TELLING THE GOOD NEWS:
HOME MISSIONS IN THE PACIFIC DISTRICT
Henry J. Schmidt with John Unger

The growth of the Pacific District Conference (PDC) from four churches with 343 members to forty-three congregations with 7320 members in 1986 is a story of missionary vision and expansion. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church "was born in an atmosphere of missions and missionary endeavor," so it is not surprising that MB theology is evangelistic in spirit. The history of the PDC reflects that evangelism and home missions have been the centerpiece of their history. The fact that the Home Missions Committee was one of the first boards appointed at the 1912 conference is its own commentary.

Laying the foundation and consolidating the settlers: 1891–1929

Church extension in the PDC prior to 1929 can be summarized in one statement: churches were established wherever groups of MBs settled. The earliest MB settlers came west in the 1890s; by 1912 several churches already had been formed. The increased flow of settlers to the west resulted in rapid growth of existing churches and the establishment of several new congregations. By 1929 the PDC had grown to twelve churches with 1705 members. Parallel to these successful congregations were several smaller, tentative settlements, many of which did not survive more than a few years.

The minutes of 1912 provide a glimpse of the mission vision and methods of the PDC in those early years. Peter Richert of Bakersfield gave a keynote address in which he stressed the need for evangelism and nurture among the various settlements, "otherwise they will stray." The emphasis was on soul winning within the existing MB congregations. Itinerant ministers travelled throughout the district conducting Sunday services and revival meetings at the various "mission stations." Four stations were mentioned in the 1912 minutes: Bakersfield, Lodi, Fairmead and Reedley. Bakersfield was to be served by Peter Richert, John J. Boese, Heinrich Kohfeld and Jacob Kliwer; John Berg was to visit Lodi once a month as well as minister to the growing number of German speaking people in the central valley; various ministers from the Reedley area were to arrange biweekly visits to Fairmead. The conference reimbursed itinerant ministers at the rate of $50.00 per month plus expenses. Two resolutions relevant to home missions were passed in 1912. First, the conference requested that the Central District release H.S. Voth of Dallas, Oregon for two and one-half months of ministry in California. Second, Abraham Richert of Corn, Oklahoma was engaged for one month of itinerant work among the MB settlers in Los Angeles, Anaheim, Orange and Escondido.
The model of home missions established at the 1912 conference formed the pattern for many years to come. Willing and able ministers volunteered their services as itinerant workers to the Home Missions Committee. The local churches, in turn, submitted to the committee requests for visits from these ministers. At the annual sessions, the resources were matched with the needs, and a schedule for ministry was drawn for the coming year. The 1913 home missions budget was formed by multiplying the number of weeks of ministry by dollars per week in wages.

During its early stages, the PDC Home Missions Committee focused primarily on helping the existing MB congregations. However, the establishment of early city mission works is evidence of a mission concern beyond the boundaries of the conference. In 1913 B.J. Friesen of Bakersfield presented the conference with the need for a mission in that city. The delegates decided that the conference was too weak to accept such a project, and was not "ripe" for the task. However, a committee was elected to explore the issue, and in 1915 the mission in Bakersfield was formally organized. In 1916 elections were held by the conference to choose committees to oversee the Bakersfield work and the mission in Portland, which had been established at roughly the same time. Both of these missions were separate from the MB churches in those cities.

The City Terrace Mission was begun in Los Angeles in 1926. For the next sixteen years the primary vision for this mission was carried by two brothers, Aaron and John Friesen. Although the City Terrace work did not come under the jurisdiction of the Home Missions Committee until 1941, it had a close connection with the conference through annual reports, visits from itinerant ministers and quarterly financial offerings.

In 1925 a category entitled, "Extension work" was added to the Home Missions budget. Primarily a subsidy for the smaller churches of the district, a portion of it was designated for the City Terrace Missions and a ministry to Russian immigrants in the Lodi and San Francisco areas. The Russian minister chosen for the work, Wasil Wasilenko, evidently preferred an independent ministry, and the cooperative venture was abandoned in 1929.

Winds of change are recognizable in the Home Missions Committee's reports of the mid-1920s. One change was the increasing acceptance of the English language. In 1921 the Aberdeen, Idaho church specifically requested ministers who could speak both German and English. In 1924 Los Angeles reported holding German services for its own members and English for the extension work. The Fairmead (later Madera) Church reported the establishment in 1926 of a separate Sunday school in English.

