethren*

The challenge before North American Mennonite Brethren by year 2000 is to "multiply by a minimum of 15 churches per year . . . and to target 10 major cities to plant 50 congregations among different ethnic peoples with various models of church." North American demographics would indicate at least four major groups that should be of concern to Mennonite Brethren in our church planting efforts.

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### *New Churches Among the “Missing Generation”*

In the past several decades the major erosion in both mainline and evangelical churches has been people in their 20's, 30's and early 40's. Commonly referred to as the “Baby Boomers” (born between 1946-1964) and “Baby Busters” (born between (1964 -1977), they represent 31% of the North America population (8 million in Canada; 77 million in United States). Their sheer number, plus the fact that they represent a different generation in terms of motivating values, rearranged priorities, leadership styles, weaker relationships, tolerance for diversity, response to change, low loyalty and high expectations, make them a formidable challenge for the church. According to Doug Murren they are nonjoiners, noninstitutional, experience-oriented and have a high level of dysfunctionality. They believe women need to be represented in leadership, and that singleness should be celebrated. They have a sense of destiny (1990: 37-39).

Even though they are more educated, marry less and later, tend to have fewer children and divorce more frequently, they are not disinterested in spiritual issues or the church. What is clear is that the church that reaches this group will have to be a different style. Tex Sample suggests that programs in churches reaching baby boomers must meet a fivefold criteria of being: intrinsically valuable; emotionally expressive; relationally focused; societally conscious; and event/action oriented (1990: 33-35). Doug Murren gives eight practical strategies for reaching baby boomers: use practical how-to teaching; give children a real visible priority; play down titles; allow women their platform; provide diversity; cultivate humor; value the singles; keep the sermons short (1989: 32; 41).

The issue is, are Mennonite Brethren willing “to become all things” to baby boomers in order to win some? If so, Mennonite Brethren must prioritize reaching baby boomers in this decade because of their current spiritual quest, their vast number and their responsiveness to new churches that fit their style. Mennonite Brethren theology will also challenge their value system in terms of discipleship, mission, service-orientation, generosity and commitment.

### *New Churches Among Different Ethnic/Cultural Groups*

With globalization trends the world is becoming more

urbanized (42%), internationalized (Anglos increasingly in the minority), and Asianized (50% of babies born globally are Asian). Every city is increasingly a mosaic of different cultural, language and ethnic groups. Denominations and churches should reflect the same kind of people mix in their membership and church planting models. Crosscultural ministries must focus various different groups.

One of these is the ethnic group. Mennonite Brethren in North America have churches in at least 17 different language groups (Spanish, German, Portuguese, Khmu, Hmong, Punjabi, Hindi, Chinese, Lao, Mandrin, Telegu, French, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, English and native Indian). Numerous churches, in response to changing demographics and new immigrant arrivals, have caught vision for starting cross-cultural churches by finding indigenous leaders and sharing facilities.

Mennonite Brethren have some good models of both separate and multicongregational ministries to ethnics. Multicongregational models include: Burnaby (Willingdon); Clearbrook (Bakerview/South Abbotsford); Winnipeg (Elmwood); Fresno (Butler/Bethany). Crosscultural church planting requires extreme sensitivity to different cultural values and patterns. Appleby's, *The Church Is in a Stew*, is a helpful resource (1990).

International Students represent another distinct group. While this is a more indirect approach to church planting in many ways it is most effective and far reaching. Over 200,000 international students studying on North American college and university campuses represent an open mission field for many of our churches. They tend to be among the most progressive in their culture, and after training many return to their countries as the political, social, economic and religious leaders. What they seek in North America is an education, along with an exposure to our culture and friendships. What they get is an education but the tragedy is that a large percentage of these students say they have never been invited into a North American home. Mennonite Brethren Mission/Services is to be commended for its recent strategy of working in partnership with conferences and churches in focusing ministry among two North American groups: international students, and new people groups in this country. Initial pilot projects are in place in Fresno and Winnipeg.

Settled, established ethnic groups offer an opportunity for crosscultural ministries. While first generation recent immigrants may be more receptive to the gospel, the second and third generation ethnics also need to be reached. While there are still cultural and racial barriers there is no language barrier. For example, in the United States there is a higher percentage of unchurched blacks than there is in Africa. Over the years Mennonite Brethren have worked with native Indians, but today there is still a tremendous need for indigenous churches among that people group. Some existing independent ethnic churches are seeking alignment with a like-minded denomination. For example, the Filipenses 4:13 church under Luis Colon in El Monte, California, was an emerging congregation looking for alignment with a like-minded denomination when they linked up with Mennonite Brethren.

