

A Road Less Traveled: The Evangelical Path of Kanadier Mennonites who Returned to Canada

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This article investigates the reasons *some* of the Kanadier Mennonite immigrants have joined evangelical denominations in Canada. Most of these immigrants arrived in Canada during the last four decades of the twentieth century, and most were part of the Old Colony Church in Mexico at one time. The decision to walk the evangelical path was invariably shaped by a combination of social, cultural and theological factors that were significantly affected by the relocation and adjustment to Canadian society.

The discussion of the relationship between Mennonites and evangelical Protestants in Canada often generates emotional hostilities, even among ostensibly peace-loving Mennonites. Over time, two polarities have become apparent. On the one hand, some Mennonites have offered a veritable litany of complaints against evangelical Protestantism, treating it as a virus that induces sickness and that ought to be avoided and perhaps even eradicated. On the

other hand, other Mennonites have enthusiastically nurtured a strong sense of kinship and cooperation with evangelical Protestants, as if they have a panacea for all that ails Mennonites.¹ Two additional polarities are apparent when discussing Kanadier Mennonites. Some look upon those Kanadier Mennonites not associated with an evangelical group as ignorant heathen living in spiritual darkness and in desperate need of salvation, and hence as targets of evangelism. Others adamantly deflect any criticism of how Kanadier Mennonite traditions might at times have hampered spiritual vitality, and persist in vilifying evangelicals. I am not a disinterested party in this discussion—my own spiritual pilgrimage has taken me to various sides of these polarities—but it is not my intention to present an apologia for any one group. As an historian of evangelicalism in Canada, I believe that the stories of Kanadier Mennonites who have embraced evangelicalism deserve to be included in the analysis of the larger Kanadier story. Because of the complexity and emotional volatility of the issues raised when discussing the Kanadier Mennonite story, I want to walk circumspectly to avoid giving offence and perpetuating caricatures. My intention is to promote mutual respect, fuller understanding and healthy dialogue within a context of honest, accurate and fair historical analysis.

The first section of this article offers definitions for terms such as “Kandier” and “evangelical,” a brief identification of the evangelical (mostly evangelical-Mennonite) denominations in Canada that have attracted Kanadier Mennonite immigrants, and a general overview of several important religious trends within this immigrant group. Using information gleaned from a range of interviews and archival materials, the second section probes the central issue of this article more directly and provides a summary and an analysis of at least ten reasons given by many of the Kanadier immigrants who opted for various evangelical church options.

The Nature of Evangelicalism

The term “Kandier” has multiple meanings. In this article I will use the term primarily in a narrow sense to refer only to the approximately 45,000 Mennonites who moved from Mexico to Canada during the latter half of the twentieth century. Almost all of these Mennonites either are, or once were, a part of the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Mexico, and are descendants of the approximately 8,000 Mennonites who left Canada during the 1920s.² The term Kandier is frequently also used in a broader sense to identify those Mennonites who migrated from Russia to North

America during the 1870s and whose descendants are now scattered across parts of North, Central and South America. They were part of a stream of Mennonites whose origins are rooted in the Dutch and Flemish Anabaptism of the early 1500s. The recently arrived Kanadier Mennonites from Mexico are one strand within the broader group of Kanadier Mennonites.

The word “evangelical” is more complex and difficult to define than “Kanaidier.” For many Mennonites the term carries a range of negative connotations because of its use by some to denote a presumeably superior spirituality, or to divide those people who are real “Christians” from those who are not. My intention is *not* to apply the term in this way, but to use the term to designate and describe a very particular phenomenon within Protestantism during the past three centuries. The widely accepted elastic descriptive creedal quadrilateral developed by the British historian David Bebbington is helpful.³ He suggests that while there is considerable diversity among the various expressions of evangelicalism from the eighteenth century to the present, certain continuities identify the essence of evangelicalism. Bebbington argues that evangelicals are characterized by at least four common qualities or marks that create a kind of conceptual unity if not always an actual unity. None of the four characteristics is unique to evangelical Protestants, but rather it is the emphasis placed on the combination of these particular characteristics that differentiate evangelical Christians from other Christians. Evangelicals are first of all *biblicist*, that is, they have a particularly high regard for the Bible. While some insist on the word “inerrancy,” others use “infallible” and still others are satisfied with “trustworthy,” they all agree that the Bible is inspired by God and hence the authoritative source of truth about God. For evangelicals, the Bible is, literally, nothing less than “God’s word,” one of God’s greatest gifts. It is to be studied, listened to and, above all, obeyed. Second, evangelicals are *crucicentric*, that is, at the centre of their theological scheme is the doctrine of the cross. They believe that atonement was made to God for the penalty of human sin by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. While some argue that this death was substitutionary and others that it was representative, all evangelicals agree that Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection was the central event of history because of the way it rescued humanity from sin. This emphasis on atonement has often eclipsed an emphasis on other doctrines such as the incarnation. Closely linked is the third characteristic, namely, that evangelicals are *conversionists*, meaning that no person is naturally a Christian. A conversion experience is the result of a personal experience of what the Protestant reformers called justification by faith through grace. Despite differing opinions

on whether conversion is sudden or gradual and the extent to which the Holy Spirit affects human choice, evangelicals unanimously insist that only through a personal conversion experience does a person become a Christian. Fourth, evangelicals are *activists*. They believe that genuine conversion will be accompanied by a new motivation for doing good and by a life of holiness that will confirm what has taken place spiritually. This explains the time and energy evangelicals devote to personal piety, to efforts in spreading the gospel and to philanthropic projects. While this definition is primarily descriptive, many evangelicals use this quadrilateral set of priorities in a creedal sense and also as the minimum requirement for religious inclusion.