Another shift was the type of ministry offered by itinerant ministers. Revival and evangelistic meetings still took place, but now were supplemented by Bible lectures as well. The Home Missions Committee expressed concern that these itinerant ministers focus not only on the saving of souls, but also on the strengthening of spiritual life among the members. The specific issue was the committee's concern about "loose living . . . on the West Coast." Bible lectures were one means of countering these trends.
During this early period the Home Missions Committee addressed a number of policy matters. In 1923 a question arose concerning the proper procedure when a brother wished to enter conference work. A resolution was passed requiring a recommendation from the home church as well as an examination by conference leadership. In an obvious attempt to curb outside influences, the conference decided that only its own ministers could be paid for special services. Since most of the smaller churches relied on conference funding they would be unable to arrange for itinerants from other traditions. Mennonite Brethren ministers were, however, encouraged to accept invitations from different groups.

Home mission work was affected by the strong winds of dissension in the 1920s. Vehement disagreements took place within the conference over issues of theology, lifestyle and home mission methodology. The 1925 schism in the Reedley MB Church that led to the founding of South Reedley (later Dinuba) is the most significant, but only one of the many examples. The Board of Reference and Counsel, meanwhile, was asked to address a hypothetical question of conflict resolution between Home Missions Committee members, evangelists and local pastors. There also was tension between the large and small congregations in the district. Small churches regularly pleaded that they not be forgotten when itinerant ministry assignments were made. Limited resources, however, meant that such requests were not always granted. The smaller congregations thus often felt abandoned by their larger and better established counterparts.

Expanding the horizons: 1930–1949

The years 1930–1949 represent a significant expansion of mission vision. During this period the work of the Home Missions Committee was divided into three categories: evangelism, extension and city missions. Evangelism was defined as everything done in the local church context to reach the unsaved and to function as a congregation. Extension work was any Christian work in areas not served by local constituencies, for the purpose of saving souls. Once an extension work was well established on conference owned property, it was designated as a City Mission. Such missions were encouraged to become indigenous as soon as possible. Rescue missions, also part of the city mission work, provided opportunities for preaching the gospel to the "down and out." People saved through such efforts were encouraged to join local evangelical churches, because the organization of a church in that context was considered impossible.

The 1930s were difficult years for the PDC, both because of the Depression and the struggle to stabilize local congregations. Membership dropped from 1779 in 1930 to 1671 in 1932 and only two new churches were organized in that decade, one of which closed soon thereafter. The closing of the Portland church in 1937, however, marked the beginning of an extended period of stability in the conference, with no further church closures for approximately twenty years. Beginning with MB urbanization in the 1940s, three city congregations were accepted into the PDC: West Salem, Oregon; San Jose, California; and Fresno, California (later Bethany MB).
Itinerant ministers continued to be a major focus of Home Missions strategy during this period, even though the form of their work was changing. One change was in response to the problem of scheduling evangelists equitably in the various churches, since smaller churches tended to be overlooked in the process. In 1932 three churches suggested that the conference should hire one full-time evangelist for the whole year, rather than several part-time ministers. This would save travelling costs and would strengthen unity, since this evangelist would serve the same length of time in each congregation. The Home Missions Committee, however, continued to match a variety of itinerant ministers with local churches until 1941 when J.D. Hofer was appointed as conference evangelist, the first attempt at a unified evangelism approach in the PDC.

Meanwhile, concern was expressed publicly both by the Home Missions Committee and the itinerant ministers about the decreasing enthusiasm in the churches for revival and evangelistic meetings. At the 1939 conference the committee noted that itinerant evangelists “have sometimes found it hard to stir the waters.” In 1942 Rev. P.N. Hiebert asked the question, “Why do the evangelists not see more fruits of their labors?”

An innovation in evangelism technique during the 1940s was the conference purchase of a tent in which to conduct large meetings in various MB communities. The intent was to shift revival meetings out of the church building and into a more neutral location. The Tent Committee reported in 1949 that the tent was used three times in 1948 and four times in 1949. Among the events conducted in the tent were crusades with Theodore Epp in Reedley and John R. Rice in Shafter.