#### *New Churches in the "Growth Corridors" of Major Cities*

The CGM has demonstrated that the fastest church growth models tend to be in the suburbs, or in the "growth corridors" of an area. The reasons for this are numerous. First, people who live in newly populated areas tend to be more open; they are developing a new social system. Second, new people tend to be drawn to a new church more readily than to an established church. Third, "growth corridors" normally do not have an abundance of churches so there is a larger critical mass of unchurched to draw from. Fourth, people tend to want to be with a more homogeneous group. "Like-kind churches" tend to grow more rapidly than heterogeneous churches. The challenge facing Mennonite Brethren is not only to "target 10 major North American cities" for ethnic church planting, but also to lay a strategy for church planting in the "growth corridors" of those same cities for Anglo plants.

#### *New Churches Among the Urban Poor*

The inner city represents the new frontier in church planting for Mennonite Brethren in Century 21. Historically, we have not had a blind eye or a deaf ear to the poor. Our history is one of a refugee people being involved in rescue mission work and in the feeding, resettlement and redevelopment of the poor. However, one is hard pressed to find a model among North American churches where the gospel has taken root among the poor in the inner city. If the prediction is correct

that the global population will be 50% urban by 2025 (more than 8 billion people) and that 50% of those urban dwellers will live in poverty, then Mennonite Brethren must ask how they will see, hear and experience the gospel in their context?

Church planting among the poor must be incarnational — one that identifies with the hurts and the needs of people in the community. It calls for a new kind of missionary — those who feel called to the poor, to live among the poor, to become poor themselves and to understand what it is like to be poor. It calls for a wholistic approach which involves a collaborative and cooperative style among pastors, churches, denominations and social service agencies. It requires a large investment of people, time and resources often with minimal visible church growth. However, Mennonite Brethren must respond to Viv Grigg's charge that "the church has given the poor bread and kept the bread of life for the middle class" (1987:14).

There is much in Anabaptist/Mennonite Brethren theology that commends itself to ministry to the poor: reconciliation, social justice issues, building community, family centeredness, discipling. McGavran's thesis of "redemption and lift" is a powerful reminder that churches and denominations easily become insensitive to other classes and kinds of people. If God calls us to plant churches in the suburban growth corridors where all the systems function, surely He also calls us to those sections of the city where the systems don't work and to people who feel even more marginalized from mainstream society.

### *Strategies for Revitalizing Established Churches*

Of the 375,000 churches in North America, approximately 80-85% have plateaued or are declining numerically in their growth pattern. Mennonite Brethren churches in North America fit that general pattern. Plateaus and decline usually signal the need for change and for a refocused vision. While the causes for plateaus and decline may be related to internal factors (i.e., schisms, lack of vision, staffing needs) or to external factors (i.e., overcrowded facilities, lack of parking, changing demographics) there are several basic characteristics of nongrowing churches. Most of these traits tend to be more sociological and strategic rather than theological. Researcher

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George Barna notes that non-growing churches share ten common traits: they act as God's protector (i.e., become turf minded); suffer from a denial syndrome; treat visitors like a captive audience (are not geared to include the unchurched); serve as judge and jury toward the unchurched; fear confrontation; use confrontative evangelism strategies; hire staff by precedent (rather than by need and in consideration of ministry to the unchurched); they live in isolation from their community; and they tend to avoid taking risks (safety, security and survival become dominant values) (1990: 13-15). Leith Anderson lists six barriers to renewed vision in the church: focus on institution rather than purpose; contentment in being a socially self-perpetuating organization; letting the minority rule; not inclined to take risks; implementing yesterday's dreams; and unwillingness to suffer pain (1990:111-118).

While there are two external factors that a local church has no control over, namely its age and environment, every congregation can make choices that impact its mission effectiveness. The following suggestions are not exhaustive, but represent significant choices for getting churches off plateaus.

### *Clarify Your Purpose*

The most important question for any church is, "Why?" Why do we exist? What is our purpose? Clarification of purpose begins with a renewed vision of what God is calling the church to be where it is. It is anchored in the spiritual dynamics of prayer, faith, fasting, sensitivity to the Spirit and obedience in mission. Without a vision of God as he is, there is no vision of the church as it could be. Robert Dale insists that churches move away from plateaus and decline when they "begin to dream again" (1981) and implement ministry to "keep the dream alive" (1988). Visions look to the future, see things the way they could be and drive us to action.

Most churches and para-church organizations have a purpose statement. It is often included in the constitution. The problem is that the typical statements are too long and unknown to most of the people. Furthermore, since the church is a dynamic organism in constant change, every generation needs to know the purpose statement in order to own it. The process of developing or revising a purpose statement is a powerful catalyst for change itself. Good purpose statements should: answer the question, "Why?" They should be suffi-

ciently brief to be remembered and be understood by both insiders and outsiders.

