

“A Habit of Social Concern”: Anxieties about the Relationship between MCC’s Relief and Service Programs and Mennonite Missions from the 1950s to the 1970s

Alain Epp Weaver, *MCC U.S.*

Beginning in the 1940s and becoming more pronounced in the 1950s, the question of how Christian service and relief related to “mission” took on some urgency for Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission agencies in the United States. As the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) quickly expanded and transformed from an occasional mechanism for specific relief ventures into an agency with ongoing humanitarian assistance and service programs, Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission agencies began to express missiological and governance concerns about MCC. Foremost among their concerns: was MCC committed to “word and deed” or were relief and service within MCC eclipsing verbal testimony to the gospel? Mission agencies also worried about how MCC, as a growing inter-Mennonite venture, related to its sponsoring churches.¹

In this article, I examine a key moment in the ongoing attempts to address Mennonite mission agency concerns about MCC. By examining a January 1958 study meeting convened by MCC that

brought together Mennonite church and mission leaders to reflect on the connection between MCC's relief and service work and Mennonite mission efforts, I suggest MCC's collaborations and conflicts with Mennonite mission agencies over its more than one-hundred-year history have not received sufficient scholarly attention. This article is an attempt to begin addressing that gap by investigating how MCC and Mennonite mission agency leadership navigated tensions while also promoting information sharing and coordination in meeting rooms and around board tables during a period of MCC's rapid, sustained growth. Mapping how MCC workers engaged with Mennonite mission units in diverse contexts around the globe (examining moments of collaboration and conflict, convergence and distance) remains an underexplored research area for future scholars.

A 1957 "MCC Relief Study Committee" of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities crystallized several mission agency anxieties about MCC. In a section of the committee's report entitled "The Problem of Social Service," committee members asked: "In light of MCC's function as a relief organization not as a church and the resulting separation of relief service from evangelistic witness, is there not a very distinct trend to an over-emphasis on purely social service?"² Specifically, committee members were anxious that this "over-emphasis" on service might "have a definite bearing on the motivations and convictions of young people who serve in MCC and leave them with the habit of social concern and possibly a lessened compulsion for evangelistic witness."³ MCC's board and staff leadership responded to these concerns by convening a "Study Meeting on the Relationship of MCC Relief and Service Program and Mennonite Missions" in Chicago on January 24, 1958. This consultation brought together over seventy leaders from the United States and Canada representing thirteen Anabaptist denominations and multiple church agencies with the stated aim of clarifying MCC's relationship to its constituent groups, particularly the relationship between MCC's relief and service programs and Mennonite missions. One immediate outcome of this study meeting was the formation of a regularized mechanism for the annual meetings of mission board leaders including meetings amongst themselves and together with MCC's Executive Committee. This mechanism developed and adapted over the ensuing two decades until assuming its present form as the Council of International Ministries in 1976. To this day, the Council brings together representatives of MCC and Anabaptist mission boards to share with one another and to reflect on common work.

Church leaders registered multiple anxieties about MCC in the run-up to and at the 1958 study meeting, although they did not always agree on the nature of the concerns or on how serious the worries were. These anxieties were missiological, ecclesiological, and practical in nature. How did "word" (evangelism) and "deed" (service) relate? Was "relief" a valid form of Christian witness in and of itself, or was it only partial and incomplete if not followed up by mission work? What was the proper relationship between MCC and Mennonite mission boards? Which Mennonite agencies would take the lead in relating to newer Mennonite churches in post-colonial contexts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America? How should MCC's growing Peace Section connect to Mennonite missions? Were rapidly expanding MCC programs drawing potential workers away from the mission boards? When seconded to other organizations, were MCC workers free to give verbal witness to their faith? Was distribution of MCC material resources through non-Mennonite agencies acceptable?

The 1958 study meeting did not result in unanimity on how to answer these questions nor did the meeting dissolve these anxieties. Variations on these questions would persist throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, while concerns about the extent of MCC's structural accountability to Anabaptist churches also endured. However, a clear outcome of the 1958 study meeting was a commitment on the part of the mission boards and MCC to develop and maintain coordinating mechanisms for the ongoing discussion and management of these tensions. While these coordinating mechanisms took on different configurations in the two decades following the 1958 study meeting, the shared commitment to greater information sharing and even collaboration between MCC and the Mennonite mission boards proved durable in its current form as the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM).