A further shift in the itinerant ministry relates to an apparent shortage of available ministers, and the tendency of churches to secure evangelists from outside the conference. Lists of itinerant ministers during these years reveal increasing numbers of non-conference evangelists. In 1946, for example, A.H. Ysker, Waldo Wiebe,
David Hooge and J.K. Warkentin are listed as evangelists; G.W. Peters and H.G. Wiens as Bible conference speakers. However, the list of non-conference speakers is even longer: Howard Belton, Oscar Zimmerman, William Evans, J.A. Hoffman, Harry Vom Brauch, Theodore H. Epp, Herb Tyler, Joe Johnston and John Belton. John R. Rice, Gypsy Smith, P.V. Rood and Oscar Lowry also held revival meetings in PDC churches during this time. The Board of Home Missions, obviously concerned about conference unity and loyalty, brought a recommendation to the 1943 conference, “that we stay with our general conference in selecting brethren for evangelistic work.”

The 1930s and 1940s represent remarkable change in the PDC mission vision. By the end of the 1930s unity had been restored in the conference. With major rifts reconciled, the vision for local church extension works blossomed. Although the initial vision was focused largely on child evangelism and only led to the establishment of churches in the late 1940s, it represented a broadened missions horizon. The burden of the Home Missions Committee in 1936, “to not only work in our own churches, but to see the gospel preached also beyond our own denomination,” was implemented through church extension.

Japanese Girls Class. Edna Kliwer, Teacher (1930s)

This period might best be described as the era of the Sunday school. Encouraged by the Home Missions Board, almost all churches began at least one Sunday school in their communities, often in local school buildings or migrant farm worker camps. The 1939 Home Missions report is illustrative of local church extension projects. Five young people from the Birch Bay Church in Blaine, Washington were involved in Vacation Bible School; Dallas operated a Sunday school and mission
in nearby Rickreall; Dinuba, conducted summer street meetings for Hispanics in Cutler, a Japanese Sunday school and open air meetings at Bryant migrant camp; Shafter young people conducted meetings in migrant camps, distributed clothing to the poor, held youth meetings at the Keene Sanitarium and conducted classes for Spanish-speaking young people; Rosedale held Sunday school in Greeley School; Bakersfield sponsored biweekly meetings at Arvin migrant worker camp, Sunday schools at Horace Mann School and Greenfield and was involved in jail ministry; Los Angeles young people distributed tracts and Bibles at the Los Angeles County Farm; City Terrace held weekly meetings for local women and children; Reedley started a Sunday school at Badger, extension work at Navalencia, a Japanese Sunday school and a camp ministry in General Grant Park.

The implementation of this work was related to three primary factors. First, the strong MB commitment to missions and evangelism was nurtured by itinerant ministries, annual conferences and the aggressive leadership of the Home Missions Committee. Second, the extension work caught the vision of young people, who did much of the initial work. A third factor was local church ownership of the work. While most extension projects were originally either individual efforts or outreach by youth, in 1943 the conference placed responsibility for these works squarely on individual churches.

In addition to assuming responsibility for ministries that grew out of local churches, the Home Missions Board also initiated extension projects in other areas. In 1940, for example, the board asked F.F. Wall and J.B. Toews to investigate a potential mission in Portland, Oregon. Nothing developed there, however, due to the lack
of a clear field or of suitable workers. In 1942 a new mission building was completed at City Terrace in Los Angeles and the conference called A. W. Friesen as a full-time worker there. One year later the conference approved a part-time worker in children's ministries, reimbursement for John Friesen's music ministry and funding for a vacation Bible school program. A second full-time worker, A. B. Goossen, was added in 1948, but was dropped a year later when the conference decided that each city mission should be restricted to one full-time worker. Special mention should be given to Elizabeth Wall. She apparently never was paid for any of her ministry, yet the minutes are filled with references to her heavy involvement in both the Los Angeles MB Church and City Terrace Mission.

The Home Mission Board was involved in establishing five city missions from 1945 to 1949. The first was Your Neighborhood Chapel, established in Pasadena, California in 1945 under the direction of the H. K. Warkentins of Dinuba, a work that continued into the early 1950s. The 1947 minutes reported an aggressive outreach in Victor, California under the leadership of A. A. Smith. Victor was accepted as a conference mission the following year, and by 1949 a chapel was dedicated. Progress also was seen in southwest Fresno, where the West Park and Sunset Gardens missions were organized. By 1948 both groups were meeting in remodeled army barracks. Volunteers from Pacific Bible Institute were heavily involved in both.