In North America evangelical Protestantism has always been a diverse “movement”⁴ made up of different denominations and transdenominational institutions. Always, it has been remarkably dynamic, adapting to and shaping new cultural environments. As the dominant expression of Protestantism throughout most of the nineteenth century and again during the latter half of the twentieth century, it has exercised enormous cultural influence in both the United States and Canada. It is not surprising then that Mennonites of all kinds in North America have interacted with evangelical Protestants. They continue to disagree, however, over what constitutes an appropriate degree of identification with evangelical Protestantism. While most Mennonites would affirm the four points of Bebbington’s definition, several important variations separate those Mennonite groups that openly identify themselves as evangelical and those that do not. These variations do not always fall precisely along denominational lines; as a result, there are individuals and even entire congregations that identify themselves as evangelical within Mennonite denominations that do not, as a whole, identify themselves as evangelical. The key features of an evangelical-Mennonite theological orientation include the following: it tends to lean more towards an individualistic and less communitarian approach in the interpretation of the Bible and in the emphasis on a conversion experience. Moreover, an evangelical-Mennonite understanding of conversion is shaped more by Protestant soteriology than by sixteenth-century Anabaptist soteriology; salvation is appropriated more immediately and confirmed by a subjective assurance of salvation, rather than seeing justification and sanctification as a broader, and more gradual, process of discipleship. Finally, evangelical-Mennonites tend to be more willingly involved and integrated within North American culture, and somewhat less concerned about an ecclesiology that is counter-cultural.

Evangelical Church Options

Kanadier Mennonites who have decided to walk the evangelical path are distributed among a variety of evangelical denominations. The majority can be found within two evangelical-Mennonite denominations that have intentionally adopted a dual "Anabaptist-evangelical" identity. They have emerged out of the broader Kanadier Mennonite community and have a long history of openness towards evangelical influences. Both have tried to develop a theological ethos that blends aspects of the sixteenth-century radical reformation with emphases found within evangelical Protestantism. An important indicator of evangelical identity for these denominations is membership with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and their support for a variety of evangelistic and missionary activities.

The group that has attracted the largest number of Kanadier immigrants and has established the most congregations among them, is the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) formerly known as the Rudnerweider.⁵ Several requests for help in organizing a congregation together with the activity of denominational evangelists during the late 1950s in Ontario, led to the formation of the first EMMC congregation made up of Kanadier immigrants near Aylmer, Ontario in 1965.⁶ The group has used Low-German radio broadcasts such as "The Gospel Message," which airs in four provinces in Canada. It also employed evangelistic and "Deeper Life" meetings, publications, Bible studies and "Singstunden" as ways to contact and attract people and establish new congregations. The denomination today has six congregations in Ontario made up almost exclusively of Kanadier Mennonites, and one small congregation in Alberta and several congregations in Manitoba that have significant contact with Kanadier immigrants. The attendance in these congregations exceeds 1,000 people, comprising more than 25% of the denomination's total attendance in Canada.⁷ The congregations made up of Kanadier immigrants comprise a significant proportion of the denomination's numerical growth in Canada during the 1990s.

Larger in number (approximately 7,000 members) and somewhat less aggressive and extensive in their involvement with Kanadier Mennonites in Canada is the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), known as the Kleine Gemeinde until 1952.⁸ Similar to the EMMC, the incorporation of Kanadier immigrants into the EMC has come largely through the work of five congregations in southern Ontario, one in Alberta and several in Manitoba. The incoming Kanadier make up about 10% of the EMC's total attendance in Canada.⁹

Several characteristics link the EMMC and EMC. Both have concerted programs of outreach among the Kanadier immigrants. Both have congregations among Mennonites in Mexico and both have been represented on the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Kanadier Concerns Committee.¹⁰ Both have for several decades actively sought out opportunities to establish congregations among the Kanadier Mennonites in Canada and elsewhere. Leaders within both of these denominations readily admit that mistakes have been made in the past, and acknowledge the need to become much more sensitive to the negative impact of careless evangelism and inappropriate rhetoric. However, it is worth noting that these evangelical-Mennonite congregations, comprised primarily of Kanadier Mennonites, seldom began as the result of aggressive evangelism on the part of evangelical or evangelical-Mennonite denominations. In many instances evangelical-Mennonite denominations were specifically sought out by small groups of interested Kanadier individuals who were asking for help in organizing a new local congregation.

A third evangelical-Mennonite group that shares an emphasis on church-planting, but that can be distinguished from other evangelical-Mennonite options by its Wesleyan theological roots is the Brethren in Christ. Despite its long history in Ontario—all but six of its forty congregations in Canada are scattered throughout the province—only one congregation located in Haldimand-Norfolk county has drawn in a significant number of Kanadier immigrants.¹¹ The denomination's church-planting initiatives have been much more interested in starting new churches within Canadian cities than among Kanadier Mennonites.

Several smaller Mennonite denominations have also made attempts to start congregations among the incoming Kanadier immigrants. Increasingly identified as "evangelical," they have begun cooperating closely with groups such as the EMMC and EMC. One example is the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, predominantly a southern Manitoba denomination. During the mid-1990s this denomination sent several married couples to Ontario to establish two "missions." Neither effort led to the formation of a congregation, and in order to avoid competing with the nearby EMMC and EMC initiatives, both were withdrawn in 1998. More recently, in 2002, the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan responded to a request for help from a group of Kanadier families to organize a new congregation in Leamington. Having adopted aspects of an evangelical ethos, but somewhat reticent about adopting an evangelical identity, several Sommerfelder congregations in southern Manitoba represent yet another "evangelical" option. All three

groups—the Chortitzer, the Saskatchewan Bergthaler, and the Sommerfelder—are more culturally conservative than the EMC or EMMC and thus offer, in the words of one Bergthaler minister, a church option that is “in-between” the Old Colony Church and evangelical-Mennonite churches.

Somewhat more aloof from other Mennonite denominations is a loosely connected fraternity of independent churches bound together by common purposes and practices known as the Nationwide Conservative Mennonite Congregations. This fellowship has less than ten congregations in Ontario, of which only two have significant numbers of Kanadier Mennonites. Like the Chortitzer and Saskatchewan Bergthaler, the Nationwide Conservative Mennonite churches tend to be more culturally conservative than the EMC and EMMC.