MCC's Expansion in the 1940s and 1950s

The two decades preceding the 1958 study meeting were a time of rapid growth. MCC initiated new programs in twenty-four countries and expanded its organizational footprint in Akron, Pennsylvania, in the 1940s and 1950s. During this period, the number of conferences represented on MCC's governance board ballooned from seven to sixteen. In the late 1980s, in an overview of MCC's connection with Anabaptist churches over seven decades, MCC leader Reg Toews observed that MCC's program growth in the 1940s was so swift that the role of Mennonite conferences in MCC's operations

was becoming “more one of influence and guidance than one of control.”⁴ This caused concern among the conferences, prompting “a renewed desire to examine the role and activities of MCC and to have a greater say in decisions regarding future direction and program.”⁵

At the MCC annual meeting in December 1943, Orie Miller raised the question of how MCC’s “foreign relief work” intersected with “the foreign missionary interests” of MCC constituent groups.⁶ This topic generated “considerable discussion,” with participants affirming that “a follow-up spiritual ministry or mission work in an appropriate form” should not be neglected.⁷ MCC’s massive humanitarian relief operation in post-Second World War Europe brought it into collaboration with different European Mennonite churches. At an October 7, 1950, study meeting, MCC and Mennonite mission boards agreed that MCC “should continue to be the channel through which” relief aid “reaches our European brethren.”⁸ Meanwhile, in the United States, both MCC and Mennonite conferences organized voluntary service (VS) units and placements including I-W alternative service assignments for young Mennonite conscientious objectors. MCC held the agreement with the Selective Service for all I-W placements administered not only by MCC but also by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conferences. Therefore, MCC needed to closely follow up with churches to provide timely and accurate reporting to the Selective Service about those placements.⁹ At the same time, the swift growth of MCC’s VS placements in the US raised questions about how those service placements might dovetail with church planting possibilities.

The Eastern Board’s 1957 MCC Study

The 1958 MCC study meeting with Mennonite denominational and mission agency representatives thus did not emerge within a vacuum but responded to years of growing tensions generated by MCC’s rapid growth during and after the Second World War. With this swift increase in global programming, MCC began to eclipse Mennonite mission agencies in global scope and personnel numbers. At the same time, an expanded MCC board threatened the influence that any one Mennonite group had on MCC. As historian James Juhnke has highlighted, MCC at its inception was a fragile venture in inter-Anabaptist coordination and collaboration, with Lancaster Mennonite Conference and the (Old) Mennonite Church most concerned about the putative dangers of inter-Mennonite ecumenical cooperation to traditional belief and practice.¹⁰ Those concerns

about the possible threat to faithful witness posed by inter-Anabaptist cooperation did not disappear after the founding of MCC. They persisted across the organization's first decades, and post-war missiological concerns emerged most forcefully within the groups that had been most hesitant about participating in MCC from the beginning.

These concerns converged in a 1957 study about MCC commissioned by the Eastern Mennonite Board of Mission and Charities and the Lancaster Conference Board of Bishops. The Eastern Board study report began with affirmations that MCC relief is "a compassionate, compelling witness" and that MCC "has made it possible to speak as one voice against war and militarism."¹¹ Eastern Board study members commended the "spiritual emphasis" of the phrase "In the Name of Christ," and noted with appreciation how MCC relief service had led to church planting in Puerto Rico, Ethiopia, Formosa, Mexico, Belgium, England, Luxembourg, and Germany.¹²

Turning to concerns, the study report authors highlighted that MCC's efforts were increasingly passing "from emergency relief to long-range rehabilitation," thus raising questions about when MCC work should be turned over to a mission board and become "the witness of the church."¹³ The authors proceeded to raise numerous issues, from how material relief was distributed to recruitment procedures and the danger of relief drawing young people away from the work of evangelism and mission. Perhaps most concerning for the report's authors was that MCC's growing prominence could lead to what they termed "a very distinct trend toward an over-emphasis on purely social service."¹⁴ The authors acknowledged MCC was not a church but rather an agency that had been tasked by Mennonite conferences to carry out relief work. They feared MCC's expansion presented the danger of a "separation of relief from evangelistic witness."¹⁵ Together, the Eastern Board and Lancaster bishops argued for closer coordination between MCC and Mennonite mission boards.¹⁶ Shortly after the Eastern Board and the Lancaster bishops finalized their study, the (Old) Mennonite Church initiated its own study process (which appears not to have continued beyond the January 1958 consultation).¹⁷

MCC Widens the Conversation

Upon receiving the study report from the Eastern Board, MCC moved quickly to address the Eastern Board's concerns and expand the missiological conversation in the process. Two months after the Eastern Board finalized its study, the MCC Executive Committee

met on September 14, 1957, to discuss how to respond. Executive Committee members expressed their awareness “that there are problems involved in the MCC program and work and its relations to the constituent groups.”¹⁸ They hoped to undertake “joint consideration” with MCC’s constituent church bodies of the matters raised by the Eastern Board study, so that “we can arrive at a mutually satisfactory answer which will make possible continued effective co-operation in the field of service which has been assigned to the MCC.”¹⁹

As an inter-Mennonite organization, MCC was accountable to churches with divergent theological beliefs and practices. In contrast, Mennonite mission agencies had more theologically homogeneous constituencies. The alacrity with which MCC acted to organize a consultation prompted by the Eastern Board study reflected the financial and demographic clout of the Eastern Board’s constituency to MCC. At the same time, responding to the Eastern Board’s concerns through an inter-Mennonite consultation underscored MCC’s accountability not only to the supporting churches of the Eastern Board but also to several other Mennonite church bodies.

