

# **Ministry to Mennonite University Students in British Columbia**

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Ministry to university students has been an important part of the overall mission of Mennonite churches and conferences. Numerous efforts have been made to reach out to university students dating back to the early years in the formation of the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland and later in Holland, Belgium, Poland, Germany, Russia and more recently in America. It has been well recognized by our forefathers that education has an important contribution to make to the health and well-being of the church. Despite this recognition, the relationship between faith and learning in the Mennonite tradition has not always been harmonious. A review of the historical developments from the 17th century to the end of the 19th-century makes clear the variety and complexity of the interaction between faith and learning in the Mennonite communities.

In the last few years, the conversation between faith and learning, particularly between faith and science, has increased dramatically.(J. C. Polkinghorne, 2004, *Science and the Trinity* , SPCK). The resulting dialogue is of central concern to Christian theology. For example, topics such as "Intelligent Design", the doctrine of creation, the integration of faith and psychology, the status of natural theology and so forth are of special interest to the church. In these discussions, a range of approaches to the dialogue between faith and learning may be identified.

In his Guilford lectures, Ian Barbour,(*Religion in an Age of Science*, SCM Press, 1990), offered a taxonomy of the different ways in which it is possible to relate science and religion. This approach has become something of a classic grid used by many subsequent writers on the subject of faith and learning. This fourfold classification employs the headings of Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration. Conflict involves the uncompromising choice demanded by those who believe that either faith or learning, religion or science, must be in control. Examples of this approach may be found in the contradictory stances of scientism and creationism. Independence signifies a much less drastic option. Science and theology are considered to use different languages, to consider different dimensions of experience, and generally to operate insulated from one another. This approach separates the domains of public knowledge (learning) and private opinion (faith).

The approaches of dialogue and integration take seriously the possibility of a fruitful exchange between faith and learning, between theology and science. This approach believes that faith and learning have things to say to each other. The integration stance has been strongly embraced by the Reformed Tradition who for example, 50 years ago, formed the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, which is committed to the integration of faith and psychology. Anabaptists have tended to avoid the dialogue between faith and learning and have developed a social justice tradition. Two elements figure prominently in the Anabaptist vision of faith and learning: the importance of nonviolence and a commitment to serve the poor and oppressed both at home and around the world.(David L. Weaver-Zercher, 2004, *A modest claim for scholarship*

in the Anabaptist tradition, Essay 3, in, D. Jacobsen and R. H. Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, Oxford University press).

For Mennonites, scholarship and learning are ultimately of secondary concern -- and perhaps that is the way things ought to be. Perhaps, faith should push issues of learning and scholarship into second place well behind love of God and neighbor. Be this as it may, the relationship between faith and learning continues to haunt the Mennonite Church. This issue is particularly stressful in the relationship of the church to higher education. The misunderstandings and tensions that result from an increased emphasis on the arts and science programs in our colleges and Bible schools is a case in point. I well recall the explosive arguments on the Board of Higher Education when liberal arts courses were introduced into the curriculum of the M. B. Bible College in Winnipeg in the early 1970s. These same apprehensions arise when addressing the needs of university students.

From the perspective of the Barbour classification addressed earlier, Mennonites in Canada have historically viewed the relationship between faith and learning as conflictual. More recently, some Mennonite leaders have adopted an independence stance. A few have even ventured into a dialogue and integration stance. As postmodernism becomes more fully established, our stance on faith and learning will become increasingly tested. We need to learn from our experiences of the past.

### **Purpose of this Paper**

In this paper, I wish to present a historical narrative of the developments in Mennonite university student ministry in B.C. between 1950 to 2005. It is my hope that our churches and conferences will examine this information and more adequately address university student ministry in the future. The material for this article will be drawn largely from the minutes of provincial conferences of M. B. churches in B.C. as well as the minutes of the M.B. Board of Reference and Counsel. These minutes were generously made available to me from the personal collection of Herbert Brandt, who for many years was the moderator of not only the B.C. Conference of the M. B. churches but also the moderator of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference and the North American Conference of Mennonite Brethren. (I was unable to locate comparable minutes addressing the services to university students from the General Conference of Mennonites of British Columbia. It appears that services to university students were not addressed by this Conference.)