During this period of child evangelism and church extension several issues emerged in conference discussions of home missions. At the 1939 conference, the question was raised concerning new Christians brought to the Lord through extension work. Should they be encouraged to join an existing MB church? Should new churches be established in such works? Or should these people be encouraged to seek fellowship elsewhere? The response of the delegation is telling. They considered the question premature, and no further discussion or action was required. The primary concern was evangelism, not the establishment of churches. A second issue appears in the 1946 minutes when the City Terrace Mission reported a serious racial problem. Black children in the area had been invited to the mission, but some local whites objected strenuously to this and kept their children home. In order to avoid conflict, separate sessions for white and black children were established the following year.

In 1949 the Board of Home Missions submitted a statement describing its vision for future church extension. The policy represented a shift from work with children to the establishment of churches, and moved the emphasis from ministry within the conference to work beyond the boundaries of conference and ethnic background. This statement was accepted for further study, setting the stage for a new vision in church planting in the PDC.

New directions: 1950-1959

The 1949 decision to "establish churches" was a major shift in mission philosophy for the PDC, as revealed by the pattern that developed in starting new congregations. The Board of Home Missions became a catalyst for locating new fields, nurturing extension projects, organizing clusters of scattered urban MBs into churches,
coordinating local church and conference resources and providing leadership and funding for new works. Six churches were established during this decade, all but one with a strong nucleus of MB families and financial assistance from the PDC. In 1952 the two West Park Chapels combined to form one group under the leadership of the Ebner Friesens. In this year the Board of Home Missions also appointed the first full-time worker to Sunset Gardens Chapel, a mission primarily to Hispanics. In 1954 the City Terrace Church became the first PDC city mission to be accepted as a full member congregation. From 1955 to 1957 new churches also emerged in Fresno (Butler Avenue), Pacoima (later Arleta), South Shafter, Santa Clara, Wasco and Seattle.

Three additional developments during this decade deserve mention. First was the appointment of an Executive Director for the board. H.H. Friesen was appointed under the title of “Evangelist” in November 1950 as the first such executive. In July 1955 Dan Goertzen was appointed as Executive Secretary. He resigned in 1958 to assume the pastorate of the new El Camino Church in Santa Clara. H.R. Wiens succeeded him as part-time Executive Secretary. Each of these men was active in seeking out new fields, strengthening existing projects and raising needed funds for the work. Their contributions were invaluable.

Second, church property and buildings became an essential cornerstone in the Board of Home Missions philosophy. In 1953 the board initiated a “Church Builders Plan,” a revolving fund designed to assist newly emerging churches develop their facilities. The response from established churches was overwhelming and for the first time there was available to the board a substantial building fund reserve. Together with the Board of Trustees, the Board of Home Missions agreed to pay for property plus one-quarter of improvements and building costs if the local group would assume responsibility for the remaining three-quarters of the cost.

Third, the Board of Home Missions became a significant influence in all areas of district life during this period. The board assumed strong leadership in appointing pastors in new churches. They also established clear policy statements for these emerging churches. In 1952, for instance, they recommended that “any church coming into the conference clearly identify themselves in name with the Mennonite Brethren Conference.”

Although the detailed reports of extension work by established PDC congregations disappeared from the conference minutes after 1954, the Board of Home Missions continued to provide nurture for evangelistic and extension work, and these programs remained strong. They continued to schedule itinerant evangelists in district churches, particularly the mission works. Itinerant ministers were, however, less common and their role in the district less visible by the 1950s. In 1958, after failing to recruit a district evangelist, the board recommended the support of Waldo Wiebe, a US Conference evangelist who would serve all three US districts. Local evangelism and church extension continued to be a strong emphasis. For example, the Home Missions report of 1952 contains references to works in Selma, Bakersfield, Dinuba, Parlier and Visalia.

Another expression of Board of Home Missions leadership was the continuing
support for child evangelism programs and the beginning of a camping program. In 1949 the Pacific Bible Institute Educational Board recommended that the Board of Home Missions take over the “His Jewels Bible Clubs” (HJBC) in the hope of starting such clubs in all PDC churches. Although this did not happen, most churches between Fresno and Bakersfield became active in the HJBC program. The work among children through the HJBC and vacation Bible school programs developed naturally into a summer camping ministry. In 1950 the camping program was accepted as a joint project of the Board of Home Missions and the HJBC. In 1959 it was recommended that the Board of Home Missions relinquish the camping program and that it be assumed by a Camping Committee.