Over the ensuing weeks, MCC invited all Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church bodies represented on its governing board to a January 1958 study meeting about MCC and its relationship to Mennonite missions. As MCC consulted leaders from different Mennonite conferences before and after that gathering, they did not hear the Eastern Board’s concerns completely echoed by other churches and agencies. For example, Henry Hostetter, foreign missions leader for the Brethren in Christ, observed to MCC administrator William Snyder that the Brethren in Christ had not encountered the same worries as those named by the Eastern Board. Despite this, Hostetter agreed, at MCC’s urging, to send Brethren in Christ representation to the January study meeting.²⁰ Given the demographic and institutional power wielded by Lancaster Conference and the Mennonite Church, MCC certainly felt compelled to mobilize quickly in responding to their concerns. A few months after the meeting, Boyd Nelson of the Relief and Service branch of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities confided to MCC’s Snyder that “I have heard from members of other Mennonite churches that they sometimes feel that we as ‘Old Mennonites’ get together and make up our minds what will go in our constituency and then we expect the rest of the constituencies to go along.”²¹ In contrast to what he described as an attitude of “let’s decide what we want and then simply tell MCC,” Nelson highlighted the importance of collaboration with other Mennonite groups in jointly guiding MCC.²²

The 1958 Study Meeting Gathers

On January 24, 1958, a little over half a year after the Eastern Board had completed its MCC study, MCC convened in Chicago to hear from MCC and mission agency leaders about how they understood the relationship between MCC and Mennonite mission boards, to name challenges in those relationships, and to identify possible ways to address those tensions. Over two-thirds of the participants came from three of MCC's sixteen constituent church bodies (the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, and the Mennonite Brethren). Almost one-third of all participants were Mennonite Church representatives. Only one out of the seventy-one participants was a woman; all were white. Eight came from Canada.²³ Participants received the revised version of the Eastern Board's study report and discussed five papers. These included an overview on "The Function and Scope of Service of MCC," by C. N. Hostetter, Jr., MCC board chair and Brethren in Christ leader, and presentations by four mission leaders on the common theme "The Relationship of the MCC Relief and Service Program and Mennonite Missions." Presenters were Paul Kraybill of the Eastern Board, A. E. Janzen of the Mennonite Brethren Mission Board, J. D. Graber of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, and Andrew Shelly of the General Conference Missions Board.

At six pages, Kraybill's presentation was longer than the interventions by other mission board leaders and reflected the Eastern Board's substantial concerns. The Eastern Board may have been most vocal, and even blunt, in naming some of these issues, but it found echoes in other presentations at the meeting. Over the ensuing paragraphs, I examine the key concerns advanced by the mission boards, consider MCC's response to those worries, and then look at evolving institutional mechanisms that MCC and the mission boards put in place to manage MCC-mission board tensions and to encourage greater information sharing and collaboration.

Discerning the Relationship of Relief and Mission

The primary missiological concern aired at the 1958 study meeting revolved around the relationship between relief and mission, or, as participants often framed it, between deed and word. Was relief to war sufferers and survivors a valid form of Christian witness in and of itself or was it incomplete unless accompanied by verbal proclamation of the gospel? Should Christian relief be understood as a forerunner to evangelistic outreach and church planting—and was

relief in some ways a failure if it did not lead, or give way, to such mission?

Paul Kraybill, the Eastern Board's representative at the study gathering, stressed that his mission board viewed relief as "completely valid . . . as a compelling expression of Christian love, the positive aspect of nonresistance, an alternative to war."²⁴ Relief, he recognized, "was a means of witness which helped to interpret the Gospel to those who were disillusioned and distressed by war and calamity. It prepared the way for mission and evangelistic outreach when the emergency had passed."²⁵ However, Kraybill quickly underscored that relief must be distinguished from the "social action" of the Social Gospel from earlier in the century. "We are pessimistic about men and society but insist that we think in terms of building the society of the redeemed rather than attempting to deal with the corporate evil that plagues the socio-political world."²⁶ Christian relief, he continued, was not redemptive, "but we can by our deeds of service symbolize in a realistic and compelling fashion our testimony that the conflicts and frustrations of men are basically spiritual and can be healed."²⁷ The government-imposed requirements of alternative service and the church's "insistence on a practical expression of the Christian life," observed Kraybill, "created in the minds of youth a deep service motivation which is quite commendable."²⁸ Yet he was keenly attentive to the danger of shifts in belief and practice, noting "in a few short decades our church has swung from a fear of the 'social gospel' to a rather general acceptance of social service as a legitimate and worthy occupation for the Christian."²⁹ Kraybill worried that the danger of relief sliding into "social action" was real, unless relief were bound more tightly to mission. This danger was exacerbated, he suggested, as relief efforts gave way to longer-term rehabilitation (or what would later be called development) work.