In addition to the minutes, my personal experiences will provide some further perspectives on the Mennonite response to university students. In 1968, I was appointed by the President of the University of B.C. to the Presidents Committee on Religion. In addition to meeting regularly with some 10 to 15 university chaplains appointed by their respective conferences, I was also the yearly recipient of over 200 student religious affiliation cards completed by Mennonite university students at the University of British Columbia at the time of their registration. These activities gave me considerable understanding of the religious and spiritual issues facing university students. (The practice of having students complete religious affiliation cards was terminated in the mid-1970s for a variety of reasons including the increasing demand for privacy from civil liberty organizations.)

In addition to gaining perspective on student ministry within the university, in 1970 I was appointed by the Canadian M. B. conference to the Board of Higher Education and served on this board for almost a decade. This Board was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the developments of the M. B. Bible College in Winnipeg, coordinating and supporting the development of Bible schools across Canada and providing some leadership in the coordination of services for university students. Unfortunately, the needs arising from the M. B. Bible College far outweighed the attention given to either the Bible schools or the needs of university students. The result was that very little time was devoted to university student programming. There was also a limited budget available to support university student programming even though some provincial M.B. conferences made such requests.

### **Appointment of the Regehrs as Youth Workers**

Already in 1958, the biannual conference of M. B. churches in British Columbia, appointed Henry Regehr as youth worker in Vancouver. Regehr was involved in a variety of activities. One of the highlights of these activities was the organization of meetings called "Conquest". In his annual report to the conference, Regehr points out that these meetings were a rich blessing to many people. Regehr also rendered services to the evening Bible school organized by the Vancouver churches.

In the 1959, M.B. Conference minutes, Regehr states "that the work of contacting the individuals who have strayed from their fellowship is proving to be a very difficult task" and that they have done much to make the basement in their home a very attractive place for young people to meet. Prayer is requested so that the home may truly be a center for young people who need help.

Regehr further contends that "the process of urbanization and the many problems associated with it are relatively new to our churches". A conservative estimate of the number of M. B. young people working or attending school in Vancouver during this time is considerably over 200 people. His attempts to serve these young people included his involvement in such activities as; Conquest Youth Rallies, Sunday afternoon discussion groups geared particularly to university students, couples clubs, personal contacts with young people and functions in their homes and at the University of B.C., and work assignments through the provincial youth committee.

The Sunday afternoon discussion groups were particularly well attended by young people. It was not unusual to find fifty or more young people crammed into the basement of the Regehr's home. After listening to a paper presented by one of the advanced undergraduate or graduate students on a topic involving the integration of Christianity and an academic discipline such as biology or psychology, a lively discussion of the paper would follow. After the discussion, the Regehrs served a variety of foods. Even today, many former university students who were members of this group consider this experience to have been a rich opportunity to take seriously the integration of faith and learning.

After several years of successful interaction with students in the discussion groups, the conference leaders became suspicious of these activities. While the papers prepared by the students were serious attempts at the integration of faith and learning, they occasionally addressed issues which were controversial. After a visit by a prominent Mennonite churchman,

the Regehers were requested to discontinue the discussion groups, refocus their approach, and initiate Bible study and prayer meetings. There was fear that the attempt by university students to integrate Christianity and learning would lead to disbelief.

### **On-campus Counseling Service**

Upon the resignation of the Regehers, the Board of Reference and Counsel in 1964, passed a motion that "in principle, we endorse an on-campus counselling program". A further recommendation was made "that we request the Canadian Board of Higher Education to charge our members of that Board to assume local responsibility to initiate a counselling program at the University." The members of the Canadian Board of Higher Education had neither the time, energy or resources to undertake such an ambitious program. Although well intended, this recommendation was not implemented.