One of the largest Mennonite denominations in Canada is the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, with approximately 34,000 members. The Mennonite Brethren readily identify themselves as evangelical-Anabaptist, and are well connected to the larger evangelical community in Canada. Despite their substantial resources and aggressive church-planting initiatives across the country, particularly in Calgary, Toronto and Montreal, their involvement with the Kanadier immigrants has been minimal. Although several congregations in Ontario located in close proximity to incoming Kanadier Mennonites have attracted some families, the influx of the Kanadier Mennonites in Canada has not been recognized as a significant event by denominational leaders. The strong presence of Russlaender Mennonites within more established Mennonite Brethren congregations, the more multi-ethnic make-up of many urban Mennonite Brethren congregations, together with the exclusive use of the English language and worship styles that are foreign to the incoming Kanadier immigrants, has created a cultural gap that few Kanadier immigrants have been interested in trying to bridge upon their arrival in Canada.¹²

A small number of Kanadier immigrants have found their way into non-Mennonite evangelical churches such as the Baptist, Pentecostal or Evangelical Free bodies. In some instances, these congregations have had their roots in splits with congregations started by evangelical-Mennonite denominations.¹³ A number of Kanadier immigrants have joined a German-speaking Gemeinde Gottes (the Church of God, Restoration) congregation that was started in Aylmer, Ontario in 1989. Led by Henry Hildebrandt, a rather dogmatic and authoritarian leader and spokesperson, the congregation came to national attention in 2001 over a hotly contested child-custody dispute with Family and Children’s Services of St. Thomas and Elgin County

in Ontario. Kanadier immigrants generally do not join non-Mennonite evangelical churches until they have become comfortable with the English language and Canadian culture.

Significant Observations

Several significant observations arise from a close scrutiny of the religious demographics among the Kanadier Mennonite immigrants. Despite the perpetually optimistic tone of EMMC and EMC denominational reports describing “God’s blessing” and “church growth,” those who have taken an evangelical path represent a relatively small but not insignificant proportion of the total number of Kanadier immigrants. Although distributed among numerous denominations, in total the number who have either become members of, or attend, an evangelical church represents approximately seven to nine percent of the total number of Kanadier immigrants. Interestingly, this is somewhat less than the percentage of evangelicals within the Canadian population in general.¹⁴

To understand the significance of the number of evangelicals, their tally must be compared to two other tallies relating to the religious life of the Kanadier immigrant community. First, by far the most dramatic religious trend to emerge in this community relates to the 60% (and this is a conservative estimate) of the immigrants who have opted not to associate with or actively participate in any church community at all.¹⁵ Most of these individuals are between 20-40 years of age. Such a wide-scale disaffection with organized religion among young adults is analogous in proportion and pace only to the “Quiet Revolution” and the associated exodus from the Roman Catholic Church that began in Quebec during the 1960s. The explanations for this trend are varied and are related to the reasons some of the immigrants have sought out other denominational options. The proportion of unaffiliated Kanadier Mennonites remains a pastoral concern, even a crisis that has increasingly united many Mennonite church leaders in Canada. This massive religious disaffection represents an important key to understanding and helping this immigrant community, as well as in understanding its response to the implications of the seismic cultural shifts related to their relocation to Canada.

A second important demographic tally is the number of Kanadier immigrants who now belong to the Old Colony Mennonite congregation in Canada, and other Mennonite churches that are similar to the Old Colony Church in worship style, organizational structure and theological ethos. Estimates indicate that

approximately 25-30% of the immigrant group is associated with groups such as the Old Colony Church, the Reinland Mennonite Fellowship, New Reinland Mennonite Church, and the Old Sommerfelder Mennonite Church.¹⁶ Although attendance statistics are often not kept, a calculation of the maximum seating capacity of church buildings suggests that only about one half of this percentage are regular participants in church life.¹⁷ Still, this statistic means that the number of Kanadier immigrants still associated with Old Colony, Reinlaender or Sommerfelder churches is approximately double the total number involved in evangelical denominations. While it is much more difficult to measure influence than count numbers, these two statistical estimates indicate that the total number of Kanadier Mennonite immigrants who walk the evangelical path remains a minority.

Reasons for Leaving the Old Colony Church

In addition to using denominational reports and archival materials, I have interviewed a wide range of individuals from among the evangelical-Mennonite and evangelical options described above.¹⁸ I especially sought out those people who were either Kanadier immigrants themselves or who had close relationships with the Kanadier Mennonite immigrant community. I was particularly interested in hearing their own explanations for their attraction to evangelical churches, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite. A preliminary analysis suggests a range of reasons for choosing an evangelical church. No matter what these reasons, the decision to join a different faith community was complex and difficult. Joining an evangelical congregation invariably represented an intentional statement about pursuing a different kind of Christian spirituality/piety and marked a dramatic moment in the lives of Kanadier immigrants. It sometimes fractured relationships with extended family members and friends. Such decisions were never made lightly, and always included at least several of the reasons outlined below. The story of each person is unique, always multi-faceted, and cannot be reduced to generalizations or simple mono-causal explanations.¹⁹

The first of many reasons given was the widespread disaffection among the immigrants with the Old Colony Church in Mexico. In Mexico the Old Colony was often associated with resistance to economic development and educational improvement.²⁰ Many members became convinced that *das Alte festhalten*, clinging to the old order, had become an obsession on the part of the church leaders, even if it exacerbated the economic plight created by a devalued

Mexican peso, unemployment, and the globalization of the agricultural industry. Once part of a strategy for keeping “the world” at bay, the obdurate resistance to change was seen to have become the *raison d’être* of the Old Colony religious system. As employment and economic circumstances grew more desperate, individuals were forced to take action. Some were excommunicated for various misdemeanours prior to coming to Canada and others for making plans to move to Canada. Some were excommunicated for disobedience after their departure from the Mennonite colonies in Mexico. The decision to leave the colony without permission was pronounced by some Old Colony leaders as tantamount to moving “to hell.” Excommunication is a very serious matter for Kanadier Mennonites, with many having been taught that once excommunicated a person is barred forever from heaven. The “spectre of excommunication,” as described by Abe Warkentin former editor of the *Mennonitische Post*, left many immigrants unsure of their status with the Old Colony Church and prevented some from pursuing a relationship with the denomination upon their arrival in Canada.²¹ So the search for alternative church options by some Kanadier immigrants was a reaction against the frustrations experienced in the Mexican colonies. In some instances the evangelical-Mennonite religious choices made in Canada were already extensions of an evangelical trajectory that had begun in Mexico.²²