Of the study meeting presenters, Kraybill advanced this worry about the separation of word and deed most forcefully. For his part, J. D. Graber of the Mennonite Board of Missions shared that in his experience MCC workers were, overall, "incurable missionaries" who feel "their work of relief and service does not seem really significant until they can see it come to some spiritual fruition."³⁰ Graber granted that he had visited MCC programs "in which the personnel developed a spirit of antagonism to the local missionaries and they did not wish to be identified with them," not wanting humanitarian relief as "an end in itself" to be "compromised or confused with any so-called soul-saving activity."³¹

For Graber, the challenge before the study gathering stemmed from the fact that "relief and service activity" and "direct mission

work" had been separated by the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches into different organizations, akin to "separating soul and body."³² The 1957 Eastern Board MCC study asked if there should be "a closer relationship between the relief organization and the mission organizations of the church in planning for continued programs of rehabilitation in foreign countries?"³³ Graber insisted greater coordination between relief and service was needed, stating, "MCC, as an arm of the Mennonite churches, should work in close harmony with the mission boards of those churches."³⁴ He cautioned against viewing relief as a precursor to mission. Relief aid, he warned, bore a "pauperizing tendency," which in turn was not a "healthy situation in which to build a church."³⁵ In this respect, Graber concluded that perhaps "all relief and service activity expected to eventuate into a mission program should be initiated and administered by the Mission Board itself."³⁶

Meanwhile, A. E. Janzen shared that Mennonite Brethren experience "proved that the basis for a prospective mission laid by a relief personnel has not been favorable to the building of a mission and sequent [*sic*] church."³⁷ If Kraybill worried about MCC drifting away from mission, Janzen expressed concern about MCC advancing a "doctrinal teaching program on Mennonite Mission fields," stressing that "a service organization should not invade or try to perform any function which properly belongs to the church."³⁸ Instead of integration of or tighter coordination between MCC relief and Mennonite mission agency efforts, Janzen favored stricter boundaries.

Andrew Shelley from the General Conference wondered if the confusion and worry that some felt about the relationship between Mennonite relief and mission efforts had to do at least partially with the fact that Mennonite relief efforts were unified via the MCC mechanism, whereas mission efforts were carried out by diverse, uncoordinated agencies. He argued that "part of what is needed at this junction of the mission enterprise is more co-ordination in the efforts of the mission boards," even dreaming about a time "when we would have a 'Mennonite Central Mission Committee.'"³⁹

Along with higher-level questions of the relationship between relief and mission as well as deed and word, participants named several practical concerns about MCC's operations. Were MCC workers free to engage in evangelistic witness as they undertook relief efforts—especially when they were seconded to other agencies?⁴⁰ Did these seconded workers receive spiritual support and guidance? Could these seconded workers give a distinctive Mennonite witness when appointed to other Christian churches, mission boards, and relief organizations or even secular agencies? Study meeting members

questioned MCC's practice of giving material aid to non-Mennonite institutions for distribution. Participants worried about "careless distribution to masses of people" without "a definite and distinct testimony" by MCC workers to the gospel foundation undergirding the relief aid.⁴¹ MCC's growing involvement in distributing USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) foodstuffs in multiple contexts also generated anxieties about MCC being linked "to government as an agent of the United States."⁴² Rapidly expanding MCC worker secondments and material aid distribution through non-MCC partner agencies in the 1950s heightened deeper anxieties about how MCC relief initiatives were connected to Mennonite mission and about the control and the influence MCC's church stakeholders had over its work.

MCC Responds to Mission Agency Concerns

MCC's official response to the concerns advanced by mission board agencies came in a presentation by MCC board chair and prominent Brethren in Christ leader C. N. Hostetter. Hostetter granted that the "danger of an overemphasis on purely social service" existed and agreed that MCC's "relief ministry 'In the Name of Christ'" must "be more than a nominal cliché."⁴³ Hostetter declared that "unless our workers know Christ, give themselves to Christ as they give themselves for others and witness positively for Christ, our program falls short as Christian relief."⁴⁴ Hostetter welcomed calls for closer collaboration and coordination between MCC and the Mennonite mission boards. He also reminded mission agency leaders that by "instructing and enlightening" their churches' representatives on the MCC board, they could greatly assist the functioning of the MCC program to be "effectively responsive to world-wide need and to sensitively cooperate with the participating churches in their world-wide programs."⁴⁵ Hostetter's call served to underscore to Mennonite church leaders that their denominations had governance roles on MCC's board and as an implicit reminder of MCC's inter-Mennonite nature, a venture in which no one Mennonite church body could expect to dictate MCC's actions.