In October, 1965, the topic of ministry to students was again on the agenda of the Board of Reference and Counsel. The board minutes contain a lengthy discussion on this topic. A large portion of a paper delivered by Herbert Brandt, the chairman of this Board, is reported below:

### **Establishment of Point Grey Fellowship**

"It appears that the people of our denomination have not seen fit to settle in a more westerly part of Vancouver. The result has been that all our churches lie east of Main Street and more or less in close proximity to each other. Over the years, there has been agitation to have a church at the University of B. C.. This has not been looked upon favorably and for many apparently valid reasons. This question has consequently being discussed and set-aside or pushed from one level to another without solving anything."

"We're all convinced that a problem exists. The university students have had an excuse if they want one. We need to be honest with ourselves and face the fact that a good percentage of our students do not attend the M. B. churches in the city. Some never make their appearance and attend only when they go home to the Valley churches. Beloved, let's accept this as a fact -- and it grieves us."

"The number of students is increasing and will undoubtedly continue to do so. The duration of stay at the University is changing from 2 to 3 to 4-5 or even 6 years. We have, therefore, a vast potential of young people that constitute a membership resource for a church. But to have a church with students only could result in a negative situation. The community itself is a vast potential. Several members of the M. B. churches not associated with the University are vitally interested in joining a church group in this area. Undoubtedly, there are those of our people who would move into this part of the city if the church were located there. Many of our students do not want to leave our denomination. But since their life is so closely connected with the university community, they desire to exercise their spiritual interests in that community."

## What is the Proposal?

"We come to the Board of Reference and Counsel to request its sanction to grant the people in the West Point Grey area permission to meet together as a fellowship. The object would be to conduct Sunday school and services in a simple manner, to reach people from the community and the University to form a nucleus of a church. The meeting place would be a house (now available) to begin with. Although various pastors would be delighted to share in the ministry, the greater part of the load would be carried by one individual. (An acceptable worker is available). This cost would be carried by the group. The organization would come as the situation develops."

"There are many problems. In spite of this, I would strongly recommend that we seek to put this program into effect. We can lose very little and possibly gain very much. In the discussions in the past, there has been talk of a university church. I believe this is a concept we should erase."

"The question has come why this group does not go ahead and organize on its own? Why the necessity of coming to Reference and Counsel. Brethern, this affects the Valley churches more than the City churches. Furthermore, another church in the city will be imperative shortly. We come therefore, because it affects all the churches, and those out of the city more than those in it. This matter has been discussed with the pastor brethern, G. L. Braun, Wilmer Kornelson, and Nick Willems and unitedly we recommend that this program be implemented. Guidance and counsel would be the responsibility of the Reference and Counsel, who in turn could charge the executive or the Board of Home Missions with it."

"After much discussion of this paper, it was pointed out that the problem of commuting from the west side of Vancouver to east side churches was impossible for students. Although a taxi service had been arranged by the Killarney Park church, this solution was unacceptable because of the large number of students at the University. The bus service is slow, and it takes at least 1 1/2 hours traveling time to attend church. To get to Sunday school, students must miss their breakfast at the residences."

At the March, 1967, Annual Convention of the M. B. Conference of British Columbia, the executive made the following recommendation to the conference;

- a) that positive steps be taken for the inauguration of a fellowship next fall within a well-defined framework.
- b) that this work constitute a new field under the jurisdiction of the Board of Home Missions.
- c) that the conference executive meet with the Board of Home Missions to plan the basis for future operation so that the appropriate recommendations may be presented to the April 29th session of the Board of Reference and Counsel and subsequently to the provincial conference.

### **Point Grey Fellowship is Launched, Sept., 1967**

Point Grey Fellowship is launched in September, 1967. The meetings were held every Sunday morning in the lower floor of the beautiful home of Arthur and Rita Block overlooking the City of Vancouver. Soon over 50 students, professors and other individuals attended the Sunday morning worship services. The format of the services was very similar to that of other Christian churches and included prayers, Bible reading, singing, and a sermon spoken either by an outside speaker or a speaker from within the group. A reverent and worshipful atmosphere prevailed within the service. Largely absent, however, were families and children. Several graduate students including Harold Epp, Bernie Harder and several others were in charge of the activities.