### *Do a Situation Audit*

An assessment should be both internal and external. Internally, there are important diagnostic questions that the church must ask. Why do we exist? Who's in charge? Is our focus primarily inward or outward? What is our history? How has change been handled in the past? What are our ministry strengths and competencies? What are our major weaknesses? What priorities does the church calendar and budget reflect? How are members mobilized for ministry? Where are people investing most of their ministry time? What is our system of welcoming, tracking and enfolding new people? What are the non-negotiables in our church?

Externally, the questions should help the church understand the people it is seeking to reach. Who are the people? What kind of people are they? What is their age, income, gender, marital status, religious preference, occupation, education level, political affiliation, etc.? Who is my "neighbour?" What kinds of needs are represented in our church's ministry area? The church must ask questions and do a lot of listening. What do the unchurched think? What do they like and dislike? What are their fears? What are their dreams? What are their "felt needs?" What are their real needs?

### *Develop Ministries That Fit Your Context*

Once a church knows a community it can make some important decisions about whom to serve and how to reach people. Increasingly in urban centers generic strategies and mass appeal are non-productive. The clearer the target the more effective the strategy.

Once specific needs and people groups are identified, ministry must be molded accordingly. For example, if the ministry is to Hmong, then their language must be learned. If one is reaching elderly retirees, the church buildings should not have steps, and the church programs should not be held during evening hours. If the ministries being designed are for young families with children, resources must go into nursery facilities and programs for preschoolers.

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*Plan to Grow Younger and Larger  
Rather than Older and Smaller*

Most churches are concerned about families and desire to be intergenerational. While this is commendable, the reality is that as churches get older they become more “age-bound” in terms of leadership, core values, style and program. Unless established churches take deliberate steps to develop an outreach focus on younger families/singles they will inevitably become “older and smaller” congregations.

Churches which fit the “jago-bound” pattern might consider following deliberate strategies. Examples: Develop several Bible study classes for younger adults; add an additional worship service that is different in style and appeals to the next generation; introduce several young-adult classes designed to reach new members; daughter a new church since new congregations draw most of their members from that segment of people that are under fifty years of age (Schaller 1990: 75); focus several ministries that are specifically socially conscious (it is estimated that 16 of the 77 million baby boomers in the United States are concerned with social justice and environmental issues); increase summer programming rather than planning a slump (two-thirds of families that change their residence do so in summer); develop a system of small groups as the major vehicle for congregational care, nurture and the enfolding and assimilation of new people; place a high priority on children’s programming; pay particular attention to having good nursery facilities and staffing; plan high visibility, event-oriented programs geared for the unchurched (i.e., musicals, dramas, crafts fair, Hawaiian Luau etc.); expand the church music program to include community children’s and youth choirs/small groups; and initiate new outwardly-focused ministries by training and mobilizing the recent converts and members.

*Prioritize Being a User-Friendly, Guest-Conscious Church*

What the late G. W. Peters said of Mennonite Brethren is all too common in many evangelical churches. “Our problem is not that our people are not evangelizing, but that our churches are unable to include and assimilate new people.” While most churches proclaim themselves as being “friendly,” the people who come as “outsiders” often have a different perception.

The deeper issues for Mennonite Brethren in developing user-friendly, guest-conscious churches relate to ethnicity (mono-ethnic vs. multi-ethnic), size (single-cell vs. multi-cell) and structures (nurture systems vs. incorporation systems). However, there are some basic questions that every church can address on a practical level. How are new people welcomed and invited into the church? What is the system for tracking and enfolding newcomers? How are they introduced to the church — its theology, philosophy of ministry, mission? Are worship services “seeker-sensitive?” Are there new classes for new people? How would guests like to be treated (left alone? introduced?)? Who initiates personal contact with newcomers after a church visit? How and where are those contacts made? While the identification and tracking of guests may not be as complex for smaller or rural churches, it is a major issue in larger, urban churches. The larger question of incorporating, assimilating and mobilizing new members is vital for plateaued/declining churches regardless of size or geographic location.

### *Conclusion*

In implementing a growth strategy for Century 21, several shifts will likely be necessary. One is the shift from the present mono-ethnic to a multi-ethnic perspective. Another shift called for is the shift from the single-cell to the multi-cell structure. To grow it will be important to shift from exclusiveness to greater inclusiveness which means, among other things, the sharing/transfer of power/authority in decision making to newer members. One must also ask, can there be a shift from a denominational focus to a transdenominational appeal? Moreover, some shifts are required in the expectations of pastors: from a “doer and chaplain” in smaller churches to “delegator and visionary” in larger, growing churches. It is urgent that there be a shift from a single socio-economic class to a variety of classes in the church. Finally, a shift is necessary from decentralized to more centralized denominational leadership in church growth/planting.