In response to concerns about MCC worker secondments and material aid distributions, Hostetter reminded participants that relief work took place in fluid and challenging settings, demanding flexibility and mobility. MCC, he stressed, imposed "no restrictions" on MCC workers offering verbal testimonies or distributing Bibles and other Christian literature. MCC sought out secondments that involved vital work with organizations that could carry or share

worker support costs and that would give freedom for "active worker witnessing."⁴⁶ However, Hostetter observed, freedom for such witnessing "must be defined within the framework of a strategy that is adapted on the basis of Christian principles of responsibility to the peoples and situations at hand," a recognition on Hostetter's part that the work of Christian relief could, in some contexts, be undermined by combining it with evangelistic testimony.⁴⁷

Several months after the January 1958 study meeting, MCC relief worker Peter Dyck sent MCC leader William Snyder several thoughts about the concerns raised at the gathering. Stressing that he wanted "to see relief workers on the field who not only do not have a package of cigarettes in their shirt pocket but in its place have a New Testament," Dyck concurred that MCC must "indeed be on guard against becoming a 'purely social service' agency" focused solely on correcting "some undesirable aspects and evils of society."⁴⁸ At the same time, Dyck suggested that the attraction young people felt to MCC service reflected at least in part the reality that "the old kind of missions with its emphasis on preaching only has largely failed, or at any event, is failing today. The new day of missions is still not fully understood but there are enough young people who suspect that modern man must be reached in a different way and so he volunteers for a service that at least seems to be more promising in terms of results."⁴⁹ Dyck also cautioned against reducing the assessment of relief efforts to whether they resulted in church planting.⁵⁰

Developing Durable Mechanisms for MCC–Mission Agency Coordination

The January 1958 study meeting was a success for MCC in that it resulted in Mennonite mission agencies reaffirming MCC's mandate as a relief agency of Mennonite churches. It further laid the groundwork for the creation of a mechanism of yearly meetings among Mennonite mission agencies and between those mission agencies and MCC. Less than four months after the study meeting, MCC's Snyder, in a memo to mission board secretaries, followed up with MCC's "suggestions" on how to build on the study meeting. The primary piece of MCC counsel to the mission agencies was the formation of a "Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Mission Boards" that would serve as "the primary point of clearance for MCC-mission concerns."⁵¹ Through regular meetings between MCC's Executive Committee and this mission board council, MCC and Mennonite mission agencies would keep one another informed about

program directions such as the expansion of MCC's Peace Section activities globally. Together they could address questions about MCC programs, ensuring, for example, that MCC would be "sensitive to expressions of concern from mission board representatives" about specific Peace Section initiatives.⁵²

In Chicago, at a "Conjoint Meeting of the MCC Executive Committee and Representatives of Mennonite Mission Boards" on May 16, 1958, mission agency and MCC representatives affirmed Snyder's suggestions. They recognized MCC as an integral part of Mennonite mission work and described "MCC as 'we' (not 'they')," a common agency of Mennonite churches making possible "emergency relief ministry in a united way, mobile and flexible."⁵³ These affirmations inaugurated a pattern of annual (and sometimes more frequent) meetings of Mennonite mission agencies with one another, eventually under the name of the Council of Mission Board Secretaries (COMBS). These mission-agencies-only meetings were supplemented by yearly conjoint meetings in which MCC and COMBS leaders met to think through matters of common concern. This pattern continued until 1971, when the separate mission-agencies-only meetings gave way to always including MCC in the conversations.

Navigating Tensions, Facilitating Collaboration

The commitment to regular meetings and information sharing and mutual counsel did not dissolve worries about MCC but it provided a formal space in which tensions and challenges could be navigated and managed. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the MCC-COMBS mechanism facilitated discernment on multiple issues where tension between MCC and the mission boards threatened to flare up. This included, for example, the "teaching" role of the MCC Peace Section in promoting biblically grounded understandings of nonresistance and peacemaking and how such efforts complemented or conflicted with Mennonite mission agency mandates as well as how MCC and mission agencies should properly engage Mennonite churches in post-colonial contexts. The MCC-COMBS coordination mechanism also provided a venue in which MCC and Mennonite mission agencies could identify opportunities for programmatic collaboration in places such as East Asia and East Africa.