Already in the early years of the life of Point Grey Fellowship, the relationship of this church to the M. B. conference became an issue. The minutes of the Board of Reference and Counsel report that "the question of the relationship of the Point Grey Fellowship to the M. B. conference is one which has continually received attention. When the group was first formed, it was constituted directly responsible to the Board Of Reference and Counsel. Since then the group has been fairly independent and the relationship between the Fellowship and the Board of Reference and Counsel has been virtually a nominal one. The fellowship has decided and executed its policies fairly autonomously."

At a meeting of the Home Missions Board and about 20 representatives from the Point Grey Fellowship, it was concluded that the Fellowship had in fact functioned independently of the Board of Reference and Counsel. While theoretically the Fellowship was still directly responsible to the Board, this in fact was not the case. The parties agreed that it would be beneficial to the Fellowship to be free of any formal connection to any other body. Therefore, it was proposed that the formal or constitutional relationship be terminated.

### **Dissolution of the Relationship between Point Grey Fellowship and M. B. conference**

At the biannual meeting of the M. B. Conference of British Columbia, the Board of Home Missions recommended that "we consider the relationship with the Fellowship as having ceased to exist and that we encourage the Board Of Home Missions to seek a way to carry out the mandate given them by the Board of Reference and Counsel." This recommendation was carried and announced in the M. B. Herald.

### **Chaplaincy at Simon Fraser University**

The meeting in October, 1965 of the Board of Reference and Counsel, considered the possibility of establishing a chaplaincy at Simon Fraser University . Nick Willems had agreed to act as chaplain. When this matter was presented to the president of the University, Dr. McTaggart-Cowan, it was rejected on the basis of lack of consultation. Herbert Brandt subsequently directed a letter to the president.

In June, 1966, it was reported that the university president would not support the appointment of an M.B. chaplain at this time. Nine denominations were currently on the chaplaincy Board and

since the Mennonites had not applied at the time of the organization of this board , the university was not prepared to change its structure in midstream.

After this failed attempt, no further efforts were made to establish a chaplaincy at Simon Fraser University. The obvious question is why not? If such services were deemed desirable in 1966, why not in later years? What has changed?

### **A New Vision for Student Ministry of the M. B. conference**

In May, 1969, the Board of Home Missions presented a new vision of university student ministry to the Board of Reference and Counsel. This vision was progressive, forward-looking and church based. From my point of view, it is by far the most well-developed statement yet developed by either the students or by the M. B. conference in BC..

The new vision starts with a supporting statement of student needs which includes the following declaration." The university student needs are basically the same as that of any other believer, however, students experience their struggle compounded by the following circumstances."

- 1) A new environment on campus and in residence which results in extreme loneliness.
- 2) An increased exposure to assumptions regarding man and his world which forces a rechecking and reorientation with the Word of God.
- 3) A cutting off from established patterns of fellowship as experienced in the home church.
- 4) A new environment in which to discover meaningful ways of witnessing to the unsaved."

After having identified the student needs, a very clear declaration for future action was identified.

**"In light of the above, we believe that the greatest need for students is to be able to meaningfully relate to a group of positive, vibrant believers through fellowship, sharing, and Bible study in which they can express their problems, be received, and contribute to others within the framework of the fellowship."**

The following principles were proposed that would govern such a fellowship;

- 1) That this fellowship be Christ and church oriented and given to the proclamation of the Word of God.
- 2) That this fellowship minister to the needs of the total family.
- 3) That this fellowship place an emphasis on a major student ministry.

- 4) That this fellowship be firmly established in Christ and the scriptural tenets of faith, be flexible and even experimental in the use of methods and approaches to meaningfully relate to the needs of today.
- 5) That this fellowship emphasize evangelistic outreach to the community.
- 6) That this fellowship begin with lay leadership which relates to the university setting and which is capable of offering theological and spiritual leadership.
- 7) That this fellowship meet in rented facilities to begin with to make the above an actual realization before any building program is considered.
- 8) That this fellowship seek to locate itself in the West Point Grey area of Vancouver.