A second, and rather pragmatic, factor in choosing an evangelical-Mennonite or evangelical congregation for some was the absence of other, more familiar, church options. Prior to the influx of Mexican Mennonites, the Old Colony Church in Canada was not a large denomination and not present in Ontario. Despite limited personnel and resources, the influx of Old Colony Mennonites into Ontario prompted the Old Colony in Manitoba to help the newly arrived immigrants organize a congregation during the late 1950s.²³ Its leaders made significant efforts to extend the church into the regions with the highest density of Kanadier immigrants in Ontario,²⁴ but they have not been able to organize congregations quickly enough or widely enough for easy access by the more than 40,000 immigrants scattered across Canada. Regardless of the reasons for the absence of the Old Colony church in certain locales, the vacuum created was reason enough for some immigrants to explore other options. Naturally, they investigated first those places where other Kanadier immigrants could be found.

Finding a community to help with cultural adjustments in Canada was yet another factor in making evangelical churches attractive to the Mennonite immigrants. Adjusting to a new culture after a major relocation is a formidable challenge in any era. For the Kanadier

Mennonites from Mexico it meant leaving the familiar, largely rural and isolated church-centred society in which almost all aspects of life were prescribed. The move to an unfamiliar, less autocratic, more industrialized, urban, consumer-oriented, religiously pluralistic society demanded immediate life-shaping decisions. Those decisions affected housing, employment, education, and transportation. They demanded a set of skills that often had not been developed and had to be negotiated in a new language.²⁵ The exodus of Old Colony Mennonites from Mexico has been called an “uncontrolled migration,” meaning that it was initiated by individuals who were seeking a better economic future for their families rather than being a church-led migration of an entire community.²⁶ The isolation experienced by such families prompted many to rely on extended family members and a larger church community to cope with the shock of cultural adjustment. Some individuals cited changes required in adapting to a Canadian environment as leading them to evangelical churches.

The Importance of Assurance of Salvation

A primary reason given by individuals for choosing evangelical-Mennonite congregations was a new or a renewed spiritual interest, along with a definite spiritual experience. An evangelical church was seen as a place to nurture this interest in an open, inviting and forthright environment. The Kanadier Mennonite immigrants brought with them to Canada a deep respect for the Bible, but were often not very familiar with the text itself. Many appreciated the way evangelical churches encouraged individuals to study the Bible for themselves, a practice that had at times been forbidden by Old Colony leaders in Mexico. The language used to describe this new interest in spiritual matters varied. Some associated the decision to join an evangelical church with an experience that definitely marked the beginning of a spiritual pilgrimage; such moments were referred to as “conversion,” “being saved,” “finding Christ,” or “becoming a Christian.”²⁷ Others saw involvement with evangelicalism not as the beginning of a spiritual pilgrimage, but rather as an “awakening,” a “renewal,” or as the discovery of a “living faith.” These events followed either an earlier religious experience at baptism, the culmination of a spiritual search following a traumatic event, or a natural progression growing out of an interest in knowing more about the Bible.²⁸

Regardless of how and when people entered an evangelical church, almost all testified that the discovery of God’s grace resulted in a life

of “freedom and joy.” This new experiential reality was made possible, in part, by having obtained the vitally important “assurance of salvation,” that is, the subjective confirmation of forgiveness and acceptance before God. For those Kanadier Mennonites who adopted evangelicalism, “assurance of salvation” highlights a transformation in the subjective character of their religious experience: they testified that they had moved from fear, anxiety, and uncertainty towards emancipation, joy and confidence. Their old feelings are reminiscent of the angst that pervaded the medieval spirituality of many fifteenth and sixteenth-century European Roman Catholics, or the “nervous” condition of the melancholy and introspective seventeenth-century Puritans who expressed a vague hope of obtaining the “assurance of salvation” near the end of a devoted life.²⁹ Such comparisons suggest that similar internal psychological dynamics leading to widespread anxiety can be created by certain theological themes and social conditions.

The heavy emphasis on “assurance of salvation” among evangelical-Mennonites is indicative of its significance. The term serves as a convenient short-hand, or rhetorical “key” for describing the psychological dynamics and theological ideas vital in understanding the acceptance of evangelical Protestantism by a steady stream of Kanadier Mennonites throughout the twentieth century.³⁰ It highlights a new understanding of soteriology, one that centres around the *individual* sinner receiving *immediate* forgiveness for *all* sin.³¹ Justification is understood as a completed transaction that replaces anxiety and striving with an immediate confidence that “all is well with my soul.” David Schroeder observes that Old Colony Mennonites tend to emphasize the future tense of salvation (I trust I will be saved), whereas evangelical-Mennonites emphasize the past tense of salvation (I have been saved).³² This latter more Protestant soteriology stands in contrast to the emphasis within Old Colony soteriology in which salvation is less certain and more dependent upon the individual’s ability to sustain life-long faithful obedience to Christ and the church. In Old Colony soteriology the lines between justification and sanctification are more intertwined, as the individual cooperates with God in living a life of righteousness, measured in part by faithful adherence to the ideals demanded by the community of God.³³ As the respect for church leadership weakened, which has been the case among incoming Kanadier Mennonites, their confidence in Old Colony theological teachings also weakened.