The years 1960–1969 represent an unprecedented decade of new church multiplication in the PDC. Twenty new churches and mission works emerged while seven closed during these years. From 1960–1969 the total operating income for the Board of Home Missions more than doubled. The theme of the 1961 conference was “Projecting Christ into the Second Century of Our Witness.” In that spirit the Board of Reference and Counsel stated, “we must localize this sense of missions even more specifically by challenging the brotherhood to think of every local church as a mission station and of our own respective neighborhoods as a mission field.” In 1962 the Board of Home Missions introduced New Horizons, a quarterly publication whose title was a fitting description of this decade.

Of the twenty missions and churches that were established in the 1960s, six were extension works initiated by individual churches; six were begun by pioneer pastors; four had substantial MB nuclei; three started through mergers and one began as the result of schism.

The six local extension projects, all in the San Joaquin Valley of California, included Visalia in 1960 and five Hispanic churches: El Faro in Reedley (1962), La Paz in Orosi (1963), Orange Cove (1965), Cutler (1963) and Calvario in Dinuba (1963). All of these churches were started by either the Reedley or Dinuba congregations.

While the Spanish speaking churches that emerged out of the Reedley and Dinuba congregations remained under local jurisdiction and support until the late 1970s, they represent a broadening awareness on the part of the conference of the importance of foreign language mission work. The 1963 Home Missions report reminded the delegates of the need for Spanish speaking pioneer pastors. From 1963 to 1965 the conference records contain annual reports from board member A. W. Schlichting concerning the growing Spanish speaking population in California and the challenge to establish more churches in this unlimited field.

In 1963 the Board of Home Missions initiated a “Pioneer Pastor” program. Under this program, an experienced pastor was placed in a city to establish a church around an existing nucleus of members. Churches in six cities were begun under this model: Phoenix, Arizona in 1963; Sacramento, California in 1964; Concord, California
in 1965; San Jose, California (Teresa Hills, later Blossom Valley) in 1968; Fresno, California (North Fresno) in 1969; and Hanford, California in 1969. The work in Hanford never actually developed into a church.

Four churches started with larger MB nuclei. Kingsburg, California began in 1962 with members from Reedley, Dinuba and Zion. College Community in Clovis, California was founded in 1963 and drew its members primarily from the surrounding Fresno MB churches. A church was started in Capitola, California in 1965 by MBs who had moved to that area. The North Park Church in Eugene, Oregon was organized in 1964.

Three churches transferred to the PDC from other denominations. The Zion Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) Church and the London Chapel, both near Dinuba, California, joined the conference when the KMB and MB merged in 1960. In 1971 the Church of the Brethren congregation in Raisin City, California joined the PDC. Finally, Faith MB Church in Fresno arose out of a church split at Sunset Gardens in 1965.

The 1960s do not represent only progress; seven churches or mission projects closed during the decade. Churches in Capitola and Concord closed in 1966 due to a lack of adequate numbers of MB families to form a nucleus and “the economic demands of such a project in the face of our conference giving record.” The yearbooks give no reasons for the closures of mission works at London Chapel in Dinuba, Sunset Gardens Chapel in Fresno, and Cutler. After several years of declining attendance, the Board of Home Missions recommended in 1959 that the Victor Chapel either join the Lodi church or “carry on alone.” The chapel was sold in 1960.

The Executive Secretaries of the Board of Home Missions continued to play an important role during the expansive years of the 1960s. Dan Goertzen returned to this position from 1961 to 1964, during which time he conducted surveys of numerous potential church sites from Arizona to Alaska. In 1966 Bill Neufeld became Executive Secretary. His assignment represented a major shift, in that he was appointed to work with the Board of Trustees in fund raising for home missions work. At the 1968 conference, Neufeld was named the first District Minister of the conference, but he continued to play an active role in the work of home missions.

The Executive Secretaries aided in the more careful articulation of policy statements to guide new mission pastors and churches. In 1962 the conference adopted policies regulating the establishment of new churches. Starting a new church in proximity to an existing MB church was conditioned by the approval of that church. In areas where there was no MB church, but there was a rapid influx of MB people, the board was “to establish new churches as rapidly as feasible and financially possible.” The Board of Home Missions also grappled with policy regarding the funding of new projects. Assistance grants to new churches were progressively increased from $5000 to $10,000. In 1965 the board initiated an “Enlargement Volunteer Financial Program” to which individuals were urged to contribute. The Friday evening Home Missions Banquets at the annual district conferences have also been a major source of mission motivation and fund raising for new church development.