The following recommendations were then identified;

- 1) That the British Columbia conference approve the above rationale.
- 2) That the British Columbia conference ask the Home Missions Board to continue to act on behalf of the M. B. conference to give leadership in formulating this fellowship.
- 3) That the M. B. churches of greater Vancouver approve the calling of a general meeting to acquaint those interested in organizing such a fellowship in becoming members thereof.
- 4) That such a fellowship be organized as soon as possible so that ministry to university students can be realized when university begins its new year in the fall of 1969.
- 5) That upon organization all responsibility of the group be placed into the hands of the fellowship.
- 6) That a close liason continue with the B. C. Board of Reference and Counsel, through the B. C. Home Missions Board, for the purpose of remaining aware of any progress and success in a ministry to university students.
- 7) That the B. C. conference of M. B. churches for one year, budget \$2000 which as needs arise, can be approved by the B. C. Home Missions Board to be made available to the fellowship. It is anticipated that the fellowship will be able to meet all its operational expenses.

While this report was presented to the Board Of Reference and Counsel by the Home Missions Board, it seems to have died along with several other good proposals on university student ministry. Again, the question must be asked, why?



### **Family Student Fellowship**

In November, 1969, a Home Missions report is received by the Board of Reference and Counsel. The report indicates that on Oct. 5, 1969, a small group of students and heads of families met at the Dr. Fred Adrian's residence for the purpose of discussing and organizing a family student fellowship. Only a small group of students attended, most of whom were attending one of the M. B. churches in the greater Vancouver area. Although the discussion seemed profitable, no definite consensus was achieved.

It was also reported that a letter from the Home Missions Board was sent to M. B. pastors in B.C. to request the names of university students attending the University. Only two pastors responded. It was also indicated that little publicity had been given to the Adrian meeting and therefore it was impossible to know how many students would be interested in establishing a family student fellowship.

The Home Missions Board now appealed to Board of Reference and Counsel for future direction. Where should they go from here?

### **Ministry to University Students by the Local Church**

Within six months of the Adrian meeting, the Home Missions Board embarked upon a new direction in addressing the needs of university students. A report prepared by Wilmer Kornelson was tabled with the Board Of Reference and Counsel and in June, 1970, adopted by the annual convention.

The report from the Home Missions Board states that "whereas the plan for a church to be formed in the university area to serve particularly the needs of university students has not materialized, the committee recommends the following to meet existing needs;"

1. That all B. C. churches on a local basis assume full responsibility to render such ministry as will be adequate to meet the existing needs of students.

Guidelines to assist the churches in evaluating and determining their services to students include;

that the local church consider what specific services are now being provided for students; each local church evaluate the student's response to their services; each local church seek ways of improving existing services to students and each local church consider what additional services might be provided.

- 2 it is suggested that each church do the following; have special meetings on the the local church level for fellowship in sharing with university students; attempt to have its pastor or some other capable person meet with students several times per school year on a personal basis on the university campus; follow-through on its students who are in residence in the university area and encourage them to establish relationships with other believers and with existing churches in the Vancouver area.

3. That the B. C. Conference Executive Committee plan, in cooperation with students, at least one student retreat per year.

4. That the B. C. conference go on record as recommending to the Canadian M. B. Conference that it establish a central service agency through the student services committee which would do the following; appoint and salary one full-time worker to concern himself with university student needs; handle such bursaries which might be available to university students; provide counselling service personally or through correspondence; serve as a placement and information bureau for Christian service or employment as opportunity and need arises.

While this ambitious report was adopted by the B. C. Conference of M. B. Churches, there is no evidence in the minutes or elsewhere that any of these activities were implemented. They were adopted along with others and forgotten. History must ask the question, why? Why spend valuable time at the Board and at the annual conferences on the topic of university student ministry when no action is undertaken.

### **Student Retreats**

In February, 1971, at a meeting of the Board of Reference and Counsel, the Board of Christian Education is charged with the responsibility of appointing a committee to plan for at least one student retreat per year.

In response to this request, the Board of Christian Education at the annual Provincial Convention in June, 1971, reported that it had been unsuccessful in carrying out the assignment involving student retreats for the following reasons; they had been unable to spell out the intended purpose of such retreats; they had approached a number of people and asked them to serve on such a committee, but all had refused to accept the appointment; university students by and large tend to be somewhat sensitive towards strongly denominational situations, preferring rather to identify with interdenominational functions. Consequently, it was concluded that our efforts should instead be directed toward encouraging students to participate in conventions sponsored by interdenominational groups such as IVCF.