In May 1964, MCC convened a follow-up to the 1958 study meeting bringing together ninety-five participants from across the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world in the US and Canada. Participants addressed many of the same issues raised in 1958, in

particular, the importance of keeping word and deed together in a unified "ministry of reconciliation."⁵⁴ Participants in the consultation grappled with how to preserve the "spiritual fruits resulting from MCC service," given that "MCC has no authorization from its supporting constituency to start churches."⁵⁵ The development of new MCC initiatives posed new questions about MCC–mission board coordination. Specifically, participants asked how MCC's new Teachers Abroad Program (TAP) related "in purpose and administration to the education, missions, and service agencies?"⁵⁶

In 1972, in response to pressure from conference concerns about MCC's connection (or lack thereof) to mission, MCC initiated a two-year self-study. This involved extensive consultation with supporting Anabaptist churches and involved MCC's connection to mission and its structural relationship with the church. The findings committee, which included Mennonite mission agency leaders, highlighted unity across MCC's stakeholders regarding "the inseparability of word and deed."⁵⁷ Committee members recommended ongoing collaboration between MCC and Mennonite mission agencies, especially when considering longer-term expansion of programs in a given context, and urged an expanded MCC mandate "to include a greater degree of activity in witnessing."⁵⁸ Robert Kreider, coordinating the self-study for MCC, concurred with the findings committee that both MCC and the mission agencies wanted "to have done with an unnatural, unbiblical dichotomy" between word and deed.⁵⁹ Yet, Kreider also acknowledged "disagreement among us [MCC stakeholders] as to how much MCC should be aggressively engaged in church planting."⁶⁰ Differences on missiological questions persisted but the self-study helped to manage these tensions.

In these and other annual and special study meetings in the '60s and '70s, MCC and the mission boards returned repeatedly to practical and more fundamental missiological questions. How would they preserve the "spiritual fruits" of MCC relief and service efforts? Could they achieve this by including MCC Voluntary Service units in the United States and Canada in follow-up mission and church planting work? How did MCC's Peace Section complement or conflict with Mennonite mission agency efforts to foster commitment to the peace witness among Mennonite churches globally? What roles should MCC and the mission boards play as they sought to disrupt old patterns of relating to the so-called "younger" Mennonite churches? What "new ways of mutual stimulation, sharing, fellowship and cooperation" should characterize their work in post-colonial contexts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America?⁶¹ These yearly meetings presented opportunities for administrators to offer mutual counsel, share reports on recent visits to MCC units and mission

teams, and jointly plan specific studies and collaborative initiatives. Debates about the relationship between “word” and “deed” began to recede. By the time the MCC–mission agency coordinating mechanism reorganized as the Council of International Ministries in 1976, participants could highlight “a growing acceptance of a holistic approach to overseas ministry” with a shared “concern to blend in fact, and not just in theory, ministries to both body and spirit in the name of Christ.”⁶²

Conclusion

The material conditions, and their attendant anxieties, that led to the 1958 study gathering—namely, MCC’s rapid expansion and waning denominational control over MCC—persisted and became more pronounced in the ’60s and ’70s. In these decades, the balance shifted as MCC became larger than any of the respective mission agencies. MCC engaged hundreds of workers in up to fifty countries around the world and a strong following among Mennonite congregations and individuals. Church and mission agency leaders recognized that “conference influence and control over MCC” had been “significantly reduced.”⁶³ By 1976, when MCC and the mission boards reorganized and renamed their joint coordinating body the Council of International Ministries, it was acknowledged by all as a mechanism for “information sharing and for influencing broad program decisions” with “little decision-making power.”⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the pressing concerns about MCC’s governance structures were shifting. Worries about how MCC was structurally accountable to its supporting Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conferences were replaced by two other concerns: the near absence at MCC “representational” meetings of “women, laity (non-pastoral, non-staff), youth, aged, Black, Chicanos, Indians, MCC workers, prophets, biblical scholars” and the need for new forms of “Canadian-US Mennonite relationships” in MCC’s governance and programming.⁶⁵

Mission agency anxieties about MCC endured beyond the 1970s but commitment to regular information-sharing and ad hoc collaboration allowed MCC leaders and the mission agencies in the US and Canada to manage those worries and tensions. Meanwhile, in the many countries where MCC and Mennonite mission agency operations overlapped, these relationships took a variety of forms including collaboration, conflict, and disengagement. In the 1960s and 1970s, MCC and Mennonite mission agencies collaborated in accompanying Mennonite churches in countries like Kenya and Ethiopia and in health work in Vietnam. In some contexts, such as in East

Africa, this collaboration included joint personnel placements. On the other hand, in the 1980s tensions flared in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories between Mennonite mission agency and MCC staff over what a faithful Christian response looked like amidst military occupation. Scores of additional examples of collaboration and conflict between MCC and Mennonite mission agency teams across the globe merit individual and comparative investigation. A fuller account of the relationships between MCC and Mennonite mission agencies would need to move beyond what this article has examined (how agency leaders connected to nurture connections and manage tensions) to investigate concrete examples of the varied ways that MCC and Mennonite mission board staff connected and interacted in local contexts.