Rapid growth is normally followed by a period of stabilization and consolidation. This best describes home mission work in the 1970s. The board did initiate new fields and strategies, but the decade yielded only five new churches: Cliffwood Heights in Capitola; Blossom Valley in San Jose; New Life in Fremont; Laurelglen in Bakersfield, California; and King Community in Federal Way, Washington. Two of these churches, Cliffwood Heights and Blossom Valley, were actually reorganizations of previously existing congregations.

This decade was a time of indigenization for a number of mission churches, but a number of previously indigenous churches came back under the Board of Home Mission's support and counsel. This support does speak positively of the board's attitude toward struggling churches, yet it also meant that fewer funds were available for new church planting.
In the midst of increased urbanization, population mobility and economic inflation during the 1970s, the Board of Home Missions worked creatively to foster vision, train workers and develop new models of church planting. One important step was the approval of the 1971 “Operational and Functional Guidelines” statement. It outlined ministries more broadly than simply establishing churches. Included were evangelism ministries to the marginal in society (the aged, slum dwellers, prisoners and hospital patients) and ministries of action and service (minority and ethnic groups, inner city ministries, child care). It also revised the guidelines for initiating projects as well as offering counsel to local churches on how to evangelize their communities. The strength of the document was that the Board of Home Missions moved toward broader and more holistic ministries.

Another change during this decade was the development of church planting teams and “tentmaking” ministries. In 1976 the board shifted from the traditional pattern of supporting works through subsidies and grants. There was a growing conviction that successful church planting required “people rather than buildings.” This led the board to invest substantial money in church planting personnel who were gifted in evangelism and discipling, with no commitment from the board for property or facilities.

The work of Elmo Warkentin during this decade deserves special mention. He served as a pioneer pastor at North Fresno, Blossom Valley and Laurelglen and also conducted surveys for works in Fresno, California and Ferndale, Washington. His vision, organizational expertise, evangelism skills and ability to attract new members laid a good foundation in these churches and provided a valuable model for the PDC.

A decade of reassessment: 1980–present

In 1980 the PDC consisted of 42 churches with a membership of 7499; by 1986 there were 43 churches with only 7320 members. Given this record, the last few years have been a time of serious reassessment by the Board of Home Missions. In this decade four churches have been established and one other mission work started. These include Good News Fellowship in Ferndale, Washington; Fig Garden in Fresno; Tualitan Valley in Beaverton, Oregon; Iglesia de los Hechos in San Jose, and India Believers in Santa Clara. During the same time three congregations closed their doors, leaving a net gain of only one congregation since 1980. Yet in the midst of these apparent disappointments there are encouraging signs. One trend is the establishment of churches among different ethnic groups. Hispanic and East Indian congregations have been founded in the South Bay during the last few years. In 1980 Bill Neufeld challenged the conference not to neglect the Hispanic population among us as a strategic mission field; that same year the PDC adopted a resolution giving higher priority to Hispanic ministries and appointed a Hispanic Task Force to assist the Board of Home Missions in that regard. In 1984 a training center for Hispanic church leaders, the Instituto Bíblico del Pacífico, was established. Ethnic ministries in various local congregations are also evidence of growing concern in this area. Another new direction is an openness to a variety of church plant-
ing models, essential in a pluralistic society.

This decade also marked the close of Bill Neufeld's active ministry in the PDC. During his 17 years of service as Executive Secretary and District Minister, Neufeld provided vision for new works, developed policies for missions workers and churches and helped establish several cooperative outreach efforts among conference agencies.

Bill Neufeld, Executive Secretary of the PDC (1966-1988); first District Minister (1968-1985)

The seventy-five year history of home missions in the PDC reflects the commitment of MB churches to reach those around them. God has multiplied the witness of the conference into 43 churches and 7320 members. These MBs are more diverse ethnically, vocationally and culturally than ever before, but in their commitment to Christ, the Church and its mission, they are one. The addition of almost 30 churches since 1950 is reason for gratitude; the average growth rate of 2-4% annually during the same period calls for improvement. The challenge to the PDC is to proclaim faithfully God's good news so He can build his church through us even more effectively in the future. The coming decades represent great opportunity for MBs to translate, with even greater effectiveness, their mission rhetoric and commitment into reality.

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