This is the last official proposal on university student ministry that appears either in the minutes of the Board of Reference and Counsel or in the Annual Provincial Conventions. A new era in the history of the M. B. conference in B.C. now emerged. This new era was headed by new leadership which established new directions, adopted a new strategy, agenda and overall mission for the M. B. conference in B.C.. University student ministry was no longer a priority. In fact, these were the silent years for university student ministry. Although the M. B. conference of B.C. had become silent on university student ministry, a lay movement was being born to address the challenge. Perhaps this is how the Spirit of God works. When one group abandons a ministry, another group, seeing the need, assumes responsibility.

## **The Silent Years**

Beginning in 1971, a new vision for the M. B. church in British Columbia emerged. It was a vision which addressed the development of mega churches, outreach into the community with imaginative programs of growth and development. Church planting took on new priority. While this active outreach program is commendable, ministry to university students by the M. B. conference of British Columbia is now a thing of the past. It no longer preoccupies the mind of conference leaders. In response, one former Mennonite university student, who now is a member of the Presbyterian church, recently stated; "the M. B. conference of British Columbia had little interest in the spiritual well-being of university students during his university years. The result is that the M. B. conference has lost a generation of university students." While this is undoubtedly an overstatement, it reflects the viewpoint of one disappointed former university student.

## **Part Two -- A New Impetus in University Student Ministry.**

In the next section of this paper, I will address the development of university student ministry as understood by a lay group of individuals from both the M. B. conference of Mennonites and the General Conference of Mennonites. While these individuals were active within their respective conferences and churches, they had a deep and abiding concern for the spiritual well-being of students both within our conferences and beyond .

In the early 1980s, an ad hoc committee drawn largely from the Education Committee of Columbia Bible College was struck to look at university and related ministries. This committee consisting of Palmer Becker, Paul Boschman, Alfred Heinrichs, Bill Redekop, Ed Hintz, and A.J. Klassen began an inter- Mennonite approach to student ministry. This group had been in dialogue with Columbia Bible College regarding its mission and received encouragement to continue its efforts. After a number of meetings, it was decided to organize their activities under the heading "Center for Discipleship".

## **The Center for Discipleship**

The purpose of the Center for Discipleship was to explore, clarify and promote Christian discipleship as it grows out of our evangelical and Anabaptist heritage. Already invitations had been received to teach classes at various Christian institutions and requests for resource speakers were coming from various groups and churches both from within and outside the Mennonite constituency. Students seemed ready to research their historical and theological roots and to grasp the vision of what radical obedience to Jesus Christ might mean in their lives and ministries.

It was recognized by this group that the Mennonite constituency had a large number of students in postsecondary schools. In addition to those attending CBC and the secular universities, there were 40 students from the Mennonite constituency in attendance at Regent College and 30 at the Northwest Seminary. The challenges faced by this large student population was the impetus for the continued meetings of members of the Center for Discipleship.

While these creative activities and meetings were taking place in Abbotsford, similar challenges were beckoning a group of M. B. church members in Vancouver mostly drawn from Killarney Park M. B. church. These early visionaries included Henry and Hilda Hildebrand, Harold and Vi Ratzlaff, Ed and Hedi Hintz, John and Erna Friesen and later by Janice and Evan Kreider and others. This group met together on a semi regular basis to pray and to study Scripture with the hope that some opportunity might arise to engage more fully in student ministry. Their interest in the development of Christian community was particularly encouraged by a study of the book, "Living Together" written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

### **Tavistock Christian Center**

The imagination of this study group was heightened when a large estate became available for purchase. The house on this property was a regal, stately Tudor mansion called "Tavistock". It was set on a large and handsome estate of 4.94 acres on prestigious Southwest Marine Drive in Vancouver. The planning and design of this uniquely magnificent residence would easily lend itself as a beautiful retreat center for students, faculty and others. It had a full-sized tennis court, a 50' by 20' heated and filtered paddock swimming pool; the lower patio, fields and stable were ideal for outdoor barbecues and social events. The Tudor living room was 25' by 19'. The kitchen was newly renovated with stainless steel commercial appliances. The atmosphere was old English, with an oak mantel fireplace, rough white plaster walls, and wool carpets over oak floors. The house had six large bedrooms of which four were ensembles. In addition, a matching stable which was converted into a large hall with plumbing could easily have become 10 or more additional bedrooms for students and guests.