Notes

- ¹ In this article, the word "Mennonite" in phrases such as "Mennonite mission agencies" is used expansively, encompassing a wide range of conferences and churches, including the Mennonite Brethren Church, the (Old) Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Brethren in Christ Church, and more. This expansive usage reflects how MCC during this period referred to what MCC now would call its inter-Anabaptist church partners and supporters.
- ² "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study Committee of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities," July 1, 1957, quoted in Minutes, Study Meeting on the Relationship of MCC Relief and Services Program and Mennonite Missions, Jan. 24, 1958, IX-5-1, folder 4/5, MCC archives in Akron, Pennsylvania (MCCA), 6 (hereafter cited as Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting).
- ³ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 6.
- ⁴ Reg Toews, "The Changing Role of MCC and the Conferences/Denominations," Departmental Office Correspondence) file 1990, roll 200, MCC Executive Office, Toews, Reg Interviews, MCCA, 2-3.
- ⁵ Toews, "Changing Role of MCC," 2-3.
- ⁶ C. N. Hostetter, Jr., "The Function and Scope of Service of MCC," Exhibit III, in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting.
- ⁷ Hostetter, "The Function and Scope of Service."
- ⁸ Hostetter, "The Function and Scope of Service."
- ⁹ MCC sometimes needed to prod Mennonite churches and institutions to provide MCC with the basic information it needed to report to the Selective Service. "Although the procedures needed to operate in this MCC-Selective Service relationship are quite simple, considerable confusion and ill will may result in the ranks of Selective Service if they are not followed," an MCC Peace Section administrator patiently explained. "Our MCC relationship with Selective Service is a privilege. Let's use it well!" Peace Section to Administrators of Mennonite Institutions, Mission Board Secretaries, etc., "Selective Service Relationships and Your Responsibility in the I-W Program,"

- IX-06-03, box 193, folder 113/126, "MCC Correspondence 1965 Council (of Mission Board Secretaries)," MCCA.
- ¹⁰ See James C. Juhnke, "Turning Points, Broken Ice, and *Glaubensgenossen*: What Happened at Prairie Street on July 27–28, 1920?" in Alain Epp Weaver, ed., *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011), 66–83.
- ¹¹ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 4–5.
- ¹² "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 4–5.
- ¹³ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 5.
- ¹⁴ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 5–6.
- ¹⁵ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 6.
- ¹⁶ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 6–7.
- ¹⁷ William T. Snyder, memo to MCC members about "Study Meeting on the Relationship of MCC Relief and Service Program and Mennonite Missions," Jan. 6, 1958, IX-5-1, folder 4/5, MCCA.
- ¹⁸ Minute Record, Executive Committee Meeting, Sept. 14, 1957, in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting.
- ¹⁹ Minute Record, Executive Committee Meeting, Sept. 14, 1957.
- ²⁰ Henry Hostetter to William T. Snyder, Jan. 13, 1958, IX-06-03, box 156, folder 91/36, "MCC Correspondence 1958 Brethren in Christ Foreign Mission Board," MCCA.
- ²¹ Boyd Nelson, Secretary for Relief and Service of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities to William T. Snyder, July 19, 1958, MCC, IX-61-AC, box 29, folder 1/66, "Hist. Mss. W.T. Snyder MCC Findings Committee–Unfinished Business 1958," MCCA.
- ²² Nelson granted that some prominent Mennonite Church leaders did not share his concern about the church's presumption that its positions should hold sway in inter-Mennonite discussions, observing that "Brother [Harold S.] Bender has suggested to me that my own personal concern at this point is out of place." Nelson to Snyder, July 19, 1958.
- ²³ The smaller number of Canadian participants stemmed from the facts that MCC Canada was not founded until 1963 and Canadian Mennonites had had their own humanitarian relief organizations. Prior to 1963, MCC worked collaboratively on humanitarian responses with precursor organizations to MCC Canada, such as the Non-Resistant Relief Organization and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, and opened a representative office in Canada in 1943. For more on MCC in Canada, see Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2013), and Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003).
- ²⁴ Paul N. Kraybill, Exhibit IV, in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting, 1.
- ²⁵ Kraybill, Exhibit IV, 1.
- ²⁶ Kraybill, Exhibit IV, 3.
- ²⁷ Kraybill, Exhibit IV, 3.
- ²⁸ Kraybill, Exhibit IV, 2.
- ²⁹ Kraybill, Exhibit IV, 2.
- ³⁰ J. D. Graber, Exhibit VII, in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting, 2.
- ³⁰ Graber, Exhibit VII, 2.
- ³¹ Graber, Exhibit VII, 2.
- ³² Graber, Exhibit VII, 1.
- ³³ "Revised Report: MCC Relief Study," 4.