Those who have made the theological shift towards evangelicalism often require time to find a new sense of religious balance. Just as Anabaptist/Mennonite soteriology sometimes can degenerate into joyless, fear-ridden and introspective legalism, so too can an over-

emphasis on assurance of salvation produce an apathy that diminishes the seriousness of daily discipleship. It is easy to find examples of a healthy theological balance among people in both the evangelical Protestant and the Kanadier Mennonite world. It is also possible, however, to find examples within both traditions of excesses that have been unfairly used by critics to discredit either movement.³⁴

The stress on assurance of salvation also represents a transition towards a preference for a more public and open expression of religious faith. From the days of Menno Simons, Mennonite faith has always been deeply experiential and personal; but this personal faith was often expressed and verified through the actions of a community rather than through the verbal testimony of an individual. James Urry's explanation for the attractiveness of pietism among Russian Mennonites during the nineteenth century is helpful for understanding the appeal of evangelicalism to Kanadier Mennonites in Canada. He argues that Mennonite faith was "often poorly expressed because it lacked not only the means for open expression, but also because any public exhibition of such faith was condemned as a sign of pride."³⁵ Evangelicalism, which has been deeply influenced by pietism, offered the means to express publicly the personal experience of faith implicit within Old Colony piety. It offered both the language and the opportunity, as well as the sanction of the Bible to give verbal expression to internal spiritual impulses. This personal element explains, at least in part, the sense of liberty expressed by virtually every Kanadier Mennonite on the evangelical path.³⁶

The confidence generated by the "assurance of salvation" helps explain a new-found "mission-mindedness" among the Kanadier Mennonites. From Max Weber onwards, scholars have noted the relationship between "certainty of grace" and evangelical activism.³⁷ Perhaps there is a connection between the Old Colony unwillingness to make definitive pronouncements about the certainty of salvation and their lack of involvement in evangelistic outreach.³⁸ Whatever the case, Kanadier Mennonites who have opted for evangelicalism have generally accepted a sense of responsibility for fulfilling the "Great Commission."

Social Factors in Joining Evangelical Churches

Frequently mentioned as an attractive feature of evangelical churches was the presence of relatives or other Kanadier Mennonite immigrants. Not only does this confirm the importance of kinship within the Kanadier Mennonite community, but it also signals a

preference for a degree of familiarity and homogeneity within their church community of choice. The presence of Kanadier Mennonites within a congregation inevitably served as a magnet for drawing others.³⁹

As a result, evangelical-Mennonite denominations such as the EMMC, and to a lesser extent the EMC, have had a distinct advantage over other evangelical groups. The historical identity of the EMMC with spiritual renewal among Sommerfelders in Manitoba during the 1930s and then among Old Colonists and Berghalers in Saskatchewan during the 1940s, gave many a first-hand familiarity with the broader Kanadier culture. This familiarity included the Low-German language, a knowledge of the religious experiences and questions of the incoming Kanadier immigrants, and close kinship ties. Moreover, the transitions within the history of the denomination, such as a change from German to English, has allowed denominational leaders to use their experience to guide the linguistic transition of newer EMMC congregations consisting of Kanadier immigrants. The absorption of individuals from the ongoing influx of new immigrants has complicated and prolonged transitions within some congregations. Those who have been in Canada for years, even decades, now prefer English and sometimes also more contemporary styles of worship. The EMMC church in Aylmer, Ontario, for example, has responded with multiple services, each with a distinct language and style to accommodate those who are in various phases of cultural change.

The evangelical-Mennonite congregations also served as a kind of halfway house between the cultural and religious way of life familiar to the Mexican immigrants and that of a multi-cultural, pluralistic Canada. The congregation became a crucible in which acculturation, especially language change, could be controlled collectively and experienced together. It was a cultural environment that enabled the individual to make choices concerning occupation, technology, religion and education. This religious environment legitimized the learning of English, more socially relevant forms of music and worship and new ideas, albeit justified as biblical. It was a religious and cultural alternative that helped some of the culturally alienated but religiously minded Kanadier Mennonites adapt to a modern society. In this way, evangelicalism served as a conduit for the Canadianization of these immigrants.⁴⁰ Without minimizing the cultural dislocation experienced by the Kanadier immigrants, one can appreciate the importance of the evangelical congregations in the cultural and religious emancipation of some of the immigrants.

Mentioned almost as frequently as the presence of relatives or other Kanadier immigrants in evangelical churches was the simple explanation, "for the sake of the young people." Many newcomers

feared that staying within German-language churches, often without youth programs, would result in permanent loss of interest and alienation of their children from a Christian community. Examples of disaffection among their fellow immigrants that substantiated such fears were not difficult to find. Individuals with a specific concern for their children were attracted to evangelical-Mennonite congregations that tried to offer spiritual nurture, Bible teaching and wholesome activities for children and youth through Sunday school and mid-week programs. The immigrants saw church-sponsored youth activities as a vital place for faith formation, as a means for encouraging education, and as a more favourable alternative to the problems created by boredom and lack of opportunity among Mennonite youth in Mexico.⁴¹ Evangelical churches seemed to promise a future for their children.

The concern that children and youth find a church community seen as culturally relevant and socially appropriate often motivated parents to accept new worship styles and cultural changes. Moreover, many first-generation immigrant parents felt helpless in guiding their children within a culture that they did not fully understand, a phenomenon common among immigrant groups. This feeling heightened their desire to find a church community they believed would help their children adjust and mitigate the corrosive impact of an overly permissive and secularist public school system.

The social factors contributing towards the decision to become a part of an evangelical-Mennonite congregation does raise the question of just how important was evangelical identity and the desire to be a part of the larger world of evangelical Protestantism for Kanadier Mennonites? The question can be answered in part by asking whether the first priority for Kanadier newcomers drawn towards the evangelical path was to find a church option with evangelical emphases, or whether it was to find a church alternative with fellow Mennonites? Were these Kanadier Mennonites looking for fellowship with the larger evangelical Protestant world or with Mennonites with an evangelical theological flavour? The proportion of Kanadier who choose evangelical-Mennonite options suggests that it is clearly the latter. The vast majority of Kanadier Mennonites in evangelical-Mennonite churches remain unfamiliar with, and until recently, uninvolved with the larger world of evangelical Protestantism in North America. The selection of evangelical-Mennonite churches had more to do with efforts to address some of their own needs than to identify with the concerns and priorities of the larger world of evangelical Protestantism in North America, a world from which they were separated both linguistically and culturally.