Although the property could have been developed for other purposes, it already had approval for the creation of four additional large building lots. Our group was excited about its potential for student ministry. We tentatively called it the Tavistock Christian Center. Although listed for \$2.2 million, we put in an offer for \$880,000 which was accepted by the owner. Twenty-five years later, this property is worth well over \$8 million. This estate could have become another oasis in an often desolate intellectual and spiritual environment of the University.

At about this time, we became aware of the Abbotsford group now called the "Discipleship Center". We invited members of this group to inspect the property and join us in the purchase of it. We were of the opinion that this should be an inter-Mennonite project supported by both conferences and therefore called a dinner meeting in which some 200 people representing both Mennonite conferences were invited. After the dinner at the Villa in Burnaby a presentation was made on university student ministry and the purchase of the Tavistock estate. After much discussion, little excitement for this project could be generated. The vision for university student ministry fell on deaf ears. The offer to purchase the Tavistock estate was withdrawn with much disappointment from our group.

### **The Pacific Center for Discipleship Association**

Our group was bruised but not without hope. We continued to meet and an application to form a Society with a federal tax number was pursued. After lengthy negotiations with officials from Ottawa, a new society was formed and registered on June 27, 1986. The Society was named the "Pacific Center for Discipleship Association". The purpose of this society is:

1. To promote Christian faith and discipleship;
2. To foster Christian community and fellowship;
3. To support Christian scholarship;
4. To facilitate the study of Anabaptist Mennonite heritage;
5. To assist in the integration of faith and contemporary lifestyle;
6. To purchase, sell, lease and hold such property, equipment, and materials as are deemed necessary to accomplish the above purposes.

### **The Menno Simons Centre**

Several years after our failed attempt to generate an interest in the Tavistock purchase, in July, 1986, we became aware of the listing for sale of the Roman Catholic convent on 4000 West 11th in Vancouver. Our group inspected the building and became excited about its potential. This building was a symbol of answered prayer. Although the property was listed for \$600,000, it had many competing offers. We placed an offer of \$605,000 with the proviso that the building would be used as a spiritual Center for students and others. The Roman Catholic diocese accepted our offer and gave us a couple of weeks to raise the necessary funds. With much prayer and financial support of members of our group and numerous others, we purchased the property on August 30th, 1986. We perceived this venture as a miracle for which we were deeply grateful. We named this building "the Menno Simons Center" in recognition of the many contributions of Menno Simons, the father of the Mennonite religious tradition.

Thus began the serious work of Mennonite university student ministry by our society. The Menno Simons Center has been described as "being like a grain of salt; sharp and refreshing; small in relationship to the larger world and its institutions, but mysteriously influential: and for many students/residents very precious". Several hundred university students have already lived at the Center and experienced the warmth and acceptance of an intentional Christian community. Weekly community meals have been served to which were invited the residents living in the Center as well as other students from the university community. The community meal has been a time of rich fellowship and discussion. This active program of student ministry is facilitated by a board, a student services committee and by an appointed and financially supported couple to coordinate the activities of the Center and provide counselling and support to the students. This Center has now served the university community for more than 18 years.

## **Point Grey Fellowship**

After purchasing the Menno Simons Center, the Vancouver contingent of the Pacific Center for Discipleship, recognized the importance of establishing a spiritual arm of the Center. In September, 1986, a church was established. It met in the chapel of the Menno Simons Center. Membership in the church has been very transitory because students and others are in Vancouver for only a few years for study after which they leave for future employment. Former members of the church are now situated in many parts of the world. God has richly blessed this congregation with numerous opportunities to serve others and to build the kingdom of God.