- 34 Graber, Exhibit VII, 2.
35 Graber, Exhibit VII, 2.
36 Graber, Exhibit VII, 3.
37 A. E. Janzen, Exhibit V, quoted in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting, 1-2.
38 Janzen, Exhibit V, 1-2.
39 Andrew Shelly, Exhibit VI, in Minutes, January 1958 Study Meeting, 3.
40 "Revised Report, MCC Relief Study," 6.
41 "Revised Report, MCC Relief Study," 6-7.
42 "Revised Report, MCC Relief Study," 6.
43 Hostetter, Exhibit III, 5.
44 Hostetter, Exhibit III, 5.
45 Hostetter, Exhibit III, 4.
46 Hostetter, Exhibit III, 5.
47 Hostetter, Exhibit III, 5.
48 Peter Dyck to William T. Snyder, Correspondence, 1958, "Study Meeting MCC and Mission Relationships," Apr. 24, 1958, IX-06-03, box 193, folder 113/126, "MCC Correspondence 1965 Council (of) Mission Board Secretaries," MCCA.
49 Dyck to Snyder, Correspondence, 1958
50 Dyck to Snyder, Correspondence, 1958.
51 William T. Snyder to Mission Board Secretaries and MCC Executive Committee, May 13, 1958, "Suggestions Concerning Findings Committee Report on the January 24, 1958, Study Meeting on MCC Relief and Service Program and Mennonite Missions," IX-61-AC, box 29, folder 1/63, "Hist. Mss. W.T. Snyder MCC Executive Committee Conjoint Meeting with Mission Board Secretaries May 1958," MCCA, 1.
52 Snyder, "Suggestions Concerning Findings Committee Report." The concerns about MCC Peace Section teaching activities in various African and Asian contexts had less to do with worries about the substance of MCC's work and more over how such MCC work would be coordinated with Mennonite mission agencies.
53 "Conjoint Meeting of the MCC Executive Committee and Representatives of Mennonite Mission Boards," May 16, 1958, Chicago, Illinois, IX-61-AC, box 29, folder 1/63, "Hist. Mss. W.T. Snyder MCC Executive Committee Conjoint Meeting with Mission Board Secretaries May 1958," MCCA, 2.
54 Dora Mishler and Larry Kehler, Council of Mission Board Secretaries-Mennonite Central Committee News, "Consultation Discusses Current Issues in Missions, Relief, and Service," May 14, 1964, Mennonite Central Committee News Service 1944-1970, reel #93 (Jan. 1961-Dec. 1964), MCCA, 2.
55 Mishler and Kehler, "Consultation Discusses Current Issues in Missions, Relief, and Service," 3.
56 Mishler and Kehler, "Consultation Discusses Current Issues in Missions, Relief, and Service," 4.
57 "Mennonite Central Committee Self-Study: Report of the Findings Committee," Dec. 2, 1973, Executive Committee and Annual Meeting Minutes, #368-369, IX-5-1, folder 6/32, MCCA. The Findings Committee consisted of people connected both to MCC and Mennonite mission agencies including Cornelius J. Dyck, Owen Alderfer, Frank H. Epp, J. M. Klassen, Wilbert Shenk, and Richard Showalter, 2-3.
58 "Mennonite Central Committee Self-Study," Dec. 2, 1973, 2-3.

- ⁵⁹ Robert Kreider, "Reflections on Cabrini," Dec. 11, 1973, Executive Committee and Annual Meeting Minutes, #368-369, IX-5-1, folder 6/32, MCCA, 1.
- ⁶⁰ Kreider, "Reflections on Cabrini," 1.
- ⁶¹ Paul N. Kraybill to Council of Mission Board Secretaries, "Overseas Report," Apr. 10, 1964, IX-06-03, box 193, folder 113/126, "MCC Correspondence 1965 Council (of) Mission Board Secretaries," MCCA.
- ⁶² James E. Bertsche, "COMBS/MCC Administrators Approve New Council," news release from the Council of International Ministries, Dec. 14, 1976, IX-06-03, box 239, folder 144/11, "MCC Correspondence 1977—Council of Mission Board Secretaries 1977," MCCA, 2.
- ⁶³ Toews, "Changing Role of MCC," 3.
- ⁶⁴ Toews, "Changing Role of MCC," 4.
- ⁶⁵ Robert Kreider, "Reflections on Cabrini," 2-3. Canada-US tensions around MCC's governance and program would grow in ensuing decades. These tensions did not involve differing missiological approaches to the unity of "word and deed," but instead related to other matters: the role of MCC in Canada in the governance oversight of MCC's work globally; the higher degree of decentralization of MCC program and operations in Canada in comparison to the US; the greater focus on programming within Canada compared to within the US; and the greater readiness of MCC in Canada than MCC in the US to pursue government funding for MCC work.