Consistent with the actions one might expect to find among any community of individuals identified as Christians, some Kanadier

immigrants cited their gratitude for specific acts of love and kindness done by individuals from evangelical or evangelical-Mennonite church. The forms of assistance received included the receipt of money, food, furniture and housing, friendship, offers of employment, assistance with immigration, and transportation. They saw these overtures as tangible expressions of love for a neighbour in need.

Evangelical Mennonite churches also offered a wide range of possibilities for women.⁴² As others have noted, it was often the women who suffered most in colony life and in the migration to and cultural adjustment in Canada. The motivation and pressure for involvement in a church community, thus, often came from women. Although evangelical-Mennonite denominations are not seen in Canada as avid promoters of full equality for women, the differences between the roles and involvement of women within the Old Colony and evangelical-Mennonite church communities were regarded as substantial enough to be welcomed. These congregations offered women opportunities for involvement in worship services and in decision-making. Moreover, they manifested a greater openness to higher levels of education for both men and women, less pressure to have large families and permission to use birth-control, and less pressure to wear distinctive “old order” clothing.

An intentional shedding of an undesirable ethnic identity is a final reason for joining evangelical churches. A few examples can even be found of Kanadier Mennonite immigrants who intentionally sought out “English” evangelical churches—such as Baptist, Evangelical Free or Pentecostal bodies—because of theological emphases not available in evangelical-Mennonite churches. In some cases the decision to join “English” evangelical churches in Canada was a deliberate attempt to shed all the “embarrassing” remnants of both their Old Colony Mennonite heritage and what they perceived to be an undesirable Mexican-Mennonite immigrant identity.

Conclusion

While the Old Colony Church remains a place of spiritual nurture and sustenance for many Kanadier Mennonite immigrants, a significant number of Kanadier Mennonites in Canada have not found the Old Colony Church and its theology a congenial home. Many of these newcomers have opted for an evangelical path. The reasons for such a shift are complex and multi-faceted. This article is by no means a definitive study, and as a result, many other questions need to be explored. For example, what variations are evident in the religious choices made by first, second and even third generation immigrants?

What impact, if any, have evangelical ideas and practices had on groups such as Old Colony and Reinlaender in Canada? What impact did Kanadier Mennonites have within the various denominations of which they became a part? What were the most significant challenges during their integration? What kind of changes took place within evangelical-Mennonite congregations in which Kanadier-Mennonite immigrants made up a substantial proportion of members, and how did the transitions within such congregations compare to transitions within other congregations within the same denomination? In addition to investigating questions related specifically to the relationship between Kanadier Mennonites and evangelicalism, a comprehensive analysis of the interaction between evangelical Protestants and Mennonites in Canada remains to be done.

Despite the polarities that have often marked the relationship between some evangelical-Mennonites and other Mennonites in Canada, I am encouraged by the virtually unanimous concern among those whom I interviewed for securing a greater degree of inter-Mennonite respect and cooperation. There is much to learn from each other. I applaud and encourage those who continue to work towards healthier relationships; all the Mennonite churches in Canada will be better for it.⁴³

Notes

- 1 Specific examples of such responses are included in Bruce L. Guenther, "Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 223-224.
- 2 The story of the departure of 8,000 Kanadier Mennonites from Canada during the 1920s and their settlement in Mexico has been told by numerous people (see for example, Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: A People's Struggle for Survival, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 94-138; Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1971), 9-30; and Calvin Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969).
- 3 For a fuller explanation see *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-19. This definitional approach is not without its difficulties (see Lyman Kellstedt and John C. Green, "The Mismeasure of Evangelicalism," *Books and Culture* [Jan/Feb 1996]: 14-15).
- 4 Evangelicalism has also been referred to as a kind of loose religious "denomination," that is "a dynamic movement with common heritages, common tendencies, an identity, and an organic character" (see George Marsden, "The Evangelical Denomination," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], x). Speaking specifically about Canada, John G. Stackhouse, Jr. describes evangelicalism in Canada as a network of interlocking institutions comprised of a mutually supportive fellowship of organizations and individuals (*Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth*

- Century: An Introduction to Its Character* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993], 177-204).
- 5 For a helpful historical study of this denomination see Jack Heppner, *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider /Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, 1937-1987* (Altona: Friesen Printers, 1987). The denomination was the result of a division within the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church in southern Manitoba during the late 1930s.
 - 6 Heppner, *Search for Renewal*, 263-273. The denomination also has churches in Mexico, Belize, Bolivia and several in the United States made up of Kanadier Mennonites.
 - 7 "EMMC Statistical Report for 2001," Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference Reports to the 43rd Annual Convention, Winnipeg, MB, 4-7 July 2002, 46.
 - 8 For a brief history of the denomination see Harvey Plett, *Seeking to be Faithful: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Steinbach: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1996).
 - 9 *Evangelical Mennonite Conference Yearbook 2001* (Steinbach: EMC, 2001). Individual congregations are sometimes featured in *The Messenger*: the profiles featuring congregations with a significant number of Kanadier immigrants include "Mennonite Christian Fellowship Chapel, Stratton, Ontario," *The Messenger* (28 June 1991): 7-10; "Fort Frances—The Church on the Border," *The Messenger* (19 June 1992): 8-10; "Leamington E.M. Church," *The Messenger* (7 May 1997): 6-8; and "Tabor: A New Chapter in Local History," *The Messenger* (7 November 2001): 8-13.
 - 10 In 1975 MCC Canada organized the Kanadier Committee (later renamed Kanadier Colonization Committee, and then Kanadier Mennonite Concerns Committee), to assist the Mennonites arriving in Canada from Mexico and Bolivia. Several years later, in 1977, MCC launched a German language newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Post*, which is published in Steinbach and distributed twice a month throughout Canada, and parts of Central and South America (Abe Warkentin, "Projections for MCC Canada Kanadier Work in Mexico," May 1992, 2, MCC Canada Board Minutes, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives).
 - 11 For a denominational history see E. Morris Sider, *Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change: The Brethren of Christ in Canada* (Hamilton: Canadian Conference, Brethren in Christ Church, 1988).
 - 12 Leaving aside the question of whether Mennonite Church Canada congregations should be identified as evangelical-Mennonite (some would claim to be, and others would not), they have fared only slightly better in incorporating Kanadier immigrants into their Ontario and Manitoba congregations than have the Mennonite Brethren. They have, however, contributed more personnel to the various Mennonite Central Committee initiatives that work alongside Kanadier Mennonites than any other Mennonite denomination.
 - 13 For example, splits within EMMC congregations in Ontario spawned two independent Baptist churches (see Heppner, *Search for Renewal*, 270-272).
 - 14 In 1989 Arnell Motz set the percentage at 8% ("Who's Growing and Who's Not," in *Reclaiming a Nation: The Challenge of Re-evangelizing Canada by the Year 2000*, ed. Arnell Motz [Richmond: Church Leadership Library, 1990]: 66); in 1995 the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada claimed that approximately 10% of Canadians were evangelical (see special issue of *Faith Today* [May/June 1995]: 19); a study done in 1993 by Angus Reid and George Rawlyk claimed that upwards of 13% of the Canadian population were evangelical ("God is Alive," *Maclean's* [12 April 1993]: 46).
 - 15 Exact numbers are impossible to obtain, but virtually every person I interviewed commented on this wide-scale disaffection (see for example William Janzen, *Build Up One Another: The Work of MCCO with the Mennonites from Mexico in Ontario, 1977-1997* [Kitchener: MCC Ontario, 1998], 68; Menno Kroeker, "Letter