Perhaps, one of the distinguishing features of this church might be called the seeking tradition. This tradition begins with wonder over the inexhaustible depth of God's being and the ultimate source of all that is in Jesus Christ. For seekers, the sense of wonder over creation challenges us to explore all the marvelous intricacies of the world in which God has placed us. There is a quest to know all that God has made us capable of knowing. God's revelation comes to us through the Bible, human experience and creation.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

In this paper, I have reviewed the history of M.B. involvement in university student ministry in B.C. between the years 1950 to 1971. Ministry to university students was a central issue on the agenda. Eight different proposals were considered of which several were partially implemented but within several years discarded. After 1970 to the present, the M. B. conference of B.C. was largely silent on ministry to university students. While some ministry to university students was undertaken by local churches, the provincial conference had other priorities such as church planting, promoting camp activities, and fostering the growth of Columbia Bible college.

This lack of involvement of the provincial M. B. and General Conference in student ministry led to the formation of the Pacific Center for Discipleship. This society assumed some of the responsibility for student ministry by purchasing the Menno Simons Center and initiating a variety of programs. The M. B. conference in 1988 was invited to appoint a representative to the board of the Pacific Center for Discipleship but declined.

The question that must ultimately be faced is why the M. B. conference of B.C. was unable to commit itself to an active and effective program of university student ministry. I've spent many hours attempting to understand the reasons for this situation. Based on my interviews with various conference leaders, I have concluded that this lack of involvement was not disinterest. On the contrary, Conference leaders have expressed a genuine concern for university students. Their intentions were honorable but their commitment to action fell far short. Why?

Perhaps many answers could be given to this question. It has been suggested that one of the reasons for this lack of action may spring from the needs of "rural vs. city" churches. In the early years, most of the university students came from rural areas. Another reason stemmed from the existence of "urban churches with a rural mentality" that did not appreciate the complex issues related to university education. A further explanation is that most M. B. Church had lay leaders with little education and limited urban experience or understanding.

While these explanations have considerable validity, an examination of the history of the evangelical movement would suggest the existence of a distinctly anti-intellectual ethos in Mennonite churches. The connection between faith and learning has not been articulated and a conflict stance has been adopted. As a consequence, traditional Mennonite theology has proven largely unable to engage in fruitful conversation with the marketplace of ideas at the University. Such fruitful conversation only occurs with a dialogic and integrative stance between faith and learning. The conflict stance only leads to misunderstanding and rejection. With the lack of meaningful conversation, Mennonite theology and the University have been impoverished.

The fear of the University is understandable. In the last several hundred years, a strongly secular and humanistic approach to university education has evolved. Christian theology, which over the centuries had been the queen of the sciences, has in the last hundred years become largely irrelevant on a university campus. Much of this secularizing of the university can be traced to the later portion of the 19th-century. Science with its startling advances, began offering alternatives to the Christian worldview. Those governing the universities gave control of their institutions to the forces of unbelief. Science soon became the arbiter of truth. When differences between Scripture and science became evident, the findings of science took precedence. Thus began a period of warfare of science with theology in modern Christendom.

Obviously, the Mennonite church leadership had much to fear from university education. Often, young people interested in university education were warned by pastors that they were in danger of losing their faith by attending the University. For many serious university students, these warnings became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The prediction became a reality.

The existence of an ideological clash between faith and university education cannot be denied. In this article, I have not attempted to address the reconciliation of the ideological clash but simply present a historical narrative of the events surrounding the Mennonite approach to university student ministry in B.C. during the last 50 years. It is a story filled with good intentions, frustrations and some triumphs. Hopefully, the next 50 years, will see the emergence of new approaches to working with university students and with the university generally. For this to occur, Mennonites will need to develop models of faith and learning which are much less polemic and adversarial and much more complementary and supportive of faith and learning.

This hope-filled articulation of the future rests on the fundamental conviction that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and that all truth rests ultimately in knowing God. The fact that God took on ordinary human flesh in the person of Jesus makes possible a new relationship with the divine. Learning filled with discovering the mystery of the unknown, of the pursuit of truth and ultimately the quest for wisdom is the challenge of the future.

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