The challenge facing the Mennonite Brethren Church as it approaches Century 21 is, Does it have on its heart what God has on His, namely, the multiplying of disciples, churches and leaders? Strategies and methods will vary; however, the mes-

sage and God's heart for people remain constants for the church in every decade. May the words of Rupert Brooke's be descriptive of a dynamic, growing and vibrant Mennonite Brethren church as it moves into Century 21, "May God be thanked who matched us for this hour"

### ENDNOTES

1. Statistical Growth Patterns for Mennonite Brethren Churches (N.A) (Nikkel 4-5; Schmidt)

| a) By # of churches        | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1989 |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| United States              | 68   | 96   | 121  | 120  | 131  |
| Canada                     | 109  | 136  | 139  | 178  | 198  |
| Total Churches             | 177  | 232  | 260  | 298  | 329  |
| Total gain per decade      |      | 55   | 28   | 28   | 31   |
| Total gain per decade by % |      | 31%  | 12%  | 15%  | 10%  |
| Net annual gain by decade  |      | 3.1% | 1.2% | 1.5% | 1%   |

| b) By New Churches                | 1950s                 |     | 1960s      |     | 1970s      |     | 1980s      |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|
| By Decade                         | Start/Stop            |     | Start/Stop |     | Start/Stop |     | Start/Stop |     |
| United States                     | +27                   | -3  | +29        | -18 | +15        | -6  | +21        | -16 |
| Canada                            | +22                   | -16 | +46        | -19 | +41        | -18 | +61        | -16 |
| Total                             | +49                   | -19 | +75        | -37 | +56        | -24 | +71        | -32 |
| Net Gain by church                | 30                    | 38  | 32         | 39  |            |     |            |     |
| Total Churches Began (4 decades): | 1950s -80s: 262 Total |     |            |     |            |     |            |     |
| Ended:                            | 112 Net: 150          |     |            |     |            |     |            |     |
| Percentage of Total starts/stops: | 57%                   |     |            |     |            |     |            |     |

| c) By membership     | 1950   | 1960   | 1970   | 1980   | 1989   |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| (Source: Yearbooks)  |        |        |        |        |        |
| United States        | 11,676 | 12,896 | 15,103 | 16,972 | 16,794 |
| Canada               | 10,033 | 13,945 | 16,694 | 21,095 | 25,185 |
| Total:               | 21,709 | 26,841 | 31,797 | 38,067 | 41,979 |
| Net Growth by decade |        | 5132   | 4956   | 6280   | 3730   |
| Decadal growth by    |        | 24.0%  | 18.0%  | 20.0%  | 10.0%  |
| Annual growth by     |        | 2.4%   | 1.8%   | 2.0%   | 1.0%   |

2. For example, Francis Dubose classifies North American churches as: cathedral, downtown "old first," uptown, people's church, university, large/medium sized/small neighborhood churches, storefront, black, ethnic, suburban (1978: 58-69). C. Peter Wagner, working off an international typology, sees essentially five types: cathedral, storefront, outer city/suburban, house church and ethnic church (1971: 181-183). Ray Bakke describes urban churches as "an ecclesiastical flower garden" (1986: 110-111). However, he also introduces another model of church types based on urban personality profiles/styles: existential or experience-oriented people (charismatic churches); relational (body-life, familial churches); and task or goal directed churches (Rose/Hadaway, 1984: 82). Arlin J. Rothauge's classification of churches is essentially by size: family church: 0-50; pastoral church: 50-150; program church: 150-350; and corporation church: 350 - 500+ (no date: 7-36). Lyle Schaller describes church models from three different perspectives: a) By size: small (under 100 - cat, collie), middle/awkward (100-225 - garden, house), large (250-450 - mansion) huge/mine-denomination (450 - ranch, nation). b) By

- theological emphasis and predominance: first-person church (God, the Father); second-person churches (Jesus Christ); third-person churches (Holy Spirit) and bible-centered churches (reading/ interpreting Scripture). c) By the models of congregational life: pastor-centered, unifying-goal, three-circles (current core, old-timers, less active new member), small group, common heritage (nationality, language, doctrine) and congregation — of congregations (multiple small congregations/groups in the larger church) (1984: 14-37; 75-88; 122-132). Paul Hiebert provides yet another perspective of church types based on a two-dimensional grid (vertically: mono cultural · multi) cultural world view; horizontally: strong group control aggressive individualism) which includes: high church and society; ethnic church and society; and aggregate church and society (1979: 9-11).
3. Lyle Schaller (1983: 161-165) enumerates a variety of assumptions which influence core values and priorities. E.g., it is important that full-time personnel be in place, nationally and regionally, who are charged with the responsibility of implementing a church growth strategy in the denomination.

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