- to the Editor," *Preservings* 19 [December 2001]: 60; and Abe Warkentin, "A Study Paper on the Impact of the Mexican Mennonite Migration on Southern Manitoba," March 1991, 6, MCC Canada Office, Winnipeg, MB).
- ¹⁶ Statistical tidbits can be found in Janzen, *Build Up One Another*; Delbert Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001), 141, 158, 161-166; *Preservings* 14 (June 1999): 14; *Preservings* 16 (June 2000): 38-40; *Mennonitische Post*, 17 March 2000, 9.
- ¹⁷ Irregular attendance is, in part, due to the relatively few churches that are available to serve a widely scattered group of people. It is, in part, due also to the fact that many Kanadier young people did not attend church regularly before they arrived in Canada.
- ¹⁸ The identity of interviewees remains confidential both in order to comply with the terms of my application to the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board, and to honour the wishes of some interviewees. I appreciated the gracious and open-handed honesty with which people tried to answer questions, and was repeatedly impressed with the concern for sensitivity in how I would handle their observations and comments. Many explicitly stated that they did not want to be associated with a project that would jeopardize some of the cooperative inter-Mennonite initiatives taking place within their communities. I do recognize the inherent limitations of anonymous, anecdotal evidence, and therefore put forward my observations and analysis only as preliminary step towards more definitive studies.
- ¹⁹ Allowing Kanadier Mennonites who are inclined towards evangelical Protestantism (for whatever reason) to tell their own stories without disparagement stands in contrast to the dismissive and distorted treatment sometimes given to those sympathetic with evangelicalism in publications such as *Preservings* (see for example, "Debate – Mexican Mennonites," *Preservings* 16 [June 2000]: 50, 57). Despite the valuable contribution that this publication has made in presenting a wealth of historical material about Kanadier Mennonites, the repeated depiction of those opting for evangelical denominations as hapless victims of "alien predators" and the wiles of "Satan," minimizes at best, and denigrates at worst, the significance of their choices, their dignity as persons who are capable of making choices they deem to be best for themselves and their families, their intelligence for handling of the issues they were in good faith trying to address, and the significance of the underlying theological differences. This assault on their dignity is, sadly and ironically, reminiscent of the insensitive abusive inflicted upon Kanadier Mennonites by some evangelical-Mennonites in the past, and perpetuates the historiographical marginalization experienced by Kanadier Mennonites.
- ²⁰ See Abe Peters, "Spiritual Challenges Facing Colonies in Mexico," 4 December 1998, MCC Canada Office, Winnipeg, MB, for an excellent explanation of the theological foundation undergirding Old Colony Church opposition to change.
- ²¹ See the reports submitted by Abe Warkentin, "A Study Paper on the Impact of the Mexican Mennonite Migration on Southern Manitoba," March 1991, 2, 6-7; and "Projections for MCC Canada Kanadier Work in Mexico, 1992-1995," May 1992, 1-11, MCC Canada Office, Winnipeg, MB.
- ²² Several interviewees recounted stories of people surreptitiously organizing Bible study and prayer meetings, and being excommunicated when discovered. This often prompted such families to seek support from another denomination.
- ²³ This process was made more difficult by the fact that the Old Colony Church leaders in Mexico did not recognize the Old Colony Church in Canada as a legitimate church, and for reasons outlined above refused to assist the immigrants arriving in Canada in organizing new congregations. A notable lack of cooperation still continues between some Old Colony leaders in Mexico and Old Colony leaders in Canada.

- ²⁴ The largest concentration of Kanadier churches are in the counties of Essex, Elgin and Haldimand-Norfolk in Ontario. See map in Janzen, *Build Up One Another*, 4.
- ²⁵ The difficulties of adjusting to a new language and a new culture were often exacerbated by the low educational standards in many of the Mennonite schools in Mexico, which had ill-prepared them for such a daunting challenge. According to a study completed in the early 1970s, over 90% of the Mennonite population in Mexico was functionally illiterate (Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country*, 305-311). This is substantiated by reports from numerous MCC workers (see for example Abe Warkentin, "Ontario Trip Report," 20-27 September 1991, MCC Ottawa Office, Ottawa, ON).
- ²⁶ This observation was made by Marvin Dueck, at "The Return of the Kanadier: A History of a Migrant People" conference at the University of Winnipeg, 3-5 October 2002. Earlier Kanadier movements were qualitatively different in that an entire church community with a common purpose was transplanted together, thereby preserving the social and religious infrastructure. The Kanadier influx into Canada was a migration of individuals looking after the welfare of their own families.
- ²⁷ Regardless of how one assesses the authenticity of evangelical conversion narratives, the indisputable fact is that for many people it marked a significant life-changing experience. Taking his cue from Andrew Walls, Bruce Hindmarsh, in a study of eighteenth-century evangelical soteriology, notes that the strong emphasis on the conversion of the individual emerges, within evangelical Protestantism, in part, as a protest against an excessively corporate (and nominal) view of salvation in which adherence to a "Christian" civil society was sufficient for salvation ("Let Us See Thy Great Salvation: What Did it Mean to be Saved?" In *What Does it Mean to be Saved: Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002], 65). The dynamics created by the dominant role of the church within Mennonite colony life in Mexico were not dissimilar.
- ²⁸ My interviews were not extensive enough to obtain a reliable estimate of the proportion of incoming Kanadier members that fit these two categories.
- ²⁹ Bebbington identifies the notion of immediate assurance of salvation as the hinge marking the transition of seventeenth-century Puritanism towards evangelicalism (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 42-50). For an example of a Puritan wrestling with the pastoral problem of "anxious Christians," see William Perkins, "Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience," in *William Perkins (1558-1602): His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, ed. Thomas Merrill (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. DeGraaf, 1966), 39-61, 103-107.
- ³⁰ I examine various factors that drew a group of Old Colony Mennonites towards evangelical Protestantism in more detail in "The Convergence of Old Colony Mennonites, Evangelicalism and Contemporary Canadian Culture—A Case Study of Osler Mission Chapel (1974-1994)," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 14 (1996): 102-104.
- ³¹ The emphasis on an *individual* conversion experience authorized the individual to challenge a religious system in which the church had had control over virtually every facet of life. It became, in the words of Nancy Christie, a kind of "fulcrum of dissent" whereby the authority of personal experience replaced the authority of the church. Christie uses the term to explain how the New Light revival in Nova Scotia during the eighteenth century challenged an Anglican hegemony (see "'In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion': Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order, 1760-1815," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990*, ed. George A. Rawlyk [Burlington: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1990], 9-47). One wonders also whether the heavy accent on the salvation of the *individual* signals not only spiritual rejuvenation, but also acceptance of the individualism that is fundamental to North American culture.

- ³² "Evangelicals Denigrate Conservatives," *Preservings* 15 (December 1999): 47.
- ³³ The Anabaptist idea that faith only becomes operative if there is obedience which is expressed in works of faith, is more consistent with medieval Catholicism than Protestantism (see Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* [Waterloo: Herald Press, 1981], 41-42). Salvation was the ultimate goal of Old Colony community life. One gets the sense that an individual's deviance could put the entire community at risk—at least if deviation is allowed to persist and be copied by other people. This understanding is rooted in their self-conception as God's chosen (and pure) people who had covenanted to remain faithful to God and to their church (Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 35).
- ³⁴ Some (certainly not all) who experienced assurance of salvation within an evangelical environment subsequently rejected their previous religious experience within the Old Colony Church as having had little or no benefit. Their own spiritual renewal was placed in stark contrast to their previous "darkness," which was seen as a condition characterizing not only their own lives, but also sometimes applied to the entire Old Colony Church and its theological heritage. Such implied inferiority and disparagement has, understandably, not been appreciated by Old Colony leaders, former friends and family members who remain with the Old Colony Church. The response on the part of some Old Colony people towards those interested in evangelicalism has not always been kind either, and many who have found spiritual renewal within evangelical churches have been ostracized (and sometimes banned) for spiritual pride and "vain boasting," and for having "left their first love." The decision to walk the evangelical path often results in tensions and divisions within families. It would be helpful if both traditions could come to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different theological systems without vilifying and denouncing adherents of other traditions.
- ³⁵ James Urry, "All that glitters . . .": Delbert Plett and the Place of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russian-Mennonite History," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 (1986): 234.
- ³⁶ Old Colony Church leaders and members have sometimes been disadvantaged in their efforts to explain their theological views because of a limited education, minimal knowledge of the Bible and their own historical and theological heritage, and the use of a "minority" language for the discussion of theological ideas. This made it more difficult for them to transplant the Old Colony way of life into other cultural environments (see similar observations by John J. Friesen, "Reinländer Mennonite Gemeinde," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada*, 12-13).
- ³⁷ See *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 178. David Bebbington argues that the introspective concentration on their inward lives, and the constant search for marks of grace, inhibited the Puritan impulse towards mission. Evangelicals, however, assumed that assurance of their own salvation was normative; this confidence helped nurture a dynamism that led to significant involvement in philanthropic endeavours and missionary activity during the nineteenth century ("Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment," *Crux* 25, No. 4 [December 1989]: 32-33).
- ³⁸ It may be that, as Abe Peters has argued, a better explanation is that the Old Colony Church sees its "mission" as the preservation of a biblical way of life ("Developing Positive Relationships," 3 March 1999).
- ³⁹ A general pattern among immigrants in Canada is to settle, if at all possible, in close proximity to other immigrants from the same region or kinfolk who can help them adjust to a new country, language and culture. This explains the relatively large number of Kanadier Mennonites in cities such as Aylmer, ON and Winkler, MB.
- ⁴⁰ Leaders within at least one evangelical-Mennonite denomination described their work with Kanadier Mennonite immigrants as helping them become "new

Canadians” (see remark in Letter from George Reimer to Menno Wiebe, 25 May 1979; and Guenther, “The Convergence of Old Colony Mennonites, Evangelicalism and Contemporary Canadian Culture,” 105-112).

- ⁴¹ In addition to the testimony of numerous interviewees, see for example George Reimer, “Some Impressions of Mexican Mennonites Now,” 20 October 1980, 4-5; and Abe Warkentin, “Projections for MCC Canada Kanadier Work in Mexico, 1992-1995,” May 1992, 6-7. This is a matter to which the Old Colony Church in Ontario has also responded.
- ⁴² Abe Warkentin, “Projections for MCC Canada Kanadier Work in Mexico, 1992-1995,” 7.
- ⁴³ It is interesting to note the adjustments that MCC has made in strategy, rhetoric and perspective in responding to the needs of the Kanadier community both in Canada and in other places (see Tony Enns, “A Brief Overview of MCC’s Work Among the Low-German Speaking Mennonites in Mexico,” 24 June 1998, MCC Winnipeg).